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A portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DPsych)

How do men and women write about their feelings and thoughts through Expressive Writing? A pluralistic narrative analysis

by

Georgia Chatzitheodorou

Department of Psychology

City, University of London

September 2022

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Declaration

I hereby grant powers of discretion to the Director of Library Services to allow the thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference to the author. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.

Preface

We are the authors of our lives. When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending. We craft love from heartbreak, compassion from shame, grace from disappointment, courage from failure.

Brené Brown

This doctoral portfolio consists of three components, a research thesis, a publishable journal article and a client case study and process report, all of which constitute necessary research and clinical practice components of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology programme. While these components are three independent pieces of work, they are all related thematically. The prominent theme throughout the work is the written and verbal expression of feelings in men's and women's stories and their ability to process, shift or broaden painful stories in order to find new meanings within them. Human beings accumulate a 'repertoire of life stories' during their lifetime which they strive to make sense of and give meaning to (Polkinghorne, 2004, p.53). As our Counselling Psychology field develops, it encourages more and more flexible therapy approaches that pay close attention to fundamental client factors, such as client preferences and expectations, which have been shown to influence therapy outcomes; this is always within the context of a trusting therapeutic relationship and the establishment of a professional emotional bond between therapists and clients (Scheel et al., 2018; Scheel and Conoley, 2012).

The first section of this portfolio involves a pluralistic narrative analysis research consisting of two different analytical levels that examines how men and women express their feelings and thoughts in the course of a 50-minute Expressive Writing task. The findings present the underlying structure of men's and women's narratives as well as the types of stories produced within them, revealing the way they express their feelings and thoughts through the medium of writing. The findings of this study are not intended to underrate the existing types of therapy used in Counselling Psychology clinical practice. Rather, they are hoped to encourage Counselling Psychologists to enhance their creativity,

flexibility and patience in engaging their clients in the therapeutic process so that they may facilitate their emotional expression and accommodate their individual needs through alternative means where appropriate. Also, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, recent studies have found that males experienced higher levels of stress and anxiety symptoms (Kumari and Singh, 2020) and difficulties in coping with them (Tsukamoto et al., 2021), and women experienced greater levels of depressive symptoms (Vloo et al., 2021) and domestic violence (Thibaut and Wijngaarden-Cremers, 2020). The results of this study may, therefore, contribute to the continued development of Counselling Psychology clinical practice and the increasing demands and responsibilities that currently faces, thereby allowing for a better level of counselling support for male and female clients. In addition, the results may serve as an opportunity to enhance Counselling Psychology educational programmes as well as explore new research avenues in the field.

The second section of this portfolio presents a publishable article for the *Journal of Poetry Therapy.* This interdisciplinary journal was selected due to its commitment to the publication of research that focuses on the integration of literary arts into a variety of service settings and on healing and growth through language and symbolism including storytelling, writing and lyrics. The article presents the Evaluations identified in the narratives which is one of the six elements of Labov's Model of narrative analysis as well as the '*Narratives of Love'*, one of the three types of stories produced in the narratives based on a range of characteristics which resulted from the findings of Labov's Model. Compared to the rest of Labov's Model elements, Evaluations represent the most fundamental element of Labov's Model (Labov, 2013) which directly illustrate peoples' feelings and the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Riessman, 2005). Also, *'Narratives of Love'* demonstrate that while the narratives in this story type contained experiences of loss, the narrators used the EW task to produce stories about their feelings of love and express their tender thoughts for their loved ones who are no longer in their lives. Therefore, Evaluations and *'Narratives of Love'* were selected for presentation since they both have fundamental implications for Counselling Psychology practice. To comply with the journal's guidelines, the entire analysis has been shortened;

however, parts of both analytic lenses are presented in an effort to illustrate the pluralistic nature of this research and how the two levels of analysis complemented one another in exploring how men and women express their feelings and thoughts through Expressive Writing.

The third section of this portfolio presents a combined client case study as well as a process report and a reflective discussion for a client I worked with drawing from Narrative Therapy. The work presented was undertaken as part of my clinical work in an NHS GP surgery. In the client case study each stage of the therapeutic process is described and the way the theoretical framework of Narrative Therapy was integrated with my clinical skills aimed at showing my ability to assess my client, formulate his concerns, create a treatment plan, adjust it to the clinical setting and evaluate my practice. The client case study highlights the importance of establishing a trusting therapeutic relationship based on openness and collaboration to enable a multifaceted exploration of concerns. It illustrates a range of Narrative Therapy interventions, and how these were used collaboratively with a client who aimed to understand his anger and worry towards his mother and explore alternative means of managing them. It shows how the client was allowed to share his narrative in his own words and how the problem he brought to therapy was separated from him through the externalisation process (White and Epston, 1990). It presents the process of deconstructing the problem by exploring its emergence and influence in the client's life, the meanings the client assigned to the problem, how certain cultural and social discourses and beliefs he grew up with may have influenced its development and maintenance as well as the exceptions to it (White and Epston, 1990). In addition, it demonstrates the exploration of other stories the client had that did not relate to the problem (White, 2000), such as his hobbies, dreams, hopes for the future, and relationships with others, while it illustrates the new, more powerful stories he started to develop with regards to the problem he brought to therapy. The fundamental role of supervision as well as the challenges encountered throughout the therapeutic work are also discussed. In the process report, a representative transcribed segment from my therapeutic work with the client is presented together with a reflective account and detailed analysis of it, aimed at showing the application of a Narrative

Therapy intervention to my clinical practice. In particular, the process report demonstrates how the client was enabled to start separating himself from the problem through exploring a name for it which represented his experience and examining the impact of it on his life and sense of self. An evaluative commentary of the presented segment is provided, while the strengths and the limitations of it are also discussed together with my learnings from my experience and how these were reflected on and addressed. A reflective discussion concludes this section, which describes the connections between the case study and the process report, as well as providing a detailed reflection of the professional identity development I have experienced from my work with this client, including observations, professional and personal insights, and lessons learned.

In conclusion, I consider the development of this doctoral portfolio with its three components to be an important part of my doctorate studies in Counselling Psychology, which contributed to my personal as well as professional identity as an emerging Counselling Psychologist. This work has invited me to reflect on my personal starting point including my experiences and my beliefs about how men and women express their feelings, while it also allowed me to explore my interests and passions and develop my own flexibility and creativity. Throughout this professional training programme, I have gained significant learning opportunities and experience in understanding psychological processes from a variety of psychological approaches, and while this portfolio marks the end of this journey, I intend to continue my learning and development efforts. Sometimes, verbal expression alone might be difficult, and thus, it is my goal to continue creating open and collaborative therapeutic relationships with my clients in which they are able to express themselves through the mediums that are most comfortable for them. Lastly, I would also like to invite my Counselling Psychologist colleagues to maintain their curiosity and be attentive to their clients' unique needs and preferences and to not hesitate to bring their creative sides and ideas into the therapeutic process and experiment them in order to meet their clients where they are.

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Section 1. Doctoral Research

How do men and women write about their feelings and thoughts through Expressive writing? A pluralistic narrative analysis

Supervised by

Dr Aylish O' Driscoll and Dr Julianna Challenor

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the ways men and women write about their feelings and thoughts in an Expressive Writing (EW) task. Eight male and seven female participants were asked to write about a personal life-experience during a 50-minute writing session. The narratives were analysed using a pluralistic narrative analysis design consisting of two different analytical levels. The first level of analysis was a structural analysis based on Labov's Model of narrative analysis (Labov, 1972) which was used to understand the underlying structure of the narratives and their patterns. The findings resulted from the structural analysis served as a basis for a second level of analysis which enabled an understanding of the types of stories produced and the ways males and females utilised the EW task. The findings of the structural analysis showed that men's and women's narratives shared many structural similarities, indicating that they expressed their feelings and thoughts in similar ways. Notable differences were also observed and are discussed. The findings from the second level of analysis showed that men and women utilised the EW task to generate three types of stories: *'Narratives of Love', 'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Stuckness'*. '*Narratives of Stuckness'* was a female-only story type. This study adds insight to the many similarities that men's and women's narratives exhibit when they expressed their feelings and thoughts through EW as well as some interesting differences. The findings have implications for Counselling Psychology clinical practice, educational programmes and professional trainings and research. Potential areas for future research are also outlined.

Chapter 1. Introduction and Systematic Review

This chapter presents a systematic literature review on how men and women express their feelings and thoughts when asked to describe a personal experience in an Expressive Writing task. A PRISMA Flow Diagram was used to describe its different phases and the main findings from the included studies are discussed. The gap in the literature is identified and the rationale for the research study is presented. The research aims and objectives of the present study and its relevance to Counselling Psychology are outlined.

Definitions of key terms

Prior to starting this chapter, it is essential to provide the definition of the term Expressive Writing (EW hereinafter) that will be used throughout this study.

EW will be defined in terms of Pennebaker's (2004, p.140) definition, which describes it as *'a strategy that is aimed at healing what ails the individual'.* According to Lepore and Kliewer (2013 p.735), *'EW is a form of therapy in which individuals write about their thoughts and feelings related to a personally stressful or traumatic life experience. EW is sometimes referred to as written disclosure, because writers are instructed to disclose personal information, thoughts, and feelings. Unlike communicative forms of writing, expressive writing is personal, free flowing, and informal, often without concern for style, spelling, punctuation, or grammar'.*

Researcher's personal rationale for the study

Writing has always been a personal interest since my childhood. This interest was first picked up by my parents who gave me a typewriter for my seventh birthday and later on by family friends and classmates who would often gift to me diaries and all kinds of stationary. I would spend almost daily a few minutes writing about something difficult, special or humorous from the day or something I was looking forward to. Even today, I can easily recall the sound of

my typewriter's keyboard while I was typing or the smell of the scented paper of my diaries.

Many years later, I first became interested in exploring the area of EW during my studies for a Master of Sciences (M.Sc.) in Clinical Mental Health Sciences at the University College of London (UCL) between 2015-2017. As part of my Master's thesis I conducted a systematic review with the aim to explore EW's efficacy with patients with progressive advanced chronic diseases including metastatic or advanced breast cancer, renal-cell carcinoma and other forms of secondary cancers which was soon turned into a valuable collaboration between a big team of researchers and was published (Kupeli et al. 2019). Whilst the study found no significant evidence as to the effectiveness of EW for this population, my colleagues and I concluded that a more tailored form of EW may be feasible for their needs. This study was the first time that I read in depth and learnt about EW and my research experience helped me understand how the simple process of EW has the power to bring positive changes in peoples' lives.

Following the completion of my M.Sc. studies, and as part of my doctorate studies, I was privileged to work as a trainee counselling psychologist in many mental health services across London. In my experience working in mental health settings that provided traditional talking therapy sessions I would observe that male referrals were generally lower than female referrals, and male clients tended to disengage more frequently from therapy than female clients. My observations at the time were also confirmed by the findings of a clinical audit that I had the opportunity to assist with in one of my NHS placements. In addition, in two of the mental health services I worked at, I had the opportunity to provide therapy under supervision through drawing, painting, moving, role-playing, storytelling, and writing either exclusively or in addition to traditional talking therapy, to both male and female clients of varying ages and with varying clinical presentations.

An inspirational experience was my therapeutic work with a female university student who presented with anxiety, low mood, and low self-esteem concerns.

During our first session, the student stated that she needed support and she was highly motivated to start therapy, but that she had a profound difficulty putting into words what she was experiencing and how she felt. I remember that I had acknowledged and normalised her difficulty, while I made attempts to gently engage with her and start building a therapeutic connection. I found it interesting that although she maintained perfect eye contact, she would either not respond at all or give one-word responses. I could see that the more effort I made to engage verbally with her, the more uncomfortable and anxious she felt. I reflected back her initial statement about her difficulty to express herself and we started to think for alternative ways of connecting and communicating. Although we did not reach a decision by the end of our first session, and I was anticipating she would not be coming back for a second session, she not only returned again, but she also brought a notebook with her and asked if she could read to me what she had written in it instead of verbalising it. In the following sessions, she would continue to bring her notebook and read to me some traumatic childhood experiences she had gone through, and it was only after writing them down at home and then reading them to me during our sessions that she gradually began to feel more comfortable discussing them and processing them verbally. Thus, the use of writing provided a fundamental starting point that allowed us to establish a good therapeutic alliance, facilitated the therapeutic process, and encouraged this student to open up, to become aware of her anxiety, low mood, and low self-esteem concerns, and to explore how these difficulties stem from and relate to past traumatic experiences.

An additional learning experience was my therapeutic work with a young male client who had a diagnosis of selective mutism and was referred to the service I was working at due to his anxiety clinical presentation which impacted significantly on his college work and self-confidence. With this client, writing and drawing served as the main therapeutic methods, helping him to express and increase awareness of feelings and thoughts that he would otherwise feel uncomfortable talking about. The client's overall positive engagement with therapy as well as a goodbye letter he wrote during his final therapy session enabled me to see how valuable it was for him to not feel forced to talk in his therapy sessions as he had experienced in the past, but to have a safe space

where he could feel accepted and respected and given the opportunity to express himself in more comfortable for him ways.

Due to the aforementioned personal and professional experiences, I progressed my initial interest in EW into a desire to explore how men and women express their feelings through it. It is hoped that this exploration through this study would raise awareness and increase our understanding on potential differences or similarities on the ways men and women express their feelings and thoughts through EW, in order to inform and contribute to clinical and future research implications in the field of Counselling Psychology.

Mechanisms of Expressive Writing and talking therapies

Mechanisms are recognised as a set of processes that explain the way therapeutic interventions work and how they produce change at a social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, educational, and physical level of the individual's functioning (Kazdin, 2007). Over the years, researchers have attempted to understand the underlying mechanisms involved in EW and in the field of talking therapies that contribute to these changes.

One of the proposed processes of EW is explained by inhibition theory according to which the act of restraining feelings, thoughts or behaviours which relate to a traumatic experience is associated with high levels of nervous system activity which in the long-term can result in psychosomatic illness, rumination and obsessive thoughts (Pennebaker, 1985; Pennebaker and Susman, 1988) as well as in other neurobiological, social-behavioral, and cognitive changes (Traue et al., 2016). As an alternative process proposed, exposure theory suggests that systematic writing about a traumatic experience may reduce physiological and negative emotional responses over time by promoting habituation of difficult emotions and thoughts related to it (Sloan and Marx, 2004; Low et al., 2006). According to cognitive processing theory writing promotes the understanding, reevaluation and reappraisal of a traumatic experience by facilitating the development of a coherent story that contributes to a more solid mental representation of the experience, thereby reducing

negative feelings (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999; Pennebaker, 1993). In addition, this theory suggests that writing encourages the active use of fundamental linguistic markers associated with insight and meaning which are also linked with cognitive change (Pennebaker and Francis, 2006). Finally, emotion regulation theory combines ideas from the theory of inhibition and psychosomatics, exposure theory and cognitive processing theory. Emotion regulation theory suggests that writing facilitates optimal emotion regulation by balancing overregulation and underregulation of emotional responses (Lepore et al., 2002). This is believed to be achieved by three central mechanisms of emotion regulation that occur during writing including directing attention to both stressful and positive thoughts and feelings, desensitizing and emotionally adapting to stressful thoughts and feelings, and restructuring the way stressful stimuli are perceived (Lepore et al., 2002).

According to results of a recent systematic review, there is a lack of evidence to fully explain the underlying processes involved in talking therapies; this is believed to be because conceptual and statistical research dominates thus far, diverting attention from functional and biopsychosocial perspectives (Carey, 2020). There are, however, several theories that attempt to provide further insight into this issue. For instance, Hill and Knox (2009), building on Bordin's (1979, 1994) work, proposed that talking therapies function through the relational work created between the therapist and the client. According to this theory, client's and therapist's collaborative processing of feelings associated with the therapeutic relationship and the problems that arise within it serve as a learning experience that will ultimately be transferred and applied to other relationships beyond the therapeutic relationship in the future. Another view is emotional processing theory which asserts that feared stimuli become less frightening over time due to habituation which includes repeated exposure to them and learning from them both during and between talking therapy sessions (Foa and Kozak, 1986). In this way, habituation promotes the correction and reorganization of trauma representations in memory, as well as the integration of new memory structures (Foa and Rothbaum, 1998). A different explanation is provided by the dual representation theory, which holds that talking therapies operate on a dual memory level, a verbally accessible memory (VAM) and a

situationally accessible memory (SAM) and enable conscious access to traumatic memories. This prevents the activation of the amygdala, thereby promoting a sense of safety and the understanding that past traumatic events do not represent an ongoing threat (Brewin, 2001). Lastly, Kandel's (1998) theoretical framework, holds that talking therapies are believed to modify gene expression which results in functional and structural changes in the brain that contribute to the development of new learnings.

From a developmental social psychology perspective, differences between the underlying mechanisms of EW and those of talking therapies might be explained by gender socialization theory according to which an amalgamation of biological, psychological, social and environmental factors are responsible for the establishment of traditional norms, which in turn influence the behavioural responses of both genders (Stockard, 1999). There is a possibility that expressing feelings through writing may be more comfortable or less threatening than doing so verbally to a therapist. In fact, some experiences including sexual abuse and parental divorce tend to be more difficult to be expressed verbally due to feelings of shame and fear of judgment and punishment compared to others (Pennebaker et al., 1987). There is also the possibility that writing motivates people to take different actions within their social environment, for example by talking and connecting with others more, or seeking social support more frequently (Pennebaker and Chung, 2007). Lastly, writing is by its nature a slower and more laborious process than that of talking, which may contribute to a different cognitive process of a stressful experience (Kacewicz et al., 2006).

The concept of mentalization refers to the ability to predict and understand our own emotional states as well as the emotional states of others (Bateman et al., 2009). Mentalization is an imaginative process that enables self-organization and self-regulation; it has a multidimensional nature and develops in response to a combination of genetic and developmental factors (Fonagy and Allison, 2012). It appears that the process of mentalisation underpins both the underlying mechanisms of EW and those of talking therapies. For instance, Bateman and Fonagy (2019, p.203) propose that writing about one's feelings is

a reflective process which allows for ‘implicit mentalization to become explicit mentalization without interference from other minds’. In talking therapies, while mentalization is understood in a range of ways because of the diverse theoretical foundations and there is no strong empirical evidence about how exactly it works due to its complexity (Lüdemann et al., 2021), it ‘represents a unique gloss on therapeutic action and the goals of psychotherapy’ (Jurist, 2018 p.2).

Taken together, neither the underlying mechanisms involved in EW nor in talking therapies can be explained by a single theory. Writing about one's feelings and talking about them are two fundamental forms of human expression that appear to be governed by complex mechanisms. During future studies, it may be possible to explore further their underlying mechanisms in order to gain better insight into their differences and similarities. This knowledge may then contribute to the improvement of existing interventions and the development of new interventions that enhance therapeutic outcomes and the overall quality of counselling support.

Expressive Writing as a clinical intervention

Premature discontinuation of psychological treatment is a major challenge therapists are often exposed to and pose a significant threat to society’s well-being status (O'Keeffe et al., 2020). According to the Public Perceptions Survey conducted by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2021), despite an encouraging increase of 10% in men's access to therapy in 2022 compared to 2010, women remain more likely to seek psychological support compared to men. Being a male or a person of a young age are considered to be among the strongest predictors of treatment drop out (Zimmermann et al., 2017). Findings from a recent large survey which included 1907 Australian males between 16-85 years old suggest that 44.8% of them ended psychological treatment unexpectedly, of which 26.6% did so following their first session (Seidler et al., 2021). The researchers found that unsuitable therapeutic strategies, poor connection to the therapist and lack of progress accounted for the majority of the drop-outs.

As human beings, we are inclined to creating stories based on our lived experiences (Phipps and Vorster, 2015). The experience of a mental health difficulty can often pose a major threat to peoples' sense of identity (Buck et al., 2012). Stories can enable individuals to reclaim meaning and purpose in their past experiences, aiding them in reclaiming their lost identities (Crossley, 2000). Therefore stories can be re-oriented through narration (Habermas and Köber, 2015), as through the language people use when narrating them they are not only able to understand what they had gone through but also to shift their perspectives (Rice, 2015).

The process of sharing our stories and expressing our feelings and thoughts in a therapeutic setting is associated with positive therapeutic outcomes and its facilitation is fundamental across various existing psychological approaches (Anvari et al., 2020; Peluso and Freund 2018). In traditional talking therapies this process is verbal; however, the use of writing is also used either as a standalone tool or in conjunction with traditional psychological approaches (Esterling et al., 1999). In fact, the medium of writing is a powerful tool which allows our feelings and thoughts to be translated into words and this process can influence our cognitive mental states (Herbert et al., 2019).

EW is a therapeutic emotional disclosure intervention which has been researched internationally over the last three decades and was first conceptualized by Pennebaker and Beal (1986). In their groundbreaking study, the researchers developed a novel EW paradigm in which 46 healthy psychology students were instructed to write for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes over four consecutive days either about a personal traumatic experience (experimental group) or a non-emotional superficial event (control group). The researchers found that although participants' blood pressure increased and their mood was lower immediately following the EW task, the EW was associated with improvements in their overall physical health at six-month follow-up, since they made fewer visits to the health centre.

Since then, in order to investigate its efficacy, a number of modifications have been made to the original EW paradigm with respect to the length of the

intervention as well as the focus of the writing process. For example, the length of each writing session has been found to range between ten and twenty minutes, while the total duration of the EW intervention has been found to range between one day and two consecutive weeks (Qian, et al., 2020; Graf et al., 2008). The effectiveness of single sessions of EW have also been explored (Gobin et al., 2022; Maslej et al., 2020). EW has been oriented on experiencing and witnessing violence writing (Kliewer et al., 2011), negative drinking events writing (Young et al., 2013), sexual schema-focused writing for childhood sexual abuse survivors (Meston et al., 2013), future goals writing (Troop et al., 2013), HIV-related traumatic stress writing (Carrico et al., 2015) and forgiveness writing (Barclay and Saldanha, 2016). In more recent studies EW was adjusted to infertility and fertility treatment and benefit finding (Frederiksen et al., 2017), gratitude-focused writing for transition to college (Booker and Dunsmore, 2017), workplace embitterment writing (Michailidis and Cropley, 2019), spiritually oriented writing for natural disasters survivors (Mosher, et al., 2021), self-compassion writing for cancer survivors (Melissant et al., 2021) and positive emotions and experiences writing (Mariën et al., 2022).

EW has been shown to benefit various clinical and non-clinical populations as confirmed by several quantitative studies, including meta-analyses, systematic reviews and Randomised-controlled trials (RCTs). For instance, a previous meta-analysis of fourteen studies and 1,718 patients with cancer demonstrated that while EW was not associated with psychological or cognitive improvements, it led to small improvements on physical symptoms including fatigue, pain and sleep disturbance (Oh and Kim, 2016). Several systematic reviews have also demonstrated that EW was related to a decrease in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms at three months postpartum in pregnant women (de Graaff et al., 2018), a decrease of anxiety symptoms in tertiary education students (Tuck et al., 2022), a decrease in anger, physical symptoms and distress in soldiers transitioning to civilian life (Bauer et al., 2018), and an increase in happiness in older adults (Brown et al., 2018). In recent RCT studies, EW has contributed to a decrease in stress and negative affect during the COVID-19 pandemic in healthy individuals (Fekete and Deichert, 2022) and to a decrease in health center visits and an increase in pain

control in adults with irritable bowel syndrome (Laird and Stanton, 2021). In earlier RCTs, EW was associated with wound healing in older adults and women (Koschwanez et al., 2013), posttraumatic growth (Stockton et al., 2014), hypercortisolism reduction in patients with Parkinson's disease (Cash and Lageman, 2015) and the relief of moderate asthma symptoms (Smith et al., 2015).

There is an ongoing debate regarding the role of gender in moderating the effectiveness of EW. For instance, Travagin's et al. (2015) meta-analysis of 21 studies found no gender differences in the effectiveness of EW among youth between 10 and 18 years of age. Similarly, an earlier RCT found no gender differences in the efficacy of EW in a sample of 537 healthy adults (Niles et al., 2014). Also, no gender differences were observed by Rivkin et al. (2006) in the effectiveness of EW on the emotional and physical adjustment to HIV-positive participants. In contrast, Yang et al. (2015) reported that following a nine-week EW intervention, females experienced greater changes in their psychological well-being than males. Manier and Olivares (2005) found that EW was associated with greater health benefits for males compared to females. Similar findings were observed by an earlier meta-analysis of nineteen studies showing that although males do not use as much emotion in their writing, they report more positive outcomes from EW as compared to females (Smyth, 1998). It is striking that the reason why EW seems to benefit more males than females seems to be related to traditional sex norms of Western cultures and, in particular, to the fact that males are less likely to express their feelings in interpersonal relationships compared to females, as well as to lack of exposure to and familiarity with expressing their feelings through writing (Manier and Olivares, 2005; Smyth, 1998).

Rationale for a systematic review

Taken together, a significant amount of research has been undertaken on the effectiveness of EW on various clinical and non-clinical populations, as well as on gender. An area that appears to remain understudied, however, relates to the possibility of gender differences in the ways males and females express

themselves through EW. In response to the above literature gap, this systematic literature review aims to explore existing findings with regards to how men and women write about their feelings and thoughts through the medium of EW.

Unlike other interventions, EW is a brief and easily delivered therapeutic intervention (Greenbaum and Javdani, 2017) which can be incorporated in counselling practice between sessions (Graf et al., 2008), or as a complementary intervention to other psychological therapies (Cummings et al., 2014). Considering that men tend to perceive psychological support in a negative way (Sagar-Ouriaghli et al., 2020) and that often struggle to express their feelings compared to women (Nam et al., 2013), a review like this will help to inform future research and to improve the counselling psychology practice as it is likely to advance knowledge about whether EW is a medium through which both sexes can express themselves more comfortably.

Literature search strategy

This literature search was undertaken to retrieve all citations related to how men and women write about their feelings and thoughts through EW. The search was conducted in Scopus, PubMed, and APA PsycInfo, in order to locate peer-reviewed citations. To ensure that all relevant citations will be retrieved, I have conducted an initial literature search for the EW search terms to determine the range of terms used to describe EW. Table 1 presents the search terms which were applied initially to Scopus database and then adapted and used for the remaining four databases.

Table 1. **Search strategy terms applied to the databases**

(ALL (expressive AND writing OR emotional AND disclosure OR written AND self-disclosure OR written AND emotional AND expression OR Pennebaker OR therapeutic AND writing OR written AND paradigm OR story AND writing OR narrative AND expressive AND writing OR creative AND writing) AND ALL (gender AND feelings OR gender AND express* OR gender AND emotional AND express* OR gender AND emotional AND content))

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

This systematic literature review has included studies that examined gender factors in the EW, exploring how males and females express their feelings and thoughts through an EW task. Only studies that included both male and female participants were eligible. Studies which have not incorporated an EW task or studies which did not address gender differences in terms of emotional content have been excluded. Studies that used oral narratives instead of an EW task have also been excluded. Qualitative or quantitative study designs were eligible. No restrictions were applied to the participants' ages in the studies. Studies written in languages other than English were excluded, as were unpublished studies, postgraduate dissertations and doctoral theses.

Reviewed articles selection

The electronic search yielded a total of 711 citations. The citations were exported to the EndNote20 reference management software. After the removal of duplicates (n=6), 705 studies were screened based on their title and abstract. Of those, 69 studies were fully reviewed for possible suitability. 59 studies were excluded because they included verbal disclosure (n=3), did not address emotional content in relation to gender (n=43), included only males or females (n=5), did not include an EW task (n=5), or were dissertations (n=3). The screening process led to the identification of ten studies that met the inclusion criteria for this study. Fig.1 summarises the screening process of the literature review for the selection of the final studies with detailed reasons for exclusions. Table 2 provides the characteristics of the final list of the included studies which explore gender differences in expression of feelings through EW.

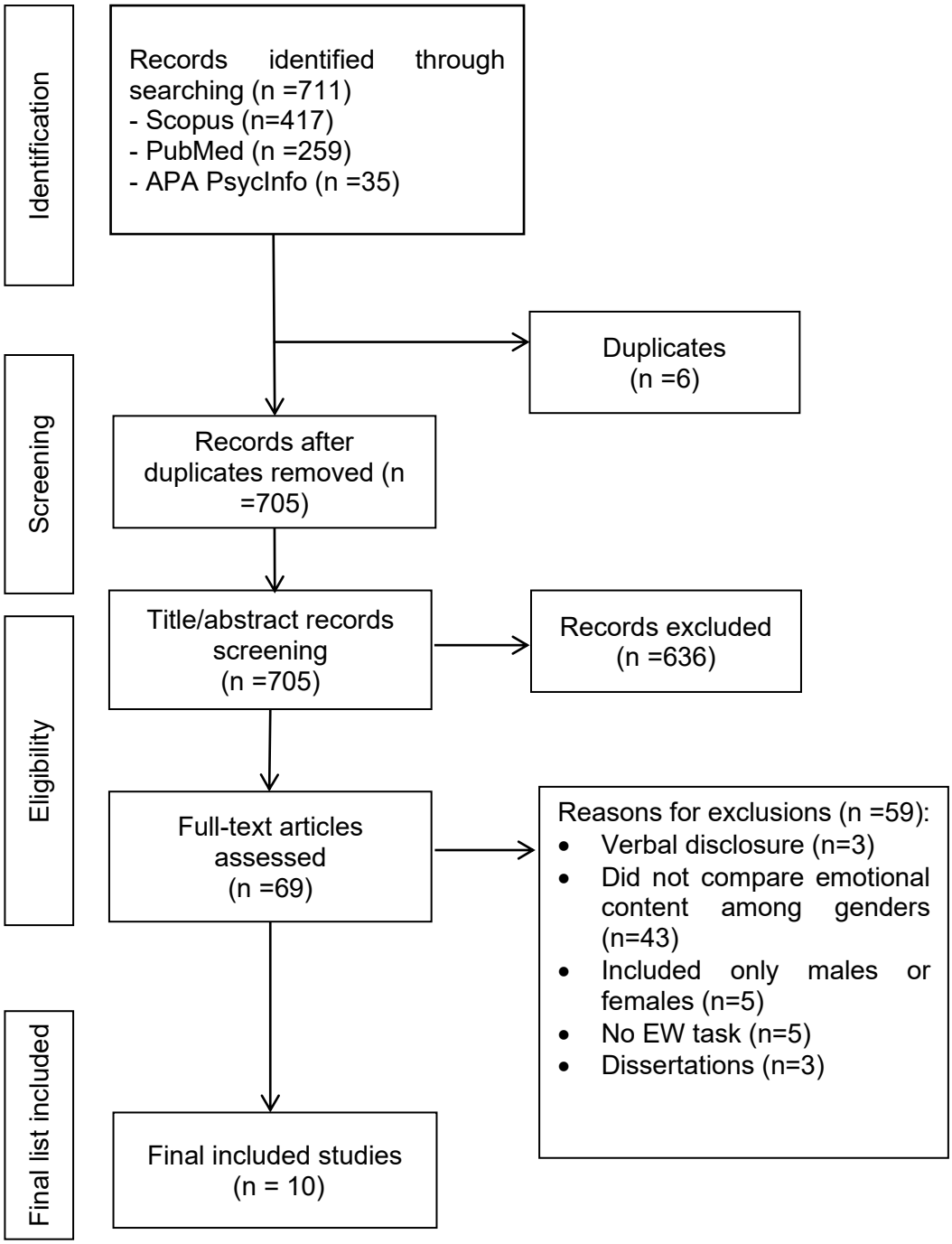

Fig 1. PRISMA flow diagram of final included studies

Table 2. Summary of studies

Study details	EW Task condition	Written Content Measures and Results
Booker et al. (2022) Design: Minilongitudinal study N=300 Participants: 18-29-year-old young adults Gender and mean age: 120 males and 180 females (M_{age}= 24.39 years old) Ethnicity: White (67%), Black (11%), Latina/o (9%), Asian (6%), Multiracial (5%), American Indian (1%) Aim: Narrative identity themes and how they change across repeated narrations.	EW condition: Two EW tasks. One about the most emotionally positive and one about the most negative experience of their life for 10 to 15 mins over one week apart.	Written content analysis: Coding schemes Results: narrative themes and adjustment were similar across gender but womens' narratives were more coherent (Estimate = −0.095, SE = 0.055, p = 0.126; Estimate = −0.068, SE = 0.051, p = 0.102), and included more agency (Estimate = 0.105, SE = 0.047, p = 0.028) and growth (Estimate = 0.154, SE = 0.052, p = 0.003) in comparison to men's.
Mesghina and Richland (2020) Design: RCT N=250 Participants:10-12-year-old children Gender and mean age: 123 males and 127 females (M_{age}= 11.55 years old) Ethnicity: Not reported Aim: Gender differences in the influence of EW on learning prior to a high demand mathematics lesson	EW condition: Deepest thoughts and feelings about the upcoming math lesson and test. Control: Copy an emotionally neutral paragraph. One session for five mins	Written content analysis: Coding scheme Results: girls' narratives in the EW condition (M = 71.15, SD = 24.93) were longer than boys (M = 62.85, SD = 23.90; β = 0.34, SE = 3.94, p = .05). Boys' narratives in the EW condition (β = -0.24, SE = 0.04, p = .02) included more positive evaluations than girls. Girls in the EW condition with higher WM included more problem statements (t(138) = 1.59, p = .14) compared to boys (t(138) = -1.77, p = .10).
Vanden Poel and Hermans (2019) Design: Correlational N=395 Participants:18-30-year-old young adults Gender and mean age: 121 males and 274 females (M_{age}= 25.66 years old) Ethnicity: American	EW condition: Two EW tasks. One about a memory with a high degree of identity-relatedness, and the second about a memory with a minimal or no amount of identity-relatedness.	Written content analysis: The Narrative Coherence Coding Scheme Results: Women constructed more coherent accounts of memories compared to men t(393) = −3.73, p = 0.001, d = 0.41.

Aim: Relationship between narrative coherence, identity functioning, psychological well-being, and internalizing symptoms		
Nelson et al. (2017) Design: Correlational N=429 Participants: men and women with a prior miscarriage experience Gender and mean age: Subsample of 36 males (M_{age}= 32.39 years old) and 58 females (M_{age}= 31.36 years old) Ethnicity: White (74.5 %), multiple or other (10.6 %), African American (8.5 %), Latino (a) (5.3 %) Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander (1.1 %). Aim: Relationship between miscarriage, heightened negative emotions surrounding efforts to conceive and gender as a moderator	EW condition: Experience and feelings during the period of conceiving	Written content analysis: LIWC2007 Results: Women used more sadness words (b=.87, t (89)=4.46, p<.001) compared to men (b=−.06, t(89)=−.24, p=.81) when they recounted a previous miscarriage. Women recounted anxiety (b=.47, t(395)=3.63, p=.0003), rumination (b=.38, t(395)=2.72, p=.007) negative emotions (b=.35, t(395)=3.33, p=.0009) and positive emotions (b=−.20, t(395)=−1.68, p=.09), while men did not. Men of partners with multiple miscarriages experienced more negative emotions compared to those with one miscarriage (b=1.15, t(395)=3.92, p=.0001)
Legerski et al. (2015) Design: Longitudinal N= 568 Participants: 7-12- year-old children Gender and mean age: 284 males and 284 females (M_{age}= 9.33 years old) Ethnicity:44%European American,26%Hispanic, 22% African American, 8% other Aim: Relationship between internal states language and Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in victims of Hurricane Andrew	EW condition: The worst things and the three most upsetting things that happened to them because of the hurricane. At 7 months follow up: three upsetting things that happened since the hurricane and still find upsetting.	Written content analysis: Coding scheme Results: Girls used more words than boys (βT1 = .21, p<.0001; βT2 = .28, p<.0001). No gender differences in internal states language.

Primeau et al. (2013) Design: Cross-sectional N=41 Participants: 18-25-year-old College students Gender and mean age: 15 males and 26 females Ethnicity: White/Caucasian (78%, n = 32), international (e.g., from Canada, Singapore, Egypt; 9.8%, n = 4), biracial (2.4%, n = 1), African American (2.4%, n = 1), Hispanic/Latino (2.4%, n = 1), Asian American (2.4%, n = 1). Aim: Relationship between type of EW and narrative content following a break-up	EW experimental condition (n=16): gains and losses related to the break-up Control (n=18): Description of the break-up experience. 100 words minimum	Written content analysis: Open coding Results: No gender differences in the emotional content of the narratives
Gawda (2012) Design: Correlational N=160 Participants: 21-46-year-old Mature college students Gender and mean age: 80 males and 80 females (M_{age}= 33.5 years old) Ethnicity: Poland Aim: Relationship between anxiety and love scripts content	EW condition: A love story after looking at a photo of a couple hugging each other.	Written content analysis: Coding scheme Results: Mens' narratives included greater use of positive emotions for partners, ($F1,158 = 49.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = 0.03$), while women's' narratives included greater use of negative emotions ($F1,158 = 4.00$, $p < .05$, $\eta 2 = 0.04$). At times, men's emotions descriptions were ambivalent, while women's were not.
Castellanos et al. (2010) Design: RCT N= 60 Participants: 17-32-year-old undergraduate psychology students Gender and mean age: 30 males and 30 females (M_{age}= 19.4 years old)	EW condition: Two writing tasks. One about a childhood event and one about a recurrent dream. 10 mins each.	Written content analysis: LIWC2007 Results: Men's narratives in the perfume condition included fewer negative emotions compared to women, while women's narratives included fewer negative emotions compared to men in the no-perfume condition $F(1, 56) = 5.78$, $p <.05$.

Ethnicity: 47% White, 27% Asian, 14% Black, 13% other. Aim: Association between exposure to perfumes and emotional content of memories		
Gawda (2008) Design: Statistical Discourse Analysis N=100 Participants: 21-46-year-old students Gender and mean age: 50 males and 50 females *(M_{age}*= 33.5 years old) Ethnicity: Polish Aim: Gender differences in the expression of love	EW condition: Perceptions of love when looking at a photograph of a couple hugging each other.	Written content analysis: Coding scheme Results: Womens' narratives were twice longer compared to mens' (F (1.98) =11.96; p<.001) but had similar to structure to mens'. Women's narratives contained more emotional words (F (1.98) =14.95; p<.001) which suggested a greater engagement in creating a love story compared to men and not richer accounts.
Fivush et al. (2007) Design: Cross-sectional N=115 Participants: 9-13-year-old children Gender and mean age: 59 males and 56 females (M_{age}= not reported) Ethnicity: In the emotional writing group: 58.9% White, 21.4% Black, 10.7% Asian, 8.9% other. In the non-emotional writing group: 57.1% White, 26.8% Black, 8.9% Asian, 7.1% other. Aim: Relationship between stressful events and well-being	EW Experimental condition (n=56): Their most deep thoughts and feelings. Control (n=56): The way they spend a typical day 15-20 minutes over three consecutive days.	Written content analysis: Coding system Results: Girls' narratives were longer (M=24.69, SD= 8.03) compared to boys' (M=17.77, SD=8.44). Younger girls had greater use of emotional words (M=2.25, SD=1.62) compared to younger boys (M=1.07, SD=0.86), there were no differences in emotional words between older girls and older boys. Girls disclosed more facts, problems, emotions, and explanations compared to boys.

Men's and women's emotional expression through EW

The studies included in this review were published between 2007 and 2022. The studies sample sized ranged from 34 to 568 participants and participants ranged in age from 7-46 years old. The ethnicity of the participants was not reported in one study (Mesghina and Richland, 2020), but in the remaining studies White participants made up the majority of those recruited. Most of the included studies asked participants to write their feelings and thoughts about specific stressful or upsetting experiences they had gone through. In two studies participants were invited to recall memories and childhood events and recurrent dreams (Vanden Poel and Hermans, 2019; Castellanos et al., 2010), while two other studies used photo elicitation and instructed participants to write about their perceptions of love and produce love stories (Gawda, 2008; Gawda 2012). Four of the included studies reported the duration of the EW task to be between five and twenty minutes (Fivush et al., 2007; Mesghina and Richland, 2020; Booker et al., 2022; Castellanos et al., 2010), while the remaining studies did not report the duration of the EW task. In all but one study, there was no minimum word limit (Primeau et al., 2013). Most of the included studies employed existing coding schemes for the analysis of the written narratives, with the exception of two studies that used LIWC2007 (Castellanos et al., 2010; Nelson et al., 2017) and one study that used open coding (Primeau et al. 2013).

Four of the included studies have examined gender differences in the expression of feelings through EW in adult populations (Nelson et al., 2017; Gawda, 2008; Gawda, 2012; Castellanos et al., 2010). Nelson et al. (2017) invited 36 males and 58 females with a prior history of miscarriage to share their experience of trying to conceive again following the miscarriage and anything that influenced it, under no time limit. LIWC2007 analysis of the narratives revealed that, despite men's and women's narratives being of similar length, there were significant differences in the expression of negative feelings between the sexes. Specifically, women's narratives were characterized by rumination as well as feelings of sadness and anxiety during their attempts to conceive again following miscarriage, whereas similar feelings were observed only in narratives of men whose partners had miscarried more than once. There

is no doubt that the retrospective design of the study revealed significant gender differences in the expression of negative feelings which have valuable clinical implications for professionals who work with couples with a history of miscarriage. Nevertheless, it would have also been interesting to capture potential gender differences in the expression of feelings both retrospectively and prospectively, through an ambidirectional design.

In Gawda's (2008) study, 50 males and 50 females between 21 and 46 years of age were shown a photograph showing a couple hugging each other, asked to consider themselves as one of the people in the photograph and to then write a story elaborating on how they understand feelings of love. The researcher revealed that women's narratives about love included more frequent use of emotional and expressive words and were more personal compared to men. Furthermore, it was observed that although men's narratives were on average half as long as women's, both genders described feelings of love in similar positive terms and their narratives had similar structures. In a later study the same researcher showed a similar photograph of a couple hugging each other to 80 males and 80 females between 21 and 46 years of age and instructed them to visualize themselves in the photo and create a love story (Gawda, 2012). The researcher found that men's love stories tended to contain a greater number of positive descriptions of their partners' feelings and more positive endings than women's love stories. It was also found that men's stories at times contained ambivalent feelings, whereas women's did not. Taken together, Gawda's studies (2008, 2012), cast a new light and provided a good starting point for discussion on the gender differences about the expression of feelings of love and the creation of love stories. It will be is necessary for future research to explore possible gender differences in the expression of a wider spectrum of feelings.

As part of Castellanos et al. (2010) RCT, 30 males and 30 females between the ages of 17 and 32 participated in either a classic fragrance condition or a no-fragrance condition room with the aim to explore whether the presence of fragrance is linked with the expression of emotional and vivid memories. Participants were unaware of the fragrance condition and were invited to

complete two EW tasks over ten minutes, describing their feelings and details about a childhood event as well as a recurring dream. Their narratives were analysed with LIWC2007 and indicated that men in the fragrance condition included fewer negative feelings compared to the no-fragrance condition, while the opposite was observed for women. While this finding had no clear explanation, the authors assumed that differences in olfactory system and neural mechanisms between men and women had a positive influence on men's reconstruction of memory and emotional content. It may be useful for future studies to explore whether participants' awareness of the fragrance exposure or whether exposure to other odors or environmental stimuli produces gender differences and influences the expression of feelings.

Three of the included studies examined gender differences in the expression of feelings through EW in child populations (Mesghina and Richland, 2020; Fivush et al., 2007; Legerski et al., 2015). The recent RCT conducted by Mesghina and Richland (2020) involved 123 males and 127 females between the ages of 10 and 12 years old. The children were randomly assigned to five-minute EW tasks: either they wrote about their feelings and thoughts regarding an upcoming math lesson and test, or they copied a feeling neutral paragraph. The analysis of their narratives using an age-appropriate coding scheme revealed that boys' narratives contained greater amounts of positive feelings than girls' narratives, as well as less disclosure of problems than girls. Furthermore, the narratives of girls were found to be longer than those of boys. A further exploration of these novel findings may involve comparing them to longer writing sessions in future research.

Fivush et al. (2007) observed similar findings in their cross-sectional study, in which they assigned 59 males and 56 females between 9-13-years old to either write about their most deep thoughts and feelings or to describe what they do on a typical day, for fifteen to twenty minutes over three days. The researchers demonstrated that girls' narratives were longer compared to boys and contained on average more facts, feelings, explanations as well as disclosures of interpersonal issues. The study also showed that although younger girls

expressed more feelings in their narratives than younger boys, there were no gender differences in the expression of feelings by older girls and older boys.

On the other hand, the longitudinal study by Legerski et al. (2015) contradicts the findings of Mesghina and Richland (2020) and Fivush et al. (2007). Legerski et al. (2015) invited 284 males and 284 females 7-12-year-old children to write under no time limit about the worst things and the three most upsetting things that happened to them following a hurricane. Seven months later the children also wrote about the events surrounding the hurricane that are still upset about. Despite the researchers' finding that girls' narratives were longer than boys', they found no gender differences in the internal state language they used in their narratives, including feelings, behaviour related to feelings, as well as cognitive terms and sensory experiences. A hurricane can be thought about as a serious source of trauma, therefore it may be possible in future studies, to explore girls' and boys' internal state language through EW as a response to other types of natural disasters or other sources of trauma. Future studies may also explore gender differences in the expression of feelings in later developmental stages.

The remaining three studies have explored gender differences in narratives themes and narrative coherence through EW (Primeau et al., 2013; Booker et al., 2022; Vanden Poel and Hermans, 2019). In their earlier study Primeau et al. (2013) invited 41 college students between the ages of 18 and 25 to write at least 100 words about their learnings and losses following a break-up experience (experimental group) or to describe their break-up experience (control group). To the researchers' surprise, there were no differences between the emotional themes created by male and female students. For their mini-longitudinal mixed methods study, Booker et al. (2022) asked 120 males and 180 females ages 18-29 years old to write down their deepest thoughts, feelings, and facts about two life experiences that had profound effects on their lives, one about a negative life experience and the other about a positive life experience for a period of 10 to 15 minutes each. The researchers found no differences in the narrative identity themes that men and women developed in their narratives, but they concluded that women's narratives exhibited greater

coherence, agency, and growth than men's narratives. Similarly, Vanden Poel and Hermans (2019) in their recent correlational study invited 274 females and 124 males between 18-30 years old to write under no time limit their thoughts, feelings, and facts about two positive or negative memories that had impacted them, one with a high relevance to their identity and one with no or minimum relevance to their identity. The researchers concluded that women were more coherent in the description of their memories compared to men.

While both Booker's et al. (2022) and Vanden Poel's and Hermans's (2019) studies have demonstrated that women's narratives are more coherent than men's, future research may examine whether other factors affect coherence scores across genders. Specifically, in Booker's et al. (2022) study, the researchers used a coding scheme developed by Reese et al. (2011) which measures three specific dimensions of coherence including context, chronology and themes. Therefore, other aspects of coherence that may have been present in men's narratives or in both men's and women's narratives may have been overlooked. In Vanden Poel's and Hermans's (2019) study, it would have been interesting to determine whether factors such as the type of the memory, the period of time passed since it occurred, or the age of the participants would have produced any differences in the coherence results between genders. Also, given that none of these two studies (Booker et al., 2022; Vanden Poel and Hermans, 2019) have interviewed the participants following the EW task, it may be useful for future studies to do so in order to understand whether these differences in coherence are or are not in participants' awareness and whether they might also relate to social norms or expectations.

Main findings summary

To my knowledge, this is the first systematic literature review which has attempted to explore whether there are gender differences in the way that males and females express their feelings and thoughts through EW. Based on the findings of the included studies in adult populations, it appears that although two studies found no gender differences in the narratives length (Nelson et al., 2017) and structure (Gawda, 2008), men's narratives are marked by fewer

negative feelings, more positive feelings, and positive endings, but also ambivalent feelings, while women's narratives contain greater emotional expression and negative feelings (Nelson et al., 2017; Gawda, 2008; Gawda, 2012; Castellanos et al., 2010). These results may point to the possibility that men and women process their feelings about their experiences differently when engaged in EW. Alternatively, as these studies included one-off EW tasks, it is likely that men require a longer period of time to express negative emotions in writing than women or that they did not feel comfortable expressing difficult feelings through the medium of writing. This result supports previous research which suggests that men tend to control and restrain their feelings (Shields, 2002).

With regards to child populations, the findings suggest that the narratives of boys tend to be shorter than those of girls. Furthermore, similarly to the findings in adult populations, boys' narratives are characterized by a greater degree of positive feelings and a lower disclosure of problems than those of girls. Conversely, girls' narratives include a wider range of feelings, facts, and interpersonal problems compared to boys' narratives (Mesghina and Richland, 2020; Fivush et al., 2007). As opposed to this, there were no gender differences in the expression of internal state language, which includes feelings and behaviours related to feelings, cognitive terms and sensory experiences (Legerski et al., 2015). There is a possibility that the expression of feelings between boys ang girls may depend on the content of the experience they write about, and, perhaps being a survivor of a natural disaster may produce common feelings and thoughts for boys and girls. In addition, there were no gender differences in the expression of feelings, facts and problems among older boys and girls in comparison to younger boys and girls (Fivush et al., 2007). It is possible that this indicates that the way in which boys and girls express their feelings through EW varies depending on their developmental stage.

In regards to the gender differences in narrative themes the findings indicate that when men and women are asked to express their feelings through EW they create similar themes (Primeau et al., 2013; Booker et al., 2022). Though it is difficult to interpret these findings because participants in both studies wrote

about different experiences, it is noteworthy that both studies had a relatively similar age range sample of young adults. This might suggest that there is a relationship between age and gender expression of feelings. Finally, the studies also indicated that women write narratives that are more coherent than men (Booker et al., 2022; Vanden Poel and Hermans, 2019). As recent life experiences have been shown to influence coherence (Volanen et al., 2007), it is possible that men chose to write about more recent experiences than women and this may have impacted on the coherence of their narratives.

Aims, objectives and relevance to Counselling Psychology

From the findings of this systematic review, it became apparent that there is a steadily growing interest, even though research is still limited, in gender differences in the expression of feelings through EW in both adult and child and adolescent populations. Taken together the findings of the included studies reveal significant gender differences in the expression of feelings through EW but also interesting similarities. The existing findings are valuable, however they derive from studies utilizing a variety of quantitative designs, including RCTs, longitudinal, correlational, cross-sectional, and statistical discourse analysis. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is concerned with exploring the content and the process or otherwise seeks to identify answers to the questions ‘how and what’ (Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2020, p.3), and to date, no qualitative research has been undertaken to explore men's and women's expression of feelings through EW. In addition, no research has been undertaken to examine this phenomenon from a pluralistic perspective.

Taking into account this gap in the existing research, this research aims to explore ‘how men and women express their feelings and thoughts when they are asked to write about a personal experience in an EW task’. The first objective of the study will be to explore the underlying structure of men’s and women’s narratives and their patterns, while the second objective will be to explore the types of stories that narrators will develop in their narratives. Both objectives will pay attention to narrators’ feelings and thoughts.

It is of no doubt that the field of Counselling Psychology is rapidly expanding the last decades. Especially following the COVID-19 pandemic we observe a growing interest and recognition of pluralistic approaches to therapy, as there is a breadth of research on how traditional talking therapy sessions are often enhanced and complemented by the use of creative approaches to therapy including EW, poetry, art, drama/psychodrama, and bibliotherapy (Feniger-Schaal et al., 2022; Skvarc et al., 2022; de Witte et al., 2021). As part of their clinical practice, Counselling Psychologists interact with both male and female clients of broad age groups who present with a wide range of concerns. Recent research findings have shown that in the initial stages of therapy a struggle to open up can often prevail (Kleiven, et al., 2020), while the prevailing reason for clients' disengagement from therapy appears to be clients' expectations and the quality of the therapeutic relationship (Leichsenring et al., 2019). Therefore, the understanding of how males and females express their feelings and thoughts through EW is an area that merits further exploration. This study may encourage Counselling Psychologists to incorporate EW into their clinical practice so that their clients' individualised needs can be better met and therapy disengagement rates may be reduced. This study aims to make a unique contribution to this topic that can serve as a basis for practitioners to be more attentive to their clients' preferences and needs, as well as more open to enhancing and broadening their therapeutic tools. In addition, this study aims to initiate a discussion about potential advancements in the theoretical, clinical and research training of future Counselling Psychologists.

Chapter 2. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the design, methods, and procedures of this research study. The chapter begins with a description of the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology followed by an outline of the study's philosophical foundation. The rationale for working within a narrative analysis approach involving two levels of analysis is also presented, as well as an overview of the narrative approach used. The chapter continues with the ethical considerations of the study and a detailed account of the research procedures followed including recruitment, method and procedure of data collection and data analysis. This is followed by a discussion of the methodological but also my personal reflexivity for the study. The study's quality and validity are also evaluated at the end of chapter.

The choice of a qualitative methodology

In designing this research and developing the research question I was drawn to a qualitative methodology for the following the reasons. A qualitative research method was considered in accordance with the study's research aim, which is to explore how men and women express their feelings and thoughts when asked to write about a personal experience through an EW task. Indeed, qualitative research is exploratory in nature and aims to understand and reveal social phenomena including people's experiences and understandings of the world as well as peoples' beliefs, perspectives and meanings (Daher et al., 2017; Flick, 2018). In contrast, in quantitative methodologies researchers use numerical data to examine phenomena and test hypotheses (Barczak, 2015; Yilmaz, 2013). Furthermore, although quantitative methods have historically dominated psychology research and have greatly contributed to our understanding of counselling and psychotherapy outcomes, qualitative methods are appropriate when investigating emotional experiences (Stainton-Rogers and Willig, 2008). Also, in qualitative methodologies, it is possible to collect data through a variety of methods, including diaries (Janssens et al., 2018), autobiographies (Glaw et al., 2017), and written texts (Kılıçoglu, 2018). Thus, adopting a qualitative methodology allowed me to collect peoples'

stories through an EW task giving me the opportunity to explore the research field that I was interested in. Last but not least, qualitative methodologies are consistent with the philosophy and aims of Counselling Psychology and the counselling process, which is based on the exploration of meaning and behaviour (Morrow et al., 2012).

Philosophical basis

Upon identifying the research question and the research aim, Frost (2021) suggests that the next and most fundamental step in analysing narratives is to place the epistemological and ontological positions as these will assist in determining which model(s) of narrative analysis will be employed. An epistemological position refers to a set of philosophical assumptions about knowledge and in particular 'what we know and how we can know' (Willig, 2012, p.10), whereas an ontological position refers to a set of philosophical assumptions regarding existence and 'what is there to know' (Willig, 2008, p.13).

The aim of this study was to explore how men and women express their feelings and thoughts when they are asked to write about a personal experience in an EW task. As a first objective, the present study sought to explore the underlying structure of the narratives and their patterns, with a focus on narrators' feelings and thoughts; as a second objective, it aimed to identify the types of stories that narrators created in their narratives. As I was interested in exploring how people use language to express their feelings and thoughts, a social-constructionist framework was considered as a possible epistemological position, as it seemed to be well suited to the first objective of the study. Within a social-constructionist framework, researchers seek to explore how people construct knowledge and meaning for themselves, their experiences, and others within their social worlds, influenced by social practices (Willig, 2019).

Furthermore, I was also interested to explore the types of stories that narrators created in their narratives and thus a phenomenological framework was also considered as a possible epistemological position, as it was deemed

appropriate for the second objective of the study. Researchers who work within phenomenological frameworks seek to explore ‘subjective experiencing’ and how they are interpreted by individuals, rejecting the notion of an objective reality (Willig, 2019, p. 9).

Due to the different nature of the knowledge that I wished to generate within the same research data set, I felt that it would be more appropriate to position the study within a contextual constructionist framework. The epistemological position of contextual constructionism is based on the notion that peoples’ knowledge about their experiences and behaviours does not remain static, but evolves continuously over time in response to multiple factors such as culture, context, space and relations (Jaeger and Rosnow, 1998). In particular, four factors have been implicated as influencing the production of knowledge, namely the way in which participants understand their own experiences and give meaning to them, the way in which researchers interpret these understandings and meanings, the participants' and researchers' cultural belief systems, and the validity of the interpretations by different scientific communities (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997). Therefore, in line with contextual constructionism this study is concerned with the exploration of the structure of men’s and women’s personal experiences through EW, and how these experiences have been evolved into different types of stories, while acknowledging that the interpretations of the data will be shaped by my social and cultural beliefs as well as those of my participants.

Frequently debated topics among researchers, realism and relativism represent diametrically opposing views on reality and its origin (Levers, 2013). A realist ontology assumes that reality is single and objective and independent of human experience and perception, whereas a relativist ontology assumes that reality is a multiplicity of subjective experiences and perceptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This study maintains situated between these ontological positions. Therefore, it is assumed that men and women will express their feelings and thoughts and structure their narratives in the EW task in accordance with their social and cultural beliefs, but they will also use the EW task to create stories based on their subjective experiences.

The philosophical basis of this study is in accordance to Frost and Nolas (2011 p.118) who argued that ‘combining ontological and epistemological perspectives work to minimize the researcher's imposition of truth on reality’ and promote an understanding of the ‘multidimensional nature of human experience’ and the ‘multiontological world’ we live in.

Working within a narrative analysis approach

The employment of a narrative approach was deemed most appropriate for the aim of this study, as it is one of the most recently developed qualitative methodologies which focuses on the exploration of peoples’ stories and seeks to understand their composition and the meanings underlying them (Ntinda, 2020). Stories surround, guide and influence people’s daily lives and it is through them that we explore who we were, who we are and who we would like to be (McAlpine, 2016).

Despite the fact that narrative research does not offer specific guidance as to how to analyse the research data as do other qualitative methodologies such as Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), Grounded Theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Andrews et al., 2013), it can be considered as a broad methodology that encompasses four different approaches: Thematic Narrative Analysis (TNA), structural analysis, Dialogic/Performance Analysis, and Visual Analysis (Riessman, 2008).

TNA is one of the most widely used approaches in narrative research and focuses primarily on exploring the content of the narrative rather than its language, function, or intended audience (Riessman, 2008). By doing so, this approach is concerned with understanding how people relate to their life experiences and how those experiences have impacted them (Bamberg, 2020). As with Grounded Theory and IPA, TNA seeks to explore people's experiences, but differs in that it seeks to interpret narratives as wholes as opposed to fragments (Riessman, 2008). On the contrary, structural analysis is a less used approach in narrative research and focuses on both the content of the narrative but also how it is organised (Riessman, 2008). Structural analysis

encompasses two different approaches, Labov's Model of narrative analysis and Gee's Model of narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008). Labov's Model concentrates on the clauses of the narratives and aims to analyse their function within the narrative, while Gee's Model is considered an approach that focuses on language and its features and analyses the way people speak (Riessman, 2005). Dialogic/Performance Analysis is an approach which examines the intended audience of the narratives as well as its purpose, and it is multifaceted since it considers context, time, language used, and the interaction between the speaker and the listener (Victor, 2009). Finally, Visual Analysis which involves the analysis of images is a collaborative approach between the researcher and the participant that integrates elements from TNA and Dialogic/Performance Analysis to explore the ways images are created and their purposes (Duque, 2009).

An additional approach which is considered within the narrative approaches is the Critical Narrative Analysis (Langdridge, 2007; Emerson and Frosh, 2004) which focuses on the psychosocial aspects of narratives and attempts to interpret them using a variety of psychosocial theories. Within the narrative approaches is also the Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA, Frank, 2010) which is based on the premise that stories reflect people's lives and include dialogue and through a process of questioning it seeks to explore the different voices within the stories as well as the function of a story and the reasons for sharing it (Frank, 2010).

In thinking about the research question of this study as we all as its two objectives, consideration was given to all the narrative approaches discussed above. Langdridge's (Langdridge 2007, p.215) Critical Narrative Analysis model turned out to be more suitable for research that includes case studies and for researchers interested in theoretical frameworks that explore issues related to 'power and politics' and has therefore been discarded. It was also decided not to use Emerson and Frosh's Critical Narrative Analysis model since it could result in overinterpretations of the narratives on the basis of its psychoanalytic assumptions about human nature (Emerson and Frosh, 2004). In particular, when applied to written research data, this model may be problematic since it

does not take into account the interpersonal context nor the speaker's response (Frosh and Emerson, 2005).

As this study sought to explore how men and women express their feelings and thoughts through EW, I was drawn to structural analysis as it seemed well suited to the research question. Between the two structural analysis approaches, Labov's Model of narrative analysis and Gee's Model of narrative analysis, Labov's Model was considered the most suitable approach, as Gee's Model is designed for the analysis of lengthy oral accounts and seeks to explore the characteristics of participants' speech (Riessman, 2008). As such, Labov's Model of narrative analysis was selected for the first objective of this study which sought to explore the underlying structure of the narratives and their patterns, with a focus on narrators' feelings and thoughts.

For the second objective of this study which sought to identify the types of stories that narrators wrote in the EW task, TNA was considered to be a potential approach. As a content-centered methodology, TNA examines thematic patterns between participants who share experiences about the same topic and holds that 'within a thematic cluster, people mean the same thing' (Riessman, 2008, p.76). However, it was decided that it would not be a suitable option for my research data since participants in this study wrote about a range of experiences each of which might have had a unique understanding and significance for them, and therefore, it was discarded.

Considering further the second objective of this study, I was drawn to use the findings derived from Labov's Model of narrative analysis as a basis for identifying the types of stories generated in the narratives. In spite of the fact that this is a departure from the classic Labov's Model, it is a novel addition to it that was deemed to provide additional insights into the interpretation of the data, as well as the ways narrators used the EW task from a more creative analytical perspective.

Known for its flexible and open to diversity nature, analytical pluralism has the purpose to link together different perspectives to the understanding of peoples'

experiences (Frost and Nolas, 2011). It has been claimed that analytical pluralism within the same data set has the potential to generate multidimensional and complex understandings to a range of phenomena (Clarke et al., 2015). I believe that the choice of analysing the data with a narrative analysis approach that involves two different levels of analysis will privilege the aim of this research study, since the two analyses will be complementary to one another in providing a more in-depth understanding of and exploration of how men and women express their feelings and thoughts through EW.

Overview of Labov's Model of narrative analysis

Labov and Waletzky (1967) conceptualised an innovative analytical framework for analysing tape-recorded narratives of personal experiences and identifying their main elements and functions through the way they were recounted. A few years later, Labov (1972) advanced their collaborative research based on the premise that the stories about past experiences people tell contain narrative clauses which have a 'beginning, middle and end' but may also have a more developed and complex structure (Labov, 1972 pp.362-363). Labov created a detailed analytical framework for the identification of recurring patterns in narrative structure according to which each narrative clause can be classified into one of the following six elements: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution and Coda.

Abstract is a set of one or two clauses which usually appear at the beginning of a narrative and summarize its content and significance (Labov, 1972). While abstracts are not mandatory elements in narratives, when they are present, they serve as a means of introducing the story (Patterson, 2008). Orientation is a set of clauses which introduce the characters of the story and their behaviours and determine the places and times where the story occurred; these clauses either follow Abstract or appear at later points throughout the narrative (Labov, 2013). Orientation is followed by Complicating Action, which is the only element required in a narrative (Labov, 1972), and is a series of clauses that express

the key events in the story (Labov, 1972). Complicating Action is considered to be the ‘skeletal’ framework of a narrative (Labov, 2007 p.48).

Evaluation is fundamental element of a narrative which can be found throughout it or in specific sections of it and consist of clauses which describe people's attitudes towards the story's events and the significance they place on them (Labov, 2013). Evaluation also conveys peoples’ feelings and meanings for their experiences (Riessman, 2005). Narratives can include three different forms of Evaluation, External Evaluation, Embedded Evaluation and Evaluative Action (Labov, 1972). Labov claimed that an Evaluation is described as External when the narrator stops the progress of the narrative to make evaluative comments about it from his current perspective, whereas an Evaluation is described as Embedded when the narrator provides evaluative comments about his feelings at the time the story was occurring, without interrupting the progress of the narrative. Lastly, an Evaluation is described as Evaluative Action when the narrator maintains the narrative progress and conveys his feelings at the time the story occurred through the description of actions.

Labov further claimed that a narrative’s evaluative elements can be contain four different evaluative devices: Intensifiers, Comparators, Correlatives and Explicatives each of which has its own subtypes (Labov, 1972). Intensifiers are words that aim to enhance the emotional content of a clause, such as quantifiers, repetitions and expressive phonology, while Comparators are words that aim to provide comparisons including similes, metaphors, questions and negative expressions. Correlatives are words used to connect events together, while Explicatives are used to explain how and why an event occurred.

The last two elements of a narrative are Resolution and Coda. Resolution is a clause that reports how the events of the story were resolved, whereas the Coda signals the end of the story and references it back into the present (Labov, 2013). Coda is the less frequently element encountered in a narrative and can include clauses that describe the impact of the experience on the narrator or clauses which include general or irrelevant remarks about the experience

described (Labov, 1972). It is not necessary for narratives to include all six elements described above, but if they do, they are considered to be ‘fully developed’ (Labov, 1972, p.363).

Labov (1972, p.370) recommends that narrative clauses can be classified into one of six elements by answering the following questions, and that the only element that cannot be identified this way is the Coda, as the narrative has already been resolved.

1. Abstract: What was this about?
2. Orientation: Who, When, What, Where?
3. Complicating Action: Then what happened?
4. Evaluation: So, what?
5. Resolution: What finally happened?

Labov’s Model is a narrative analysis approach with a number of advantages. Known for its rigorousness and attention to detail, it permits the exploration of narrative structure and the comparison of structural elements across different narratives, while its focus on the linguistic features and the different forms of evaluations and evaluative devices facilitates an understanding of narrators' perspectives on their experiences (Patterson, 2008).

Despite its number of advantages, Labov’s Model has been criticised for several reasons. As Riessman (2008, p. 100) has pointed out, Labov's definition of narrative as a 'brief and temporally ordered story' poses a key limitation since not all narratives meet these criteria. Patterson (2008, p.30) has also highlighted that when Labov’s Model is followed strictly, it does not consider the ‘partial and constructed nature of personal experience’. Also, due to the fact that Labov's Model is primarily focused on the analysis of clauses, it has the potential to produce a simple and 'event-centric' analysis, which may result in the loss of other rich research material (Patterson, 2008 p.33). Another limitation according to Riessman (2008), regards the coding process of Labov's Model which may present challenges as different researchers may code clauses in different ways. For instance, there may be difficulties in

distinguishing Complicating Action clauses from Evaluative clauses, since a clause may serve to report an event that occurred, as well as to convey the perspectives of the narrators about it (Patterson, 2008). Lastly, since Labov's Model tends to decontextualise the data and approach each clause as autonomous within the narrative without considering the surrounding context, a more experiential and flexible approach to it is encouraged in order to allow for a richer and more robust interpretation of the data (Patterson, 2008 p.38). This is also the reason why it is recommended to be used as a foundation for a subsequent analysis (Frost, 2011).

Overall, despite the above limitations, Labov's Model is considered a 'paradigmatic' approach which explores in detail the use of language to understand the way people's experiences are structured within a narrative (Riessman, 2008, p.81).

Narrative types

A 'narrative type' is defined by Frank as 'the most general storyline that can be recognized underlying the plot and tensions of particular stories' (Frank, 1995, p. 75). Frank (1995) conceptualised three different types of narratives about illness stories and he asserted that the rationale of narrative types is not to disregard the subjective experience of illness, but rather to better listen to and understand how people experience illness. While Frank did not propose a specific analytic procedure for identifying each narrative type, he suggested ways in which each of them can be recognised.

The first narrative type he proposed is the 'quest narrative', which portrays the illness journey as a 'quest' (Frank, 1995, p. 115). In quest narratives the plot starts with how illness was a disruptive event in a person's life, but as the narrative progresses, the focus shifts to the illness acceptance as well as to beliefs about what was gained out of it (Frank, 1995). The second narrative type is the 'restitution narrative' which as Frank (1995) claimed is the most common plot encountered in illness stories. In restitution narratives the plot starts with reflections about the healthy life before the illness, it progresses with reflections

about the illness that the person experiences at present and ends with a 'natural desire to get well and stay well' in the future (Frank, 1995 p.78). The third narrative type, the 'chaos narrative' is a type 'opposite of the restitution narrative' and its plot throughout reflects on how 'life is never getting better' as a result of the illness (Frank, 1995 p. 97). Chaos narratives have no reflections about the future or the past, lack sequence and capture the person's ongoing anxiety about the illness throughout (Frank, 1995). In spite of the above three distinct narrative types, it is essential that narratives are seen as 'patterns in a kaleidoscope' in the sense that they need to be understood as unique stories that cannot always be fitted exclusively to a single narrative type but rather integrate aspects from each (Frank, 1995, p.76).

In summary, Frank's types of narratives provide a framework that explores how people make sense of their illness journeys, placing emphasis on the illness experience and its whole impact on the person. In the same way that 'a conductor sets the tempo, indicates emphasis and initiates performance actions', people can tell their stories in varying ways which reveal a sense of who they are and how they are influenced by them (Frank, 2010, p. 14).

Ethical Concerns

A low-risk ethical approval has been granted for this study by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at City, University of London prior to its commencement. In conducting this study, the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics of Human Research (BPS, 2014) and the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2018) were followed.

Before participants agreed to participate in the study, they were emailed a Participant Information Sheet **(Appendix 1)** that outlined the aims of the study, their role as participants and the potential benefits and advantages of participating. The Participant Information Sheet also informed them about the study's eligibility and exclusion criteria, their right to confidentiality, the right to withdraw at any time without explanation or consequence, the protection and

storage of their personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018), and what would take place on the day of participation. In addition, they were given the full names and contact information of myself and my supervisor for them to contact if they had any questions or concerns. Following this, participants were given a week to process the study and consider their participation. Participants who were eligible and agreed to participate were required to sign a written consent form **(Appendix 2),** by which they confirmed their agreement to participate and their agreement that sections of their written narratives would be used for the purposes of publications. Participants were informed that their data would be anonymised, and all identifiable information would be removed in order to protect their identities. Prior to consenting to participate in the study, it was ensured that participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions they may have.

Both researchers and practitioners should be aware that EW can be a powerful and potentially disturbing experience. There is evidence that EW can trigger short-term emotional reactions in some individuals, such as crying or being upset (Pennebaker and Chung, 2011). Researchers should emphasize this to participants by limiting the topic range of the EW, promoting self-care and responsibility during the EW process, as well as providing a supportive debriefing process. In this study, a number of steps were followed to ensure that participants were well supported and treated sensitively with care and respect. In order to prevent triggering a stress response or painful memories, participants were advised to not write about existing painful or distressing personal experiences. Participants were also informed that in case they felt distressed during the writing process they could invite me into the meeting room for support, and they also had the right to take a break or withdraw from the process at any time. Following the completion of the research procedure, participants were provided with a five-to ten-minute debriefing during which they were encouraged to discuss their experience of the writing process and ask any questions that had arisen. Any signs of discomfort or distress were acknowledged and addressed. A debriefing form **(Appendix 3)** was also provided to participants, which included a list of local psychological services they could contact if necessary.

At the end of the research procedure participants received a £15 Amazon voucher. There is evidence that incentives can increase response rates in qualitative research (Kelly et al., 2017), however, incentives that are poorly conceived may have adverse effects on participants (Kang, 2016). By offering incentives to participants, I aimed to compensate them for their time, travel expenses to City University from all over London, and any discomfort caused by the research. My intention in offering them vouchers rather than cash compensation was to offer them something tangible giving them the opportunity to think about and purchase a necessary for them item. As a second reason, their participation in the study took place a few weeks before Christmas, and I thought that the vouchers may also allow them to purchase a gift for a loved one.

Participants' identities were protected by anonymising the data and removing all identifying information. Participants were identified by unique codes that were developed and pseudonyms were used instead of their real names in the analysis of the data.

Given that qualitative research is not lab-based, the physical and psychological safety of the researcher is of utmost priority and require a careful approach (Williamson and Burns, 2014). In this study, it was anticipated that the research data would contain sensitive and difficult personal experiences. Indeed, as it is presented in the next chapter, some of the narratives contained particularly sad and heavy experiences. Although as a Counselling Psychologist Trainee, I was capable of attending to and prioritising my self-care and psychological well-being, I drew upon several resources for support along the way. Personal therapy sessions and the keeping of a reflective diary were crucial in helping me to explore my feelings and process my responses to the research data in greater depth. The exchange of experiences with my colleagues from the course and the peer research supervision groups also helped me to normalise my feelings and feel supported and listened to. Finally, my physical safety was taken into consideration during the data collection process which was ensured by carrying a pocket alarm button and a mobile phone with me at all times. The dates, location, start and end times of the meetings were all communicated to

two members of my immediate family environment. An agreement was also made that they would be contacted at the end of each meeting.

Data storage

The research data files were anonymised and stored securely on the University's file-hosting service (OneDrive) and on the University's digital repository platform (Figshare) under my password-protected private account. For confidentiality reasons, participants' consent forms were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office, to which I had exclusive access. Participants were informed that upon completion of the research project, their data would be kept for five years and then deleted. They were also informed that their consent forms would be shredded and disposed of in confidential bags in accordance with the University's confidential waste management policy.

Research Procedures

Sample and eligibility criteria

Qualitative research requires a small sample size to be manageable, while also being large enough to capture in depth people's experiences (Sandelowski, 1995). It has been argued by Patton et al. (2002) that the sample size in qualitative research does not follow specific rules, but is influenced by a number of factors, including the research question, the research aim, the usefulness, the credibility, and the resources and time available. Results from a recent systematic review showed that saturation in qualitative research can be achieved with a sample size of 9-17 when involving interviews or 4-8 when involving focus groups (Hennink and Kaiser, 2021).

Due to my interest in exploring how men and women express their feelings and thoughts through EW it was felt that an equal representation of males and females in the sample would be appropriate for this study. Therefore, this study sought to recruit eight male and eight female participants. To ensure that the

study did not include more participants than necessary, I employed a gradual recruitment process until the desired sample size was achieved.

Eligible participants for this study were literate adults of minimum 18 years of age who were willing to write about a personal experience in an EW task for 50 minutes. For the purpose of protecting the well-being of participants, those with recent traumatic experiences, ongoing mental health diagnoses, active suicidal thoughts, or those at immediate risk of harming themselves or others were excluded from the study. The study did not have a maximum age limit and participants of any educational level or with any first language were welcome to participate in this study as I was interested in incorporating some heterogeneity into the sample in order to enhance my research findings.

Recruitment procedure

Following ethical approval, a two-month recruitment period began in early November 2018 and ended in December 2018. In order to facilitate the recruitment process, two different strategies were developed. Recruitment flyers **(Appendix 4)** were created and placed on the research boards of the five different Academic Schools of City, University of London. Regular visits were made to the Schools to ensure that the flyers were in place or to replace those that were missing. The study was also advertised online via the University's pool management software (Sona Systems, 2015). In the recruitment flyers and online advertisement, information was provided regarding the study's aims, method of data collection, and eligibility requirements, as well as information on the study's location and compensation.

The recruitment flyers were not effective in reaching potential participants and all participants were recruited via the Sona System. Potential participants who were interested in participating in the study were able to register for it through the Sona System. Once a potential participant registered, I was notified by the Sona System and a copy of the Participant Information Sheet was emailed to them. This enabled them to learn more about the study and decide whether to participate. Participants were given a week to consider their participation, and

with those who were still interested, further emails were exchanged to ensure that they met the study's eligibility criteria.

Participants who met the eligibility criteria and agreed to take part in the study were invited individually for a one-off meeting in a pre-booked meeting room at City, University of London. On the day of the meeting participants were welcomed and then briefed about the study. They were required to sign two copies of the written consent form, one of which they kept for their records and the other for mine and were also given the opportunity to ask questions. Following this, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire (**Appendix 5)** containing information regarding their age, gender, ethnicity, and employment status.

Participants

For this study, sixteen participants were recruited, eight males and eight females. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 58 years old. The ethnicity of six participants was identified as White, six as Asian, three as Black, and one as Mixed. Eight participants identified themselves as full-time students enrolled in a bachelor's or master's degree program, two as students and employed, five as part-time or full-time employed, and one as unemployed.

Data collection

Research setting

The research study was conducted within pre-booked meeting rooms located at the College Building of City, University of London. To acquire a digital view of the rooms and gather information about their different types and facilities, a preliminary online search was conducted on the University's website. A visit to the University's meeting rooms followed in order to determine their suitability and familiarize myself with their location within the building. Once it was confirmed that a participant was eligible to take part in the study, a meeting room was booked at a convenient for them date and time. To ensure there

would be sufficient time for the briefing and the debriefing process as well as participants' potential lateness, each meeting room was booked for one hour and a half. It was also ensured that the meeting rooms selected were easy to access, as quiet as possible, and had waiting areas nearby since I would have to wait until the participants had completed the research procedure.

Expressive Writing Task

The use of written accounts is considered to be a valuable method of qualitative research since participants are given the opportunity to think about their answers prior to responding, as opposed to the use of oral accounts (Handy and Ross, 2005). Therefore, in accordance with the research aim of this study, this research collected written accounts as research data.

The data collection method for this study was based on the EW paradigm of Pennebaker and Beall (1986) who had participants write their deep thoughts and feelings about a very emotional experience for fifteen minutes over four writing sessions. The present study, however, utilized a modified version of the original EW paradigm and invited eligible participants to write about any experience or event in their life that they consider to be very important and personal to themselves or their significant others for approximately 50 minutes **(Appendix 6)**. Due to the primary focus of my research being the ways in which men and women express their feelings and thoughts through writing, I was not interested in asking participants to write about a specific experience and therefore selected to have an EW task without a specific focus. As opposed to this, I wanted to observe how their feelings and thoughts are expressed through the different experiences they would choose to share. Moreover, I was unsure whether participants were comfortable writing about a specific experience of my choice or whether they had already processed it, so it seemed more appropriate and ethical to ask participants to write about an experience of their choosing.

Using a modified version of EW instead of the original paradigm was felt to be the most suitable choice based on the following factors. First, this study was a qualitative, narrative exploration of how people express their feelings and

thoughts through an EW task rather than an assessment of the effectiveness of EW. In addition, results from a recent systematic review demonstrated that even brief writing sessions can yield rich data related to emotional experiences (Ramsey-Wade et al., 2021). Last but not least, this was a doctoral thesis, and although additional writing sessions might have provided valuable insights into the research question, they were not feasible due to the time constraints involved.

Procedure

On the day of the meeting, participants were given a copy of the EW task instructions so that we could discuss it and were encouraged to ask any questions they had about it. Participants were advised not to write about experiences that they considered painful at the time of writing, so as to avoid triggering a response. In addition, they were advised not to pay attention to grammar, syntax, or spelling while writing. The purpose of this was to ensure that they would be able to write freely and remain focused on the writing process without being concerned about potential mistakes. Participants were provided with writing paper, two pens and a sealed envelope in which they were asked to place the EW task upon completion. It was ensured that they were given a few minutes to familiarize themselves with the room and sit comfortably and they were reminded of their right to take a break during writing or to withdraw at any point. As soon as participants felt ready, they remained alone in the meeting room to complete the EW task. The purpose of this was to protect their privacy and to allow them to focus on the procedure. Participants were informed that I would wait for them to finish and would return to the room once 50 minutes had elapsed. Participants were also informed of the nearby waiting area where I would wait until they finished and were encouraged to call me into the room if they felt distressed at any point during the writing process.

A successful completion of the procedure was achieved by all participants, and no terminations or breaks were necessary. However, In the course of the debriefing process, a female participant became tearful as the personal

experience she chose to write about had caused her some distress. I remained in the meeting room with her and used my counselling skills to ensure that she felt heard, and her feelings were acknowledged, normalised, and validated. I also reminded of her right to withdraw from the study without any consequences or questions. As with all participants, this participant was also provided with a debriefing form which included a list of local psychological services and was encouraged to seek support if needed. The participant was a therapist herself and was aware of the importance of self-care and capable of self-regulation. Fifteen minutes later, she felt grounded and ready to leave. After the participant left, it was felt essential to report the matter to my research supervisor and consult her on this. The participant was contacted later in the day to inquire how she was feeling. In response she stared that she was feeling well, found the writing process helpful and appreciated my support throughout.

Transcription

Within one week of the meeting, each narrative was transcribed using Microsoft Word. This timeframe was maintained throughout the data collection so that I could also recall and record my experience with each participant in my reflective journal. Considering my decision to transcribe the already written data, even though I was aware that it is audio or visual data that are predominantly necessary to be transcribed in qualitative research (Bailey, 2008), I found this process valuable in preparation for the analysis, since it enabled me to start interacting with the data, remove any identifiable information and have them all in a common format.

An ethical dilemma was encountered while transcribing one narrative as a female participant's handwriting was challenging for me to read and therefore to transcribe. Several strategies were used to facilitate the transcription process, including re-reading the narrative several times in order to become familiar with the participant's handwriting, typing out words and phrases that I recognized, and leaving spaces for those that I was unable to read, as well as taking breaks from reading the narrative and coming back again to it. In spite of the above efforts, the transcription still contained many gaps that hindered its

coherence. The participant was contacted in order to inquire whether she would be willing to provide some clarifications for some parts of her narrative to ensure that the account of her experience is accurate and complete. However, the participant did not respond, and after consulting with my research supervisor, it was decided that it was best to discard her account. I found the decision to be difficult, given that the participant spent time sharing her experience, while I was able to see how much effort she put forth through her lengthy narrative. Nevertheless, I believe this decision was more ethical compared to transcribing and subsequently interpreting her experience inaccurately. As a result of this decision, the sample size of the study was reduced by one participant, making it a total of fifteen participants, eight males and seven females.

Analytic procedure

Brief summaries

After transcription, each of the fifteen narratives was read individually and a brief summary was drafted for each. Given that participants were allowed to choose the experience they wanted to write about, the decision to create summaries for each of the narratives was made with the intention to explore the heterogeneity of the accounts and gain a preliminary understanding of them as whole narratives prior to their breakdown for analysis.

Structural analysis: Labov's Model of narrative analysis

Following the development of brief summaries, the first level of analysis involved applying Labov's model of narrative analysis to the narratives, in which the narratives were coded according to the six Labovian elements (Labov, 1972). Each narrative was read several times clause by clause in order to identify the six Labovian elements, Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution and Coda. As a means of identifying the function of each clause and its classification to one of the Labovian elements, the following questions were used as suggested by Labov (1972, p. 370).

1. Abstract: What was this about?
2. Orientation: Who, When, What, Where?
3. Complicating Action: Then what happened?
4. Evaluation: So, what?
5. Resolution: What finally happened?

The Coda in each narrative was identified by determining the clauses that brought the narrative to the present time. For each Evaluation identified within the narratives, the type of it was determined, specifically whether it was an External Evaluation, an Embedded Evaluation, or an Evaluative Action. Within the Evaluations there were also identified the Evaluative devices including Intensifiers, Comparators, Correlatives and Explicatives and their subtypes. For each narrative a table was created with detailed descriptions under the identification of each Labovian element. An illustration of how Labov's Model of narrative analysis was applied to each of the narratives can be found in **Appendix 7.** Following the application of Labov's model to all narratives, tables were created for each Labovian element with detailed descriptions across men's and women's narratives **(Appendices 8 and 9)**. All tables helped to synthesise this first level of analysis but also explore the similarities and differences between men's and women's narratives in terms of structure and patterns.

Types of stories

Following the application of Labov's Model of narrative analysis, the next level of analysis aimed to identify the types of stories that men and women created which also enabled an understanding of the ways EW was utilised by them. The identification of the types of the stories was based on a range of characteristics within the narratives which resulted from the findings of Labov's model. In particular, it was explored how the narratives began, progressed, resolved and ended, the range of feelings and thoughts men and women experienced and the ways they dealt with them at the time their experiences occurred as well as how they expressed them through the EW task. Therefore, there was a close exploration of the language they used. Particular emphasis was also paid to the

Evaluations throughout the narratives, as they conveyed their insights for their experiences including meanings and reframed perspectives. An individual table was created for each narrative including the identification of the above characteristics as well as my initial interpretations of them **(Appendix 10)**. I then engaged in a reflexive process of looking for similarities and differences between men and women. Based on this process, three story types were identified, and a table with representative quotations for each was created **(Appendix 11),** which served to synthesise and summarise this second level of analysis. Upon consultation with my supervisor, I came to final decisions about the interpretation of the data and the types of stories that were identified.

When conducting the analytic procedure, I found it helpful to have a visual reminder of the research question and two objectives of this study, which enabled me to remain focused on my inquiry and on the two levels of analysis.

Reflexivity

In our role as qualitative researchers, 'we both shape and are shaped by the research process' (Palaganas et al. 2017 p.430). No matter what narrative approach is used in qualitative research, reflexivity is an essential component, which illustrates how the researcher interacted with the data throughout the research process (Frost, 2021). In a similar way to Socratic questioning, reflexivity can be viewed as an internal dialogue that enables researchers to critically examine their assumptions and perspectives (Lazard and Jean, 2020). Furthermore, particularly in pluralistic qualitative research, reflexivity plays a crucial role in explaining not only the approach or approaches adopted, but also the rationale for these choices and their contribution to answering the research question (Frost, 2021).

Methodological reflexivity

Contrary to my expectations, the recruitment process was smooth and lasted for an overall period of one and a half months. Having developed a recruitment plan that included two different recruitment strategies (recruitment through

flyers and recruitment through the Sona System) proved to be useful, as all participants were recruited through the Sona system and none through the flyers. I found the smoothness of the recruitment process to be a good starting point for my research journey, which prompted me to look forward to what lies ahead.

The data collection process was a unique experience as I had the opportunity to meet, brief and debrief sixteen different people of a wide age range and from different parts of the world. In spite of the fact that I was confident and well prepared to explain to them the research procedure and the instructions for the EW task, I found myself being mechanical the first few times. Nevertheless, as I became more familiar with the process, my interactions with the participants became more relaxed and natural. As I waited in a nearby waiting area for each participant to complete the EW task, I recall thinking of the potential experiences they were writing about as well as their experience of the writing process. In the debriefing process, I realised how the majority of them wanted to have some continuity following the EW task reflecting on the content of the experience they wrote about and sharing with me their reflections of the writing process, while others did not. Also, the experience that I had with the female participant who became tearful during the debriefing process and the discussion I had with her made me reflect on the emotional power of writing and how it allowed this participant to see her experience on the paper for the first time and connect with it.

Narrative analysis considers transcription to be a fundamental part of the analysis (Frost, 2021). As a result of the tangible nature of the narratives, I felt more closely connected to the emotional worlds of participants as I had a firsthand access to their experiences through their own words. When transcribing the narratives, I would notice that my attention was drawn to the different content and lengths of the narratives, as well as the different handwritings and punctuation marks, the use of upper and lower case letters, and the different tension of the pen on the paper. The ethical dilemma that I encountered with one participant's handwriting which was challenging for me to read and transcribe was unexpected and difficult to deal with, however it made

me realise that even transcribing written data is not without challenges, while it gave me the opportunity to make an informed decision to discard the participant's account.

The analysis of this research was conducted during the pandemic and was often felt to be a very isolating experience. As a novice qualitative researcher, I found the analysis process to be the most challenging and long-lasting part of this research. While I was aware that the narratives contained rich research material, the fact that participants wrote about different experiences felt very interesting but at the same time disorienting and overwhelming. The application of Labov's Model to the narratives was a very useful and demanding approach which helped me explore the underlying structure and patterns of the narratives. However, as it is less preferred in qualitative research compared to other approaches, and only a few studies have utilised it, I found that I needed to devote sufficient time to becoming familiar with its analytical procedure and application to the narratives.

As well, identifying the types of stories produced in the narratives based on the findings resulted from Labov's Model of narrative analysis which allowed for a deeper understanding of the different ways in which narrators used the EW task to produce three types of stories was a novel addition to Labov's Model that also required careful consideration, revision, and time. In writing this thesis, I recall feeling lost and overwhelmed many times during this second level of analysis, which was a frequent theme in supervision sessions. However, as the research progressed and the richness of the material emerged, the process untangled and became absorbing.

Overall, the analysis process stretched, daunted, and challenged me in numerous ways and for a long time, but it was a rewarding experience that allowed me to grow in confidence and flexibility as well as explore the research aim of this study and its objectives from two different interpretive perspectives within the same narrative analysis approach.

Personal reflexivity

After a childhood interest in writing, I developed a research interest in EW during my master's degree following by a research interest in the ways men and women express their feelings and thoughts through EW during my doctorate studies. Due to my experiences and the lack of existing literature, I became interested in exploring this research area. In conducting this research, I wanted to understand how men and women can be better supported in their therapeutic journeys, which led me to think that exploring how men and women express their feelings and thoughts through the means of writing would advance this understanding.

Born and raised in a Greek culture, I have always felt and believed that men do not express their feelings and in particular their vulnerable feelings in the same way as women do. On the contrary, as a Counselling Psychologist trainee, I worked with a number of male and female clients who had difficulty to express their feelings verbally in the therapy room. The more my experience with these clients progressed the more I realised how alternative means such as the means of writing became integral or supplementary part of the therapeutic process that enhanced our therapeutic relationship and enabled them to express themselves in more comfortable ways.

For the purpose of managing the beliefs and assumptions I have developed as a result of being born and raised in a Greek culture, I decided to analyse the accounts of male and female participants alternately. Due to the difficulty and unrealistic nature of remaining completely objective during the data analysis process, I found it helpful to discuss often my analysis notes with my supervisor in order to explore my thinking process and manage my concern of missing important data for interpretation or overinterpreting them because of my beliefs and assumptions. Supervision sessions were also helpful in discussing ideas about how the data could be presented and whether there were any underlying beliefs concerning it. Two weeks of break between the two different analyses, as well as after their completion, allowed me to process my subjectivity and remain aware of it. Also, I would maintain open communication with two colleagues who served as peer-readers throughout the data analysis process and during the data reporting so as to understand how others perceive my

interpretations and thinking process. Lastly, the reflective diary I used throughout this research provided me with an opportunity to explore my underlying beliefs and assumptions and how they could affect this research. It also provided me with an opportunity to keep notes regarding important decisions made, as well as my feelings and thoughts regarding them. Overall, I believe that the awareness of my personal starting point and my experiences along with the above ways that I attempted to practice reflexivity enabled me to see things that could have been missed otherwise, while maintaining an open mind toward the uniqueness of each narrative and continuing to be curious about the way in which each participant expressed his or her feelings and thoughts about their personal experiences through EW.

Quality and validity assurance

Given that this study involves a narrative analysis design consisting of two different analytical levels, it adhered to the quality and validity standards of narrative research as developed by Riessman (2008) as well as to the guidance of pluralistic research (Frost, 2021).

Rather than suggesting fixed standards or criteria for ensuring validity in narrative research, Riessman (2008) suggests four different features of validity to assist narrative researchers in assessing the trustworthiness of their work. As a first feature is the ‘historical truth and correspondence’ which can be ensured by providing a clear presentation of the methodology employed (Riessman, 2008 p. 186). In this study, this has been accomplished by providing an explicit theoretical explanation of Labov’s Model of narrative analysis and the analytical procedure followed, presenting the two different levels of analysis and interpretations of the data within the same approach.

Among other features of validity are ‘coherence, persuasion, and presentation’, which are achieved by presenting both the similarities and differences of the narratives, providing detailed quotes with the exact words participants used, interpreting the data convincingly, and paying attention to the ways in which language is used within the narratives and their structural characteristics

(Riessman, 2008, p. 189). In this study, the above have been sought by analysing and presenting the structural similarities and differences between male and female narratives and the types of stories that narrators produced within the EW task using direct, representative quotations.

Additionally, Riessman (2008, p. 193) argued that another criterion of validity is the 'pragmatic use' of the methodology used in a study and whether this methodology can serve as a foundation for alternative narrative interpretations of the data. In fact, Labov's Model (Labov, 1972) is regarded to be 'a point of departure' for subsequent analysis (Riessman, 2008, p.81). This was followed in this study, as the application of Labov's Model to the narratives provided the basis for identifying the types of stories narrators produced and as such the different ways they utilised the EW.

The last criterion for validity according to Riessman, is the 'political and ethical use', which can be assured by allowing participants to express themselves freely regardless of the method of data collection (Riessman, 2008, p. 196). In this study it was attempted to adhere to this by allowing narrators to structure their narratives as they wish as well as by allowing them to choose the experience they wish to write about.

In pluralistic qualitative research it is essential to assess the quality of the study through consideration of a number of practices and principles either when working pluralistically across different approaches or when working within a single approach (Frost, 2021). Frost (2021) argued that it is necessary to determine the strengths and the limitations of the approach(es) used and decide what value each will offer to the interpretation of the data. To this end, I have presented the strengths and the limitations of Labov's Model of narrative analysis used in this study as well as how it contributed to the two different interpretations of the data.

In addition, Frost emphasized the importance of approaching the data in a 'systematic' manner, as well as providing 'clarity and transparency' through an explanation of the analytical procedure, the parts of the text selected for

analysis and why, and any decision regarding whether one approach was prioritized over the other (Frost, 2021, p.167). In addition to describing the analytic steps I followed for each of the analyses, I have also provided tables in the Appendices of this thesis detailing the analysis process. It has also been clarified that Labov's Model has been used as a starting point for understanding the underlying structure of the narratives and their patterns, and that based on it, the types of stories produced in the narratives have been identified.

As a final point, Frost highlighted the importance of researchers' reflexive engagement during the research process, as well as their acceptance of ‘conscious and unconscious’ factors that could affect their interpretation of the data (Frost, 2021 p.167). In keeping a reflexive journal for each stage of the research process and by sharing my reflexive engagement with relation to the methodology but also my personal reflexivity in relation to the research topic, I hope that I have attempted to illustrate my role as a researcher throughout the research process.

Chapter 3. Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of a narrative analysis consisting of two different analytical levels that explored how men and women express their feelings and thoughts when they write about a personal experience in a 50-minute EW task. The chapter is organised into three parts each of which represents the different steps of the analytical procedure. The first part provides an individual summary of narrators' personal experiences which helped to understand the content and the heterogeneity of the accounts and served as a framework for applying the subsequent analytical lenses. The second part presents the findings from a structural analysis of the narratives based on the application of Labov's Model of narrative analysis (Labov, 1972; Labov and Waletzky, 1967) which enabled an understanding of the underlying structure and general patterns across the narratives. The third part presents the three story types identified in the narratives which were characterised as *'Narratives of Love', 'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Stuckness'*. The identification of the story types enabled a further exploration of the narratives allowing for an understanding of the ways narrators used the EW task. Both Labov's Model and the identification of the type of stories created in the narratives were complementary in that they allowed for an interpretation of the narratives from two different interpretive lens.

Introduction to narrators and their narratives

Table 3 presents a summary of each narrative. The purpose of including these summaries is to demonstrate the diversity of the stories that narrators wrote about as well as the important points of each narrative. Four narrators wrote about the difficulties they encountered during their studies, four wrote about the loss of a loved one, two wrote about their experiences of abuse, two wrote about their travel experiences, one wrote about parental divorce experience, one wrote about the experience of being homeless and one wrote about a surgery experience.

Table 3. Narratives summaries

Narrators	Narratives Summaries
Lysandros	A 20-year-old man who wrote about his experience of his parents' breakup. His narrative began with his happy childhood memories and how everything changed after his father cheated on his mother. This is followed by the description of his new responsibilities following his father's cheating, how he coped with his parents' breakup and the reasons for the feelings of anger he experienced towards them. As he concludes his narrative, he discusses his understanding of his experience at present and how it has contributed to his growth.
Meera	A 21-year-old woman who wrote about her experience with failing her re-sit examinations at medical school. Meera began her narrative by explaining how she had been treated as a 'black sheep' in her family and how she applied to medical school despite her family's opposition. Following her successful entrance into medical school, she recounts her experience after failing her re-sit exams and describes the reasons for her feelings of anger, shame and fear. Her narrative ends with an update of her life at present and the impact of her experience on her self-development.
Thalia	A 23-year-old woman who wrote about the mental health difficulties she experienced during her studies. Her narrative started with her describing the loneliness and nervousness she felt when she left her home country for the first time to study in the UK. She describes the challenges she faced during her studies in the UK and her mental health difficulties journey. At the end of the narrative, Thalia described how her mental health eventually improved and the progress she was able to make.
Hanita	A 27-year-old woman who wrote about her experience of her decision to go on a trekking trip despite her father's opposition. Her narrative began with her writing about the household she grew up in, and her admiration for her father. She describes her decision to embark alone on the same trekking trip that her father went on several times, despite the opposition of her family and particularly that of her father. Her narrative recounts her preparation for the trek, her actual trek experience and the challenges she encountered. Hanita's narrative ends with her reflections about her experience, how her experience cannot be talked about with anyone in the family and how she continues to support her choices and explore new hiking destinations.
Evelyn	A 35-year-old woman who described an event related to domestic violence by her father. She described her feelings of fear and terror when she witnessed her father hitting her mother on a Christmas day and how she

	attempted to support her. She expresses her mixed feelings of love and fear toward her father and she discusses the impact of this experience on her life at present, and her ongoing complex feelings.
Sienna	A 26-year-old woman wrote about her relationship with her grandfather and the memories she has of him. Sienna described what she remembers about her grandfather and what she misses most about him. She also reflected on the day of his loss, how she coped following his death, and how she has always thought about and connected with him. Sienna concluded her narrative by discussing her perspective on the loss of her grandfather today, as well as the ways in which his presence has impacted her life and the lives of her family members.
Nathan	A 21-year-old man wrote about his experience with gallbladder removal surgery. Nathan provided an account of his hospital stay from surgery to recovery, including the challenges he faced and the feelings of worry, fear, and loneliness he experienced. At the conclusion of his narrative, he discussed how he views his experience now, and how it has impacted his self-development.
Kaya	A 22-year-old woman who shared her experience of sexual abuse by a man she met through online. She recounted how she first met him online, her feelings before meeting him in person, as well and her experience of being abused by him and how she eventually managed to escape. Kaya reflected on the feelings she experienced during her abuse, while she also described the impact of her experience on her life and how she copes with it at present.
Marcus	A 24-year-old man who wrote about his experience of falling behind his cousin academically and how it affected him. In his narrative he discussed how he saw himself and his performance at the time, how he coped, and how he was ultimately able to change his perspective and achieve his goal for the national exams. His narrative also pointed out the consequences of his response at the time and concluded his reflections from the day he achieved his goal.
Aadan	A 40-year-old man, who wrote about his experience of becoming homeless. His narrative begun with how he ended up being homeless and his memories of his first night on the streets. He described his attempts to seek support, the challenges he encountered and the ways he coped. He also recounted how he took the time to re-evaluate his life value of his experience and plan for his future.
Karolina	A 23-year-old woman wrote of her life-changing experience of traveling in Europe. Her narrative begins with her decision to travel after discovering that she was not living her life to its fullest potential. As she recounted her experiences traveling to different destinations, she explained how she connected with herself, discovered her identity, and explored what she wanted from life. While traveling, Karolina described how she gained insight

	into herself and her life overcoming her mental health challenges. Toward the end of her narrative, she reflected on how her travels helped her achieve emotional balance and to lead a fulfilling and happy life.
Lee	A 27-year-old who wrote about the loss of his father to cancer. He began his narrative by describing his father's sudden diagnosis and how it obliterated everything else, including personal goals, dreams, and family plans. He described his feelings of helplessness and his ways of coping at the time, as well as how he coped with the loss of his father. He expressed his gratitude for his mother's support, and he ended his narrative by reflecting on his feelings about his father and how he experiences life without him.
Oliver	A 46-year-old who wrote about his experience of his father's loss to cancer. The narrative began with a description of his relationship with his father, his experience of his father's illness and the way he coped with his father's death. Oliver also talked about the support he sought from a priest and how he gradually managed to accept his father's loss and find purpose and meaning in his life. As the narrative concludes, Oliver reflected on his grieving journey, and his feelings of still missing his father.
Max	A 58-year-old man who wrote about the struggles he encountered during a training course ten years ago. He described his experience of being a mature student as well as the challenges he faced with the course's requirements. Max discussed the discomfort with keeping a journal with his feelings and thoughts and sharing them with his professors, the difficulty of keeping up with the course workload, as well as the ways he coped. The end of Max's narrative reflects his current perspective on his experience.
Chen	A 25-year-old man, who wrote about his experience of breaking up with his fiancée. He described how their relationship developed and the challenges they faced. Furthermore, he discussed how different perspectives on certain issues led to the breakup and how he experienced it. Toward the end of his narrative, he reflects on how he continues to think about his ex-fiancée and what he would like to say to her if he had the opportunity.

Structural analysis: Labov's Model of narrative analysis

This section presents the findings of the structural analysis of the narratives as resulting from the application of Labov's model of narrative analysis (Labov, 1972; Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Labov's Model was used to explore the underlying structure of the narratives with the aim to understand how men's and women's feelings and thoughts are expressed. The analysis revealed that males' and females' narratives shared many structural similarities and narrators expressed their feelings and thoughts in similar ways. Two noticeable differences were also observed. The structural analysis based on Labov's Model assisted also in the second level of analysis providing an understanding of the types of stories produced in the narratives and thereby revealing the ways males and females used the EW task.

In order to simplify the reference to each element of the narrative structure, narrators' excerpts are presented with their corresponding codes as defined in Labov's Model. A detailed description of Labov's Model can be found in the Methodology chapter of this thesis. Table 4 presents a key to the Labovian coding and the questions which were used to help identify the Labovian code of each clause, as suggested by Labov (1972, p. 370).

Table 4. Key to Labovian codes (Labov,1972, p. 370)

Labovian codes	Questions for their identification
Abstract **(A)**	What was this about?
Orientation **(O)**	Who, When, What, Where?
Complicating Action **(CA)**	Then what happened?
Evaluation **(EV)** • External Evaluation **(EX EV)** • Embedded Evaluation **(EM EV)**	So what? • The narration pauses and the narrator evaluates feelings from a current perspective

• Evaluative Action **(EV A)**	• The narrator expresses feelings experienced at the time the story occurred • The narrator describes actions that reveal feelings
Resolution **(R)**	What finally happened?
Coda	The story is returned to the present time

Abstract

Both males' and females' narratives started with an Abstract which included an overview of narrators' stories. Abstracts provided an initial sense of the experience narrators would describe and demonstrated that each narrator had a different story to share.

The analysis identified that within the Abstracts there were reflective statements about how narrators were affected by their experiences, how they evaluated what they had been through, or what their lives were like prior to their experiences. This indicates that they sought to incorporate insight into their narratives even from the very beginning of the writing process. The following examples illustrate the use of reflective statements in narrators' Abstracts, with underlining for ease of reference.

Sienna's Abstract reflects on how the loss of her grandfather affected her view of her father.

> *I don't think I have looked at my father in the same way since my grandfather passed away 10 years ago.* **(A) (Sienna)**

Lee's Abstract provided an evaluation of how he experienced his father's illness and loss.

My father passed away from terminal stage colorectal cancer when I was 11. **(A)** *I was barely acquainted with the concept of cancer and its mortality rate, and the most horrifying realization was the death of my closest kin.* **(A) (Lee).**

Lysandros's Abstract presented a comparison of his childhood before and after his father cheated on his mother.

I was lucky enough to have a great early childhood. Everyone in the family and all of our family friends were healthy, loving and loved. However, this 'fairytale' scene\setting changed when I was about 12-13 years old (last year of primary school or first year of secondary school) when my father cheated on my mother and my mother did not take it that well. **(A) (Lysandros)**

Orientation

The narratives of both male and female narrators included similar Orientations which provided background context related to their experiences. It was observed that Orientations were either located immediately following narratives' Abstracts or at various points throughout the narratives, or both. This was an indication that narrators often diverted from the main narrative to enrich their stories with more contextual details including explanations or connections with prior experiences. These diversions from the main narrative often gave the impression that narrators were in dialogue with themselves or with the reader as they wrote.

Hanita's main narrative of her travel experience was diverted so that she could speak directly with the reader and provide background information regarding the cultural environment she grew up in, including how she was perceived by her family, traditional gender beliefs, and the relationships within the family.

Allow me to give you some context. **(O)** *I am a lawyer, born and raised in a mother conservative Muslim household in Kolkata, India and I have been*

the rebel of the family from the very start. **(O)** *Yes, my parents gave me the best education, guidance and exposure that they could.* **(O)** *But there was always a line separating the way boys and girls were treated in the family.* **(O)** *I grew up seeing my father work all day as a lawyer and much like the quintessential Atticus Finch and Scout from 'To Kill a Mockingbird', any relationship was without many complexities.* **(O)** *It was simple and pure love.* **(O) (Hanita)**

Evelyn's main narrative was diverged to allow her to provide background information and connect how she used to cope when her parents argued in the past and how she coped during her experience of domestic abuse that she wrote about in the EW task.

I could already hear my mum and Dad arguing in the hallway and I knew it was getting louder and more out of control. I felt that knowing feeling of dread. My siblings were upstairs, and they were a lot older than me. I used to go to them to try to feel less scared, **(O)** *but I couldn't reach them and my mum and dad were in the hallway***. (Evelyn)**

Aadan's main narrative about his experience of becoming homeless was diverted so he could describe the values he grew up with.

During the whole time I would wander around London and try to get contacts from the council. I spent most of my spare money on STRONG cheap beer. I was about to go into hard drugs when a shopkeeper I met and bought from regularly gave me 10 pounds. I asked him why he gave me the money with tears running down my eyes. I had never begged for money in my life, it was against my upbringing. **(O) (Aadan)**

Marcus often took time during the narration of the struggles he encountered during school, to explain to the reader the educational system he attended in Malaysia as well as the Malaysian currency and its equivalent in pounds.

I was staying with my uncle since I was 6 years old. My good academic performance was shown when I was enrolled into standard I class when I was just six years old (in Malaysia standard I consists of 7-year-old students) **(O) (Marcus)**

…

During Standard 6, just before our early year exam, my uncle promised my cousin who is the same age as me, that if he could beat me and be the top student, he'll be rewarded with RM50 (equivalent to 10 pounds). **(O) (Marcus)**

…

And this is the year where we, Standard 6 students are all going to sit for a national public exam. By getting a good result in this exam, you increase the chance to enroll into one of the best boarding schools in Malaysia. **(O) (Marcus)**

Sienna and Lysandros also provided the reader with additional details about their stories in brackets.

My father cheated on my mother and my mother did not take it that well. From then onwards, there were countless endless fights happening all the time (even late at night, disturbing my brother's and mine sleep). **(O)** *My mother also had two-three suicide attempts (one by taking pills and another attempt by trying to cut her veins or arteries by breaking one of the kitchen's windows).* **(O) (Lysandros)**

And that's why I think I remember him for the small things and the details: his watch, his wooden cane, rustic but beautifully shaped, of a dark brown colour, the gums he had in the top drawer of his bedside table. I went through his stuff to find them once and (I was maybe 4 or 5) **(O)** *and I still remember the look he gave me as if it was yesterday.* **(Sienna)**

Complicating Action

Despite the variety of stories, males' and females' narratives contained similar Complicating Actions which detailed the main events of their experiences. While narrators did not receive specific instructions about how to structure their stories in the EW task, Complicating Actions were chronologically ordered. This was evidenced by the use of temporal connectives between the Complicating Actions of the narratives. This indicates that the writing process might have induced narrators to structure their stories in a logical flow, explaining clearly how events occurred, what they felt or thought, or how they acted.

Sienna's Complicating Actions in the excerpt below, which refer to the day of her grandfather's loss, are described in chronological order, providing a sense of how the events unfolded and how and why she became irritated.

> *My grandad passed away at the age of 86, after a full life, a marriage of over 50 years.* **(CA)** *After a few days in hospital, he died peacefully at home in his sleep.* **(CA)** *When he passed away my parents were called at his home.* **(CA)** *I don't remember exactly what happened in the following first hours and my next memory is of the house full of people and people staying over for hours in his bedroom, where his body was.* **(CA)** *I appreciated the support but got irritated when these people didn't actually leave for hours.* **(Sienna)**

Complicating Actions also featured a range of past tenses, including simple past, past progressive, and past habitual forms, suggesting that the writing process encouraged narrators to not just report the events of the stories but to also recall the duration and frequency of their feelings, thoughts or ways of coping at the time their experiences occurred. Following is an example of Thalia using the past habitual form to reflect upon her repeated coping mechanisms and her feelings at the time of her experience of the mental health struggles she encountered during her studies.

> *Nothing was making me happy and I started to feel very guilty about my lack of enthusiasm. I knew I had a lot to be grateful for, but I wouldn't be happy about it.* **(CA)** *So, I started being anxious and depressed I would*

not come to class, I would not get good grades... **(CA)** *I was overall tired of all those confusing feelings, and I would not stop crying at night and the worst was I didn't know why.* **(CA)** *It was hard to carry on making everyone think that you are ok, wearing that mask every day. I would not deal with it anymore*. **(CA) (Thalia)**.

Furthermore, it was noticed that very often Complicating Actions contained other people's voices, which was demonstrated by the use of direct and indirect speech. In using these features, narrators created a sense of vividness in their descriptions, and it was as if they were reenacting dialogues in their minds as they wrote.

I remember being in utter shock, seeing my mum curled up in the corner sobbing. She looked such a mess and wasn't saying anything either. I rushed towards her and tried to hug her. **(CA)** *I was saying 'sorry mummy I did a bad thing, I'm so sorry'.* **(CA)** *She said it wasn't my fault and hugged me.* **(CA) (Evelyn)**

My uncle who wasn't there since he was managing his students at his school, came back early from work and hugged me. He said, 'if you hadn't failed earlier this year, I can't guarantee you that you would achieve these great results today **(CA)** *You have to fail, in order to succeed, he added'.* **(CA) (Marcus)**

Evaluation

Both male and female narratives contained External and Embedded Evaluations which were placed throughout their narratives. Their presence in the narratives suggests that narrators engaged in significant reflection as they wrote about their experiences rather than simply recounting the events of their experiences. Further, since the Evaluations were incorporated throughout the narratives, and since the Evaluations attribute great importance to the structure of a narrative (Labov, 1872, p.366), their analysis had a predominant role in understanding the different story types of the narratives.

External Evaluations were characterized by the use of present tense and insight into the narrators' feelings and thoughts about their experiences from their current perspective. The presence of External Evaluations in the narratives showed that narrators made efforts to assess and comprehend their own or others' feelings and thoughts while writing.

> *He liked a very humble life, he was underrated and the family lived with very little. And that's why I think I remember him for the small things and the details: his watch, his wooden cane, rustic but beautifully shaped, of a dark brown colour, the gums he had in the top drawer of his bedside table.* **(EX EV) (Sienna).**

> *First of all, I felt angry at my father (he risked everything for a new person in his life). In the beginning, I had so many negative emotions for him, I considered what he did unethical; I was enraged at him, was that a model father figure? After so many years, I justified his actions though, I say to myself 'We only live once, and if he is happier this way, I am glad for him'.* **(EX EV)** *But is he happier?* **(EX EV)** *And if yes, why is he happier?* **(EX EV)** *These are things that I will never understand (still some bitterness exists in my heart about his action)*. **(EX EV) (Lysandros)**

In other cases, External Evaluations featured the use of the second-person pronoun which demonstrated that narrators made efforts to assess their experiences from a distance as they wrote.

> *Some people say that the loss of a loved one takes time to get over, I don't think you become ever to get over it.* **(EX EV)** *As the time goes on you get used to that person not being around.* **(EX EV)** *But you never really are the same again.* **(EX EV)** *In the beginning, you are into a kind of denial that it never happened or that they never existed.* **(EX EV)** *They become a distant memory on an old chapter in a book. (***EX EV)** *And as you get older, other people and events take over and fill some of the void, but you never really replace that person, their ways, their nature, their presence that was such meaningful in your life.* **(Oliver)**

I was one with nature and when you have a clear conscience, when you treasure and respect nature, she will speak to you. **(EX EV)** *The roots of the trees told me stories about past centuries. The wind has a voice of its own if you listen.* **(EX EV)** *Even though being a musician, I realised that you don't need music when you have the nature's melodies.* **(EX EV) (Karolina)**

Embedded Evaluations provided insight into narrators' thoughts and feelings at the time of their experiences. It was observed that Embedded Evaluations often featured evaluative or linguistic devices including similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, quantifiers, repetitions, and emphatic adverbs. This gave the impression that narrators did not simply report their feelings and thoughts at the time of their experiences, but that they re-produced them and re-lived their intensity through their writing.

For instance, they often included vivid and rich descriptions of narrators' feelings at the time which were evident through the use of metaphors and similes. These metaphors and similes were sensory in that they included both visual and auditory details, and one feels as if narrators reproduced their feelings as they wrote.

I still feel disappointment, have complaints and feel angry towards my parents but these are much better nowadays. The breaking-up of my parents was an exhausting process, it drained me somehow as I was trying to float on the surface with a tsunami occurring at the same time. **(EM EV) (Lysandros)**

It was hard to carry on making everyone think that you are ok, wearing that mask every day. I would not deal with it anymore. I told my boyfriend. He said I was very selfish to think about these things. That killed me inside because the last thing I wanted was to be selfish. **(EM EV)** *I barely passed my exam that January and my boyfriend broke up with me the last day. I cried so much that night, it felt like I was removing all veins from my body.* **(EM EV)** *I felt useless, like I could not be any good to anyone***. (Thalia)**

On other occasions, they included rhetorical questions that emphasized narrators' feelings at the time, again giving the impression that they re-produced their feelings and also re-thought their answers to their questions as they were writing them.

I felt a lot of anger at God. My family is very religious, they always said God had a reason for everything. But what was the reason for this? **(EM EV)** *To let me get into Medical school just for me to be kicked out?!* **(EM EV)** *It brings nothing to my life other than a student debt of £18.000.* **(Meera)**

...

Most of all, I was fearful. But now, in one day it had all been taken away from me. Should I go to uni? **(EM EV)** *What do I actually want to do?* **(EM EV)** *What would other people say to me?* **(EM EV)** *Now will I be judged?* **(EM EV)** *Ironically, at no point did I think about the fact I wouldn't be a doctor*. **(Meera)**

I felt colder in that heated room than in the blustering wind outside. **(EM EV)** *I felt betrayed with nowhere to turn.* **(EM EV***) What can I do?* **(EM EV)** *Who to turn to?* **(EM EV)** *I started calling my friends, but they would not pick up their phones. I then realised that most of the people I had been hanging out with since 2005 were my girlfriends' friends and family. Once things ended between us then it meant no more relations with those people. How could I have been so blind?* **(EM EV)** *(***Aadan)**

Also, they often contained repetitions, quantifiers, and emphatic adverbs that reflected the intensity of narrators' feelings at the time. These elements also lent the impression that narrators' feelings were reenacted during the process of writing.

After a short period at home, I returned to London to carry on with my job and my life. About six months later I was missing him a lot. **(EM EV)** *I missed our chats by phone, I missed his support when I needed advice.* **(EM EV)** *I missed my best friend.* **(EM EV) (Oliver)**

When he came back from the pub and the key was put in the door, I felt a sinking feeling because I never knew what would happen that evening and most of the time it was <u>really terrifying</u>. **(EM EV) (Evelyn)**

...

I saw my mum and dad during the loud shouting into the kitchen. I was <u>so scared</u> and didn't know what to do. I knew my dad was going to hit my mum. I felt <u>so frightened</u>, and I just knew it. **(EM EV)** *I was <u>so scared</u> for my mum.* **(EM EV)** *I just wanted something to stop it, to stop him. To help me escape it all. I started playing with a musical Christmas card while they were shouting. It was <u>so terrifying</u>.* **(EM EV) (Evelyn)**

Male and female narratives differed in that two of the male narratives contained Evaluative Actions, while none of the female narratives did. Evaluative actions were included in specific sections of these male narratives, which gave insight into how narrators coped instead of how they felt or what they thought. This created the impression that they did not process these specific ways of coping while writing. Evaluative Actions were the least prevalent type of evaluation in this study.

As an example, in the following section of Aadan's narrative of his experience of becoming homeless, it is evident that he reported the fighting action he engaged in rather than expressing the anger that perhaps felt at the invasion of his sleeping area.

I took the beer and went back to sleep in the portico of the catholic church where I was refused refuge. While I was there quietly drinking my cans of beer, some people came and urinated right where I was sleeping. <u>I got up and started fighting.</u> **(EV A)** *The commotion brought the police and I and was taken into custody. The police were very rough with me and almost broke my arm. Monday was the court date.* **(Aadan)**

Furthermore, in the following section of Marcus's narrative of the challenges he faced during school, it is evident that he reports his social withdrawal coping

strategy rather than describing the anger that perhaps felt when his cousin outperformed him.

> *And now he is better than me in academics. It really hit me mentally and physically. I didn't even try to be happy for him. I was just doing my own things. I was reluctant to play football in the evening with colleagues for some period of time.* **(EV A)** *The only thing I wanted to do was to study well, in fact really hard and couldn't wait for the next test to come even sooner* **(Marcus).**

Overall, External and Embedded Evaluations in both male and female narratives demonstrated many similarities and suggests that the writing process encouraged narrators to be highly reflective of their feelings and thoughts about their experiences while writing. In contrast, the presence of Evaluative Actions in two of the male narratives and in none of the females, was indicative of a struggle to process feelings of anger and frustration during the writing process.

Resolution

Both male and female narratives included a Resolution indicating the outcome of their respective stories. The presence of Resolutions in the narratives along with the rest of the Labovian elements including the Abstracts, Orientations, Complication Actions and Evaluations suggested that narrators produced 'complete stories' through EW (Labov, 1972 p. 362).

The analysis identified two different Resolution patterns across the narratives. The first pattern was identified in three out of seven female and two out of eight male narratives. Resolutions in this pattern provided a positive conclusion to narrators' stories and were characterized by feelings of proactiveness, endurance, and persistence.

> *On Monday I went to court and told the judge my situation. As I was a first offender, I did not get jail time. He referred me to a program for alcohol and drug addiction which I started immediately after I was released with a*

fine. I had accommodation for three months during the program. I used the time to get another job and plan a new career path that included going back to uni. **(R) (Aadan)**

And it started to rain, blocking most of the views but I still went on. If I fell sick, I didn't care. I came all the way to reach the top and I didn't break my body and I fought with my family for nothing. I had to make it count. And I did. The snow got really slippery. And because everyone at the campsite knew by this point how slippery it was, 2 guys actually joined me to reach the zero point. I can't thank them enough for the kindness they showed. I may not have climbed through the frozen waterfalls and the nearby vertical ice sheets had it not been for their help. But I did it, I made it after everything, all drenched in the rain, tired, torn apart, with every part of my body protesting against every step I took, I made it! **(R) (Hanita)**

The second pattern was identified in four out of seven female and six out of eight male narratives. In this pattern, Resolutions provided a negative conclusion to the narrators' stories and were marked by various difficult feelings left with the narrators, by a lack of choice or control over the situation at the time, or by a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness.

My main goal was to get out of the flat. The whole ordeal felt like a lifetime. I was confused, shocked, shell-shocked. What happened afterwards was pure hell. I was stopped from leaving, I eventually escaped, and he chased after me. Finally, I sought refuge in a woman's office. I suddenly felt as if everything was my fault and none of his. I felt shame, guilt, disappointment. **(R) (Kaya)**

I took the role of the supportive member of the family towards my mother and brother. I'm glad I was able to offer help, but I can remember myself feeling worried and perhaps distressed because I was given many more responsibilities than I could handle, I was in my early teens, but I had to be the model figure for my brother and the towards my mother. **(R) (Lysandros)**

But now I was a failed Medical student. No matter what happened next, I would always be a failed Medical student. So, why worry about failing a few more times in life? The next 5 months, were spent with me sleeping most of the time, only leaving for food or for a shower. **(R) (Meera)**

Coda

With the exception of two narratives, both male and female narratives included a Coda which related narrators' experiences to the present time. While the narratives differed in content as narrators wrote about different experiences, the analysis of Codas shed light on how narrators' experiences influence their lives at present.

Three different Coda patterns were found across the narratives. The first pattern was found in three male and one female narratives. A distinctive feature of this Coda pattern was a strong relational aspect and regard for people no longer in the narrators' lives as well as feelings of affection, admiration and respect towards their loved ones. It is worth mentioning that all four narratives in this Coda pattern had a negative Resolution, while their Codas were marked by the above positive characteristics. The contrast between the negative Resolutions and the positive Codas indicates that although these narrators' experiences involved loss, the writing process enabled them to approach their experiences from a wider and more distanced perspective, reflecting on their acceptance of their losses and discovering meanings.

Some people say that the loss of a loved one takes time to get over. I don't think you become ever to get over it. As the time goes on you get used to that person not being around. But you never really are the same again. In the beginning you are into a kind of denial that it never happened or that they never existed. They become a distant memory on an old chapter in a book. And as you get older, other people and events take over and fill some of the void, but you never really replace that person, their ways, their nature, their presence that was such meaningful in your life. I still miss my

father and often wonder what he would like today but I know one day, we will both be in the same place, together again. **(Coda) (Oliver)**

He still lives through my dad, but it also fills me with pride to see how much my family has accomplished in three generations. He didn't have an education, whereas my sisters and I have had several years of it and are still using what we learnt to shape our lives for the better. I think it would be hard for my grandad to understand the extent of all of this if he was still alive, but it all started from him. **(Coda) (Sienna)**

The second Coda pattern was identified in four male and three female narratives. A distinguishing feature of the Codas in this pattern was that they provided consideration of the positive effects of narrators' experiences, the lessons they learned and the personal progress they made despite the difficulties they had faced. A noteworthy observation was that five out of the seven narrators in this Coda pattern, had provided a negative Resolution to their stories, while their Codas were marked by the above characteristics and had an overall hopeful and positive tone. This contrast between the negative Resolutions and the positive Codas suggests that even though narrators described challenging experiences (parents' break-up and academic failures, for example), the writing process allowed them to put those experiences in a positive context, considering their personal growth and their current sense of power and control over their lives.

Parents are like every person with their strengths and weaknesses, they could even be considered as 'bigger children' Some things are unfair, but we can do nothing about them but accepting them. However, I've grown to be a responsible, independent person; Something that I would not have been able to become if all the extreme 'drama' in my life had not happened. **(Coda) (Lysandros)**

Today, I'm doing a lot better. I'm a pharmacy student at (University's name) now. But the day I failed does bother me a lot. The dark emotions and hopelessness I felt really terrified me. I hope and fear that I won't have

to experience a time like that again. But at least now, people's opinion doesn't come first before my own needs, wishes and happiness. Thank you. **(Coda) (Meera).**

An interesting observation was that one male and one female narrative lacked a Coda. These narratives summarised the last Complicating Actions and concluded with a positive Resolution of the narrators' experiences, without any reference to the present time, as was the case in the rest of the narratives. As Codas are not mandatory elements in the narrative structure (Labov, 1972 p.370), and the Resolutions in these narratives were characterized by a positive sense of self, a sense of pride and accomplishment, and lessons learned, these two narratives were also included in this Coda pattern.

I went back to London in August. It was sunny. My new boyfriend came to see me and I was so happy that he made the journey from Wales. He was actually one of the few people who understood what I was going through and how to make me smile. I eventually wrote the essays, passed my re-sits with a first class and so I didn't fail my course in the end. I was still depressed and even more anxious to be around people, but I was feeling a lot better about myself. **(R) (No Coda) (Thalia)**

After the national public exam's results were published, I was crying because I was personally congratulated by my teacher before the official result ceremony and she said that I was the best student of the year. **(R)** *My uncle who wasn't there since he was managing his students at his school, came back early from work and hugged me. He said, 'if you didn't fail earlier this year, I can't guarantee you that you would achieve these great results today. You have to fail, in order to succeed, he added'.* **(No Coda) (Marcus)**

The third Coda pattern was identified in two female narratives but not in any of the male narratives. The main feature of the Codas in this pattern was that they were characterized by a sense of helplessness and powerlessness, as well as a lack of strength to take charge of life. It was observed that the two narratives

in this pattern had also a negative Resolution. Considering the similarity between the negative Resolutions and the negative Codas it appears that the writing process enabled these narrators to reflect on the detrimental impact that their experiences of abuse have on their lives at present.

That day happened five years ago but I still remember it like yesterday. It feels like the awkward elephant in the room so there is no mention of it in my home. That event has changed the way I see men and relationships. There is a fear of sexual intimacy that I cannot seem to move past. I try to avoid thinking about it, as it was painful at the time, but each day gets easier and easier. Now it feels like a distant memory. One that I tend to forget, but one that I can't forget. **(Coda) (Kaya).**

Even now, that my dad has passed away I feel all this guilt. And I even feel guilty for grieving. For all the parts of me that still loved him as a dad. I have all this anger and frustration in me. I am so confused about relationships with men and have had a number of emotionally abusive romantic relationships as an adult. I think this event will stay with me and impact on me for my whole life. I had many sad, traumatic events as a child growing up in domestic violence. But this one always impacted me because from such a young age I always carried all this guilt. And from then on, I always felt responsible for my mum's safety. I still do now even as an adult. I never got over these feelings of guilt. **(Coda) (Evelyn).**

To conclude this section, the structural analysis of the narratives assisted to identify the structure and the patterns of the narratives and revealed that both males and females exhibited many structural similarities within their narratives when asked to write about a personal experience in an EW task. It also assisted to identify two notable differences between men's and women's narratives. On the basis of the structure of the narratives, it was then possible to identify the types of stories that narrators produced, which also enabled an understanding of how narrators utilised the EW task. The types of stories identified are presented further in the following section of this chapter.

Types of stories

The following section presents an overview of the types of stories narrators created in the narratives which also provided insight into how narrators used the EW task when they were invited to write about a personal experience in it. The analysis showed that male and female narrators produced types of stories that shared many similarities, while their narratives differed in content. One notable difference in terms of story types was also observed between men's and women's narratives. Three story types have been identified based on the fifteen accounts: *'Narratives of Love', 'Narratives of Empowerment'*, and '*Narratives of Stuckness'* (Fig.2). In each story type, the main features of the story are described and illustrated with excerpts from the narratives of the narrators.

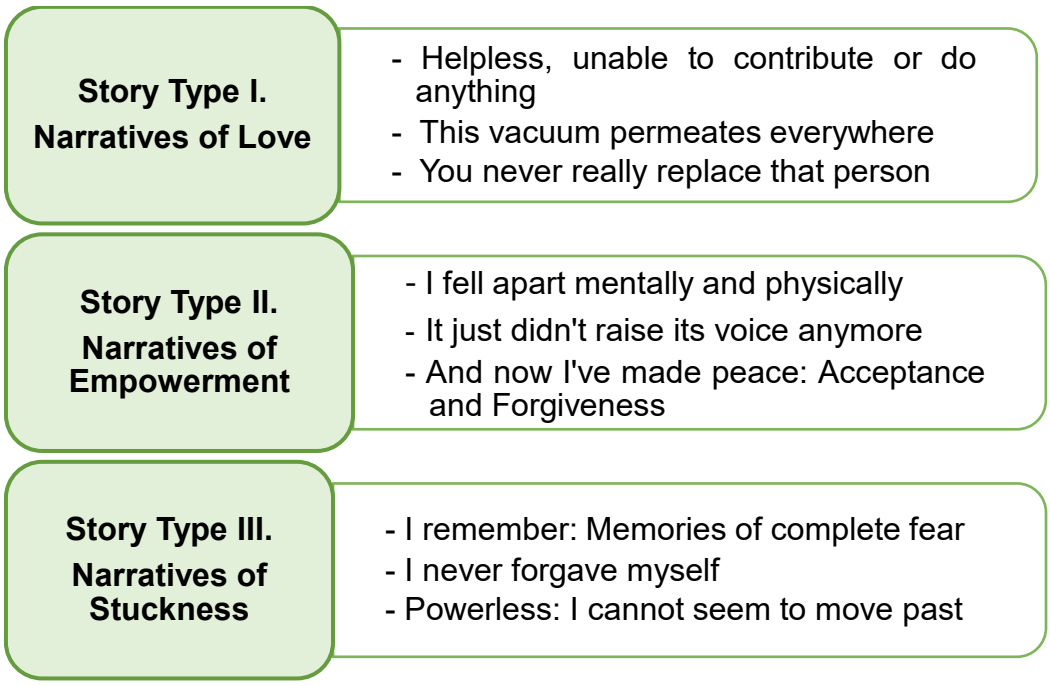

Fig.2. A visual representation of the story types and features of the narratives

Story type I. Narratives of Love

The narratives of three males and one female were characterised as *'Narratives of Love*'. While the narratives in this story type contained experiences of loss (three experiences of losing a loved one and one experience of a break-up),

they maybe be thought of as stories where narrators used the EW task to produce stories of feelings of love for the people they lost. These feelings were evidenced through the range of difficult feelings narrators experienced when they lost their loved ones and the ways they coped, through their fond memories of them and their relationships with them, as well as through their learnings and the ways in which they remain connected to them and honor their relationship with them despite the passage of time. '*Narratives of Love*' could be seen as narratives which had a gradual transition from a place of emotional vulnerability to a broader and more distanced understanding of loss.

Helpless, unable to contribute or do anything

Narrators began their narratives by reflecting on the range of painful feelings of helplessness, shock, surprise, and mixed feelings they experienced as a result of their experiences, their vulnerability as a result of these feelings, and the different ways in which they dealt with them.

Lee, who narrated his experience of his father's loss to cancer, reflected about the period of his father's diagnosis. Lee spoke of his feelings of helplessness and a numbing, almost robotic emotional response. His description of his feelings and coping mechanisms at the time, along with his efforts to leave enough space for adults, seem to illustrate his internal turmoil and how all his hope for his father's survival rested with the adults.

> *The diagnosis was sudden and completely out of blue. A day ago, we were still talking about furnishing our new houses and about my dream secondary school. The next day, it felt like that these things no longer matter and everything else became too surreal. I witnessed the family crumble from its usual routine and order. Family dinners became hospital visits and dinner talk became more rushed and grimmer. I felt helpless, unable to contribute or do anything. I was going to school as usual every day and I was visiting the ward many times each week. I was carrying out day to day tasks robotically, almost like a zombie, while trying to stay out of the way of adults.* **(Lee)**

Oliver wrote of the shock he felt when he saw his father in the hospital and how he struggled to cope with it. The details he provided about how his father looked and sounded, the instinct he had about his father's condition, as well as his attempts to reconcile his emotional and rational responses seem to reveal the struggle in seeing his father in such a vulnerable state and perhaps his feeling of being unable to assist him.

> *My father became ill in the winter of 1997 and was admitted to hospital for tests. It was discovered that he had cancer, but he was told that it was treatable. I was living in London at the time and I went back home to visit him in march 1998. He was in hospital at the time. On first seeing him sitting on the bed I was shocked. He looked thin, pale, and much older than his age. It was hard to snooze my alarm. As usual, when we got together, we talked for a long time. But this time it was different. He sounded more serious than usual and more emotional. After a few days he was allowed to come home, and he seemed to be making a recovery. But in my mind, I knew that everything wasn't ok for him.* **(Oliver)**
>
> ...
>
> *About two weeks later on a Friday morning while sitting at my work desk in work, my sister phoned me to say that my father was taken ill again, and we both needed to go home. I felt a sinking feeling as we flew home. we were met by a relative at the airport. On arriving at the hospital, we both saw him unconscious with a breathing mask and looking very ill, small, and pale. We were both shocked. But in my heart, I knew this was the end and that we at least had one last chat together.* **(Oliver)**

Sienna expressed mixed feelings of awareness but also of surprise at her grandfather's health decline. It seems that her use of the phrases *'we knew'* and *'took us all by surprise',* indicates that the feelings expressed were not only her own but a collective experience that all of her family members shared over a situation that they could not change.

> *My granddad passed away at the age of 86, after a full life, a marriage of over 50 years. 5 kids (one of them was stubborn), 11 grandkids and one*

great grandkid. Although we knew that our time with him was limited, how quickly his health deteriorated took us all by surprise and after a few days in hospital, he died peacefully at home in his sleep. **(Sienna)**

Sienna also wrote about her mixed feelings of appreciation for people's support and irritation for their attitude on the day her grandfather died. The ways she describes the people remaining in her grandfather's bedroom '*for hours'* and how their approach was *'intrusive'* appear to indicate a sense of helplessness and vulnerability related to protecting the last chance she and her family had to spend time with her grandfather in privacy.

When he passed away my parents were called at his home early in the morning. I don't remember exactly what happened in the following first hours and my next memory is of the house full of people and people staying over for hours in his bedroom, where his body was. I appreciated the support but got irritated when these people didn't actually leave for hours. It was a private moment and I felt they were being intrusive. **(Sienna)**

This vacuum permeates everywhere

These narratives also described how narrators experienced the loss of their loved ones' including feelings of emptiness, loneliness, pain, desperateness, and guilt.

In reflecting on his father's death a few months later, Lee made efforts to understand that his *'feigned maturity'* and *'bottled emotions*' at the time were the result of denial, indicating how hurtful the reality of his father's loss was for him. Through the use of an evocative metaphor, Lee described a tangible sense of emptiness encompassing all aspects of his inner and outer world after the passing of his father. This sentiment seems to convey the significance of his father to his life and how, in losing him, he has lost his wholeness as well.

He passed away a few months later. I was abruptly awakened by my grandparents. I was half expecting this news with feigned maturity and I arrived at the hospital with emotions bottled within me. I was probably still in denial, and still refusing to believe that he would just be gone forever. The motionless body and the coldness of his hand unbottled everything. I realized that the space he has occupied in my life is now a vacuum. This vacuum permeates everywhere; Within the sand, during the funeral, his favourite sofa, the empty and silent living room and every memory of him. Everything about him became past tense. **(Lee)**

Oliver's similes are striking and convey a tangible sense of pain, emptiness, and loneliness that surrounded his inner and outer world six months after his father's death. It feels as if his father had been so instrumental in his life, that upon his loss, Oliver also lost the unconditional love, support, and role of best friend that his father played in his life.

About six months later I was missing him a lot. I missed our chats by phone, I missed his support when I needed advice. I missed my best friend. I felt like someone reached into and pulled my soul leaving a great big space which could not be filled. I felt alone. I felt I had no one to talk to or look up to as a role model. It was like I was in a boat without a sail, pushed into the sea without direction, just going one way or another. **(Oliver)**

Chen reported feeling bad and guilty after the breakup with his fiancée. With descriptions of her fiancée's personality and examples of how she encouraged and believed in him, he illustrates how with the termination of their relationship, he lost someone who held a significant and fundamental position in his life.

After the break-up I began to feel really bad and guilty. She was a great person and she always helped me to go beyond my limits. She believed me more than I believed myself. When I was applying for low salary jobs thinking that I don't deserve them or I won't get a job in big companies,

she pushed me to apply. And thus, I actually got job offers from large companies. **(Chen)**

You never really replace that person

As their narratives progressed, narrators described what they learned from their experiences, how they feel and experience their lives without their loved ones, and how they remain connected to them despite the passage of time, as shown by their affectionate and admiring thoughts for them and the fond memories they hold of them.

Sienna recalled her Sunday visits to her grandparents' house, writing of the activities she used to do with her grandfather, the special moments they shared and her feelings of excitement at the time. Her recollection of all of these details, her feelings of gratitude toward her parents for ensuring that she had weekly contact with her grandfather, and her attempts to look back on their special moments from an adult perspective are all indicators of the strong bond between her and her grandfather, and how much she misses their harmonious and playful relationship.

I remember sometimes we would go buy wine together from local farmers (he had been a farmer himself and knew this stuff) or meat, or once we even went to pick fruits from trees. I was around 10 and I was so excited at the idea that I pulled out of my closet a special outfit and I even wore a hat with daisies. When I think about it now, I am not sure we were even allowed to be in that garden, let alone to pick fruits from plants. What I think I miss the most is not being called by the nickname he gave me anymore. It was 'kitten' **(Sienna)**

…

My parents insisted we'd pay a visit every Sunday afternoon and I am glad they did. I would find my grandfather sitting in the living room, or, on the sunny days in the balcony, or if my grandmother was cooking lunch, grating cheese with a round metal grater/container in the kitchen. He loved

food so much, but he loved wine more. He would drink half a litre of red wine everyday with his lunch, then have a nap. **(Sienna)**

Sienna described also how the first Christmas after her grandfather's death, she preserved the chair he used to sit in. She seemed to have always held her grandfather's image in high regard and that she honored his memory by reserving his place.

He was always sitting at the end of the table and the first Christmas after he passed away, I didn't let anyone take his seat. I guess the image of him seating is the most iconic for me as he would always be sitting whenever I would go visit him. **(Sienna)**

With reference to his own grief journey and lessons learned, Oliver described that although life continues and he has adjusted to a life without his father, his father will always be an irreplaceable figure to him. His reflections on still missing his father, his attempt to imagine what he would be like today if he still existed, and his confidence that he will be reunited with him are all indications of how he continues to honor him and maintain the relationship with him.

Some people say that the loss of a loved one takes time to get over. I don't think you become ever to get over it. As the time goes on you get used to that person not being around. But you never really are the same again. In the beginning you are into a kind of denial that it never happened or that they never existed. They become a distant memory on an old chapter in a book. And as you get older, other people and events take over and fill some of the void, but you never really replace that person, their ways, their nature, their presence that was such meaningful in your life. I still miss my father and often wonder what he would like today. But I know one day, we will both be in the same place, together again. **(Oliver)**

Despite coming to terms with a life without his father and gaining valuable lessons from his loss, Lee expressed how he feels incomplete without his father. The distinct metaphor he uses to paint a visible picture of persistent

emptiness, the poetic language and imagery to convey his feelings of sadness and envy and his attempt to imagine a world where his father still exists, appear to reflect his constant and repeated attempts to avoid forgetting his father. Moreover, his reflections on how his memories of his father before he turned eleven faded and how this would affect his identity as a father create the impression that he continues his relationship with his father through his desire to become a father himself and through wanting to provide his own children with the memories he may have missed as a child. In this way, I wondered if he would also feel that his father and he worked on this together.

> *The emptiness of his absence haunts me for many more years to come. I often wonder how my life would turn out to be if he was still alive. I often think about this as I observe fathers playing with their children in the park and on the streets. Such childhood adversity has made me more resilient and more appreciative of my loved ones. But at the same time, I still feel that something is missing. I often wonder about what kind of father I will become in the future. I am rather unsure as the memory of my father before I was 11 grew hazier. Till this day, I still feel a hint of sadness and maybe envy as I gaze upon the silhouette of a father and his child walking side by side down the street. Maybe time doesn't heal everything. I just took these years to get used to his absence.* **(Lee)**

Additionally, Lee described his appreciation for his mother's support of the family during the grieving process, as well as his aspirations for her emotional resilience, creating an image of her as a heroine. His experience of his mother during the grieving process and his use of *"my mother and I are the only ones left now"* seem to suggest that his bond with his mother, who is the last surviving parent figure in the family, is a way of preserving his connection and relationship with his father.

> *My mother and I are the only ones left now. Life goes on after his death. My mother did her best to support the family while still grieving. Such remarkable emotional resilience is something that I aspire to.* **(Lee)**

Siena shared how she had thought of her grandfather and included him in important moments in her life and how she had experienced his presence through another person.

> *I had thought of my grandad in important moments of my life since and in the small ones. One that touched me was meeting at work a man who looked incredibly similar to him, and even had the same name. It was like having the unique chance to spend some more time with him so many years later.* **(Sienna)**

Sienna continues to sense her grandfather's presence through her father. She reflected on how she lives a life that she can shape while she tries to picture what her grandfather would have thought about all he had done for her and her family.

> *He still lives through my dad, but it also fills me with pride to see how much my family has accomplished in three generations. He didn't have an education, whereas my sisters and I have had several years of it and are still using what we learnt to shape our lives for the better. I think it would be hard for my grandad to understand the extent of all of this if he was still alive, but it all started from him.* **(Sienna)**

Chen who narrated his experience of breaking up with his fiancée shared how he thinks and he prays for her, how he believes in her ability to move forward in her life and how he would want to have her in his life once again. In expressing what he wishes to say to her he uses capital letters, which suggest an imagined dialogue that, together with his thoughts of care for her, may indicate his unique way to keep her close.

> *I am going back home next month for my research and I know I would see her because she lives just next street to me. If I could talk to her, I would want to let her know that IF IT WAS JUST LOVE, I WOULDN'T BROKEN UP EVER, IT WAS JUST OTHER THINGS THAT MADE ME DO THAT. I don't know if my ex-fiancée would ever trust another guy because of what*

I did. I know that my ex-fiancée is a very strong and independent person and she would have moved on, I am praying for her every night. If I was given a second chance I would definitely take it. **(Chen)**

Story type II. Narratives of Empowerment

The narratives of five males and four females were characterised as *'Narratives of Empowerment'*. This was the most prevalent story type in this study and may be thought of as a range of stories where narrators used the EW task to produce feelings of resilience and growth. These narratives captured a collection of difficult feelings and thoughts that narrators went through as a result of their experiences, but also narrators' development of insight into their experiences including their emotional strength, their ability to reframe their experiences and find meaning in them as well as their ability to accept and forgive themselves or others. *'Narratives of Empowerment'* may be considered as narratives that demonstrate a gradual progression from disempowered to empowered emotional states.

I fell apart mentally and physically

Narrators in this story type began their narratives with descriptions of the vulnerable emotional states they experienced during their experiences including feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, desperateness, fear, shame, anger, helplessness and loneliness.

Meera, who wrote about her experience with failing her re-sit examinations at medical school, described the reasons for her predominant feeling at the time, that of fear. Her descriptions of how *'it had all been taken away'* seems to indicate a sense of hopelessness, powerlessness, and desperateness, as failing her resit exams, meant that she lost not only the opportunity to gain the privileged status she wished for but also the respect she was deprived of.

Obviously, the email said I hadn't passed the resit exams and that I was forced to withdraw from the course…Most of all, I was fearful. Because

getting into Medical school had set my life on a definite path. I would automatically be given a job and the respect I had never been given growing up. But now, in one day it had all been taken away from me. **(Meera)**

Meera also described experiencing intense feelings of shame. These seem to be connected to her failure to meet people's expectations about her academic identity as well as to her parents' consistent efforts to pray for her.

There was a lot of shame in me. Shame towards the fact that there were so many people I'd have to tell I failed, since almost everyone I knew was a Medical student. Shame towards my parents who were going to the temple everyday to pray for me to pass the re-sit exams when I told them I didn't think I would pass them. **(Meera).**

There were also multifaceted feelings of anger for Meera. It feels that Meera's anger towards her friends was a secondary feeling in response to being ignored and gossiped about by them. It also feels that her anger towards God emerged as a reaction to her struggle to make sense of her failure at the time, which led to her questioning her faith and loss her trust in her family's religious beliefs.

A lot of anger as well was felt. I was angry at many of my friends at Medical school. For passing and leaving me behind. For ignoring me through my resit period and now trying to gossip about me. I felt a lot of anger at God. My family is very religious, they always said God had a reason for everything. But what was the reason for this? To let me get into Medical school just for me to be kicked out?! It brings nothing to my life other than a student debt of £18.000. **(Meera)**

Through a striking visual metaphor, Lysandros paralleled his experience of his parents' break-up as a battle with a *'tsunami',* perhaps in an attempt to convey how catastrophic and emotionally overwhelming this process was for him that it impacted on his energy levels, leaving him worn out.

The breaking-up of my parents was an exhausting process, it drained me somehow as I was trying to float on the surface with a tsunami occurring at the same time **(Lysandros).**

Taking a critical look at his parents' behavior, Lysandros also described his feelings of helplessness resulting from his parents' lack of involvement. His use of the phrase '*I was only thinking about my youngest brother'* suggests that he assumed responsibility for duties that his parents could not perform at the time.

I found myself helpless, my parents were on the borderline to be irresponsible and apathetic towards their children, and I was only thinking about my youngest brother (4 years younger than me), because I believed, and I still believe that the whole situation would have affected him much more than me **(Lysandros).**

Thalia's repeated use of *'I stopped'* emphasised the feelings of depression and her giving up on herself during her studies. I wondered if bringing other people's voices in her narrative was an attempt to ensure that the reader would understand what others weren't able to at the time.

I stopped taking care of myself, I stopped wearing makeup, I stopped taking care of my skin, and I did not care what clothes I was wearing...People would tell me to 'just be happy', 'smile more', or 'do something you like' but that made me feel even worse, as if it was a trait that I was feeling depressed. **(Thalia)**

Aadan who wrote about his experience of becoming homeless, used capital letters, tactile imagery as well as consecutive rhetorical questions in historical present tense that all appeared to emphasise how angry, lonely and desperate he felt when he was not provided with the support he needed.

After talking to an advisor, they told me I had made myself INTENTIONALLY HOMELESS and they would not offer any accommodation. I swore at them and threatened to go to their superiors,

they got security to intimidate me and chucked me out. I felt colder in that heated room than in the blustering wind outside. I felt betrayed with nowhere to turn. What can I do? Who to turn to? I started calling my friends, but they would not pick up their phones. **(Aadan)**

Taking a critical look at the way he coped during his studies at the time, Max described a mental and physical breakdown that had a profound and multifaceted impact on him.

In short, I fell apart mentally and physically. My fitness was neglected and so was my diet. I was drinking more than I should have on a school night down to the pub followed by take away/fast food etc. What little money I had was being wasted at an increasing rate. This stupidity all should have been avoided as at my age I should have known better. **(Max)**

It just didn't raise its voice anymore

As the narratives in this story type progressed, narrators described how they gradually overcame, improved, or recognised the difficult feelings they went through, as a result of their experiences. Narrators appeared to have found meaning and value in their experiences, including lessons learned and personal growth.

Karolina who wrote about how her travels were a life-changing experience for her, reflected on how she gradually managed to overcome her anorexia after struggling with it for seven years and how she started to take care of herself and others. Her use of '*it just didn't raise its voice anymore'* along with the reference to anorexia as her *'loyal'* and *'hated'* companion who *'was gone'* demonstrates the empowerment, freedom, and control she managed to achieve over her life.

After a while, I realised that I have won my battle with anorexia after 7 years. Just like that. It just didn't raise its voice anymore. I couldn't believe

how I hadn't realised that my most loyal and hated companion was gone! **(Karolina)**

…

I had quit inflicting suffering on myself and other beings. I stopped using plastics where possible. I stopped buying new clothes. I was one with nature. **(Karolina)**

Through her beautiful poetic and metaphorical reflections, Karolina also demonstrated how her resourcefulness arises from within her and not from external sources as it had been in the past, how she developed a more balanced emotional life and how she gained a greater understanding of herself and others. While she seems to still be processing the factors that contributed to her emotional growth, it appears she feels capable of understanding the world around her and living a fulfilled life.

When I am in a lot of pain, and it still happens, I seek out my friends, the mountains. They whisper the answer in my ear. That 'there is no answer, you can do whatever you want, as long as you don't inflict pain on the other, love life and have love for people and they will love you back'. Realizing that this took away of my life any depression and anxiety and gave me balance. I've never had balance in my life before and I had always attributed it to external factors, until I realised it had to be within myself. I don't know what exactly opened my eyes, but I feel deeply grateful and blessed that I had the cognitive capacity to grasp how this world works and how to be happy and content in it without having much! The smaller the suitcase, the happier I am. **(Karolina)**

In a similar way to Karolina, Thalia described how the *'voices'* in her head *'have finally stopped',* indicating how she began to take control of them and felt able of leading her life. It seems that this is also demonstrated through her descriptions of '*sleeping better',* '*feeling less anxious' and 'like being on a cloud'.*

I was sleeping much better and I was feeling less anxious. It was like being on a cloud. After all, these voices in my head have finally stopped but it took so much time before I could feel happy again. **(Thalia)**

She also discussed how she found meaning in her experience in that despite her feelings of depression that she still had at the time, she managed to complete her course and improved her self-perspective.

I passed my re-sits with a first class and so I didn't fail my course in the end. I was still depressed and even more anxious to be around people, but I was feeling a lot better about myself. **(Thalia)**

Tracing the origins of her fear to her childhood, Meera reflected on how she overcame her fear of failure when she had to withdraw from the program. Possibly, in *'smashing'* her fear of failure, she also smashed the definition of failure with which she grew up.

I think that day was when my fear of failure was smashed. Growing up, failure was always termed as unacceptable. **(Meera).**

In addition, Meera also wrote of the development of her inner strength and self-confidence, despite the fact that failure affected her at the time and continues to impact her today. There is a sense of pride in what she has achieved since then, and it feels as if her experience of failure is related to how empowered she feels at present and how well she is doing in her current life.

Today, I'm doing a lot better. I'm a pharmacy student at (university name) now. But the day I failed does bother me a lot. The dark emotions and hopelessness I felt really terrified me. I hope and fear that I won't have to experience a time like that again. But at least now, peoples' opinion doesn't come first before my own needs, wishes and happiness. Thank you. **(Meera).**

Aadan reflected on the day he was taken into custody and his court day. He recognised the value of his experience explaining how it enabled him to evaluate his substance abuse struggles and the quality of his friendships and how it motivated him to take action and make positive changes to his life.

> *I sat down and took an inventory of my life that weekend and realised that I had some addictions which had to be discussed. I had friends who did not VALUE me. I had bad relationships which did not let me grow and prosper. I lost many friends that weekend. On Monday I went to court and told the judge my situation. As I was a first offender, I did not get jail time. He referred me to a program for alcohol and drug addiction which I started immediately after I was released with a fine. I had accommodation for three months during the program. I used the time to get another job and plan a new career path that included going back to uni. It was a terrible time I went through, but I now see it was necessary to break with my past and my bad relationships, stop my addictions and separate me from toxic people who were parasites. Amen.* **(Aadan)**

For Max *'it's easy to see what went wrong'* at the time. Max is aware of his own efficacy as well as of the value of his experience, as evidenced by the specific examples he provides about what else he could have done differently and also how he applies his learnings to his current life. His broader perspective of the course and the successful completion of it also suggest feelings of confidence and pride in what he has accomplished.

> *It's easy to see where I was going wrong and in fact went wrong. The problem was that I fell behind right from the start which led to a build-up of anxiety and nervousness which then led to problems of preparation for lessons and teaching plans and resources generally.* **(Max)**
>
> *…*
>
> *I suppose hindsight is a great thing because I know that I could have done things differently. Perhaps not even gone the route that I went. Paid for a tutor or ask for help earlier just to make life a little easier. I am using what*

I learned and experienced as a tutor myself. The time was not all wasted, and I did complete the course at the end! **(Max)**

Marcus who wrote about his experience of falling behind his cousin academically, acknowledges that he could determine by himself how to modify his approach at that time, while he also considers the consequences of not seeking support and accepts responsibility for his actions.

Eventually I realised that emotional or psychological factors are as important as studying. I had to be emotionally stable. I had to stop treating everybody as my enemy or competitors. I had to learn to be supportive and happy for my colleagues' achievements. I had to work in a group, be a good mentor to my colleagues. And all of these I figured out myself, alone in my room, only after another poor performance, 3 months after my first exam of the year. Only If I had consulted my uncle or my teachers earlier that I wouldn't be wasting my time dealing with my own negative self. But my ego has triumphed every rational thoughts. My ego has put myself above any other individuals. My ego has thrown me away from my family and colleagues. **(Marcus)**

Through his uncle's voice, Marcus also seems to claim his learnings from his experience.

After the national public exam's results published, I was crying because I was personally congratulated by my teacher before the official result ceremony and she said that I was the best student of the year. My uncle who wasn't there since he was managing his students at his school, came back early from work and hugged me. He said, 'if you didn't fail earlier this year, I can't guarantee you that you would achieve these great results today. You have to fail, in order to succeed, he added'. **(Marcus)**

And now I've made peace: Acceptance and Forgiveness

As their narratives progressed, other narrators within this story type described how they have forgiven and accepted themselves or people who hurt them through recognising the positive effects of their experiences and through understanding human nature and its complexity.

Lysandros who wrote about his experience of his parents' break-up, reflected on how although his feelings for his parents remain, they have mellowed over time. The comparison of his parents to *'bigger children'* with *'strengths and weaknesses'* and his acceptance of life's unfairness appear to demonstrate his acceptance of both the human nature and vulnerability of his parents as well as how his experience helped him gain meaning and formed the basis for his own growth.

> *I still feel disappointment, have complaints and feel angry towards my parents but these are much better nowadays.* **(Lysandros)**
>
> ...
>
> *Parents are like every person with their strengths and weaknesses, they could even be considered as 'bigger children' Some things are unfair, but we can do nothing about them but accepting them. However, I've grown to be a responsible, independent person; Something that I would not have been able to become if all the extreme 'drama' in my life had not happened.* **(Lysandros).**

Hanita, who wrote about her experience of her decision to go on a trekking trip despite her father's opposition, refers to her father as *'papa'.* This appears to indicate her feelings of affection for him, despite the difficulties he faces in understanding her and her difficulty in sharing her experience particularly with him. In addition, her phrases *'he is as stubborn as I am', 'he is my father after all',* and *I have made peace'* are all indications that she has forgiven and accepted him along with their shared human nature and its imperfections. In a sense, it seems that through forgiveness and acceptance of her father, Hanita has reframed her experience in a way that she no longer feels hurt, sees the value in her experience and feels able to own her choices for climbing experiences in new places.

I still can't speak about that moment at zero point with anyone in my family. It hurts the most to not be able to share it with papa. He of all people should understand that moment! Understand what I was feeling! Why I wanted to climb Pindari. But no. He is as stubborn as I am. He is my father after all. I see myself in him as he should see himself in me. And now, I've made peace. That moment, this trip, quite literally the climb and metaphorically the climb of my life, I had to do it ALONE. These views, the moments, the Himalayas, the pain, the joy is mine alone. Nothing to share, but only to cherish deeply. Last year when I was in the UK, I climbed the mountains of Scotland and Snowdonia. And I still haven't shared the pictures with papa. It doesn't hurt anymore, I guess. **(Hanita)**

Through his use of *'I persevered'* and repeated statement, *'I embraced it',* Nathan highlighted his resilience and how he has come to terms with the scars he was left with as a result of his surgery experience. For Nathan, the acceptance of his experience as an integral part of him, seems to have opened the door to new body and life related values and important learnings.

But overall, I persevered and I do have scars in my tummy, but I guess it's a part of me as a person. Although a harrowing experience, which affected me both physically and mentally I have come to terms with it and embraced it as It's so far been my only major surgery which is a relief. So, my surgery for me was both a depressing as well as a long-term thing that I had to go through, but I embraced it. I guess the main physical after effect is when I am doing lots of physical activity and I'm tired sometimes as the area where the gall bladder used to be sometimes hurts but nowadays is very rare. Overall, I still believe it taught me to value my body and appreciate life more so that's a plus. I've grown up to accept my three scars on the sides of my stomach and belly button as an important part of me. **(Nathan)**

Story type III. Narratives of Stuckness

Two female narratives have been identified as *'Narratives of Stuckness'*. In this study, this story type was the least prevalent, and narrators appeared to use the EW task to tell stories about a range of complex feelings associated with their experiences of abuse. Narrators processed their painful memories, their struggle to accept their experiences and to be compassionate toward themselves, as well as their feelings of helplessness in changing their emotional states, their beliefs about themselves and the world around them and regaining control over their lives.

I remember: Memories of complete fear

Narrators in this story type began their narratives with descriptions of their strong memories of fear and terror resulting from their experiences of abuse and the way they managed these feelings at the time.

Evelyn who shared an incident of domestic violence by her father and her experience of growing up in a violent household, reflected on her fear of her father and how it manifested emotionally as well as physically throughout her childhood. Her use of *'I think'* and *'I know now'* are indicative of her efforts to understand her feelings for her father, since, as a child she loved him yet feared him and his actions at the same time.

> *I knew there was something wrong about the way my Dad talked to my mum. I think I felt it in the pit of my stomach and looking back, I know now that very often I felt in fear of my Dad. My whole childhood, I think I felt a knot in my stomach and I was always waiting for the new danger or waiting for my Dad's anger to explode. At the time, as a child I didn't really understand my mixed feelings towards my Dad. I loved him but I was also afraid and could see the damage and destruction he caused. He had a lot of power and control in the house. He emotionally controlled and abused the whole house* **(Evelyn)**

Evelyn recalls again the physical sensation of her fear at that time, and describes how she coped with it by making herself almost invisible and diverting

her attention. In repeating *'I remember'* three times, she seems to emphasize the vividness of her memories of her fear.

> *I remember the feeling in my stomach. The knot. I remember trying to 'be good', 'be quiet' and stay under the radar. I was frozen with fear to be honest because my instincts know he was in a bad mood. I remember all the Christmas cards in the house. I tried to keep myself occupied and not get in the way.* **(Evelyn)**

Evelyn also spoke of how helpless she felt in the face of her fear. Her detailed descriptions of her surroundings, the evocative simile she used to link her father's departure with a feeling of relief, her repetitive use *'I remember'* and her shock at seeing her mother appear to provide an insight into the difficult memories she holds from her experience.

> *I was so scared and didn't know what to do. I felt so frightened and I just knew it. I was so scared for my mum. I just wanted something to stop it, to stop him. To help me escape it all. I remember the music from the Christmas card was still playing. I remember him going out of the house and slamming the front door. It was like a horrible dark cloud had lifted when he left the house. But I remember being in utter shock, seeing my mum curled up in the corner sobbing.* **(Evelyn)**

Kaya, who narrated her experience of sexual abuse, spoke of the *'complete fear'* she felt the day of her abuse. Her descriptions of her thinking and coping processes, her attempts to escape, and how she felt her experience lasted forever all seem to show the clarity and weight of her memories of terror.

> *I felt immediately uncomfortable and I started to cry. All the regrets filled into my head and the 'what if's. I was lying frozen on the ground trying to push him off me each time. I felt complete fear. My pain receptors were off, and my main goal was to get out the flat. The whole ordeal felt like a lifetime. I was confused, shocked, shell-shocked. He had thought I liked it, but he didn't acknowledge my tears. What happened afterwards was*

pure hell. I was stopped from leaving, I eventually escaped, he chased after me and finally I sought refuge in a woman's office. I was terrified. **(Kaya)**

I never forgave myself

As their narratives developed and in contrast to *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and '*Narratives of Love',* narrators within this story type described their inability to forgive themselves for their abuse experiences. Narrators reflected on the wide range of feelings they experience in their lives at present including guilt, anger and frustration as well as feelings of self-blame, self-criticism and a strong sense of responsibility for what occurred to them.

Evelyn wrote repeatedly of her difficulty forgiving herself and her feelings of responsibility for the actions of her father that have plagued her throughout her life. I wondered whether this struggle to forgive herself along with her core beliefs about herself, and her tendency to always meet others' needs, is a displaced guilt, which may be easier to cope with than directing her feelings at her father or accepting that she was unable to protect her mother and herself at the time.

I never truly trusted my dad after that, and I never forgave myself. I always blame myself for my mum taking a beating that night. I've always carried with me in my adult life that I'm not good enough or inherently a bad person. I've always been a people pleaser and always tried to fix things. I've always felt like I've done something wrong in life. **(Evelyn).**

...

I never forgave myself for that night. I really spent my childhood thinking that all my dad's actions were because of me. I really believed that I had caused all the pain suffering in my family. I never forgave myself. **(Evelyn).**

Evelyn's feelings of guilt did not seem to end with the death of her father, but rather extended to the guilt she feels for grieving for his passing. It feels as if

with the loss of her father she experienced multiple losses, that of the father she wished to have and that of all the things that she loved him for. Evelyn also discussed holding anger and frustration within her. Rather than being a relief, I wondered if the loss of her father has left her with a flood of unresolved feelings that she is unable to reconcile and give closure to.

> *Even now, that my dad has passed away I feel all this guilt. And I even feel guilty for grieving. For all the parts of me that still loved him as a dad. I have all this anger and frustration in me.* **(Evelyn).**

Although Kaya appears to be taking responsibility for her decisions and actions at the time, she uses harsh language when evaluating them. Her use of *'my naive self*', *'so stupidly and naively again',* and *'I stupidly followed'* are indications of Kaya's negative evaluation of herself and her actions, communicate a sense of self-criticism and self-blame, as well as a lack of self-acceptance.

> *I was 16 at the time so I thought I was ready for a real relationship (never had one before at that point). He was 7 years older so my naive self thought it was pretty cool. We had planned to meet up for lunch (my ideal), and he told me that I should meet him outside his block house getting something to eat. So stupidly and naively again, I decided to go.* **(Kaya).**
>
> **...**
>
> *We ended up walking around the town and we even had a bite to eat. He asked me what I was studying what my hopes and dreams were and showered me with compliments. No one had ever done this with me, so I was hooked. He treated me like his lady. I was incredibly naive. He told me that he needed something from his flat and I stupidly followed.* **(Kaya).**

Powerless: I cannot seem to move past

Contrary to *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and '*Narratives of Love',* in this story type narrators described feeling powerless to heal from their experiences of abuse. Narrators wrote of the fears they cannot overcome, the flashbacks, the

feelings of confusion, guilt, and responsibility, as well as changes in their perceptions of men and relationships.

Kaya reflected on how her experience is still vivid in her mind and how it has affected her perception of interpersonal relationships with men, leaving her with a sense of fear of intimacy. Her use of the phrase *'I cannot move past'* is indicative of her powerlessness to change the devastating effects of her experience, while her description of how her experience is silenced and cannot be discussed in her home can also be read as evidence of her helplessness. Kaya described how she avoids thinking about her memories, and I wondered whether her avoidance coping behavior in conjunction with the lack of space to discuss her experience is associated with and sustains her feelings of powerlessness and fear.

> *That day happened five years ago but I still remember it like yesterday. It feels like the awkward elephant in the room so there is no mention of it in my home. That event has changed the way I see men and relationships. There is a fear of sexual intimacy that I cannot seem to move past. I try to avoid thinking about it, as it was painful at the time, but each day gets easier and easier. Now it feels like a distant memory. One that I tend to forget, but one that I can't forget.* **(Kaya).**

Evelyn spoke of her *'really vivid'* flashbacks, which seem to indicate the residual effects of her experience. Evelyn's experience has affected her beliefs about men and her relationships with them. In describing how she is *"always"* afraid of men, it seems as if she is trapped in a lingering feeling of impotence from which she feels unable to move on.

> *It was such a terrible sight and sometimes I have flashbacks, really vivid ones about that event. It has been so traumatic as an event in my life. It has affected my relationships with men. I am always in fear of what men can do in romantic relationships and the capacity they have to inflict damage on women.* **(Evelyn)**

Evelyn's confusion about relationships and her abundance of emotionally abusive relationships she had in her adulthood seem indicative of her ongoing vulnerability and difficulty defending and protecting herself. Her use of *'this event will stay with me and impact on me for my whole life'*, '*this one always impacted me'*, '*I always carried all this guilt', 'I always felt responsible'* and *'I never got over these feelings of guilt'* imply a torrent of guilt and responsibility that is still unresolved and possibly connected with her inability to free herself from the repercussions and effects of her experience.

> *I am so confused about relationships with men and have had a number of emotionally abusive romantic relationships as an adult. I think this event will stay with me and impact on me for my whole life. I had many sad, traumatic events as a child growing up in domestic violence. But this one always impacted me because from such a young age I always carried all this guilt. And from then on, I always felt responsible for my mum's safety. I still do now even as an adult. I never got over these feelings of guilt.* **(Evelyn).**

Summary

In order to examine the structure and patterns of the narratives, a structural analysis of the data was conducted based on Labov's Model of narrative analysis (Labov, 1972). According to this first level of analysis, narrators' stories have many structural similarities, and men and women express their feelings and thoughts in similar ways when asked to write about a personal experience for 50 minutes. In addition, this analysis identified two differences between the narratives of men and women. First, two of the male narratives contained Evaluative Actions in specific sections, but none of the female narratives did. Evaluative Actions provided insight into how these two male narrators coped with their feelings of frustration and anger, rather than naming what they felt, perhaps indicative of a difficulty in processing these feelings during the writing process. Second, one of the overall three Coda patterns emerged, was found in two female narratives but not in any of the male narratives. Unlike the other Coda patterns, this Coda included the feelings of helplessness and

powerlessness that both of these women experience in the aftermath of their experiences, suggesting that the writing process provided them with the opportunity to reflect upon the impact of these experiences on their lives.

Subsequently, a second level of analysis was conducted using the findings from the structural analysis of the data. This led to an identification of the types of stories that narrators produced, enabling a deeper understanding of how they utilised the EW task. This second level of analysis showed that narrators utilised the EW task to generate three types of stories: '*Narratives of Love', 'Narratives of Empowerment'* and '*Narratives of Stuckness'*. A further finding of this analysis revealed that *'Narratives of Stuckness'* was exclusively a female story type, showing a marked difference between the stories produced by men and women in this study.

In conclusion, through the two different levels of analysis of the narratives, it was possible to explore the same data from different perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of the ways men and women express their feelings and thoughts through EW, offering a variety of interpretations and insights.

Chapter 4. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings that resulted from a narrative analysis consisting of two different levels of analysis and relate them to existing empirical and theoretical literature. Implications of the findings for Counselling Psychology clinical practice, future Counselling Psychology research and educational programmes and professional trainings are discussed, as are limitations of the present study and opportunities for subsequent research.

Structural analysis: Labov's Model of narrative analysis

As a first objective, the present study sought to explore the underlying structure of the narratives and their patterns. Through the application of a structural analysis approach based on Labov's Model of narrative analysis (Labov, 1972) this first level of analysis found that men's and women's narratives shared many structural similarities revealing that they expressed their feelings and thoughts in similar ways when they were asked to write about a personal experience in a 50-minute EW task. Two structural differences were also observed between the narratives of men and women. The following section discusses in detail the findings that were derived from the structural analysis of the fifteen narratives. Specifically, it discusses the findings resulting from the narratives' Abstracts, Orientations, Complicating Actions, Evaluations, Resolutions, and Codas and how these can be understood in the context of existing empirical and theoretical research.

The analysis of narratives' Abstracts, found that both male and female narrators used their first sentences in the EW to give brief and broad insights into the experiences they would write about, with consideration to how the experiences affected them, how they view their lives now, or how they saw their lives prior to the experiences. This is in agreement with previous research, which found that the writing process enhances people's ability to focus their attention and get closer to their personal stories (Cangialosi, 2002). From another perspective, it is also possible that these insights at the beginning of the writing

process may also be related to the fact that I was not present in the room while narrators were writing, so this might have given them the space to engage quickly in the writing process and think through the stories with more comfort.

The analysis of narratives' Orientations showed that both male and female narrators often tended to divert from recounting their primary experiences in order to provide contextual details, further explanations or draw parallels between the experiences they narrated and previous experiences. An interesting finding was that in these frequent pauses, narrators appeared to be attempting to speak to the researcher to provide her with background information she was unaware of, or to themselves to clarify things, or make connections with previous experiences. Thatcher's (2020) recent research has also shown that participants often engaged in dialogues with the deceased, with themselves, or with others during an EW task which asked them to write about an experience of anger with a person they lost. As Thatcher concluded, the dialogues with themselves or others that participants engaged with through the writing process, ultimately led to greater self-awareness and sense-making. This view is also shared by a large qualitative study conducted by Elspeth and Malpass (2022), which recruited participants with dyspnoea and other breathing difficulties, and showed that when participants were asked to write a letter to their breath, their letters consisted of three types of dialogue including argumentative, reconciliatory, and thankful, despite receiving no instructions or directions on how to write their letters. The authors concluded that the way participants wrote their letters allowed them to gain understanding into how they currently relate to their breathing difficulties, as well as developing new ways of relating to them.

The analysis of narratives' Complicating Actions demonstrated the presence of temporal connectives, a variety of past tenses, including simple past, past progressive, and past habitual, as well as direct and indirect speech in both male and female narratives. The use of temporal connectives indicated that the writing process encouraged narrators to record the events associated with their experiences and also their thoughts and feelings about them in a chronological sequence. The use of a range of past tenses suggested that the writing process

prompted narrators to not just report the facts of their experiences, but to elaborate on the duration and frequency of their feelings, thoughts, and actions in relation to them. The use of direct and indirect speech added vividness to the narratives and gave the impression that during writing narrators re-played dialogues in their minds. Taken together, the above features found in the Complicating Actions of the narratives are consistent with Çakırtaş et al. (2018) who claimed that writing about a personal experience can stimulate people to create a similar representation of their original experience, think about it in an organised and structured way and eventually process and assign meaning to it. In a similar vein, Pennebaker and Smith (2016) also asserted that writing can help people not only organise the events surrounding their experiences, but also enlighten them about their own feelings and thoughts regarding them.

Analysing the Evaluations of the narratives, it was found that both male and female narratives contained throughout both External and Embedded Evaluations. This suggested that during the writing process narrators did not only describe the facts related to their experiences but engaged in reflections with regards to their feelings and thoughts about them. According to the analysis of External Evaluations that were found in the narratives, the use of the present tense was evidence of the narrators' attempts at evaluating their feelings and thoughts related to their experiences from their standpoints as of the time when they wrote their narratives. This is in agreement with prior research which indicated that the language people use in their writing and in particular the use of verbs such as ‘I realise’ or ‘I understand’ are cognitive phrases and an indicator of their attempts to understand and thereby gain awareness of their experiences (Kacewicz, et al. 2007 p.280). In the present study, it was also found that the External Evaluations often contained the use of second-person pronoun, which suggested narrators’ efforts to evaluate their feelings and thoughts from a distance while writing. A similar conclusion has been drawn by Campbell and Pennebaker (2003), who concluded that switching between personal pronouns in peoples' writing signifies a change in perspective that is further associated with improved health.

The analysis of Embedded Evaluations provided insight into narrators' feelings and thoughts at the time their experiences occurred. It was revealed that within Embedded Evaluations, there was an array of linguistic devices used by both male and female narrators during the writing process to express their feelings and thoughts, including similes, metaphors, rhetorical questions, quantifiers, repetitions, and emphatic adverbs. These devices suggested that the narrators did more than simply name their feelings and thoughts, but reproduced them during the writing process. In agreement with this finding, earlier research has shown that EW not only draws people closer to their feelings, but also allows them to 'reexperience' them (Baddeley and Pennebaker, 2003 p.199). A prospective experimental study by Cosentino et al. (2021) also showed that writing about a professional traumatic or stressful experience allowed participants to rework their experiences as they wrote about them.

The findings discussed above in the Abstracts, Orientations, External and Embedded Evaluations of males and females narratives are consistent with cognitive processing theory (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999; Pennebaker, 1993). Both male and female narrators wrote their experiences in a chronological way providing detailed background information, while they also expressed and processed a range of feelings and thoughts related to their experiences using a range of cognitive phrases and linguistic devices. If taken together, it might be possible that writing promotes cognitive processing in a similar way for both genders. Additionally, cognitive processing theory appears to be similar to cognitive theories in talking therapies. This is in line with an earlier RCT which has compared CBT and a structured EW task for the treatment of acute stress and PTSD symptoms and found no differences in their effectiveness, attributed to imaginal exposure and cognitive restructuring that both approaches share in common (Emmerik et al., 2008).

Evaluative actions were found to be the least common type of Evaluation in the narratives of this study. The analysis revealed that two of the male narratives contained Evaluative Actions while none of the female narratives did. This finding does not appear to align with the theory of emotional inhibition as a proposed mechanism for EW (Pennebaker, 1985), as Evaluative Actions in the

present study provided information about how the two narrators dealt with their frustration and anger at the time, rather than acknowledging these feelings. It may be that writing does not facilitate men's processing of emotional schemas associated with anger or frustration. This contradicts findings of a large meta-analysis by Frattaroli (2006) who following the synthesis of one hundred forty-six RCTs found no differences between men and women's written emotional expression. Alternatively, brief or one-off EW tasks similar to the present study may not provide sufficient time for men to process such feelings. Previous research has shown that an hour-long EW session is more emotionally demanding than a longer one (Chung and Pennebaker, 2010).

The analysis of narratives' Resolutions showed two distinct patterns in males and females' narratives. The first pattern emerged in three out of seven female and two out of eight male narratives. This pattern had a positive outcome related to the narrators' experiences and included feelings of proactiveness, endurance and persistence. The second pattern emerged in four out of seven female and six out of eight male narratives. This pattern had a negative outcome related to the narrators' experiences and included feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness and a lack of control. The presence of Resolutions in all narratives, indicated that the writing process enabled all narrators to create a *'complete story'* that had a beginning, middle and end as Labov (1972, p.362) defined it. Bases on this finding, it may be suggested that writing facilitates the development of coherent narratives for both men and women. EW has also been previously found to enable the production of coherent stories, which in turn allows for new ways of thinking and construction of meaning (Sexton et al., 2009). Coherence has been previously linked with better stress management (Antonovsky, 1987) as well as secure attachment style (Mikulincer, 1995). More recently, findings from an innovative meta-analysis which included 47 studies and 10,883 participants revealed a strong correlation between greater coherence and lower PTSD symptoms severity (Schäfer et al., 2019). The development of coherence is also central to the focus of many talking therapies, including Narrative Exposure Therapy, which is based on dual representation theory of trauma (Neuner et al., 2002).

In two of the three Coda patterns identified by the analysis, similarities were found between the narratives of males and females. The first pattern which was identified in three out of eight male and one out of seven female narratives was characterised by warm and relational features and feelings of affection, admiration and respect for people who are no longer present in narrators' lives. Codas in this pattern adopted a broader and distanced perspective, although these narratives described experiences of losing loved ones. An interesting finding was that the narratives in this Coda pattern included the above positive characteristics, while their Resolution was negative. The second Coda pattern which emerged in half male and three out of seven female narratives was characterised by a hopeful and positive tone and featured the positive effects of narrators' experiences as well as narrators' learnings and personal progress. Five out of seven narratives in this Coda pattern had a negative Resolution, while their Codas featured the above positive characteristics.

Considering both Coda patterns, one may conclude that writing helped men and women to reflect on the control over their stressful experiences as well as view them differently. EW has been consistently demonstrated to promote change perception and healing following trauma-related experiences (Sexton and Pennebaker, 2009; Park and Ayduk, 2016). The results of several RCTs have also demonstrated that EW promotes resilience and adjustment (Saldanha and Barclay, 2021) and fosters growth and meaning following traumatic experiences (Zheng, et al., 2019). Moreover, the striking differences between Codas and Resolutions are in accordance with both emotion-regulation theory (Lepore et al., 2002) and cognitive processing theory (Harber and Pennebaker, 1992). Narrators expressed either tender feelings for their loved ones despite their experience of losing them, or described how experiences such as parental divorce, academic failure, illness, and homelessness, have contributed to their growth and sense of agency. Several talking therapies whose principles and interventions are derived from cognitive learning theories or theories of affect and emotion regulation can be paralleled to emotional regulation theory and cognitive processing theory; for example, acceptance and commitment therapy (Hayes et al., 1999), emotion regulation

therapy (Mennin & Fresco, 2014), mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (Segal et al., 2002) CBT (Beck, 2011) and rational-emotive therapy (Ellis, 2001).

The third Coda pattern was found in two of seven female narratives, but not in any of the male narratives. In this Coda pattern, feelings of powerlessness and helplessness were prominent, as well as a lack of control over life. There was also a negative Resolution in both narratives. On the basis of the above, it can be argued that writing enabled these two female narrators to process their experiences of abuse and their impact. The fact that these females expressed and did not withhold their difficult feelings and the multifaceted impacts of their experiences on their lives at present, is consistent with emotional inhibition theory (Pennebaker, 1985). Emotional inhibition theory presents common features with interventions of cognitive-behavioural models which are known to alleviate emotional distress through systematic exposure to feared stimuli (Carrey, 2011). Interestingly, Psychodynamic therapy has more recently considered this to be achieved through the concept of transference and the dynamics of the therapeutic relationship, which facilitate the re-evaluation of feared stimuli (Muir and Hibberd, 2019). Last, but not least, the presence of this coda pattern only in female narratives but not in any male narrative indicates that it may be more difficult for men to express complicated feelings related to abuse experiences than it is for women. This is in accordance with gender socialization theory (Stockard, 1999). This is also confirmed by earlier research which has claimed that victims of experiences of abuse express their feelings about their experiences differently and in particular feelings of shame, based on the gender-related meanings that they have been attributed to their experiences (Range and Jenkins, 2010; Stickney, 2010).

Types of stories

As a second objective, the present study sought to identify the types of stories that narrators produced in their narratives which further allowed for an understanding of the ways narrators used the EW task. The following section discusses the types of stories identified based on the structure and the characteristics of the narratives and how these can be viewed and understood

in the context of existing theoretical and clinical theories. This second level of analysis found that although the eight male and the seven female narrators who took part in this study shared different experiences, they produced stories which shared many similarities. The analysis also showed that the narratives of females exhibited a distinct story type. The analysis showed that narrators used the EW task to create three distinct types of stories; '*Narratives of Love',* '*Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Stuckness'.*

The most prevalent story type in this study was identified in the narratives of five out of eight males and four out of seven females were '*Narratives of Empowerment'.* The study found that while the narratives in this story type contained a range of experiences that included homelessness, parents' break up, surgery experience, academic difficulties and failures, mental health difficulties during studies and travelling experiences, narrators appeared to use the EW task to create stories about the meanings they gained out of their experiences, despite the challenges they encountered. When viewed as a whole, '*Narratives of Empowerment'* may be summarized as stories that chronicled the gradual transition from a disempowered emotional state, including feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, desperateness, fear, shame, anger, helplessness and loneliness to an empowered emotional state, including feelings of hope and positivity. Thus, according to this analysis, narrators in this story type did not only write about their disempowered emotional states as a result of the challenges they faced, but rather, as their narratives progressed, their focus shifted to their insights into their experiences. In essence, these insights concerned their understanding of their experiences and the positive aspects of them, as well as the meanings, values, and lessons they gained from them.

'Narratives of Empowerment' align with posttraumatic growth theory conceptualised by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004). This theory posits that posttraumatic growth is an unplanned process of positive changes and personal development that occurs over an extended period after a traumatic event as a result of struggling to cope with it (Tedeschi et al., 2018). Posttraumatic growth can be measured by the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory which covers five

different areas of growth including relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life and the degree to which the individual will develop growth on these areas depends on certain personality traits including extraversion, openness and optimism; however, it still remains unclear whether these traits pre-existed the traumatic event or were influenced by it (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996). Interestingly though, while the authors demonstrated that women tend to achieve higher scores of growth compared to men (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996), the present study did not confirm this, considering that '*Narratives of Empowerment'* was the most prevalent story type produced in this study by five out of eight males and four out of seven females.

The narratives of three out of eight males and one out seven females were classified as '*Narratives of Love'.* The study found that while the narratives in this story type contained experiences of loss (three experiences of losing a loved one and one experience of a break-up), narrators used the EW task to create stories about their feelings of love and express their tender thoughts for their loved ones who are no longer in their lives. '*Narratives of Love'* may be understood as stories that illustrated a gradual transition from a vulnerable and out of control emotional state in response to loss, including excruciating feelings of helplessness, shock, surprise, emptiness, loneliness, pain, desperateness, and guilt, to a broader and more distanced understanding of loss which involves acceptance of it and discovering personal meanings. Thus, based on the analysis, narrators in this story type, wrote about the difficult feelings and thoughts that arose as a result of their losses and the ways they coped, but as their narratives progressed, their emphasis changed. In fact, they recalled the special relationships they had with their loved ones, their feelings of affection and admiration for them, and their most cherished memories of them. They also talked about the lessons they learned from their losses, their ongoing feelings for their loved ones and their experiences of life without them, as well as the unique ways that they have preserved their connection to them despite the passage of time.

There are many similarities between *'Narratives of Love'* and contemporary theoretical approaches to grief, each of which seeks to emphasize the variety of ways in which grief can be experienced and its dynamic processes, thus challenging conventional theories which pathologize the process of dealing with loss. For example, continuing bonds theory (1996), developed by Klass, et al. (1996), proposes that in order to cope with the loss, bereaved individuals construct new, continuing relationships with their loved ones following their loss in order to retain them in their life even though they are not physically present. Also, developed by Stroebe and Schut (1999), dual process model of grief theory postulates that during grieving bereaved people engage in a dynamic, ongoing alteration between loss-orientation coping and restoration-orientation coping. The concept of loss-oriented coping involves emotional reactions that are intended to help the individual cope with the loss itself as well as process it. These responses may range from rumination, avoidance, and feelings of pain to reminiscence and yearning for the deceased. The concept of restoration-oriented coping strategy involves emotional reactions that are intended to help the individual cope with changes associated with secondary losses following a loss, including rebuilding and reorganising life and finding a new sense of identity. These responses may range from pleasant feelings of relief or pride to more unpleasant ones including anxiety or even fear. Lastly, meaning reconstruction theory places the construction of meaning at the heart of the grieving process and holds that in order to cope with the loss bereaved people attempt to both assimilate and accommodate the loss (Neimeyer, 2001). Assimilation of the loss involves attempting to comprehend it and developing new ways of thinking about it, while accommodating the loss refers to making new ideas about the world in order to adapt to it. Essentially, meaning reconstruction theory views grieving as an ongoing process of rediscovering and redefining meanings that the loss has challenged (Neimeyer, 2016).

A female-only story type was identified in two of the seven narratives which were categorized as '*Narratives of Stuckness'.* This was the least common story type identified in the current study. The study found that both narratives in this story type contained experiences of abuse and narrators appeared to use the EW to process the distressing feelings and thoughts associated with their

experiences as well as their pervasive nature in their lives at present. In contrast to *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Love'* which featured a gradual shift from vulnerable emotional states to resilience, *'Narratives of Stuckness'* when considered as a whole, can be thought of as stories that were characterised by feelings of powerlessness and helplessness from the beginning until the end and lacked any transition to more restorative feelings. Thus, the analysis revealed that narrators in this story type synthesized and processed their memories of terror and fear, their current feelings of guilt, anger, frustration, self-blame and responsibility for what they had experienced, and their sense of being trapped in a powerless sense of self, which prevents them from moving forward.

'*Narratives of Stuckness'* fall in line with social learning and cognitive psychological theories. For instance, emotional processing theory, originally developed to understand anxiety disorders, posits that fear has a normal structure in individuals' memories and is essential for dealing with and escaping real threats, but its structure becomes pathological when harmless stimuli are associated with threats (Foa and Kozak, 1986). According to this theory, following a traumatic event, the traumatic memories are not fully processed, and as a result are stored with an abnormal structure in the individual's memory. (Foa and Kozak, 1986). Dual representation theory suggests that a traumatic event is stored simultaneously in two different levels of memory, verbally accessible memory (VAM) and situationally accessible memory (SAM) (Brewin et al.,1996). According to this theory, in VAM are stored memories which can be consciously accessed, edited and communicated to others and include sensory details of the traumatic event, emotional and physiological responses experienced and the meaning attributed to the traumatic event, while in SAM are stored unconscious memories which cannot be accessed, edited or communicated automatically and include bodily responses and visual and spatial details related to the trauma (Brewin et al.,1996). When the consequences of the traumatic are event are considered, VAM produces ongoing and distressing feelings to the individual, while when SAM is triggered produces intrusive dreams and flashbacks which are experienced by the individual almost as if the traumatic event re-occurs in the present time (Brewin,

2001). Finally, cognitive model of post-traumatic stress disorder holds that following a traumatic event individuals may experience PTSD symptoms as a result of two processes, an ongoing problematic appraisal of the event which results in a current sense of threat and a low degree of conceptual processing which obstructs the conscious access to the traumatic memories (Ehlers and Clark, 2000). Thus, specific stimuli become linked with problematic emotional, behavioural and cognitive responses which unless elaborated are maintained over time (Ehlers and Clark, 2000).

The three different types of stories found in this study appear to exhibit similarities with existing narrative types in the literature of health psychology. Gergen and Gergen (1997) introduced the typology of 'progressive narratives' in which people move towards a progressive positive direction as a result of their experiences, despite the difficulties they encountered. This typology seems to present similarities with both *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Love'* in that they both depict a progressive movement towards positive feelings. Frank (1995) proposed that the plots of illness accounts fall into three typologies, 'quest narratives', 'restitution narratives' and 'chaos narratives'. Quest narratives present illness metaphorically as an inspiring journey that has a final destination of insights, purpose, and meaning for people (Frank, 1995). Typically, restitution narratives are characterised by the storyline '*Yesterday I was healthy, today I am sick, but tomorrow I'll be healthy again'* and thus, portray illness as an experience that occurred recently and from which people desire to return to good health (Frank, 1995, p.78). Chaos narratives are stories difficult to be shared or heard, lack order and coherence and describe illness as a permanent experience from which people have no expectation of recovery (Frank, 1995). Both *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Love'* seem to be closely related to quest narratives in that narrators are not defined or permanently silenced by their experiences, but rather they have meaningful stories to share about them; they have accepted their experiences and have adapted their lives to them and can therefore view them from the perspective of gains rather than losses. In *'Narratives of Empowerment',* for example, narrators spoke of their learnings, their meanings,

and their growth as a result of their experiences, while in *'Narratives of Love'* they took a broader view of their losses.

It was also found that although narrators in *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and in *'Narratives of Love'* presented the ways they were changed by their experiences, or the ways they reinterpreted their experiences, they did not idealise their experiences by demonstrating a complete and heroic transformation of themselves as a result of them (Frank, 1995). Rather, they attempted to demonstrate a subjective reality of their experiences by discussing some difficult feelings and thoughts that they still experience today and how what they experienced has not left them unaffected.

Based on the examination of narratives of emotional distress, Adame and Hornstein (2006) proposed the typology of *'*revelations/purposeful suffering' according to which people's emotional crises serve as catalysts to alter their perspective of themselves and their lives, leading to life-changing insights and narratives of revelation. There is a strong correlation between this typology and both *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Love',* in that narrators emphasized the significance of their experiences in providing learnings and insights.

In contrast to *'Narratives of Empowerment'* and *'Narratives of Love', 'Narratives of Stuckness'* appear to share similar features with Frank's chaos narratives (Frank, 1995) in that they were characterised by vulnerable feelings throughout and a lingering lack of control over life, However, while chaos narratives are usually fragmented, lack order, coherence and reflection (Frank, 1995), this was not confirmed in *'Narratives of Stuckness'* which were sequenced and reflective. In addition, *'Narratives of Stuckness'* present similar characteristics with regressive narratives as described by Gergen and Gergen (1997), which are stories that range from sad to tragic, are marked by a complete lack of control over life and no anticipation of a positive movement. As explained by Pollinghorne (1996), 'victim life plots' are stories that exhibit pessimism, a lack of purpose, and a lack of positive prospects. These plots also share similar characteristics with '*Narratives of Stuckness'* in the sense that the narrators

described how they have remained trapped with their feelings of helplessness and powerlessness since their experiences occurred, with no hope or anticipation for a better future.

Implications for Counselling Psychology

The findings of the present study may be important for Counselling Psychology clinical practice, future Counselling Psychology research and educational programmes and professional trainings.

The findings from the first level of analysis overall show how both men and women in this study worked on their feelings and thoughts through the medium of writing, how they almost relived their feelings and how they developed insights from their current perspectives. These findings might be useful for Counselling Psychologists who might want to broaden their therapeutic tools and enable an alternative way of emotional expression for their clients. According to recent research (Cooper, et al., 2021), clients may have specific preferences for therapeutic activities, while results from a meta-analysis comprising 53 studies and more than 16,000 clients have confirmed a relationship between the exploration and accommodation of clients' preferences with decreased therapy dropouts and positive treatment outcomes (Swift et al., 2018). In light of the above, practitioners may be able to determine whether writing could serve as an appropriate medium of interest and value that could be integrated into the therapeutic process following an assessment of its clinical suitability for their clients' needs in combination with an exploration of their clients' preferences.

Also, recent research has led to the development of the Cooper-Norcross Inventory of Preferences (C-NIP; Cooper and Norcross, 2016), a multidimensional tool designed to assess clients' preferences in psychotherapy, including therapy's Directiveness, Emotional Intensity, Orientation and type of support. It may be useful to explore the feasibility of developing an inventory designed specifically to explore the ways in which men and women prefer to

express their feelings and thoughts as part of their therapy treatment. This inventory may then be used by practitioners to assess the needs of their clients.

The findings from the first level of analysis demonstrated also that two of the male narratives were found to contain Evaluative Actions that described how the narrators dealt with their feelings of anger and frustration at the time rather than descriptions of their feelings or thoughts, whereas there was no evidence for Evaluative Actions in the female narratives. This might suggest that males need some support to process feelings of anger through the medium of writing. This is in accordance with Deng's et al. (2016) findings according to which men tend to be less expressive when it comes to negative feelings, however, they experience stronger emotional experiences than women. It is important for practitioners to be aware of this and to aid their male clients in processing feelings of anger in beneficial for them ways, while practitioners who specialize in anger management might also find the findings of interest. EW exercises may provide practitioners with the opportunity to help their male clients understand anger, their relationship with it, the underlying feelings associated with it and its impact, as well as to explore constructive strategies for expressing and dealing with their anger. Research is also necessary to confirm these findings, as well as to determine whether men and women have difficulty expressing other feelings as well.

According to the second level of analysis, both male and females used the EW task to produce *'Narratives of Empowerment'* reflecting on the positive aspects and meaning gained from a range of stressful experiences despite the challenges they encountered. This showed how through the medium of writing people can produce more empowering stories about their experiences. This is consistent with the findings of a pilot RCT which invited caregivers to write about the benefits of providing care to a loved one and concluded that EW was not an effective and feasible intervention for everyone; however, it benefited caregivers who enjoyed expressing themselves through writing as it helped them to positively reappraise their daily life role as a caregiver (Gallagher, et al., 2020). It is suggested that practitioners consider incorporating focused EW exercises into their therapeutic work with clients who are interested in

expressing themselves through writing or are willing to try it in order to help them discover their internal resources, resilience and growth, and help them gain a holistic perspective on their stressful experiences.

The second level of analysis has also shown that both male and females used the EW task to produce *'Narratives of Love',* reflecting on their tender thoughts for their loved ones who are no longer in their lives. This demonstrated how through the medium of writing people can produce stories about the depth of love for the people they lost, almost as if they were still alive. Similar findings were reached by Barak and Leichtentritt (2017) who found that creative writing exercises, particularly poetry writing that is oriented on the development of dialogue with the deceased, reinterpreting and reshaping the loss facilitate meaning reconstruction. It is likely that the findings will be of particular use to practitioners who specialize in grief and bereavement and may wish to support their clients in working through the reality and the pain of a loved one's loss using EW exercises that facilitate the process of meaning-making. In addition, given the broad spectrum of tasks psychologists perform in palliative care settings (Gramm et al., 2020), the findings may also be of assistance to practitioners who support palliative stage patients their medical professionals and their caregivers. EW exercises which focus on the end of life experience may help them process feelings that might otherwise be unspoken or difficult to express.

'Narratives of Stuckness' was an additional finding of the second level of analysis in which two females narrated experiences of disempowerment feelings and self-blame as a result of their experiences of abuse. This suggests that writing may be a suitable means for people to process the detrimental consequences that result from an experience of abuse, as well as their own perceptions of themselves and the world. These findings may be valuable to practitioners who work with female clients who are victims or survivors of abuse and present with similar feelings of stuckness. Written exposure therapy (WET) is a novel, evidence-based, short-term treatment protocol developed to treat PTSD in trauma survivors adults who have experienced sexual or physical abuse or military combat (Sloan and Marx, 2019). In the United States, WET is

widely used as a trauma preferred treatment method and is recommended as a first-line treatment by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense (Management of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Work Group, 2017). WET may assist female clients in developing self-compassion, acquiring constructive coping strategies, approaching the present and future from a more optimistic perspective, and unraveling complex feelings that decimate their identity, which can be difficult to convey verbally even in a safe therapeutic setting.

It is also important that the *'Narratives of Stuckness'* was an exclusively female story type. This might suggest the possibility that women are more likely to experience feelings of self-blame after an experience of abuse. This is confirmed by recent research which revealed an association between violence and abuse with anxiety and depressive disorders and PTSD in women (Schouler-Ocak and Brandl, 2021). It may also be that complex feelings related to experiences of abuse including ongoing shame or guilt might be difficult for males to express through the medium of writing. Indeed, researchers have confirmed that males often have difficulty disclosing or seeking support for abuse experiences (Ellis et al., 2020). This might suggest that males have similar experiences but do not feel comfortable disclosing them through the medium of writing. This emphasises how therapeutic writing might not be suitable for everyone and how practitioners need to be aware of any social or cultural barriers that males might encounter in discussing similar feelings and experiences in therapy.

Lastly, but definitely not least, the overall findings might also have implications for professional doctorate trainings in Counselling Psychology or other psychotherapy educational programmes. A recommendation might be to enrich their existing curriculums and provide future trainees with theoretical knowledge and experiential opportunities to engage with less verbal forms of emotional expression such as the therapeutic writing which will help them broaden their competencies and skills.

Limitations and directions for future research

While the study revealed some interesting findings, some potential limitations should also be considered. This study recruited fifteen participants who provided written accounts of a wide range of personal experiences including experiences of loss, break-ups, homelessness, surgery, difficulties during studies, travel experiences and abuse. There is a possibility that this heterogeneous content of personal experiences may have affected both the underlying structure of the narratives and their patterns, as well as the types of narratives produced. For instance, the two female narrators Evelyn and Kaya were the only ones to recount experiences of abuse and the only one whose narratives were characterised as '*Narratives of Stuckness'.* While I strongly believe that all narrators who took part in this study were courageous enough to share very personal experiences, it is likely that the experiences of abuse of these two women had a different impact on them compared to how other narrators were impacted as a result of their experiences. In light of the fact that trauma and stress focused EW has previously been linked to improved wellbeing (Smyth and Helm, 2003), future research may look at whether writing about a specific stressful experience produces gender differences in terms of writing structures and types of stories produced.

Further limitations of this study are the wide range of ages of the participants (20 to 58 years of age) and the fact that no information was gathered regarding whether participants had ever sought counselling support for the experiences they shared before taking part in the study, or information about how much time has elapsed since their experiences occurred. It is reasonable to assume that narrators whose narratives were described as '*Narratives of Empowerment'* and '*Narratives of Love'* had the benefit of time to give meaning to their experiences or that they had received some form of talking therapy which supported their ability to process and gain insight into their experiences. Based on this, but also considering a small-scale RCT conducted by Procaccia et al. (2021), who showed that the efficacy of EW on psychological adjustment to the COVID-19 pandemic for a sample of Italian Healthcare Workers varied according to age, gender and marital status, further research would be necessary to replicate if such or other variables including time or type of support received influence the stories men and women produce in an EW task.

Moreover, participants in this study were asked to write about their personal experiences in one 50-minute writing session, as opposed to the original EW paradigm in which participants engaged in four fifteen-minute writing sessions (Pennebaker and Beall, 1986). Given the presence of few Evaluative Actions in two of the male narratives which described the ways the two narrators coped with their experiences at the time, rather than their feelings or thoughts, another area for future research might be to determine whether factors such as different time variations of the EW task or gender produce differences in the way people write about their feelings and thoughts. Additionally, no follow-up interviews were conducted with the participants following the EW task session. This is perhaps an avenue for future research as it may provide further insights into the narratives' structure and types of stories produced, but also men's and women's experiences of the EW task itself. Also, a mixed method study utilising a word use analysis software such as the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2007) to analyse written narratives accompanied by follow-up interviews would allow to better understand the way men and women write about their feelings and thoughts.

Finally, the study included participants who identified with male and female gender identities, and so the terms 'men' and 'women' were used throughout this thesis. Although participants completed information about their gender identity as part of a short demographic questionnaire, the options that they were given were limited to male, female and transgender. Participants in future research should have access to a wider selection of non-binary identities, so that they may choose the gender identity that they identify with.

Conclusion

To my knowledge, this study was the first narrative analysis utilizing two levels of analysis which sought to explore how men and women write about their feelings and thoughts when they are asked to write about a personal experience in a 50-minute EW task. The study demonstrated that although male and female narrators wrote about different stories in terms of content, they expressed their feelings and thoughts in very similar ways as revealed by their narratives

structure. The study also found that male and female narrators used the EW task to create '*Narratives of Empowerment',* '*Narratives of Love'* and *Narratives of Stuckness'.* Notable differences were also identified between the narratives of men and women. First, two of the male narratives contained Evaluative Actions, while none of the female narratives did, and second, *'Narratives of Stuckness'* was a story type found only in two female narratives and not in any of the male narratives. While the findings of the present study warrant further research and are not intended to be generalised, it is hoped that the two different levels of analysis used to examine the narratives have attempted to provide insights into how similarly men and women may express their feelings and thoughts through the medium of writing, in addition to the similar but also different types of stories they may create using this medium.

In closing, it is important to remember that the way we prefer to express our feelings and thoughts is multisensory and multimodal (Beaumont, 2018). Also, the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy more and more embraces pluralistic approaches to therapy which aim at helping clients through a collaborative therapeutic framework which combines therapists' theoretical knowledge, competencies and techniques with clients' available resources, ideas and experiences (McLeod, 2018). In recognition that not every client will benefit from the same therapeutic approach (Maurer and KyleI, 2022; Can and Halfon), I wish to acknowledge that EW is also unlikely to be appropriate for or of interest to every practitioner or client. I hope, however, that the study's findings highlight the importance of practitioners diversifying and broadening their therapeutic activities in order to provide high quality standards of emotional support; this can be accomplished by tailoring therapy to their male and female clients based on a collaborative understanding and decision-making of their preferences and needs concerning emotional expression.

Final reflections

This pluralistic research study which was conducted between 2017 and 2023, provided me with the opportunity to confront and embrace a sense of messiness which was until then unfamiliar and often felt uncomfortable and unsettling. My

experience conducting this study has changed me as a researcher as I have developed a more holistic and flexible approach to my previously methodical and structured thinking process which I believe reflects the unique characteristics of pluralistic research that distinguishes it from other qualitative research methods.

As a Greek-born and bred woman, I have always found that men have a harder time expressing vulnerable feelings than women. Also, since a very young age, I have always had a natural flair for expressing myself through writing, which was uncommon among my male classmates at the time. Throughout my clinical experiences as a trainee Counselling Psychologist in the UK, I observed that men as well as women may have difficulty at times expressing themselves verbally in therapy, whereas other, less verbal expressive art approaches may be more appropriate and comfortable for emotional expression, such as writing, drawing, painting or sensory play.

When I started this research and in light of my cultural background, I anticipated that I would find a great deal of difference in the emotional language employed by men and women expecting male narratives to be more void of emotional language and vulnerable feelings as compared to female narratives. At the same time, due to my clinical experiences, I also started this research with a sense of curiosity and openness to better understand the phenomenon of men's and women's feelings and thoughts expression through the medium of writing. My memory still recalls how each time during the data collection process I would wait in the waiting area until participants completed the research procedure, contemplating the possible experiences they were writing about. The curiosity and impatience I experienced sometimes would lead me to read their narratives shortly after they had left the meeting room following the debriefing process.

Reflecting on the findings of this research and the similar ways men and women expressed their feelings through EW, my initial expectations were mainly challenged. The results of the study revealed the unlimited potential and power of writing for both the men and women who participated in the study. The results showed how the medium of writing allowed narrators to take control in the

experiences they chose to explore, process a range of feelings and thoughts related to them in powerful emotional language and ultimately produce stories about them.

It is my belief and hope in my role as a researcher, that my subjective experiences, combined with those of my participants added value to the study, resulting in different types of knowledge that do not contradict one another, but rather complement each other and build upon one another.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Participant Information Sheet

May 2018 v.2

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of study: Personal life events into words: A Critical Narrative Analysis on the construction of peoples' stories through Expressive Writing

Name of principal investigator Georgia Chatzitheodorou, **Research Supervisor:** Dr Julianna Challenor

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. You are welcome to ask me or my Supervisor if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore how people construct a personal and important event of their lives using an Expressive Writing task. Expressive Writing is a simple self-expression intervention which involves writing freely without worrying about punctuation, grammar or spelling. This study is undertaken as part of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology course at City, University of London and will run from November 2018 to September 2020.

Public task

City, University of London considers the lawful basis for processing personal data to fall under Article 6(1)(e) of GDPR (public task) as the processing of research participant data is necessary for learning and teaching purposes and all research with human participants by staff and students has to be scrutinised and approved by one of City's Research Ethics Committees.

Legitimate Interests

City, University of London considers the lawful basis for processing personal data to fall under Article 6(1)(e) of GDPR (legitimate interests) as the processing of research participant data is necessary for the purposes of City's legitimate interests and having completed the legitimate interests assessment City believes that the research falls within its legitimate roles and is satisfied that City has considered the interests and fundamental rights and freedoms of the research participants as documented in our LIA below.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a healthy adult (aged 18 and over) and you are willing to write your deep thoughts and feelings about a personal and important event of your life for approximately 50 minutes. Unfortunately, you will not be eligible to take part if you are aged seventeen years and under, if you have a current mental health diagnosis and if you have current suicidal thoughts or any risk to harm yourself or other or others. We are looking to recruit twelve-fourteen participants.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in part or all of the study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason, being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. By choosing to either take part or not take part in the study, this will have no impact on your marks, assessments or future studies.

What will happen if I take part?

Should you decide to take part in this study, your participation will involve a one-off session lasting approximately 50 minutes at City, University of London. In this session, you will be asked to write your deep thoughts and feelings about a personal and important event of your life.

Expenses and Payments

In appreciation of your time you will be offered a £15 Amazon voucher on the day of the meeting.

What do I have to do?

If you wish to take part, please get in touch. My contact details are at the end of this leaflet. We will arrange a time that is convenient for you to come at City, University of London and write about your deep thoughts and feelings about a personal and very important event of your life for approximately 50 minutes. Prior to your participation in this study, the researcher will go through the participation information sheet with you, and you will have the opportunity to ask any questions that you might have. You will then be asked to provide your written consent and demographic information. All your answers will be strictly anonymous and confidential. No other requirements are involved.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Writing about a personal and important experience or event of the past might bring some distressing feelings. After your participation in this study, the researcher will debrief you to make sure you are feeling ok, and you will be provided with information of clinical sources of support available should you feel you need it.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation in this study will contribute to developing our understanding on the working mechansims of Expressive Writing which in turn might allow the research and development of new Expressive Writing adaptations. Your participation will also enhance our knowledge of how Expressive Writing can be better incorporated and used in the Counselling Psychology practice.

What will happen when the research study stops?

If for any reason the research is stopped prior to completion the data will be kept anonymised, but all personal details will be destroyed. On completion of the research and after the required period of time that data has to be kept all data will be destroyed using cross shredding.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All data obtained will be confidential and will be shared only with my supervisor. Our contact details are at the end of this sheet. All data will be anonymous, and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity from being made public. Your data will be saved using a participation number, and not your real name. They will be stored in a locked file cabinet in which the researcher has sole access. They will be kept for ten years and will then be shred appropriately.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you would like to take part in this study, please don't hesitate to contact me. My contact details are at the end of this leaflet.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of this study will be used as part of my doctoral thesis for the Professional Doctorate course in Counselling Psychology at City University of London. This thesis will be made available on the City Research Online. It is also possible that the results will be published in scientific journals and presented at conferences. Quotations from that data will be used; however, there will be no identifying information as all data will be anonymous, and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. The results of the findings will be available to read at City Research Online repository.

What will happen if I do not want to carry on with the study?

You are free to withdraw from the study without an explanation or penalty at any time.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London by the City University, of London, Department of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Further information and contact details

Georgia Chatzitheodorou (student researcher)
City University of London
Email: georgia.chatzitheodorou@city.ac.uk
T: +44 (0) 7827165856

Dr Julianna Challenor (Supervisor)
City, University of London
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
Email: Julianna.challenor@city.ac.uk

Data Protection Privacy Notice: What are my rights under the data protection legislation?

City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. Your personal data will be processed for the purposes outlined in this notice. The legal basis for processing your personal data will be that this research is a task in the public interest, that is City, University of London considers the lawful basis for processing personal data to fall under Article 6(1)(e) of GDPR (public task) as the processing of research participant data is necessary for learning and teaching purposes and all research with human participants by staff and students has to be scrutinised and approved by one of City's Research Ethics Committees.
The rights you have under the data protection legislation are listed below, but not all of the rights will be apply to the personal data collected in each research project.

- right to be informed
- right of access
- right to rectification
- right to erasure
- right to restrict processing
- right to object to data processing
- right to data portability
- right to object
- rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling

For more information, please visit www.city.ac.uk/about/city-information/legal

What if I have concerns about how my personal data will be used after I have participated in the research?

In the first instance you should raise any concerns with the research team, but if you are dissatisfied with the response, you may contact the Information Compliance Team at dataprotection@city.ac.uk or phone 0207 040 4000, who will liaise with City's Data Protection Officer Dr William Jordan to answer your query.

If you are dissatisfied with City's response you may also complain to the Information Commissioner's Office at www.ico.org.uk

What if there is a problem?

If the research is undertaken in the UK and if you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: 'Personal life experiences into written words: A Critical Narrative Analysis on the construction of males' and females' stories through Expressive Writing.
You could also write to the Secretary at:
Anna Ramberg
Research Governance & Integrity Manager
Research & Enterprise
City, University of London
Northampton Square

London
EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been conducted, you should contact the Vice-President (Research & Enterprise) at researchintegrity@city.ac.uk.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 2- Consent form

CONSENT FORM

Title of the study: 'Personal life events into words: A Critical Narrative Analysis on the construction of peoples' stories through Expressive Writing

Name of Researcher: Georgia Chatzitheodorou

Aim of the study: To explore how people construct a personal and important life event through Expressive Writing

This consent form is to ensure that you agree to take part in this research and you are aware of your rights as a volunteer participant. Before signing please read the statements below and initial the boxes to indicate agreement.

Please initial box

1	I confirm that I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.	
2	I confirm that I do not have a current mental health diagnosis.	
3	I confirm that I currently do not have suicidal thoughts and I do not feel like harming myself or others	
4	I understand taking part in the study will involve writing my deep thoughts and feelings about a personal and important event of my life for approximately 50 minutes.	
5	I understand that the writing task might be upsetting and bring distressing feelings for me. The researcher will debrief me to make sure I am ok, and she will provide me with information on clinical sources of support available.	
6	This information will be held by City as data controller and processed for the following purpose(s) Public Task: The legal basis for processing your personal data will be that this research is a task in the public interest, that is City, University of London considers the lawful basis for processing personal data to fall under Article 6(1)(e) of GDPR (public task) as the processing of research participant data is necessary for learning and teaching purposes and all research with human participants by staff and students has to be scrutinised and approved by one of City's Research Ethics Committees.	
7	I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published.	
8	I understand that a pseudonym will be used to protect my identity from being made public.	
9	I understand that the data collected will be shared with my supervisor and will be used for my thesis. I understand that the thesis will be made available in the City Research Online repository	

10	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	
11	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
12	I agree to the arrangements for data storage, archiving, sharing.	
13	I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publication.	
14	I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix 3- Debriefing form

DEBRIEF INFORMATION

Title of study: '**Personal life events into words: A Critical Narrative Analysis on the construction of peoples' stories through Expressive Writing**

Thank you for taking part in this study. Now that it's finished, we would like to tell you a bit more about it.

The purpose of this study is to explore how people construct a personal and important event of their lives through an Expressive Writing task. The results of the study will contribute to developing our understanding on the working mechanisms of Expressive Writing which in turn might allow the research and development of new Expressive Writing adaptations. It is also hoped that results will also enhance our knowledge of how Expressive Writing can be better incorporated and used in the Counselling Psychology practice.

Sometimes, writing about a personal and important experience or event of the past might result in distressing feelings. If you would like to speak to someone about your feelings, thoughts or worries you may contact your GP or one of the services below.

British Psychological Society
www.bps.org.uk
Tel: +44 (0)116 254 9568

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
www.bacp.co.uk
Tel: 0870 443 5252

Samaritans
www.samaritans.org/
Tel: 08457 90 90 90
Charity providing 24-hour emotional support

If you are a current City University student, you may also contact:
Student Counselling and Mental Health Service
T: +44 (0)20 7040 8094
Email coun@city.ac.uk

We hope you found the study interesting. If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

Georgia Chatzitheodorou (student researcher)
City University of London
Email: georgia.chatzitheodorou@city.ac.uk
T: +44 (0) 7827165856

Dr Julianna Challenor (Supervisor)
City, University of London
Northampton Square
London EC1V 0HB
Email: Julianna.challenor@city.ac.uk

Ethics approval code: ETH1819-0513

Appendix 4- Recruitment flyer

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Department of Psychology, City, University of London

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

I'm looking for volunteers to take part in a study of Expressive Writing! Your participation would involve one session lasting 50 minutes at City University, London. You would be asked to write your deep thoughts and feelings about a personal and important life event. In appreciation of your time, you will be offered a £15 voucher.

For more information about this study, or to take part, please contact:

Georgia Chatzitheodorou (Principal Researcher), Trainee Counselling Psychologist, City University London
Email: **georgia.chatzitheodorou@city.ac.uk**
Psychology Department
at T: +44 (0) 7827165856

OR

Dr Julianna Challenor (Supervisor)
Email: **Julianna.challenor@city.ac.uk**

This study has been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Committee, City, University of London.

Ethics approval code: ETH1819-0513

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. If you have any data protection concerns about this research project, please contact City's Information Compliance Team at dataprotection@city.ac.uk

Appendix 5- Demographic questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Participant number (For researcher to complete):

Age:

I identify my gender as:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Transgender Male
- ☐ Transgender Female
- ☐ Other:

I identify my ethnicity as:

- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black\African\Caribbean
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other Please state:

I identify my employment status as (Tick all that apply):

- ☐ Part time\full time Student
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Part-time employed
- ☐ Full-time employed

Appendix 6- Expressive Writing task instructions

Expressive Writing Task Instructions

*For this Expressive Writing task, I would like you to write **your deep thoughts and feelings** about a personal and important event of your life for **50 minutes.***

*In your writing, I would like you to really let go and explore your **very deepest emotions and thoughts**. You may want to write about something **personal and very important** about yourself or your significant others, linking it to your past, present or future. You may write about any experience\event in your life that you consider it to be very personal and important.*

Before you start, please read the following:

- It would be better to avoid writing about something that you consider extremely painful in the present
- There is no need to worry about grammar, syntax or spelling errors
- When you finish place your writing task within the provided sealed envelope
- Make sure you don't disclose your name.
- Your writing task will be anonymous and confidential. You will be identified only by a participant number.

Appendix 7- Illustration of application of Labov's Model of Narrative Analysis

Labov's Narrative elements and definitions Labov (1972)	Transcript and coding	Analysis of Labov's Narrative elements
Abstract (A) What is the narrative about? **Orientation (OR)** Who, What, When, Where? **Evaluation (EV)** So what? **External Evaluation** The narrator explains what the point of the story is. **Embedded Evaluation** The narrator explains how they felt at the time or quote themselves or	**MOST PEOPLE HAVE A PARENT THAT THEY FEEL CLOSER TO.** IN MY CASE I WAS CLOSER TO MY FATHER THAN MY MOTHER. WE HAD SIMILAR INTERESTS IN SPORTS AND MUSIC AND SIMILAR TASTE IN CLOTHES AND FOOD. HE WAS ALMOST LIKE A BEST FRIEND THAN A PARENT. MY FATHER BECAME ILL IN THE WINTER OF 1997 AND WAS ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL FOR TESTS. IT WAS DISCOVERED THAT HE HAD CANCER. BUT HE WAS TOLD THAT IT WAS TREATABLE. I WAS LIVING IN LONDON AT THE TIME AND I WENT BACK HOME TO VISIT HIM IN MARCH 1998. HE WAS IN HOSPITAL AT THE TIME. ON FIRST SEEING HIM SITING ON THE BED I WAS SHOCKED AS HE LOOKED THIN, PALE AND MUCH OLDER THAN HIS AGE . IT WAS HARD TO DISNOOSE MY ALARM. AS USUAL, WHEN WE GOT TOGETHER, WE TALKED FOR	**A**: The narrative is about his closeness to his father. His relationship with him differed from his relationship with his mother. He evaluates his relationship with him. **OR**: Characters, Situation, time, and settings: Similar interests to father, father was a best friend for him, father's diagnosis of cancer in 1997, admission to hospital. Information about where he was living at the time. These are also **CAs** as they progress the narrative. **Embedded Evaluation:** - He reports his feelings of shock when he first saw his father and he provides explanations. This is also **CA** as it progresses the narrative. **OR:** He provides background information about the long discussions they used to have with his father. **Embedded Evaluations:**

introduce other people and what they said. (The continuity of the story is preserved). **Evaluative action** The narrator stands within the story and reports the feelings of the characters through their actions. **Evaluative devices** • Intensifiers • Comparators • Correlatives • Explicatives **Complicating action (CA)** Then what happened? **Resolution (Res)** What finally happened? **Coda** The end of the narrative	A LONG TIME. BUT THIS TIME IT WAS DIFFERENT. HE SOUNDED MORE SERIOUS THAN USUAL AND MORE EMOTIONAL. AFTER A FEW DAYS HE WAS ALLOWED TO COME HOME AND HE SEEMED TO BE MAKING A RECOVERY. BUT IN MY MIND, I KNEW THAT EVERYTHING WASN'T OK FOR HIM. I WENT BACK TO LONDON AFTER THAT AND KEPT IN TOUCH BY TELEPHONE WITH MY MOTHER. ABOUT TWO WEEKS LATER ON A FRIDAY MORNING WHILE SITTING AT MY WORK DESK IN WORK, MY SISTER PHONED ME TO SAY THAT MY FATHER WAS TAKEN ILL AGAIN AND WE BOTH NEEDED TO GO HOME. I FELT A SINKING FEELING AS WE FLEW HOME. WE WERE MET BY A RELATIVE AT THE AIRPORT. ON ARRIVING AT THE HOSPITAL, WE BOTH SAW HIM UNCONSCIOUS WITH A BREATHING MASK. WE WERE BOTH SHOCKED AS HE WAS LOOKING VERY ILL, SMALL AND PALE. BUT IN MY HEART, I KNEW THIS WAS THE END AND THAT WE AT LEAST HAD ONE LAST CHAT TOGETHER. **MY FATHER DIED THE NEXT MORNING AT AROUND 6AM WHILE ALL HIS FAMILY WERE THERE.** I WENT INTO HIS ROOM	- He makes an evaluative comment about how different the meeting with his father was and how more serious and more emotional he sounded. - He also reports his instinct about his father **Evaluative devices:** • Intensifiers Quantifiers: 'EVERYTHING WASN'T OK' • Comparators: Comparatives: 'HE SOUNDED MORE SERIOUS THAN USUAL AND MORE EMOTIONAL'. Metaphor: 'IT WAS HARD TO DISNOOSE MY ALARM'. • Explicatives: Causal conjunctions: 'I WAS SHOCKED AS HE LOOKED THIN, PALE AND MUCH OLDER THAN HIS AGE' **CA:** Reports his father's return home, his own return to his basis, his contact with his mother, his sister call to inform him about his father deterioration. There are **OR** elements as he introduces new characters. (sister, mother, relative). **Embedded evaluations:** - Sinking feeling as he was going back home and his and his sister's feeling of shock when they saw their father. He provides explanations for this.

	AS HE TOOK HIS LAST BREATHES. THERE WAS A COLD AND CALM SILENCE AS WE DRIFTED AWAY. A FEW DAYS LATER WE HAD THE FUNERAL AND A VERY LARGE CROWD CAME FROM THE COMMUNITY TO SEE HIM OFF. HE WAS WELL RESPECTED AND LIKED BY MANY PEOPLE. IT WAS AN EMOTIONAL TIME BUT I COPED QUITE WELL AT THE TIME. AFTER A SHORT PERIOD AT HOME I RETURNED TO LONDON TO CARRY ON WITH MY JOB AND MY LIFE. ABOUT SIX MONTHS LATER I WAS MISSING HIM A LOT. I WAS MISSING OUR CHATS BY PHONE, I WAS MISSING HIS SUPPORT WHEN I NEEDED ADVICE. I WAS MISSING MY BEST FRIEND. TO COPE WITH THE LOSS AND THE FEELINGS OF EMPTINESS, I STARTED DRINKING AT HOME EVEN AT NIGHTS. USUALLY, I WOULD GO TO BED DRUNK AND WAKE UP FEELING TERRIBLE. I STARTED TO TAKE DAYS OFF WORK, I DIDN'T GO OUT WITH MY FRIENDS LIKE I USED TO DO. I FELT LIKE SOMEONE REACHED INTO AND PULLED MY SOUL LEAVING A GREAT BIG SPACE WHICH COULD NOT BE FILLED. I FELT ALONE. I WASN'T AS CLOSE TO MY MUM OR	- He also reports his thoughts and how he knew that this was the end; however there was an opportunity for a last chat with his father he tried to reframe it and see something positive **External evaluations:** - emotional time for him, but he coped well **Evaluative devices:** • Comparators: Metaphor: 'I FELT A SINKING FEELING AS WE FLEW HOME'. • Explicatives: Causal conjunctions: 'WE WERE BOTH SHOCKED AS HE WAS LOOKING VERY ILL, SMALL AND PALE'. **Res:** He presents the outcome of the story, his father died. **CA:** The funeral and his return to his routines. **OR:** Information about the funeral and new characters **Embedded evaluations:** - He was missing his father and his role in his life, emptiness, pain (EV/CA)

	SISTER AND SO THE CONNECTION WAS LOST. I FELT I HAD NO ONE TO TALK TO OR LOOK UP TO AS A ROLE MODEL. IT WAS LIKE I WAS IN A BOAT WITHOUT A SAIL, PUSHED INTO THE SEA WITHOUT DIRECTION, JUST GOING ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. I DID NOT THINK I WAS GOING TO MAKE IT THROUGH THIS PHASE OF MY LIFE AND I WAS SCARED THAT I WOULD LOSE MY JOB, MY FLAT, ETC. ONE NIGHT WHILE AT HOME, AN OLDER FRIEND OF MINE POPPED BY MY PLACE. HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT MY WELL BEING BOTH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL AS I WASN'T EATING PROPERLY AT THE TIME. HE EXPLAINED TO ME THAT HE ALSO LOST A PARENT A FEW YEARS BEFORE AND WENT THROUGH A SIMILAR EXPERIENCE. THE PROBLEM HE TOLD ME WAS THAT HE DIDN'T ACUALLY GREIVE PROPERLY AT THE TIME OF THE DEATH AND THAT HE IN FACT BOTTLED IT UP. HE SAID TO ME THAT I NEEDED TO EXPRESS MY FEELINGS TO SOMEONE, PERHAPS A STRANGER TO HELP WITH THE NEGATIVE PROCESS. OF COURSE, I WASN'T THE ONLY ONE IN THE FAMILY. MY MOTHER AND SISTER WERE ALSO	- Pain, loneliness and fear he. He explains how it was like for him. **CA:** Description of his coping (drinking, withdrawal) **Evaluative devices:** • Intensifiers: Quantifiers: 'I WAS MISSING HIM A LOT'. Repetition: 'I WAS MISSING' (4 times). • Comparators: -Comparatives: 'MY BEST FRIEND' **CA**: The connection with his mother and sister was lost, visit from a friend who was concerned for him, suggestions from his friend. **Evaluative devices:** • Comparators: Similes: 'I FELT LIKE SOMEONE REACHED INTO AND PULLED MY SOUL LEAVING A GREAT BIG SPACE WHICH COULD NOT BE FILLED'. 'IT WAS LIKE I WAS IN A BOAT WITHOUT A SAIL, PUSHED INTO THE SEA WITHOUT DIRECTION, JUST GOING ONE WAY OR ANOTHER'. **External Evaluation:** He explains that he was not the only one in his family who was struggling at the time.

	GOING THROUGH A TOUGH TIME AND I NEEDED TO BE STRONG FOR THEM. I DID NOT FEEL STRONG. I FELT USELESS, HELPLESS AND A WRECK. AS IT WAS TURNED OUT A MUTUAL FRIEND OF OURS HAS BEEN ORDAINED AS A PRIEST AND MY FRIEND RECOMMENDED THAT I GO AND VISIT HIM AND TALK TO HIM ABOUT MY INNER MOST THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS. BY DOING THIS, I COULD EXPLORE WAYS OF DEALING WITH AND ACCEPTING MY FATHER'S DEATH. AFTER A FEW MEETINGS WITH THE PRIEST I STARTED TO ACCEPT AND COME TO TERMS WITH THE EVENT. BUT IT WASN'T AN EASY JOURNEY AND IT NEVER IS. SOMETIMES I FELT I WAS MAKING PROGRESS, OTHER TIMES I FELT THAT I WASN'T. I HAD STOPPED DRINKING COMPLETELY WHICH HAD HELPED ME FOCUS MORE AND NOT HAVE A VIEW OF THINGS THROUGH ALCOHOL. **I HAD BEGUN EATING PROPERLY AND MY JOB WAS VERY FULFILLING.** SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE TAKES TIME TO GET OVER. I DON'T THINK YOU BECOME EVER TO GET OVER IT. AS THE	**CA:** The difficult time his mother and sister had, his friend's recommendations to talk to a priest. **Embedded evaluations:** He reports feeling useless, helpless, powerless **Evaluative devices:** • Correlatives: Double attributives: 'I FELT USELESS, HELPLESS AND A WRECK'. **CA**: The final events in the story: the meetings with the priest were helpful as he started to accept and come to terms with his father's loss, he started to take care of his self and found meaning in his job. **External Evaluation**: - He stands outside the story and makes an evaluative comment about how difficult his journey was and how this always is a difficult journey. He normalises the difficulty. **Embedded evaluation**: - He reports how he was feeling about the progress he was making at the time and how his alcohol quit helped him. **Evaluative devices:** • Intensifiers: Emphatic adverb: 'IT **NEVER** IS'

	TIME GOES ON YOU GET USED TO THAT PERSON NOT BEING AROUND. BUT YOU NEVER REALLY ARE THE SAME AGAIN. IN THE BEGINNING, YOU ARE INTO A KIND OF DENIAL THAT IT NEVER HAPPENED OR THAT THEY NEVER EXISTED. THEY BECOME A DISTANT MEMORY ON AN OLD CHAPTER IN A BOOK. AND AS YOU GET OLDER, OTHER PEOPLE AND EVENTS TAKE OVER AND FILL SOME OF THE VOID, BUT YOU NEVER REALLY REPLACE THAT PERSON, THEIR WAYS, THEIR NATURE, THEIR PRESENCE THAT WAS SUCH MEANINGfFUL IN YOUR LIFE. I STILL MISS MY FATHER AND OFTEN WONDER WHAT HE WOULD LIKE TODAY. BUT I KNOW ONE DAY, WE WILL BOTH BE IN THE SAME PLACE, TOGETHER AGAIN.	**Coda:** He refers to a quote about loss and he gives his own perspective about it. He describes the initial denial that you have when a loved one dies and how the deceased starts to fade into your memory over time. He also describes how the deceased remains irreplaceable no matter the life events or other people that might take over. He concludes his narrative by expressing how he still misses his father, his wish to know what he would like at present of he was still alive and his certainty that they will reunite together again one day. **Evaluative devices:** • Intensifiers: Emphatic adverbs: 'I DON'T THINK YOU BECOME **EVER** TO GET OVER IT' 'BUT YOU **NEVER** REALLY ARE THE SAME AGAIN', 'BUT YOU **NEVER** REALLY REPLACE THAT PERSON', 'I **STILL** MISS MY FATHER' • Comparators: Futures: 'BUT I KNOW ONE DAY, WE WILL BOTH BE IN THE SAME PLACE'. Seems to show his hope

Appendix 8- Illustration of Resolutions synthesis across women

Narrators	Transcripts	Analysis comments -Patterns across Resolutions
1.Hanita	But I did it, I made it after everything, all drenched in the rain, tired, torn apart, with every part of my body protesting against every step I took, I made it!	**Positive Resolution:** She persisted, she endured, and she reached her goal.
2.Thalia	I eventually wrote the essays, passed my re-sits with a first class and so I didn't fail my course in the end.	**Positive Resolution:** She took control over her life, proactiveness.
3.Sienna	AFTER THE FUNERAL, IT WAS SO STRANGE BUT ALSO RELIEVING TO NOTICE HOW LIFE WAS GOING ON, LIKE AS IF WE HAD SAID GOODBYE WITH NO REGRETS AND WE WERE GRATEFUL FOR WHAT WE HAD HAD.	**Negative Resolution:** Saying goodbye to her grandfather who died, mixed feeling, relieving and strange.
4.Meera	But now I was a failed Medical student. No matter what happened next, I would always be a failed Medical student. So, why worry about failing a few more times in life? The next 5 months, were spent with me sleeping most of the time, only leaving for food or for a shower.	**Negative Resolution:** Giving up on life, switching off.
5.Karolina	I signed up for university and I packed a suitcase. It all felt so natural.	**Positive Resolution:** Proactiveness, she took control over her life.
6.Kaya	The whole ordeal felt like a lifetime. I was confused, shocked, shell-shocked. What happened afterwards was pure hell. I was being stopped from leaving, I eventually escaped, and he chased after me. Finally, I sought refuge in a woman's office. I suddenly felt as if everything was my fault and none his. I felt shame, guilt, disappointment.	**Negative Resolution:** Although she managed to find refuge, she was left with feelings of guilt, shame and disappointed.
7.Evelyn	I remember being in utter shock, seeing my mum curled up in the corner sobbing. She looked such a mess and wasn't saying anything either. I rushed towards her and tried to hug her. I was saying 'sorry mummy I did a bad thing, I'm so sorry'. She said it wasn't my fault and hugged me. We cried together afterwards. I never forgave myself for that night. I really spent my childhood thinking that all my dad's actions were because of me. I really believed that I had caused all the pain suffering in my family. I never forgave myself.	**Negative Resolution:** Self-blame and difficulty to forgive herself for her father's actions.

Appendix 9- Illustration of Resolutions synthesis across men

Narrators	Transcripts	Analysis comments-Patterns across Resolutions
1.Aadan	I used the time to get another job and plan a new career path that included going back to uni.	**Positive Resolution:** He took control of his life, proactiveness
2.Chen	After the break-up I began to feel really bad and guilty.	**Negative Resolution:** He was left with difficult feelings following the break-up.
3.Lysandros	I took the role of the supportive member of the family towards my mother and brother. I'm glad I was able to offer help, but I can remember myself feeling worried and perhaps distressed because I was given many more responsibilities than I could handle, I was in my early teens, but I had to be the model figure for my brother and the towards my mother.	**Negative Resolution:** He took on a supportive role in the family, he was worried and distressed, he was given responsibilities that he could not handle-lack of control
4.Marcus	My uncle who wasn't there since he was managing his students at his school, came back early from work and hugged me.	**Positive Resolution:** Acknowledgment of his effort
5.Max	The other thing that I had to do was to be assessed in the classroom which because I was behind with the coursework seemed to put further pressure on and I didn't do as well with that either. So, what should have been an enjoyable experience turned into being a bit of a nightmare.	**Negative Resolution:** He fell behind the course work, his course experience turned into a nightmare
6.Lee	I realised that the space he has occupied in my life is now a vacuum. This vacuum permeates everywhere; Within the sand, during the funeral, his favourite sofa, the empty and silent living room and every memory of him. Everything about him became past tense.	**Negative Resolution:** Everything about his father became past tense, lack of control to change the outcome.
7.Nathan	I did have my down days, I did feel tired and I guess old as I couldn't participate in too much of physical activity which was good as I hated PE but also bad as I could not hang out with friends as much.	**Negative Resolution:** down days, feeling tired and old, missing friends.
8.Oliver	My father died the next morning at around 6am while all his family were there. I went into his room as he took his last breathes. There was a cold and calm silence as we drifted away.	**Negative Resolution** Father died, tangible sense of silence, cold-calm.

Appendix 10- Illustration of the second layer of analysis-types of stories

Initial thoughts	Transcript	Narrative's characteristics
Her travels are a psychological and spiritual turning point Miserable, stuck in the same place, although she had everything, she hated it Realisation about wasting time and not embracing life She took action, ended things -Deeply spiritual state of mind -Realisation of what she needed, a place to facilitate her	I consider my travels through Eastern Europe a major turning point in my life. Both psychologically and spiritually. I was working in Scotland for a year and I was living together with my partner. But I was deeply miserable. I was stuck in the same place! I was seeing the same people every day, there was close- mindedness and stable jobs. All people were working towards retirement and they were enjoying only during the weekend. I had a perfect life, lots of money- more than I could spend- , a partner, my mum, my sister living nearby. I was popular, I was like an exotic bird, but I hated it. One day, I was sitting at work just waiting for time to pass, and I realised that I was wasting the only thing I had, time. This is not embracing life. This is security. What we're all wishing for. But not me. In the next 3 days, I dropped out of university and I gave notice to the 3 jobs I was doing. I put all my money in my savings account, I cancelled memberships, accounts, everything. I ended my relationship, I left two boxes at my mum's place and I used a voucher to get on the next coach for a random destination. All I had in my backpack, was a change of clothes and 200 euros. I woke up in Croatia. I don't remember my exact train of thoughts in the days leading to my departure, but I was in a Deeply spiritual state of mind. I hadn't had any alcohol or drugs in a year, and I didn't need them. I needed a place where no one knew me to sort out my thoughts, to	Evaluation of her travels She starts her narrative by explaining her vulnerable place at the time, provides examples Realization about not living life according to her values. This led her to take action She tries to process her thoughts at the time, spiritual state of mind

connection to herself Her realisation about life as a starting point for making changes for herself and her surroundings, kinder -Ecstatic, free in the summer nights She connected to nature -Realisation about overcoming anorexia, it didn't raise its voice anymore, it surprised her. Loyal and hated companion for 7 years. -Her soul did not fit with the modern world	find out who I really was, what I wanted from this life and to treasure it. Life itself is the most holy and beautiful thing but most of us cannot grasp it. I realised that the very essence of life is nondepletable and therefore equal across species, time and evolution. When I realised this, I became vegan. I travelled further to the mountains of Slovenia. I relied on strangers who were taking me in or I slept outside in these beautiful summer nights. I was ecstatic, I was free. I had quit inflicting suffering on myself and other beings. I stopped using plastics where possible. I stopped buying new clothes. I was one with nature and when you have a clear conscience, when you treasure and respect nature, she will speak to you. The roots of the trees told me stories about past centuries. The wind has a voice of its own if you listen. Even though being a musician, I realised that you don't need music when you have the nature's melodies. After a while, I realised that I have won my battle with anorexia after 7 years. Just like that. It just didn't raise its voice anymore. I couldn't believe how I hadn't realised that my most loyal and hated companion was gone! My best friend found me. She felt that I was going to leave for good. I didn't make a huge deal out of it, but she knew me too well. We hiked the mountains together, not talking much because we knew everything that could be said. At the time, nothing remained unsaid between us. Just us, the heat of the sun, lakes and trees. She had felt my unexplained sadness and she knew why I was doing this. My soul was too old for the modern wheels of this world. What do you love? What do you want to be? What do you want for you? Why not take all of it and build a new life? I was used to having no roots, but I indeed had a new base. Away from my family, friends,	Expresses her thoughts about life and how people tend to not understand its meaning Her narrative is progressed by her descriptions of how she started to take control of her life, finding meaning and purpose. Uses examples and poetic language Reflects on her battle with anorexia how she simply overcame it, couldn't believe it Rhetorical questions in an effort to show her thinking process at the time

-Instinct about where she would go next, has always had it -Life is simple -Resourseful when she is in pain at present -She realised that she is the agent in her life -Learnings out of her experience, she learnt how to be happy and content -Struggles to understand what exactly changed her perspective, but she feels grateful and blessed	past. One night, under an oak tree I dreamt of a stranger. This had happened before and I have learnt to trust my subconscious. He understood. We just talked for hours. He was like me but older and he was carrying more pain from observing life and feeling how people destroy themselves. I knew I going to go to London. I had known since I was 12 years old. For some reason I always seem to know roughly where life will carry me or where I will carry my life. I signed up for university and I packed a suitcase. It all felt so natural. I let my best friend to encourage me. Five days later I met the stranger from my dream. He understood. We talked for hours. He was like me, but he has felt more pain. And that made him appreciate the beauty more. We crossed paths for a while, then he left. He left pain and enlightenment, uncertainty and direction. Life is simple. There is nothing bad about it, it's all down to interpretation. That's what nature told me. When I am in a lot of pain, and it still happens, I seek out my friends, the mountains. They will whisper the answer in my ear. That there is no answer, 'you can do whatever you want, as long as you don't inflict pain on the other. To love life and have love for people and they will love you back. Realizing that this took away of my life any depression and anxiety and gave me balance. I've never had balance in my life before and I had always attributed it to external factors, until I realised it had to be within myself. Painful experiences are so irrelevant when you look at the pain we inflict to others. I don't know what exactly opened my eyes, but I feel deeply grateful and blessed that I had the cognitive capacity to grasp how this world works and how to be happy and content in it without having much! The smaller the suitcase, the happier I am.	Very poetic language Evaluates her instinct about her life Resolution: Positive, the process felt natural to her She ends her narrative with very poetic and metaphoric language. Balanced emotional life, self-agency, she gained lessons She tries to process what contributed to her change Happy, fulfilled

Appendix 11- Illustration of the types of stories synthesis

Narratives of Love

Story Type I. Narratives of Love	Helpless, unable to contribute or do anything	This vacuum permeates everywhere	You never really replace that person
Representative quotes	*The diagnosis was sudden and completely out of blue. A day ago, we were still talking about furnishing our new houses and about my dream secondary school. The next day, it felt like that these things no longer matter and everything else became too surreal. I witnessed the family crumble from its usual routine and order. Family dinners became hospital visits and dinner talk became more rushed and grimmer. I felt helpless, unable to contribute or do anything. I was going to school as usual every day and I was visiting the ward many times each week. I was carrying out day to day tasks robotically,*	*He passed away a few months later. I was abruptly awakened by my grandparents. I was half expecting this news with feigned maturity and I arrived at the hospital with emotions bottled within me. I was probably still in denial, and still refusing to believe that he would just be gone forever. The motionless body and the coldness of his hand unbottled everything. I realized that the space he has*	*I remember sometimes we would go buy wine together from local farmers (he had been a farmer himself and knew this stuff) or meat, or once we even went to pick fruits from trees. I was around 10 and I was so excited at the idea that I pulled out of my closet a special outfit and I even wore a hat with daisies. When I think about it now, I am not sure we were even allowed to be in that garden, let alone to pick fruits from plants. What I think I miss the most is not being called by the nickname he gave me anymore. It was 'kitten'* **(Sienna)**

	almost like a zombie, while trying to stay out of the way of adults. **(Lee)** *My father became ill in the winter of 1997 and was admitted to hospital for tests. It was discovered that he had cancer, but he was told that it was treatable. I was living in London at the time and I went back home to visit him in march 1998. He was in hospital at the time. On first seeing him sitting on the bed I was shocked. He looked thin, pale, and much older than his age. It was hard to snooze my alarm. As usual, when we got together, we talked for a long time. But this time it was different. He sounded more serious than usual and more emotional. After a few days he was allowed to come home, and he seemed to be making a recovery. But in my mind, I knew that everything wasn't ok for him.* **(Oliver)** *...*	*occupied in my life is now a vacuum. This vacuum permeates everywhere; Within the sand, during the funeral, his favourite sofa, the empty and silent living room and every memory of him. Everything about him became past tense.* **(Lee)** *About six months later I was missing him a lot. I missed our chats by phone, I missed his support when I needed advice. I missed my best friend. I felt like someone reached into and pulled my soul leaving a great big space which could not be filled. I felt alone. I felt I had no one to talk to or look up to as a role*	*…* *My parents insisted we'd pay a visit every Sunday afternoon and I am glad they did. I would find my grandfather sitting in the living room, or, on the sunny days in the balcony, or if my grandmother was cooking lunch, grating cheese with a round metal grater/container in the kitchen. He loved food so much, but he loved wine more. He would drink half a litre of red wine everyday with his lunch, then have a nap.* **(Sienna)** *He was always sitting at the end of the table and the first Christmas after he passed away, I didn't let anyone take his seat. I guess the image of him seating is the most iconic for me as he would always be sitting*

	About two weeks later on a Friday morning while sitting at my work desk in work, my sister phoned me to say that my father was taken ill again, and we both needed to go home. I felt a sinking feeling as we flew home. we were met by a relative at the airport. On arriving at the hospital, we both saw him unconscious with a breathing mask and looking very ill, small, and pale. We were both shocked. But in my heart, I knew this was the end and that we at least had one last chat together. **(Oliver)** *My granddad passed away at the age of 86, after a full life, a marriage of over 50 years. 5 kids (one of them was stubborn), 11 grandkids and one great grandkid. Although we knew that our time with him was limited, how quickly his health deteriorated took us all by surprise and after a few days in hospital, he died peacefully at home in his sleep.* **(Sienna)**	*model. It was like I was in a boat without a sail, pushed into the sea without direction, just going one way or another.* **(Oliver)** *After the break-up I began to feel really bad and guilty. She was a great person and she always helped me to go beyond my limits. She believed me more than I believed myself. When I was applying for low salary jobs thinking that I don't deserve them or I won't get a job in big companies, she pushed me to apply. And thus, I actually got job offers from large companies.* **(Chen)**	*whenever I would go visit him.* **(Sienna)** *Some people say that the loss of a loved one takes time to get over. I don't think you become ever to get over it. As the time goes on you get used to that person not being around. But you never really are the same again. In the beginning you are into a kind of denial that it never happened or that they never existed. They become a distant memory on an old chapter in a book. And as you get older, other people and events take over and fill some of the void, but you never really replace that person, their ways, their nature, their presence that was such meaningful in your life. I still miss my father and often wonder what he would like today. But I know one*

	When he passed away my parents were called at his home early in the morning. I don't remember exactly what happened in the following first hours and my next memory is of the house full of people and people staying over for hours in his bedroom, where his body was. I appreciated the support but got irritated when these people didn't actually leave for hours. It was a private moment and I felt they were being intrusive. **(Sienna)**		*day, we will both be in the same place, together again.* **(Oliver)** *The emptiness of his absence haunts me for many more years to come. I often wonder how my life would turn out to be if he was still alive. I often think about this as I observe fathers playing with their children in the park and on the streets. Such childhood adversity has made me more resilient and more appreciative of my loved ones. But at the same time, I still feel that something is missing. I often wonder about what kind of father I will become in the future. I am rather unsure as the memory of my father before I was 11 grew hazier. Till this day, I still feel a hint of sadness and maybe envy as I gaze upon the silhouette of a father and his child*

			walking side by side down the street. Maybe time doesn't heal everything. I just took these years to get used to his absence. **(Lee)** … *My mother and I are the only ones left now. Life goes on after his death. My mother did her best to support the family while still grieving. Such remarkable emotional resilience is something that I aspire to*. **(Lee)** *I had thought of my grandad in important moments of my life since and in the small ones. One that touched me was meeting at work a man who looked incredibly similar to him, and even had the same name. It was like having the unique chance to spend some more time with him so many years later.* **(Sienna)**

			He still lives through my dad, but it also fills me with pride to see how much my family has accomplished in three generations. He didn't have an education, whereas my sisters and I have had several years of it and are still using what we learnt to shape our lives for the better. I think it would be hard for my grandad to understand the extent of all of this if he was still alive, but it all started from him. **(Sienna)** *I am going back home next month for my research and I know I would see her because she lives just next street to me. If I could talk to her, I would want to let her know that IF IT WAS JUST LOVE, I WOULDN'T BROKEN UP EVER, IT WAS JUST OTHER THINGS THAT MADE ME DO THAT.*

			I don't know if my ex-fiancée would ever trust another guy because of what I did. I know that my ex-fiancée is a very strong and independent person and she would have moved on, I am praying for her every night. If I was given a second chance I would definitely take it. **(Chen)**

Narratives of Empowerment

Story Type II Narratives of Empowerment	I fell apart mentally and physically	It just didn't raise its voice anymore	And now I've made peace: Acceptance and Forgiveness
Representative quotes	*Obviously, the email said I hadn't passed the resit exams and that I was forced to withdraw from the course…Most of all, I was fearful. Because getting into Medical school had set my life on a definite path. I would automatically be given a job and the respect I had never been given growing up. But now, in one day it had all been taken away from me.* **(Meera)** *…* *There was a lot of shame in me. Shame towards the fact that there were so many people I'd have to tell I failed, since almost everyone I knew was a Medical student. Shame towards my parents who were going to the temple*	*After a while, I realised that I have won my battle with anorexia after 7 years. Just like that. It just didn't raise its voice anymore. I couldn't believe how I hadn't realised that my most loyal and hated companion was gone!* **(Karolina)** *…* *I had quit inflicting suffering on myself and other beings. I stopped using plastics where possible. I stopped buying new clothes. I was one with nature.* **(Karolina)** *…* *When I am in a lot of pain, and it still happens, I seek out my friends, the mountains. They whisper the answer in my ear. That 'there is no answer, you can do whatever you want, as long as you*	*I still feel disappointment, have complaints and feel angry towards my parents but these are much better nowadays.* **(Lysandros)** *...* *Parents are like every person with their strengths and weaknesses, they could even be considered as 'bigger children' Some things are unfair, but we can do nothing about them but accepting them. However, I've grown to be a responsible, independent person; Something that I would not have been able to become if all the extreme 'drama' in my life had not happened.* **(Lysandros).**

	everyday to pray for me to pass the re-sit exams when I told them I didn't think I would pass them. **(Meera).** … *A lot of anger as well was felt. I was angry at many of my friends at Medical school. For passing and leaving me behind. For ignoring me through my resit period and now trying to gossip about me. I felt a lot of anger at God. My family is very religious, they always said God had a reason for everything. But what was the reason for this? To let me get into Medical school just for me to be kicked out?! It brings nothing to my life other than a student debt of £18.000.* **(Meera)** *The breaking-up of my parents was an exhausting process, it drained me somehow as I was trying to float on the*	*don't inflict pain on the other, love life and have love for people and they will love you back'. Realizing that this took away of my life any depression and anxiety and gave me balance. I've never had balance in my life before and I had always attributed it to external factors, until I realised it had to be within myself. I don't know what exactly opened my eyes, but I feel deeply grateful and blessed that I had the cognitive capacity to grasp how this world works and how to be happy and content in it without having much! The smaller the suitcase, the happier I am.* **(Karolina)** *I was sleeping much better and I was feeling less anxious. It was like being on a cloud. After all, these voices in my head have finally stopped but it took so much*	*I still can't speak about that moment at zero point with anyone in my family. It hurts the most to not be able to share it with papa. He of all people should understand that moment! Understand what I was feeling! Why I wanted to climb Pindari. But no. He is as stubborn as I am. He is my father after all. I see myself in him as he should see himself in me. And now, I've made peace. That moment, this trip, quite literally the climb and metaphorically the climb of my life, I had to do it ALONE. These views, the moments, the Himalayas, the pain, the joy is mine alone. Nothing to share, but only to cherish deeply. Last year when I was in the UK, I climbed the mountains of Scotland and Snowdonia. And I*

	surface with a tsunami occurring at the same time **(Lysandros).** … *I found myself helpless, my parents were on the borderline to be irresponsible and apathetic towards their children, and I was only thinking about my youngest brother (4 years younger than me), because I believed, and I still believe that the whole situation would have affected him much more than me* **(Lysandros).** *I stopped taking care of myself, I stopped wearing makeup, I stopped taking care of my skin, and I did not care what clothes I was wearing...People would tell me to 'just be happy', 'smile more', or 'do something you like' but that made me*	*time before I could feel happy again*. **(Thalia)** … *I passed my re-sits with a first class and so I didn't fail my course in the end. I was still depressed and even more anxious to be around people, but I was feeling a lot better about myself.* **(Thalia)** I think that day was when my fear of failure was smashed. Growing up, failure was always termed as unacceptable. **(Meera).** … *Today, I'm doing a lot better. I'm a pharmacy student at (university name) now. But the day I failed does bother me a lot. The dark emotions and hopelessness I felt really terrified me. I hope and fear that I won't have to experience a time like that again. But at*	*still haven't shared the pictures with papa. It doesn't hurt anymore, I guess.* **(Hanita)** *But overall, I persevered and I do have scars in my tummy, but I guess it's a part of me as a person. Although a harrowing experience, which affected me both physically and mentally I have come to terms with it and embraced it as It's so far been my only major surgery which is a relief. So, my surgery for me was both a depressing as well as a long-term thing that I had to go through, but I embraced it. I guess the main physical after effect is when I am doing lots of physical activity and I'm tired sometimes as the area where the gall bladder used to be sometimes hurts but*

	feel even worse, as if it was a trait that I was feeling depressed. **(Thalia)** *After talking to an advisor, they told me I had made myself INTENTIONALLY HOMELESS and they would not offer any accommodation. I swore at them and threatened to go to their superiors, they got security to intimidate me and chucked me out. I felt colder in that heated room than in the blustering wind outside. I felt betrayed with nowhere to turn. What can I do? Who to turn to? I started calling my friends, but they would not pick up their phones.* **(Aadan)** *In short, I fell apart mentally and physically. My fitness was neglected and so was my diet. I was drinking more than I should have on a school night down to the pub followed by take*	*least now, peoples' opinion doesn't come first before my own needs, wishes and happiness. Thank you.* **(Meera).** *I sat down and took an inventory of my life that weekend and realised that I had some addictions which had to be discussed. I had friends who did not VALUE me. I had bad relationships which did not let me grow and prosper. I lost many friends that weekend. On Monday I went to court and told the judge my situation. As I was a first offender, I did not get jail time. He referred me to a program for alcohol and drug addiction which I started immediately after I was released with a fine. I had accommodation for three months during the program. I used the time to get another job and plan a new career path that included going back to uni. It was a*	*nowadays is very rare. Overall, I still believe it taught me to value my body and appreciate life more so that's a plus. I've grown up to accept my three scars on the sides of my stomach and belly button as an important part of me.* **(Nathan)**

	away/fast food etc. What little money I had was being wasted at an increasing rate. This stupidity all should have been avoided as at my age I should have known better. **(Max)**	*terrible time I went through, but I now see it was necessary to break with my past and my bad relationships, stop my addictions and separate me from toxic people who were parasites. Amen.* **(Aadan)** *It's easy to see where I was going wrong and in fact went wrong. The problem was that I fell behind right from the start which led to a build-up of anxiety and nervousness which then led to problems of preparation for lessons and teaching plans and resources generally.* **(Max)** *…* *I suppose hindsight is a great thing because I know that I could have done things differently. Perhaps not even gone the route that I went. Paid for a tutor or ask for help earlier just to make life a little easier. I am using what I learned and*	

		experienced as a tutor myself. The time was not all wasted, and I did complete the course at the end! **(Max)** *Eventually I realised that emotional or psychological factors are as important as studying. I had to be emotionally stable. I had to stop treating everybody as my enemy or competitors. I had to learn to be supportive and happy for my colleagues' achievements. I had to work in a group, be a good mentor to my colleagues. And all of these I figured out myself, alone in my room, only after another poor performance, 3 months after my first exam of the year. Only If I had consulted my uncle or my teachers earlier that I wouldn't be wasting my time dealing with my own negative self. But my ego has triumphed every rational thoughts. My ego has put myself above any other*	

		individuals. My ego has thrown me away from my family and colleagues. **(Marcus)** *…* *After the national public exam's results published, I was crying because I was personally congratulated by my teacher before the official result ceremony and she said that I was the best student of the year. My uncle who wasn't there since he was managing his students at his school, came back early from work and hugged me. He said, 'if you didn't fail earlier this year, I can't guarantee you that you would achieve these great results today. You have to fail, in order to succeed, he added'*. **(Marcus)**	

Narratives of Stuckness

Story Type III. Narratives of Stuckness	I remember: Memories of complete fear	I never forgave myself	Powerless: I cannot seem to move past
Representative quotes	*I knew there was something wrong about the way my Dad talked to my mum. I think I felt it in the pit of my stomach and looking back, I know now that very often I felt in fear of my Dad. My whole childhood, I think I felt a knot in my stomach and I was always waiting for the new danger or waiting for my Dad's anger to explode. At the time, as a child I didn't really understand my mixed feelings towards my Dad. I loved him but I was also afraid and could see the damage and destruction he caused. He had a lot of power and control in the house.*	*I never truly trusted my dad after that, and I never forgave myself. I always blame myself for my mum taking a beating that night. I've always carried with me in my adult life that I'm not good enough or inherently a bad person. I've always been a people pleaser and always tried to fix things. I've always felt like I've done something wrong in life.* **(Evelyn).** *...* *I never forgave myself for that night. I really spent my childhood thinking that all my dad's actions were because of me. I really believed that I had caused all the pain suffering in*	*That day happened five years ago but I still remember it like yesterday. It feels like the awkward elephant in the room so there is no mention of it in my home. That event has changed the way I see men and relationships. There is a fear of sexual intimacy that I cannot seem to move past. I try to avoid thinking about it, as it was painful at the time, but each day gets easier and easier. Now it feels like a distant memory. One that I tend to forget, but one that I can't forget.* **(Kaya).** *I am so confused about relationships with men and have had a number of*

	He emotionally controlled and abused the whole house **(Evelyn)** *I felt immediately uncomfortable and I started to cry. All the regrets filled into my head and the 'what if's. I was lying frozen on the ground trying to push him off me each time. I felt complete fear. My pain receptors were off, and my main goal was to get out the flat. The whole ordeal felt like a lifetime. I was confused, shocked, shell-shocked. He had thought I liked it, but he didn't acknowledge my tears.* **(Kaya)**	*my family. I never forgave myself.* **(Evelyn).** *I was 16 at the time so I thought I was ready for a real relationship (never had one before at that point). He was 7 years older so my naive self thought it was pretty cool. We had planned to meet up for lunch (my ideal), and he told me that I should meet him outside his block house getting something to eat. So stupidly and naively again, I decided to go.* **(Kaya).** *...* *We ended up walking around the town and we even had a bite to eat. He asked me what I was studying what my hopes and dreams were and showered me with compliments. No one had ever done*	*emotionally abusive romantic relationships as an adult. I think this event will stay with me and impact on me for my whole life. I had many sad, traumatic events as a child growing up in domestic violence. But this one always impacted me because from such a young age I always carried all this guilt. And from then on, I always felt responsible for my mum's safety. I still do now even as an adult. I never got over these feelings of guilt.* **(Evelyn).**

		this with me, so I was hooked. He treated me like his lady. I was incredibly naive. He told me that he needed something from his flat and I stupidly followed. **(Kaya).**	

Section 2. Publishable journal article

A pluralistic narrative analysis of how men and women write about their feelings and thoughts through Expressive Writing

Corresponding Author: Georgia Chatzitheodorou

Email: Georgia.chatzitheodorou@city.ac.uk

Department of Psychology, City University of London, London, UK.

Section 2 has been removed for copyright reasons

Section 3. Client case study and Process report

'It's just like a negative bubble!'

Section 3 has been removed for data protection reasons