

Study shows writing about a romantic relationship may help it last longer

August 22 2006

Writing about one's romantic relationship may help it last longer, researchers at The University of Texas at Austin report in this month's issue of *Psychological Science*.

In a study titled "How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Words," Psychology Professor James Pennebaker and graduate student Richard Slatcher analyzed writing samples from 86 couples. One person from each couple was instructed to write for 20 minutes a day for three consecutive days. Volunteers in one group wrote about their daily activities while those in the second group wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings about the relationship. The participants' dating partners did not complete any writing task.

The researchers found that 77 percent of volunteers who wrote about their relationship were still dating their partner three months later. In contrast, only 52 percent of people who wrote just about everyday activities stayed with their partner.

The study also showed that those who wrote about their relationship used more words expressing positive emotions such as "happy" and "love" in Instant Message (IM) exchanges with their dating partner during the days following the writing.

"These results demonstrate that people who express more emotion, both in their writing and to their partner, may have the power to improve their relationship's longevity," Pennebaker says.

Monitoring IM conversations allowed the researchers to examine the ebb and flow of the participants' daily conversations in their natural setting, and provided insight into the progression of the relationships after the writing. For example, couples who used more words expressing positive emotions in their IMs after the writing period were more likely to stay together down the road.

Pennebaker and Slatcher believe the connection between writing and improving one's relationship may extend beyond the realm of dating couples.

“That people may enhance their romantic relationships by simply writing down their thoughts and feelings about those relationships has clear implications,” Pennebaker says. “The use of expressive writing as a tool for relationship enhancement could be applied to those in families, circles of friends and even work groups.”

Source: University of Texas at Austin

Citation: Study shows writing about a romantic relationship may help it last longer (2006, August 22) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-08-romantic-relationship-longer.html>

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