

Healing Bereavement Through Writing: A Therapeutic Study on Ravinder Singh's *I Too Had a Love Story*

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Abstract

Writing therapy is an expressive therapy that helps people grow personally and recover from a traumatic experience by using writing as a tool. Through writing, one can express oneself freely and let go of inhibitions. A person who is not stable both mentally and physically becomes insecure and gets isolated from people and objects. However, writing is a form of therapy that lessens their intense melancholy. Writing enables one to fully express oneself and let go of any inhibitions, including those that are challenging to articulate. This paper explores the therapeutic role of writing in the context of grief, as exemplified in Ravinder Singh's autobiographical novel *I Too Had a Love Story*. The life narrative recounts the author's journey through love and loss, highlighting the cathartic power of writing in processing grief. The paper discusses the various dimensions of expressive writing as a therapeutic tool, including emotional expression, cognitive processing, narrative construction, and the externalisation of thoughts.

Keywords: Writing therapy, Traumatic Experience, Bereavement, Distress, Potential of Writing.

Introduction

“Writing Therapy (WT) is defined as a process of investigation about personal thoughts and feelings using the act of writing as an instrument, with the aim of promoting self-healing and personal growth”. (Ruini 23) Expressive or therapeutic writing can be a powerful tool for individuals coping with grief and serves as a form of therapy. Grief is a complex and deeply personal experience; writing can provide a safe and cathartic outlet. This, in turn, can help in processing thoughts and emotions. Famous psychologists like James W. Pennebaker, Joshua M. Smyth, Sandy Beall, Denise M. Sloan, Brain P Marx, and so on introduced and developed several techniques and mechanisms in which expressive writing helps with grief. The current study tries to apply a few of these ideas and techniques to this novel and claims that the author has tried therapeutic writing to cope with bereavement. Even though this novel *I Too Had a Love Story* is fictionalised, it is a real story in which the author experiences the sudden loss of his loved one. Karen Baikie, a Clinical Psychologist, and Kay Wilhelm, a consultant psychiatrist, mentioned some potential mechanisms (Box 4) in their article titled Emotional and physical health benefits of expressive writing, which includes “Emotional Catharsis, Cognitive Processing, Development of a Coherent Narrative and Emotional inhibition and Confrontation” (Baikie 341). These are some mechanisms by which expressive writing might help individuals cope with their grief.

The first method is emotional catharsis or expression. Grief often brings a whirlwind of emotions, including anger, guilt, and confusion. Through writing, these emotions can be expressed in a non-judgmental space. The other benefit is cognitive processing, where writing helps individuals make sense of their loss. They gain clarity as they put their thoughts and experiences into words, and many things change for them.

Another vital aspect is narrative construction. Grief can be overwhelming and disorganised, but writing offers an opportunity to create a coherent narrative. The final aspect is the inhibition and confrontation of emotions, which also refers to externalisation of thoughts. Writing can help externalise intrusive thoughts by putting them on paper. Individuals can gain distance and perspective by externalising these thoughts, enabling them to process them more objectively. Additionally, writing can lead to stress reduction and enhance the ability to cope with traumatic experiences like bereavement. It emphasises the significance of memorialisation and personal growth through writing, as well as the stress reduction and enhanced coping mechanisms it provides.

Personal growth is significant, as writing about bereavement might uncover inner strengths, help gain new insights, and develop a deeper appreciation for life and relationships. Writing impacts the human mind by exploring the inner self and thereby helping them to “unleash their creative potential and express their thoughts and emotions in a meaningful way” (“The Power of Writing: How It Influences Personal Growth and Professional Success”).

Holloway in a research article mentions Walter's suggestion on various memorials as "the stories we tell after someone has died serve to bridge the gap between the living and the dead. These stories are told in a range of settings - public and private - and are often linked to various kinds of memorials - such as obituaries and funeral eulogies as well as spiritual meetings and conversations with family and friends". (Holloway 30) Memorialisation is crucial, and writing can honour and commemorate the deceased. It is a process that helps an individual preserve memories of a loved one or of important events that have occurred in their life. It captures memories, replications, and the person's impact on the writer's life. These are the critical aspects of writing as a form of therapy for bereavement. Writing therapy helps an individual to articulate grief, celebrate sweet moments of loved ones, and navigate the complexities of emotions.

Ravinder Singh's autobiographical novel *I Too Had a Love Story* offers a poignant and emotionally charged exploration of love, loss, and the healing power of writing through grief. The book narrates Singh's journey of finding love with his soulmate Khushi, only to have their fairy tale shattered by her untimely death due to a tragic accident. It is a devastating and heartbreaking story. Through writing, Singh finds solace and catharsis by transforming his pain into a beautifully crafted novel titled *I Too Had a Love Story*.

In the case of *I Too Had a Love Story*, several critical points emerge regarding the writing experience. The first point is self-expression and emotional release, since writing allows him to authentically express the depths of his grief, anger, and longing, providing not only a safe, non-judgmental space but also an outlet for emotional intensity. The next point is narrative construction. Through writing, Singh can create a coherent narrative around his loss. He not only weaves together memories, emotions, and reflections but also helps make sense of the profound changes brought by bereavement, finding meaning within the experience. Then, of course, there is memorialisation and tribute. Singh's memoir serves as a poignant tribute to Khushi and captures the essence of their love story, ensuring the memory lives on through his words. Writing becomes a way to honour and immortalise their connection.

Without a doubt, personal growth and transformation are also essential aspects of his writing. It not only chronicles his grief but also his resilience, his capacity for love, and his ability to find hope amidst profound loss. There are other benefits and healing aspects as well. Writing can have therapeutic benefits, reducing stress levels and promoting emotional processing, ultimately facilitating healing. It suggests focusing on the mechanisms underlying its therapeutic effects, the role of individual differences, and the development of tailored interventions to support bereaved individuals. The findings underscore the potential of writing as a therapeutic intervention for those coping with the profound impact of loss. Singh's memoir exemplifies how putting pen to paper can be a powerful tool in grieving.

Review of Literature

The therapeutic potential of expressive writing has garnered increasing attention in recent years, particularly in bereavement and grief. Two literature reviews, one by Baikie

and Wilhelm (2005), published in *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, and another by Joanne Frattaroli (2006), published in *Psychological Bulletin*, explore the efficacy and underlying mechanisms of expressive writing interventions for individuals coping with the loss of a loved one.

Baikie and Wilhelm's review examines the role of expressive writing in alleviating the physical and psychological symptoms associated with grief, thereby substantiating its therapeutic benefits. Their findings, culled from a range of studies, suggest that engaging in expressive writing can significantly benefit bereaved individuals. Notably, the review highlights reductions in physical and psychological distress, improved mood and well-being, and enhanced cognitive processing of the loss as potential outcomes of such interventions.

Furthermore, the review delves into potential moderators and mediators that may influence the therapeutic effects of expressive writing. Individual differences in coping styles, emotional approach, and narrative coherence are identified as factors that could shape the efficacy of these interventions. Baikie and Wilhelm also offer practical considerations for implementing expressive writing in bereavement contexts and provide recommendations for future research in this area.

Complementing this work, Joanne Frattaroli's review explores the therapeutic benefits of expressive writing for bereaved individuals from a different perspective. Their findings suggest that expressive writing can facilitate emotional processing, enhance meaning-making, and promote psychological well-being among those grappling with the loss of a loved one. Joanne Frattaroli's review delves into the theoretical underpinnings of expressive writing as a therapeutic intervention, examining the potential mechanisms through which it may aid the grieving process. Additionally, the authors explore individual differences in emotional regulation and narrative coherence as possible moderators of the efficacy of expressive writing interventions.

Both reviews emphasise the practical considerations of implementing expressive writing interventions in bereavement contexts and offer recommendations for future research. Their research highlights the reduction of distress, the enhancement of well-being, and the facilitation of cognitive processing as key outcomes of writing interventions. These findings align with Singh's experience, where writing serves as a powerful mechanism for coping and transforming his grief. These recommendations include further investigating the mechanisms underlying the therapeutic effects, exploring the role of individual differences, and developing tailored interventions to meet the unique needs of bereaved individuals.

Writing as therapy in the novel

It must be understood that the human experience is intrinsically shaped by the bonds we form with others. From our earliest days, we are hardwired to seek closeness, deriving vital sustenance and security through our primary attachments. As we mature, our connections expand, welcoming friends, partners and communities into our inner circles. We find profound belonging, support, and love within these intimacies. However,

the beauty of such attachments is inextricably tied to the potential for immense pain—the closer and more profound the bond, the more catastrophic the devastation brought by its loss.

The grief that accompanies bereavement lays bare the intensity of the attachment. For those bound by superficial ties, the sting of separation may be acute yet temporary. However, for individuals who have woven the fabric of their lives with another, the loss represents an unravelling of the self. The bereaved are left grappling with a void that permeates every aspect of their existence, a hollowness that defies language. It is a visceral, complete disconnection, in which even the mundane routines and familiar surroundings become jarring reminders of an absence that cannot be filled.

The echoes of the lost connection haunt the bereaved. Once cherished memories now carry the weight of a love profoundly felt yet irretrievably distant. The court has noticed that they are connected to technology, but the memories are still fresh in their minds.

Ours was such a different story. A 21st century love story, whose foundation was modern-day gadgetry. Thanks to Graham Bell for inventing telephones that helped me talk to her, know her better and, finally, fall in love with her. Thanks to the Internet, the World Wide Web and sites like Shaadi.com, that helped me find her. I discovered myself to be a true software engineer in this hi-tech love phase. And whether this kind of love was good or bad, was no longer a point to ponder over—we were already in it. (Singh 31)

Uncaught memories, once cherished, now carry the weight of a profoundly felt yet irretrievably distant love. The mundane rituals and daily rhythms that once tethered two lives together now are lacerating reminders of what has been lost. And yet, it is this very intensity of attachment that imbues our closest bonds with immeasurable value. To love deeply is to embrace both the sublime joy of connection and the anguish of its absence, allowing the tender moments to coexist with the searing pain of severance.

Ultimately, the depth of our grief is a testament to the profundity of our attachments. It is a brutal reminder of what it means to be human – to forge connections that sustain, fulfil, and irrevocably shape our essence. And while the devastation wrought by loss may seem interminable, we can find the courage to rebuild by embracing the totality of our bonds, carrying cherished memories as sacred touchstones on our journey forward.

The narrator believes that writing offers more meaning than any other means of expressing one's loss. He establishes handwriting as a sacred and intimate medium to express their grief. He states that "Somehow, I believed handwritten words carry much more meaning and feeling in them. They have something special that can't be conveyed in sterile, electronic mail" (Singh 138). This encapsulates the profound act of writing as a form of bereavement and coping with loss.

The line "I didn't tell her about it, but at the end of every day, I started writing my feelings for her in a diary" (Singh 138) implies that the narrator's diary became a private

sanctuary. In this space, they could openly confront the rawness of their emotions without the constraints of outward appearances. He describes his feelings through writing as “Each and every page described how I missed her, what all I would have done had she been with me, and wrote small verses for her. And her half-sketched picture which I drew while thinking of her, but left incomplete when I realized I was a poor artist” (Singh 138) shows his ritualistic pouring of the heart onto the page, an outpouring of the love, longing, and sorrow that consumed his waking hours in his beloved’s absence. It evokes a sense of the meticulous care and emotional labour poured into this handwritten record of bereavement. It was not simply a recounting of events, but rather a sacred documentation of the narrator’s most visceral desires, his craving for the physical and emotional closeness he had lost.

Furthermore, the narrator’s tender attempts to capture their loved one’s essence through concise verses and a sketched picture highlight the desire to transcribe memory into a tangible form, to make that which has become ephemeral somehow permanent. The incomplete sketch symbolises both the limitations of artistic representation and the impossibility of fully recreating the wholeness of the lost connection through words or images alone.

In this passage, the handwritten diary becomes a canvas for unfurling the complex tapestry of grief - the longing, the what-if’s, the tender reminiscences, and the ultimate inadequacy of any medium to fully encapsulate the profundity of what has been lost. Writing emerges as a ritual of bereavement, a catharsis through which the narrator could privately honour, express, and wrestle with the love that endured despite and because of its permanent severance.

The handwritten word, so deliberate and permanent, stands in defiant opposition to the sterile technological world. It is a rebellion against the perceived impersonality of modern communication, reclaiming the sanctity of self-expression through the impressions of pen upon paper. In this deeply personal act, the narrator finds solace by crafting a memorial in ink that has no character limits, a tribute to a love story that defies the constraints of the temporal world.

Conclusion

The exploration of writing as a therapeutic tool through the lens of Ravinder Singh’s *I Too Had a Love Story* underscores the multifaceted role that expressive writing plays in the bereavement process. The narrative serves as a testament to the power of writing to not only navigate the tumultuous journey of grief but also to memorialise a lost love and foster personal growth.

Singh’s poignant recount of his love and loss illustrates the cathartic potential of writing. It emerges as a sanctuary for emotional release, a framework for constructing a coherent narrative from chaos, and a medium for honouring the memory of a loved one. Writing becomes a conduit for Singh to process his grief, externalise his thoughts, and ultimately, find a semblance of peace in the wake of tragedy.

In conclusion, *I Too Had a Love Story* exemplifies the profound impact that expressive writing can have on an individual grappling with loss. It reaffirms that writing can be a potent form of therapy, offering a means to articulate the inexpressible, preserve the essence of a cherished relationship, and embark on a path toward healing and resilience. The insights gleaned from Singh's journey and empirical evidence underscore the value of writing as a therapeutic modality in bereavement. This research paper not only sheds light on the therapeutic aspects of writing but also celebrates the enduring strength of the human spirit to find hope and meaning in the aftermath of profound loss.

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