

## Transcripts for A Neuroscience-Proven Expressive Writing Protocol with Dr. James Pennebaker (225)

Sue Marriott she/her (00:02.634)

Dr. Pennebaker, thank you so much for joining us. Ann and I are particularly interested in always bringing to our audience things that actually work and not just theory. And in particular, we love this because it doesn't require a therapist and it doesn't require any money. So we also really like promoting things that make the world a better place and that are accessible to everyone. And we ran across this protocol that you and series of studies that have shown incredible health outcomes and mental health outcomes. So tell us all about it. Can you set it up a little bit so that for people who aren't aware of it, kind of give a little bit of background and then we'll really get into it.

Jamie Pennebaker (00:49.953)

Of course. By way of background, I'm a social psychologist and I'm not a clinical psychologist. So I am not trained to help people. And my training, I stumbled into it. I started graduate school because I was interested in the mind-body problem and I was interested in how we come to feel what we do. What makes us anxious? What makes us sick?

Sue Marriott she/her (01:02.277)

You just stumbled into that?

Jamie Pennebaker (01:19.753)

And once I started my first job, I had been doing a lot of work on the psychology of physical symptoms, when people feel symptoms and how and why. And I wanted to put together a big questionnaire to identify what kind of people report symptoms. And there really wasn't much done on this back then. And so I sat around with my students, I said, let's come up with a questionnaire and try to just identify what kind of people, what kind of behaviors might be related to reporting the physical symptoms. I said, on this questionnaire, who cares about theory? Who cares about any major ideas? Let's just throw out anything that we're interested in. So somebody said, well, I wanna ask some questions about what people eat. Another person wanted to focus on people's relationship with their mothers and fathers. Another person was interested in birth order. I mean, all these kind of things. And somebody said, how about this? Prior to the age of 17, did you ever have a traumatic sexual experience? Yes or no? Sure, I thought that was a good one. So we put all these questions together and it ends up being about a 12 page questionnaire that we gave to several hundred college students. And what we found was that one sexual trauma question was related to every health item that we had on the whole questionnaire. And what made this so interesting to me was, what was it about a traumatic sexual experience that was associated with health problems? So I ended up doing other studies, and I started to notice with doing studies with adult samples that first of all, this is a really robust effect. But what was the real problem was it wasn't a traumatic sexual experience per se. It was having any kind of trauma was bad for you. And we've known that forever. But having a bad, having any kind of upheaval that you keep secret increased its toxicity. In other words, big secrets are really unhealthy. And as you get into this, you as therapists, you know very well what this problem is. If you are keeping a big secret, you have to be on guard all the time. What if somebody finds out? What if I spill the beans? How is this person thinking about how I am right now? Do they know what's going on? In other words, people who are keeping a big secret, they don't sleep as well. They are on guard more, so their autonomic nervous system is more active. Their immune system is probably suppressed. And all of these factors together make life miserable. And quite frankly, therapists generally deal with people who, frankly, are harboring really big secrets. I'm terribly anxious. I worry about this all the time, but I can't tell anybody.

Sue Marriott she/her (04:26.868)

And I'm very conscious of this.

Ann Marie Kelley (04:26.938)

And then sometimes they don't even know they're holding it as a secret, right? Like these events happen and it's sort of a secret in their body, but they're not even consciously aware that they're holding it as a secret. They're just not talking about it. It's like gone, it's passed.

Jamie Pennebaker (04:40.288)

That's right.

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Sue Marriott she/her (04:46.35)

what do you call it, like a ball and a pool underwater, kind of behind you that you don't really know you're doing it, but it is taking some passive effort to hold it down. And yeah, so rather than necessarily consciously thinking about it, it's just something that we're just naturally doing. And maybe, and is it true that it's, is it secrets specifically or just unprocessed trauma?

Jamie Pennebaker (04:55.364)

That's exactly what I'm saying. You know, I don't make a big distinction. And I think it's both. So the question I started, and by around this time, I started talking to my therapist friends about their views of therapy and why it worked. And the kind of conversation you have is, no, really, why does it work? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Tell me about CBT. Tell me about, who cares?

Ann Marie Kelley (05:36.104)

Right.

Jamie Pennebaker (05:39.629)

Why? Because all therapies work. Why does it actually work? And then I started wondering if holding secrets is so bad, what if we brought people in the laboratory and had them talk to somebody about the secret? But as a researcher, that's too complicated because then you're having to deal with how the other person reacts. So it occurred to me, well, what about just having them come in and write about a secret? And then I came up with why. Well, a secret's kind of ambiguous. How about I just have people write about any kind of major upheaval in their lives, ideally ones they haven't talked much about with others. And that was how I started. And I did a lot of thinking about this and trying to figure out, well, how many, should I just have them come in and write once or should I have them write multiple times? Anyway, I decided to do an experiment where I'd have some of the people, these were all students in our first studies, I asked them to write about a traumatic experience, and then I had another group at the same time write about superficial topics. So there was kind of an experimental group and a control group. And I decided to have people write for four times 15 minutes a time. Now, the logic of this - there was no theory. It was just a fluke. It was the issue was I needed to have run about 50 people and I could get a group of rooms only from about 5pm till 10 at night. And I could have to do it in four days because I could do it on Monday through Thursday night. That was why I had people write four times. So I'd line them all up. And some people would be scheduled every five or 10 minutes. They come in, I'd talk to them first, and then gives them the writing instructions, depending on what condition they were. Someone would take them to a small room where they'd be by themselves, where they could write for 15 minutes. At the end of 15 minutes, yet another person would knock on the door and say, okay, your time is up, fill out this questionnaire and then staple the questionnaire to your writing, put it in this big box as you leave. And we'll see you tomorrow. So that was that first study. I get all of this with no, there was no theory. There was no, no anything except this general idea that maybe this could be beneficial. I also got permission from all these students to have the Student Health Center record all their visits to the Student Health Center by month from before the experiment to three months after the experiment by was it illness or was it an injury or was it a checkup or whatever. So I could get this information. So the study, what would happen was, when people came into the lab, they'd sit down and I'd say, okay, so they had signed up for an experiment that dealt with writing about life experience, which was something vague. They'd sat down and I said, okay, I can't tell you exactly what this study is about, but what I'd like to have you do is to write for four nights, 15 minutes a night, you'll be doing it here. And different people will be asked to write about different topics. Some topics may be very personal, others may be not. You can quit any time and get full credit and the usual consent issues. Are you willing to participate? They say yes, and they all did. Then by a flip of the coin, they were put in either the experimental condition where they would write about emotional upheavals for four days or a superficial topic for four days. If they're in the trauma conditions, the very first experiment, I said, okay. So for the next four days, what I would like to have you write about is the most traumatic experience of your entire life. When you go into that room, I want you to start writing about this. And the only rule I have is to write the entire time. If you run out of things to write about, just repeat what you've already written. I want you to really let go and explore

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deepest thoughts and feelings about this. You might tie this into other issues in your life, maybe how it's related to your family, to other upsetting experiences, to relationships you're in or have been in. It could be related to school, who you wanna be in the future, who you have been in the past, or who you are now. You could write about the same traumatic experience every day, or you could write about it differently each day, that's entirely up to you. And many of us have not had major traumas, but all of us have had major stressors or conflicts and you can write about those as well. But whatever you choose to write about, I want you to really let go and to immerse yourself in these. And that was basically the instruction. These, by and large, were college students. They were anywhere from 18 to 22 years old. And half the students wrote about traumas that all of us would agree were major upheaval. I was really impressed. This was an upper-middle-class university, and I was impressed by the degree of hardship that a lot of these kids had had. And the other issue was the degree almost automatically started writing about incredibly personal, powerful experiences. I was also fascinated about how they would walk out of the lab every night. I could see them and we would talk to them briefly. Some had been crying in the room. Some just were, you could tell, were really exhausted, especially the first night. And by the end of the experiment, especially the first day, they felt worse than they did before they went in. They felt somewhat sad, like going to a sad movie.

Ann Marie Kelley (12:05.227)  
Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (12:07.961)  
Nobody flipped out. Nobody required us to take them to a psychologist or psychiatrist. But the one thing about it was it was a powerful experience. And what we discovered compared to people who were asked to write about these superficial topics, and the superficial topic would be describe your dormitory room. Describe an event you went to in the last 24 hours, each describe things, make it very objective, we're just interested in the facts.

Jamie Pennebaker (12:45.569)  
We tracked the student health records and the people who wrote about these traumatic experiences ended up going to the student health center, about half the rate as people in the control conditions and also half the rate of about people who were not in the experiment. In other words, writing about these deeply upsetting experiences in an interesting way seemed to protect their health. But there were other things that were fascinating about this overwhelmingly they said this was a really powerful, very beneficial experiment. To give you an example, Ask any researcher about bringing people in the lab for four days to do an experiment and ask what percentage of the people don't finish the study. It'll be 50%. We got everybody. Everybody came and they did the whole thing.

Ann Marie Kelley (13:35.303)  
Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (13:42.157)  
Another thing that was interesting was over the next year or two, I'd be walking on campus and sometimes a student would come up to me and they'd say, I know you don't remember me but I was in your study last year and that study changed my life. Thank you for letting me be in your study. I can tell you that had never happened to me. And it just was a marker of what an experience this was. So very briefly.

Sue Marriott she/her (13:56.533)  
Mm.

Ann Marie Kelley (14:08.726)  
You knew you'd really hit something. Yeah, you really knew you had tapped into something incredibly deep. And that was the start for you, wasn't it? Of like a path that says, I got to keep going forward. Yeah.

Sue Marriott she/her (14:12.218)  
Very good.

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Jamie Pennebaker (14:19.901)

That's right. And the other thing I knew was the second time I did the study, you do the study, then you wait several months to go to the Student Health Center to get the data. And I remember coming back from the Student Health Center the second time. The first time I was hopeful it would come out, and it did come out. That was a shocker. And in the second study, everything was writing on this.

Ann Marie Kelley (14:43.886)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (14:48.453)

And I remember going through, walking back from the Student Health Center, just looking at the various conditions of what had happened. And I remember getting into my office or running into a friend. I said, this worked. And I knew that this would change the course of my life, my career, which it did. Now

Sue Marriott she/her (15:11.394)

Well, and there's been many studies since that have just continued to, you know.

Jamie Pennebaker (15:13.925)

But that's right. So that's right. In fact, there have been now over 2000 expressive writing studies since that first one, which was published in 1986. And we know that this writing can bring about changes in not just colds and flus and minor illnesses, but it's been associated with changes in

you know, how long people are in the hospital after surgery. We know that it's related to...

Jamie Pennebaker (15:49.473)

issues like depression and PTSD, arthritis, asthma. It's associated with... Exactly. Oh, yes, sleep, which by the way, I think is one of the most diagnostic issues. We'll come back to this in a second because you're going to ask, why does it work? And the other issue is it was associated with...

Sue Marriott she/her (15:55.042)

Fibromyalgia, yeah, sleep.

Ann Marie Kelley (16:10.692)

Ha ha!

Sue Marriott she/her (16:12.039)

Indeed.

Jamie Pennebaker (16:17.485)

with people who had been laid off from their jobs. They got jobs more quickly if they wrote about it. They're getting laid off. It's been associated with fertility treatment. It's been associated with, my God, it's breathtaking the kinds of studies that have been done. And indeed, if anybody out there listening to this wants to know more information, go to Google Scholar. Google Scholar is one of my favorite places because it's a...

Sue Marriott she/her (16:34.335)

in it.

Jamie Pennebaker (16:48.685)

essentially appendix of all the scientific literature. Enter search terms, expressive writing, and fill in the blank. What are you interested in? Probably somebody has done something on it. And I have long, you know, the first studies I did were 1986. And then I was very active in this for about 10 years. And then I started to move off into other areas.

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that initially were related, but I haven't been involved in research on expressive writing in much detail in the last several years. I can't keep up with the literature. In fact, this morning I did a quick search on expressive writing studies in the last year, and there were at least one or two hundred studies. I mean, it's just, it's just, it's breathtaking.

Ann Marie Kelley (17:30.528)  
Mm-hmm.

Ann Marie Kelley (17:40.898)  
Wow.

Sue Marriott she/her (17:44.65)  
Well, you're yeah, go ahead.

Ann Marie Kelley (17:46.971)  
What was really fascinating is you started and it followed even doing blood draw studies, right? So it wasn't just outcome measures that we were looking at. You looked at in the immunology studies that the outcomes pre, post and significant time periods after this, could you talk about that? The effect of those bloodstains.

Jamie Pennebaker (18:00.349)  
That's right.

Jamie Pennebaker (18:09.201)  
So actually, the second study I did, I worked with Jan Kiko Glazer and Ron Glazer. And back in the 80s, they were just studying it, starting in this new world of psyc And we teamed up and they were at Ohio State, I was in Dallas at SMU. And at study, we drew blood before the experiment, after the last day of writing, and then again, six weeks later.

Ann Marie Kelley (18:13.141)  
Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (18:39.153)  
and the blood would be set up to Columbus, Ohio, where they would assay the blood. And what we found was that people in the experimental condition showed enhancement in immune function compared to controls. And after that, I was involved in some other immune studies looking at immunity response.

There was also, there have probably been a dozen immune studies. There have been really cool studies on wound healing, where you do experimental wounds on people. There's all sorts of just fascinating things. It's also associated with people making better grades in college or in high school. That people do better on standardized exams, like the MCAT or SATs, if they do writing beforehand.

And I think part of this is expressive writing, in a sense, stills the mind. It makes us, we stop ruminating about these upheavals that we've dealt with.

Sue Marriott she/her (19:50.634)  
I mean, it sounds too good to be true, really. Like it's the elixir that we all look for of that it fixes everything and it does everything and it's free and short. So, so.

Ann Marie Kelley (19:55.628)  
I'm out.

Jamie Pennebaker (20:02.573)

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So let's temper everybody's expectations. Yes, it's free. Yes, anybody can do it. Doesn't always work. You know, I do expressive writing occasionally, you know, once or twice a year. Usually it really helps. Sometimes it doesn't. You know, there you go. I think sometimes...

There are all sorts of reasons why it doesn't work as well as why it does work. But don't expect this to automatically change your life. It is something that can help put things in perspective, but sometimes it might just be too big or it might be too close. So my recommendation is to try it out, see if it works for you and if it doesn't.

Do something else. Go to a therapist. Go jogging. Do some yoga. You know, the reality is, there is no one true way to fix anything.

Sue Marriott she/her (21:14.41)

And I know that Andrew Huberman just had a podcast and had spelled out this protocol, and it was very specific, but we've heard since then that you would say it differently, and I wanna give you the opportunity that everyone's gonna be interested in, okay, how do I do this, what are the prompts, what are your suggestions, so.

Jamie Pennebaker (21:35.309)

So one of the big problems is expressive writing. With all these studies, we now know it's a lot more complicated than when I started. You know, at the beginning, I thought I had found truth. Write about a trauma for four days. But then I quickly discovered you don't have to write about a trauma. You can write about anything that's bothering you. And in fact, that's the way I write. You know, if I...

Ann Marie Kelley (21:56.949)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (22:02.889)

lying in bed in the middle of the night and I'm obsessing about something that's maybe happened at school or something that happened with Between my wife and me or with our kids or you know, you know, why is my ankle hurting and I'm obsessing about it So forth I'll get up and I'll just start writing. What's going on here. Why am I thinking this? I Don't write four times. I'm not writing about a trauma but what I'm doing is I'm putting a

an experience into words that has bugged me. And I think that's the essence of this. It might be helpful for me just to very briefly go over what we know in terms of why it works. And then we can come back to some of the more practical sides of it. Across all of these studies, the first thing I learned years ago is if you're looking for a single explanation for this, you will never find it

Ann Marie Kelley (22:36.22)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (23:02.109)

too many things going on. And I think of this as kind of a cascade of factors. The first factor is merely labeling something, merely describing something. I had this experience. You know, very often people don't even get to that. They kind of go, they start to move into this world of, I'm not going to talk about it because if I talk about it, it'll just make me think about it. Which is a...

Ann Marie Kelley (23:23.66)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (23:31.485)

frankly, kind of a goofy way of thinking. The important issue though is labeling it. The second is to start to describe it. Start to put it in a language-based format. You could write, you could talk to someone, you could talk to a tree, it doesn't matter. And your writing could be typed or it could be handwritten.

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Sue Marriott she/her (23:59.822)

to bring in handwritten, or I've done studies where I have people write easy finger lines with the thing written in the air. And in all those cases, it works. It's the translation of what's inside your hand and it can work.

Jamie Pennebaker (24:01.321)

Or I've done studies where I have people write using finger writing and putting it in the air. And in all those cases, it works. It's the translation of what's inside your head into words. So that's really important. That process also is interesting because when you are describing something, you, first of all, you're having to do a sentence. When you start a sentence, you're committed to

to finish that sentence. Unlike if you're just walking down the street thinking about something. You think about this upsetting experience and then you go, oh, I should have said this. Oh, I wonder if there's, I wonder if, you know, what I'll have for dinner. But here you are committed to finishing that sentence and then you're kind of committed to the next sentence and so forth. And what you're able to do is start to put together your finding meaning. What happened?

Ann Marie Kelley (24:42.967)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (25:00.573)

Why did this happen? What role did I play? How am I gonna deal with this? All of these are issues that you can do with writing. And the other thing I find over and over again is when people write about some experience they haven't talked about much with others, they start to realize this experience is much bigger than I ever thought. Yes, this happens, but yeah, it's true. I haven't been sleeping because of this and I haven't been eating, so I've been losing weight.

And I've been so nervous, I haven't been seeing any of my friends. And oh my God, this is a much bigger thing than I ever imagined. And wow, this reminds me a lot of the last time something like this happened several years ago, and I did the same thing. I mean, the same, in other words, it's helping people to put things together. The other, the next issue is this idea of clear, cleaning the mind, clearing the mind.

Sue Marriott she/her (25:52.962)

The issue is this idea of cleaning the mind. Cleaning the mind. I think science is hard to start learning from you. But I just try to clean the mind. My idea is that...

Jamie Pennebaker (26:00.481)

I think Scientology is called going clear, but I just call it clearing the mind. The idea is that

Jamie Pennebaker (26:10.189)

If we have an upsetting experience and we're ruminating about it, what happens is we're thinking about this event pretty much all the time. And if you can stop that rumination, all of a sudden your mind has, there's much more, you can process more information. We call this in the clinical world executive functioning, or sometimes referred to as working memory. And there are all sorts of ways to test this working memory.

Sue Marriott she/her (26:29.614)

We find this in the critical work of exceptional functioning, and sometimes the same thing in the work of the man. And there are certain ways to test this work of the man. But what you find is people who are under stress, they have much less work to do.

Ann Marie Kelley (26:34.08)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (26:39.973)

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But what you find is people who are under stress, they have much less working memory. They just are incapable of remembering and more forgetful and so forth. So there've been some very fine studies where people are asked to come in, like beginning college students, to write about their deepest thoughts and feelings about coming to college or a control topic. And what you find is after this, they have greater working memory.

and they have greater working memory for several weeks afterwards, and they also do better in school. They also sleep better. And I think all of these are markers of what this expressive writing is doing. There's one other thing that's really important. We know if you're going to stand back and look at what really, really works in psychology, there's only two or three things that you can really take to the day.

One of them is putting up setting experiences into words. And the psychoanalysts, the CBT people, the name your three-letter therapies, they all involve language. Another thing that you can take to the bank is some kind of relaxation. And there's all sorts of types of relaxation. But I think being able to do that is very important. And the last, which is.

Perhaps one of the most powerful is establishment of a social network, a friendship network. And one of the questions is, I've been interested in, oh, and by the way, I think exercise. I'd throw that in as another one. But this social network, we know that social support is one of the best predictors of improved physical and mental health. One of the things I was curious about was if...

Do people do expressive writing? Are their social behaviors changed afterwards? And so what we did was to develop this device where people would wear what we call an ear, it's electronically activated recorder. And it was a recorder that came on for 30 seconds and we'd go off for 12 minutes. They would do this off and on for two days. And one of my former students, Matias Mel, who's at the University of Arizona has really taken this to...

Jamie Pennebaker (29:03.277)

the next level in terms of ways of doing it. But what we would do is we'd have people do this express, we'd have them do the ear for two days, and then a week later they do the expressive writing, and then we'd have them wear the ear again a month later. And what we found was that people who did this expressive writing compared to controls, later on they talked more, they laughed more, they used more positive emotion words.

Ann Marie Kelley (29:29.505)

Mm.

Jamie Pennebaker (29:32.625)

they were more socially integrated. Now we gave them questionnaires and asked how, you know, has your social life changed and so forth. The questionnaires didn't show anything, but these objective markers of being socially integrated did. So you can see expressive writing, it's changing the way we're thinking, it's changing the way we're feeling, it's changing the way we're sleeping, it's changing the way we're connecting with others. So it's all of these features that can make a difference.

Sue Marriott she/her (30:03.846)

Well, yeah, it still sounds like an elixir in this wonderful way. I keep translating what you're saying into kind of therapy language, you know, the way that we think of it. And what's so nice is it does dovetail so much, right, with the neuroscience and name entertainment and the creating a coherent narrative is part of, you know, secure attachment. So that tracks just incredibly. I am curious.

Ann Marie Kelley (30:19.899)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (30:29.258)

Mm-hmm.



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Sue Marriott she/her (30:32.518)

I do wonder, I know that you've done all the different research related to even finger writing, which is so interesting, but you're saying thinking about it doesn't work, but what about talking? You know what I mean?

Jamie Pennebaker (30:43.377)

Yeah, I think talking, honestly, I think talking can be the best. But, you, this is a high risk game, it's like poker. You can tell another person about this horrible thing that happened to you. And we've all had this experience, you start to do this and you look at the other person and you see their facial expression and you can see the horror in their eyes. And you realize, whew, this was a bad idea. And then you change topics.

People often keep the secrets because they know if they say it, it's going to mess the family dynamics up and sometimes they are completely right or that people will think less of them. Yep, that's a good possibility as well. So if you can be certain that the other person will show unconditional acceptance of you, then I think talking, that would be my first choice.

But if you want to be safer, try writing first and then talk.

Sue Marriott she/her (31:50.683)

Yeah, and I love your idea that you can, it doesn't matter if anybody reads it, that you can throw it away, that you even advise throwing it away. I think that is great. And yeah.

Ann Marie Kelley (32:01.248)

Well, I was also thinking that part of the writing process is if you, especially at the beginning of something that you've really been holding back, I think there's this element of social judgment. Even if you trust the friends, you have this self analysis of what they're going to do. You have this meta view of what are they thinking about what I'm saying, right? So they're...

So it's harder to drop as deeply into your own experience of when you're just writing purely and you don't have that thought, I'm gonna tear it up at the end or nobody that I know is gonna read it. There's this freedom for authenticity and openness to connect without the meta view of what are people thinking? And I think especially today, it's harder and harder for people not to think about what are people thinking about what I'm thinking with social media, et cetera. Everything's kind of a outside in view of self.

Jamie Pennebaker (32:52.689)

Mm-hmm.

Ann Marie Kelley (32:52.702)

and rating is such a direct experience to your internal process.

Jamie Pennebaker (32:56.865)

I think that's a really good way of putting it. I also have noticed over the years that people would come in our studies and they'll write about something that they've not talked to anybody about. And then when we contact them later, we'll ask, how many people have you told about this experience? And a high percentage of people have now talked to other people about this experience.

Jamie Pennebaker (33:25.309)

horrific as they thought or that they now have a different perspective on it than when it may have happened several months or years before.

Sue Marriott she/her (33:37.242)

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And you make a distinction between journaling, just what we typically think of as journaling. And I'm also just thinking about like clients, you know, just talking versus this kind of talking or this kind of writing. Can you say a little bit about that?

Jamie Pennebaker (33:52.453)

Well, I do make a big distinction between, you know, keeping a diary or journaling. To me, journaling means doing this every day for the rest of your life, which I can't imagine. That sounds horrible. I would never do it. I know some people do it great, it's beautiful. But for me, no. My approach to this is, look, this is like a Band-Aid or a penicillin or something like that. Try it for three or four days.

And if at the end of three or four days it doesn't work, do something else. And if you're feeling better after three or four days, great, stop and go, you know, go enjoy life. Should you write when you're happy? I don't buy what I want to try to understand why I'm happy. I just like being happy. So, uh,

Sue Marriott she/her (34:41.598)

The content is different though, I think, right? The journaling we're writing about our day or maybe talking about our feelings.

Jamie Pennebaker (34:43.409)

That's right.

Jamie Pennebaker (34:47.469)

Exactly. That's exactly right. That's exactly right.

Sue Marriott she/her (34:51.018)

But so this might get us into more of the detail of like, how would you prompt someone? Like what specifically might you say?

Jamie Pennebaker (34:59.281)

So this is what I think has been, for me, the biggest breakthrough over the last 20 years, and that is...

There is no one true way. This is, I'm giving you a detailed, what, roadmap of how to do this. And here's the detailed roadmap. Well, you know, go do some writing. See if it works for you. Okay, what should you write about? Any damn thing you want. If you're upset about something, write about that.

Ann Marie Kelley (35:28.905)

Hehehe

Jamie Pennebaker (35:38.985)

And promise yourself you're right at least, say, three or four days for at least five to 15 minutes each day. And again, if you don't find any benefit, no harm, no foul. It still was free. However, this is a technique that can be very beneficial. Now, initially, I had people write about the most traumatic experience of their lives. I don't do that anymore. I don't

You know, if I'm, it depends on who asked me to come in and talk to them. You know, if they've just been diagnosed with a disease, I'll say, you know, if you want, write about it, write about this diagnosis and explore your deep thoughts and feelings, but you might find some other topics are just as important. You know, having this disease also might have major implications for your marriage. You might have major implications for your career or whatever. In other words.

Try to approach writing as a method to better understand some topic that is weighing upon you. Some people say, well, you should write with your non-dominant hand. Sure, try it out. Some people really find value in it, and some

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don't. I don't, but that's just me. Some people think that it's better to write a story or to write it in third person. Sure, if you want, try it.

first students who worked on this, she absolutely believed that writing and then editing it later was one of the most helpful things for her. I believe her. I don't want to do it. But again, what I do with people who want to know more about this is to say, look, you're the boss. You experiment to see what works. And be a scientist about this.

You know, if you're having trouble sleeping, start to record your sleep. Maybe you've got a Fitbit that'll do it for you. And then look to see, are you sleeping better? Are you drinking less? Are you exercising more? Are you happier? But get some kind of objective measures and try to see, do you see any improvement from what you're doing? And if you're not, try writing in a different way. Try thinking about it differently.

Jamie Pennebaker (38:08.293)

Maybe another topic might be relevant. In other words, don't trust me, don't trust anybody. You are your own therapist. And you can see this as a little Rosarian without the bother of a therapist. It's essentially saying, hey, look, I just work here. You're gonna have to fix yourself. I will give you whatever tools I know about.

Ann Marie Kelley (38:14.712)

I'm out.

Jamie Pennebaker (38:36.869)

but you need to figure it out on your own.

Ann Marie Kelley (38:40.946)

One of the things that stands out about this kind of open ended instead of like, here is the protocol, is some of the things you've written about is that writing takes you on a journey and you don't know where that journey is always going to end. If you have a protocol and you try to stick to that, this is the four things you're going to do, you're going to get caught in bringing yourself back into the shoulds.

Sue Marriott she/her (38:49.358)

One of the things you're threatened about is that writing takes you on a journey and you don't know where that journey is going to get you in. If you have a protocol and you try to stick to that, this is the poor thing that you're going to do. You're going to get caught in bringing yourself back to where you should.

Ann Marie Kelley (39:06.37)

going from one place, I can't sleep, and I'm writing about this one thing that I'm ruminating about, so I'm gonna write about it. And if I'm told, write about that exact thing every time, I might contain myself, but what you've mentioned before is that you can start writing, and it takes you into this, and it reminds you of this, and you get bored, and all of a sudden you've gone a stream of consciousness, and then it starts landing into something that your subconscious or your unconscious might be communicating to you, right? I mean, that it's just like, you're on a journey.

And now you're like, every time I write about this one thing that I'm ruminating about, I land over here. And it's so informative. So I love what you're saying. Open up the structure. Listen to yourself. That's part of the whole writing process, isn't it?

Jamie Pennebaker (39:48.593)

That's right. And it's been so funny ever since I first publications, you know, I get calls and emails all the time. You know, where do I get certified to do this? I want to be a writing therapist. And why haven't you patented this or trademarked this? And, you know, I'm a big believer in capitalism, but this is not the direction I want to spend my life. I want to discover things. And

Sue Marriott she/her (40:07.874)

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Capitalism is real.

Sue Marriott she/her (40:17.714)  
Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (40:19.393)  
But the important issue about this is everybody's approach has to suit them. And the beauty of it, because it's free, you have that freedom. It will not be costly.

Sue Marriott she/her (40:36.654)  
I was thinking though too that as far as this how it works and why it works in the immune system and but there was also some findings about language and language changing. Would you want to speak to that a little bit?

Jamie Pennebaker (40:50.809)  
I'll talk a little bit. The big danger is I'll go and just start talking for the next two or three hours. After I guess I published the first two or three papers on expressive writing, I became obsessed with the question, can you identify healthy writing by the way people are writing in the experimental condition? And, you know, one of the issues was that

Sue Marriott she/her (40:58.417)  
Oh

Jamie Pennebaker (41:21.221)  
30 people who are writing about traumatic experience. Not all of them get healthier. And of course, our measures of health are really crude. But who benefits and who doesn't? So I initially got a group of clinical psychology or counseling psychology people in a master's program to go through these and to evaluate these trauma essays. You know, how insightful are the people, to what degree are people using causal

thinking to what degree are they emotional, to what degree are this, that, and the other. It took them forever to do those ratings. The people didn't agree at all. Several of them got depressed just reading all these depressing essays. This was not an effective strategy. So I thought, well, you know, I had taken a computer course in college. How hard could it be to get a computer?

Ann Marie Kelley (42:02.755)  
Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (42:18.797)  
I had looked for computer programs and there weren't any and I'd call some computer scientists around the country and they all said it was a good idea but they didn't know anybody who was doing anything. So working with one of my graduate students at the time, Martha Francis, we put together a computer program called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, LIWC. And I know it doesn't sound or appear to...

He pronounced this way, but we call this L-I-W-C Luke. It's the Luke probe.

And the Luke program would allow us to go into any text and analyze it in terms of its emotional tone, is it positive, negative, is it high in anger, et cetera. Cognitive dimensions, are people using causal language, are they using what we call self-reflection language where they're using words like understand, realize, know, meaning, things like that. And many other dimensions of language. Then once you start, you know, we initially had about

ten divisions of language, and then we thought, well, we ought to throw in pronouns and prepositions and articles and other parts of speech.

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And what we discovered early on was that there were certain kind of fingerprints of healthy language. And if people used positive emotion words, they benefited more than if they didn't. So if they use words like love, care, et cetera. But it's kind of ironic. They're writing about horrible things. And often they'll say, I'm not happy, nobody cares about me, et cetera. But ironically, that

Jamie Pennebaker (43:56.353)

is better off than someone who doesn't use those words. Because if someone says they're not happy, they're still thinking along that dimension of happiness. A person who says they're sad and miserable is probably more at risk. And what we found was that people who used a moderate number of negative emotion words benefited the most. If they used way too many,

that was problematic, they were probably, you know, ruminative, maybe depressed. Or if they didn't use any at all, they were probably, you know, psychologically distancing and not much in touch with what they were writing about. But what mattered more than the emotion words were the use of cognitive words. And these cognitive words were both the causal words and insight words that were getting at the degree to which people were trying to figure things out.

and Anne were, by the same token, were trying to put things together in some kind of story format. And we found that accounted for much more action than emotion. If people, two things that we discovered, the more that people increase in their use of these cognitive words, the more they benefited, and the more they changed their perspective from day to day. So,

Ann Marie Kelley (44:59.116)

Mm.

Jamie Pennebaker (45:22.545)

going from I words to we words or they words and bouncing around from day to day, those people benefited more than people who didn't. In other words, there had to be some kind of growth in their writing. If they came in and wrote the same way every day, by and large, they did not benefit. Now there's an important lesson here. I thought, well, heck, this is great.

We will now do some experiments where we will tell people how to write. Initially, we told them, try to use these kind of words. That was a disaster because they were trying to figure out which words to use. But later, we, you know, we put it into the language that I just said, you know, try to put together, try to make this a story, change your perspective, etc. That has never worked. And I think part of it is.

Ann Marie Kelley (46:13.974)

Mm.

Jamie Pennebaker (46:16.837)

What we're studying here is some kind of emergent process. That is...

people who come in and they're obsessing about something and they're worried about it, if they, on the first day, they do some kind of dump, let me tell you what happened, where there's not much analysis, and the second day they, you know, there's more of this and more of that, that's just a natural emergent process. But if we tell them, okay, this first day, just do this, just do that.

Ann Marie Kelley (46:51.218)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (46:52.465)

think it blocks what naturally occurs. So I'm very reticent to tell people how to do it, but just very broadly, you've written for two days, your third day, you might think about wrapping things up, but not being heavy handed about it.

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Ann Marie Kelley (47:14.986)

Are you saying when you say cognitive words, are you saying words like that puts a meaning to it like because or cause or that kind of cognitive words? Like kind of a...

Jamie Pennebaker (47:26.857)

And also words like understand, realize. And if you do an analysis of therapists, they're often pushing for that. So what do you think about this? How are you feeling? Do you feel like you understand those kinds of words? And I think one thing a therapist does is a therapist is really pushing people to think in certain ways that I think are actually benefit.

beneficial that we see with writing, especially this perspective change. You know, if a client comes in and they sit in there having trouble in their marriage and they say, you know, I'm feeling this, I'm feeling that, I'm feeling this, I'm feeling that, you're going to say, yeah, but what about your spouse? What's your spouse's perspective? Or if another person comes in and says, my spouse, he does this, he does that, he does this, he does this, he does that, and you say, yeah, but you, how are you feeling? What's going on in your...

your job is to force perspective change, which I think can be very beneficial.

Ann Marie Kelley (48:29.294)

to those words like because or understanding is maybe activating different parts of our mind that are taking, like that are making more meaning of the story if we just come and bitch and bitch and bitch in our writing we're not maybe associating and making some kind of progress in the way that we're understanding the story. Is that?

Jamie Pennebaker (48:40.337)

That's right. Or it's a root. That's right.

Sue Marriott she/her (48:43.05)

in our reading, we're not maybe associating and making some progress in the way that we're understanding this story. Is that?

Jamie Pennebaker (48:49.745)

But I think that's a good way to think about it, that these words are reflecting kind of the cognitive work that's necessary in therapy. But actually, you can make the same argument for someone who's learning particle physics, that it's really hard to understand at first, but then you have to start, you know, I realize, I think, I wonder, those words, I think, would probably be a predictor of who learns that material better.

Sue Marriott she/her (49:20.246)

It's interesting, I can't help but think again about therapy stuff and attachment and like, who are the people that then don't, that just write the same thing each time? And also, you know, I've heard you say it's not what you say, it's how you say it, which is very much, you know, in the attachment literature is that they're listening for style of speech. So do you know much about, is there an overlap about some of this attachment? You know, are we?

Is this another way into those categories?

Jamie Pennebaker (49:53.933)

I think it's, you know, I used to know the attachment world pretty well. And as you know, there's the attachment wars. I assume the attachment wars are still going on, which I've always been absolutely fascinated. You know, there's certain...

Sue Marriott she/her (50:11.318)

Yeah.

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Sue Marriott she/her (50:15.837)

We just, yeah, we just wrote a book. So, yeah, we're familiar.

Jamie Pennebaker (50:25.755)

So I can't speak to this very well, but certainly different attachment styles are associated with different ways of thinking and organizing material. And I think that probably would mesh with some of the things that we're finding.

Sue Marriott she/her (50:46.102)

But yet you're finding that you're still by doing the exercise, and I can imagine with the prompts of going right for the heart of the watermelon and do the hard thing, that then, I don't know, that like, in other words, you're getting these massively statistically significant effects, and that's based against control groups. So that's...

Jamie Pennebaker (51:15.634)

I do want to be very clear here. These are not massively powerful statistical effects. They are reliable. They are modest effects. To give you an example, the effects are of the same magnitude of many drugs. So for example, Prozac.

Sue Marriott she/her (51:27.422)

Oh, interesting.

Jamie Pennebaker (51:39.153)

Prozac versus an active placebo is actually a fairly, it's not that strong a drug.

Sue Marriott she/her (51:48.626)

So we're not talking about kind of the effect of some of the psychedelics are having these big effects.

Jamie Pennebaker (51:54.605)

That's right. That's right. This one and well, that psychedelics have really big effects while they're high. But the question is, are those people who take psychedelics today, how are they in a month? Are they healthier in a month than people who don't? And that's where I think the effects are. They're going to be very modest. And and the same is true with psychotherapy. You.

do psychotherapy, and you go and you look at your clients two months from now, some of them will be quite different, or somewhat different, some won't, but the effects are modest. And Darien is the killer problem. It's been interesting, this world has taken me in all these different directions. So for example, one of my favorite, this is taking us in it.

irrelevant direction, but it's interesting.

Sue Marriott she/her (52:56.55)

It's therapist uncensored, so we can say anything we want.

Ann Marie Kelley (52:58.148)

Yeah, un-sensor yourself. Go for it.

Jamie Pennebaker (53:00.669)

So one of my favorite studies was a study that was done 30 years ago. This was a study of about 10,000 people and people who had a heart attack. And what they did for half the people, they gave them a daily aspirin and the other half the people, they gave them a placebo. And the study was so strong that they...

showing that this aspirin use prevented a second heart attack if they stopped the study. Well, if you look at the effect size, it is really, really small. If they had done that study with 100 people, they would not have seen an effect. If they'd done it with 1,000 people, they probably would not have seen the effect. In other words, many of the things we do

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are truly reliable, they're statistically, you can take it.

take it to the bank, but the effects are not real strong. And that's the way I view expressive writing. If you do the study with 100 people, you will see an effect. If you do it with 20 people, you might not see the effect. In other words, and long-term effects of psychedelics, long-term effects of many things, you just don't see that many effects.

Sue Marriott she/her (54:28.302)

Hmm. It is helpful because definitely the way that it has been put out there, I think, is pretty exciting. And even at the beginning of the episode when we were talking about, and it does this and it does that, and it's really related to this, and we're kind of laughing about it being an elixir, it is helpful to kind of have the moderation of, yes, it gets, yes.

It can do those things and that is true statistically, but having realistic expectations.

Jamie Pennebaker (55:04.766)

And this is a, I think, a problem that all of us in, certainly in science, we fail to appreciate. I remember when I first, in laboratory studies, you know, you do an experiment and everything's controlled and you do something and then you measure somebody immediately after you've done something. And there you can get really big effects.

And then you think, I'm so cool because now we know what causes discrimination and racism in the culture. And then you go and try to do something in the culture to see if you can bring about changes, you know, in a large group of people over the next two or three months. And it's almost impossible because once you go outside the lab. All this stuff is impinging on people. And that's why.

When I can do an expressive writing stack with 50 people or whatever, and I am finding that people on average are going to the doctor less, I didn't appreciate how powerful that was. And in fact, the first studies I did, I all did at SMU. SMU, all the students live on campus.

Right there in the middle of all the dorms is the Student Health Center. Turns out if you're close to a Student Health Center, you go to the Student Health Center at much higher rates than if you have to walk, you know, half a mile. When I moved to the University of Texas, I did my first expressive writing study, and students hardly ever went to the Student Health Center. Had I done that first study at the University of Texas, it wouldn't have come out, because there were just people didn't go.

Ann Marie Kelley (56:58.266)

That's just in talking about bringing back all my PhD studies and hammering about effect. I remember writing a dissertation that if you got any of an effect, a point one, it's like you were so excited. But you're pointing out something that's really important. It isn't because it has a modest effect that it isn't incredibly powerful. It is very easy to miss an effect. We don't want to overestimate it, make it an elixir. But like you're saying, and what I love about your studies is that

Jamie Pennebaker (57:09.06)

It's perfect.

Jamie Pennebaker (57:21.745)

Yes.

Ann Marie Kelley (57:24.97)

you did find an effect and you knew it had meaning. It wasn't you were doing this research study to find that effect. It was like, oh wow. And then you continued to explore it, which is such authentic research. And you kept going with, wow, now let's look further rather than having the presumption of what you wanted to see and you're researching it. So that's a really a powerful way to do research. And we are still saying that the effect is powerful.



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Like if you can look and see a difference in the blood draws many weeks later, you're hitting on something huge, but there's all sorts of other factors that are gonna influence and that are gonna intrude on an outcome variable. So even finding a modest effect is actually a really big deal in research, yeah.

Jamie Pennebaker (57:51.622)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (58:09.553)

That's exactly right. And it comes back to, look, it's free. You don't have to, this is not a big investment. And I tell everybody this, try it. It may work. And I'm constantly amazed. Talking to members of my family and of course,

Ann Marie Kelley (58:17.71)

Yeah.

Jamie Pennebaker (58:35.333)

when I'm having problems, they'll say, you know, dad, you should write about this. You know, it just annoys the hell out of me. But they're right.

Sue Marriott she/her (58:43.438)

That's great. Well, and before we go, could you give us any just thumbnail on the research on our political leaders and language? And I know that's another area of interest of yours. And, you know, I think, yeah.

Jamie Pennebaker (58:56.245)

I'm sorry.

Jamie Pennebaker (59:03.161)

So this computer program, Luke, has created a life of its own. And there's kind of an interesting irony. So people in the clinical world know my expressive writing. But I have even more citations from people who do work in business, in computer science, in all these other areas who are interested in the language work that I do.

stumbled on. And I became interested in by analyzing the language of peoples, can you understand them better? Can you get a sense of, you know, are they depression prone? Are they

Jamie Pennebaker (59:48.049)

neurotic, are they analytic, are they smart, are they lazy thinkers, are they ruminating, and all of these different dimensions. And I've been, so I've worked with all types of people, everything from law enforcement to, I was just involved in a very interesting case of

Jamie Pennebaker (01:00:16.657)

who had four children, and all of these children died between the age of seven months and maybe a year and a half. And after the last one died, and these were sequential, she was arrested and accused of murder. And she had kept a diary the whole time. She ended up, she was in prison for 20 years, and over the years, people in Australia were saying,

a large increasing number of people were saying this was a miscarriage of justice. And there was some evidence that some genetic possibilities that could account for it. Her husband interestingly refused to have his blood measured. And I was asked to analyze her diaries in the years when all this was going on. And I went through and I approached all of my projects, which is, I don't know if she's guilty or not.

No, honestly, I don't care. I'm just going to go through and analyze. And I've done enough work to know if someone is going to commit a murder or going to commit, you know, if they're sitting kind of pre-meditation, I'm pretty good at

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seeing if there are changes in language. I can also see if somebody is, you know, highly unstable. There are all sorts of things. And there was zero evidence for any of this.

And so I wrote a report for the court. And she, so my work together with some of the other people as well, she was exonerated actually just a couple of months ago, which is, which is, and so after 20 years in prison, she's now been, she's now been exonerated for that and I feel really proud of, proud of that.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:01:55.301)  
Hmm.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:01:58.577)  
Oh wow.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:01:58.714)  
Wow.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:02:11.205)  
You ask about politicians, what can you tell about politicians?

Ann Marie Kelley (01:02:14.706)  
Well, you were saying that you could tell when someone's lying. So no.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:02:20.633)  
Yeah, are there any just kind of takeaways as we lead into this election year?

Jamie Pennebaker (01:02:25.433)  
You know, of course this looks like it's going to be a rematch. So there's, we already know Trump, we already know Biden and their language gives them away. You know, I could give you, I could show you, show you their language and you say, yep, in fact, we've just published an article looking at the leaders of United States, Great Britain, Angela.

Angela Merkel in Germany and the person who was the groups that run Switzerland and how they all talked about COVID in their press conferences. And it was just fascinating just reading them, but also you just look at the language. So Trump, of course, was in a different world than all the rest. He speaks in these broad, you know, broad pronouncements using positive emotion words.

everything's great, we're doing a wonderful job, everything is great, there's nothing to worry about, go back to work, it's all beautiful. But he's not an analytic thinker. An analytic thinker is somebody who is thinking in a formal, logical way. Most leaders think in a somewhat analytical way. Trump has been the least analytical president that the United States has ever had. He's a

He's a braggart. I was going to say he's a storyteller. Reagan was a storyteller. Trump is not very good at stories either. He's, he's, his, his language is, um,

It's by and large fairly disorganized, but very social, and very, very simple language. Biden is actually quite social. He's also a storyteller, but he's much higher in analytic thinking. And it's very interesting, somebody like Obama. Obama was, he was actually quite a storyteller as well. He was not particularly high in analytic thinking. He could be,

Jamie Pennebaker (01:04:38.277)  
but not very much. And in fact, we've been tracking the language of US presidents going back to George Washington. And one of our interests is this analytic thinking. We find analytic thinking is generally associated with, being logical, smart, et cetera. And what you see is starting in the 1800s, the analytic thinking was pretty high. And then it came to about Teddy Roosevelt at the end of...

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and then Wilson in the end of World War I. And all of a sudden, the analytic thinking of presidents just started dropping and dropping and dropping with Trump being the lowest and the second lowest actually was probably Obama, which is kind of weird. And what and at the same time, we can also measure cloud, the degree to which somebody speaks with authority. And what you see in the in the 1800s,

Clout was kind of modest. And then after World War I, Clout started going up and it's been going up and up and up. And, you know, here we have Trump, the highest. Obama was quite high as well. And what this is, is I think it's mass media that our leaders have gotten the message that we have to speak as though the audience is stupid.

but speak with absolute certainty. And that's what's been happening here. We're also seeing this to some degree in the UK and in Canada and Australia as well. And I think it's part of kind of this media awareness that is what makes for a good leader. Speak with certainty, speak with confidence. And we know speaking with confidence is a scary thing.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:06:28.898)

So, speaking of confidence, are we now, speaking of confidence is a scary thing. Because most people who speak of confidence are people with a more likely to trust than we should be objectively to trust in God. That was so fascinating. And just to clarify, when you're saying low analytical and high confidence, you're analyzing your language, not,

Jamie Pennebaker (01:06:35.065)

Because most people who speak with confidence are people that we're more likely to trust and we objectively should trust them far less.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:06:45.306)

That was so fascinating. And just to clarify, when you're saying low analytical and high confidence, you're analyzing their language, not their personal brilliance or whether they're smart. You're analyzing how they promote themselves in their speeches. And what I recall about that article is some of the summary is that you now are more likely to get elected if you use low analytical speech.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:07:03.677)

That's right.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:07:14.33)

speech and high confidence. So the more confidence you express in the simplest terms, and we were just talking and writing about that, that gives our body who can be very highly activated with all the stimulation we have around us, you have a high confidence, simple words we feel, our body feels calmer, we feel more secure in a way. We're given a false sense of security.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:07:30.141)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:07:37.437)

That's right.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:07:37.902)

And that from your article, you were saying that those are the ones you can predict just by their speaking that they're going to be much more likely to get elected. And I thought that was really fascinating.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:07:38.113)

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And that from your article you were saying that those are the ones you can predict by their speaking that they're going to be much more likely to get elected. And I thought that was really fascinating.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:07:45.885)

That's right. And it's so interesting. Yes, it reflects the leaders, but really, it reflects us, the people. We're suckers. We like Cheetos. We like Cheetos for our food, and we like Cheetos for our leaders. Me too. They're simple. They're sweet. They're crunchy. And that's how we are choosing our leaders.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:07:54.72)

Yes.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:07:58.322)

We like Cheetos for our food, and we like Cheetos for our food. I love Cheetos! Me too! Me too! They're simple, they're sweet, they're crunchy, and they're delicious.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:08:01.814)

I love Cheetos. We do.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:08:14.458)

It's really interesting to being able to look at language in such detail. You're not expressing political judgment in this. You literally are looking at their language and the predictions of that. And so it's something for us all to be mindful of, isn't it? Do we really, really want to be eating Cheetos for the rest of our lives?

Sue Marriott she/her (01:08:18.396)

I'm not expressing political judgment. You're literally looking at their language and prediction.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:08:20.868)

That's right.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:08:24.477)

That's right.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:08:33.238)

That's right. And you look in the past and a lot of the presidents in the past have been really boring, but they've been sane.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:08:42.866)

Mm-hmm. That's really interesting.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:08:44.271)

Well, it's good to be getting kind of the message out about this idea of encouraging complexity and like kind of staying in difficult gray areas, being uncertain and widening our capacity to kind of hang in with uncertainty or as people shift their thinking, seeing that as a positive thing, not, you know.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:09:10.681)

And I should also point out that these concerns are something that I see in education. I see it in therapy. I see this with MDs, that the MD who's the most certain often is viewed as most effective, even though they might be screamingly incompetent. And when the patients.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:09:10.786)

waffling.

## Transcripts for [A Neuroscience-Proven Expressive Writing Protocol with Dr. James Pennebaker \(225\)](#)

Ann Marie Kelley (01:09:36.145)

Mm-hmm.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:09:39.377)

have no knowledge of the topic, you're going to believe that the physician who says, you have to do this, or the therapist who says, you have to do this, or the teacher who says, you have to do this, they, people are suffers for.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:09:57.526)

Well, you know, we're suckers for it because our body needs to feel, I mean, our body feels insecure and we aren't used to, we don't like that sense of insecurity, right? We want to feel secure. And so I love the message that we're sending is like actually like the words of cognition that you were mentioning, they're questionings words. Do I understand this? What do I think about this? It takes us out of a certain, this person is a jerk.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:10:07.261)

That's exactly right.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:10:23.197)

Yeah, yeah.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:10:23.626)

and is mistreating me to, okay, but wait, what really happened? And so now I'm going into my own sense of uncertainty, exploring it, developing more of a way of thinking that tolerates uncertainty, which is such a deep sign of security in a way. To...

Jamie Pennebaker (01:10:39.869)

Yes, sir.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:10:40.845)

that tolerates this, which is such a deep science. It's, yeah, and we wrapped right back around to our book, right, it's called Secure Relating, Holding Your Own in an Insecure World. That was not on purpose that we landed here at all, but it's exactly some of the stuff that we talk about around growing our capacity for, to tolerate this difference and to look at,

Jamie Pennebaker (01:10:51.17)

I'm going to go.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:11:02.77)

these bigger systems that create insecurity that then cause us to be more tribal and divide. Exactly. Well, good. Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you so much. Now, if people are interested, where might they reach you? How might they get a hold of you or find papers about you?

Ann Marie Kelley (01:11:10.53)

And go for simple answers. Yeah. This was so fun.

Jamie Pennebaker (01:12:40.305)

Yeah, opening up by writing it down.

Sue Marriott she/her (01:13:29.438)

Okay, that's wonderful. All right, well thank you very much. We appreciate the deep dive and really appreciate your work.

Transcripts for [A Neuroscience-Proven Expressive Writing Protocol with Dr. James Pennebaker \(225\)](#)

Jamie Pennebaker (01:13:36.709)

You bet, I will enjoy this. You guys are doing a great job.

Ann Marie Kelley (01:13:37.536)

Well, thank you. Thank you so much and we'll see you around the bend. All right, bye bye.