Introduction

Background:
- Personality is associated with individual writing styles for:
  - Personal correspondence/letters (Broehl & McGee, 1981)
  - Published books (Foster, 1996)
  - Diary entries, school assignments, and academic publications (Pennebaker & King, 1999)
- Existing research focuses on “formal” writing samples (e.g. full sentences, coherent essays)
- But much of our day-to-day writing is informal (e.g. to-do lists, text messages, notes to ourselves)

The present study:
- Are informal writing styles associated with personality?
- Predictions:
  1. Personality variables are associated with informal writing styles
  2. Any associations are weak

Methods

Participants:
- 86 cohabiting couples (82 opposite-sex, 4 same-sex); 172 individuals
- Age: M = 23.02, SD = 4.07
- Marital Status: Not married (83%), Married (11%), Engaged (6%)

Measures:
- Participants were measured for:
  - Relational attachment style (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000)
  - Mindfulness (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003)
  - Ruminative response style (RRS; Treynor, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003; Whitmer & Gotlib, 2011)
- Self-trust not to commit relational transgressions

Procedure:
- Participants completed personality measures (see above)
- Participants then wrote about a time when they felt emotionally vulnerable, knowing they would have a conversation about it with their partner
- Writing samples were linguistically analyzed using LIWC software (Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001)
- Almost all participants wrote informally (e.g. bullet-point lists)
- Writing samples were analyzed to determine relationships between writing styles and personality variables

Results

- Prediction 1 is supported while prediction 2 is partially supported
- Multiple personality variables are associated with writing styles
- All correlations but one are weak; one correlation is moderate
- People who trust themselves not to transgress against their partners used fewer words and fewer pronouns
- Participants who brood use more words and a greater variety of words when writing about their vulnerability
- By contrast, people who are mindful (living in the present) have less variety in their words used to describe vulnerability
- The amount one trusts their self not to physically hurt their partner explains 15.9% ($r^2$) of the variance in word count
- See Table 1 for detailed results

Discussion

- Even with shorter, informal writing samples, personality is expressed through one’s writing
- However, effects are generally weaker in informal writing
- This study supports the notion that language use is an individual difference, across a variety of contexts
- Supports the ecological validity of other studies; in the present study, participants were not told what format to write in
- Further research could examine correlations with other personality measures (e.g. the Big Five personality traits)

Table 1 (Correlations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>Diction</th>
<th>Personal Pronouns I</th>
<th>She/He</th>
<th>Positive Emotion</th>
<th>Anxious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>-0.104</td>
<td>-0.172*</td>
<td>-0.122</td>
<td>-0.136</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>-0.152*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious Attachment</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.166*</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant Attachment</td>
<td>0.067</td>
<td>0.017</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.173*</td>
<td>0.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumination: Brooding</td>
<td>0.180*</td>
<td>0.203**</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.223**</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rumination: Reflection</td>
<td>0.158*</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Openness</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.158*</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Infidelity</td>
<td>0.211**</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.184*</td>
<td>0.081</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Self-Trust</td>
<td>-0.249**</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>-0.206**</td>
<td>-0.185*</td>
<td>-0.097</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Secrets</td>
<td>-0.108</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>-0.198**</td>
<td>-0.176*</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Honesty</td>
<td>-0.187*</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
<td>-0.172*</td>
<td>-0.142</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: End Rel.</td>
<td>-0.189*</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>-0.022</td>
<td>0.037</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Money</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>-0.079</td>
<td>-0.121</td>
<td>-0.161*</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.123</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Physically Hurt</td>
<td>-0.399**</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>-0.123</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Emotionally Open</td>
<td>-0.148</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.124</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>-0.167*</td>
<td>-0.192*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Sexually Faithful</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>-0.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Trust: Emotionally Faithful</td>
<td>-0.204**</td>
<td>-0.095</td>
<td>-0.174*</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
<td>-0.136</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the 0.05 level
**Significant at the 0.01 level
Yellow = moderate correlation
Orange = weak correlation

References