



Professor James W. Pennebaker

Regents Professor of Psychology, University of Texas, USA

Using words to assess, change, and assess health

The ways people express themselves can reflect and also influence their mental and physical health. Early research on expressive writing pointed to the potential value of translating emotional experiences into words. Later studies found that the ways people used words in writing

and in everyday life could reveal their social and psychological processes. Most recently, cross-disciplinary projects are discovering ways that the analysis of language in social media, search queries, and autobiographical writing can detect mental and physical health problems sometimes earlier than the writer knows. Promises of big data analysis on the mental health communities are discussed.

Biography

James W. Pennebaker is the Regents Professor of Psychology and Executive Director of a university-wide educational initiative called Project 2021 at the University of Texas at Austin. Pennebaker's earliest work examined the psychology of physical symptoms. The symptom research ultimately led to his discovery of expressive writing which found that writing about emotional upheavals improved physical health and immune function. More recent studies have explored natural language. He finds that everyday word use is related to personality, deception, status, group dynamics, and emotional states. He is now working with his university's senior administration to rethink 21st century education models. Author or editor of 10 books and over 300 scientific articles, Pennebaker has received several university and international awards and honours for his research and teaching. His most recent books are *The Secret Life of Pronouns: What Our Words Say About Us* (Bloomsbury, 2011) and *Opening Up by Writing it Down* (Guilford, 2016).