An Understanding of Why: The Role of Narrative Coherence as a Moderator in the Relation Between Interparental Conflict and Optimism Towards Marriage

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The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Briana Lee Schubert

Abstract

Interparental conflict can have implications for the offspring's later relationship functioning, as studies have shown that interparental conflict is associated with offspring's greater fear of intimacy, decreased positive attitudes about marriage, and lower romantic relationship satisfaction in offspring (Kirk, 2002; Jennings, Salts, & Smith, 1991). Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) suggests that offspring who observe increased interparental conflict may adopt similar patterns in their own interpersonal relationships. Additionally, witnessing interparental conflict may create a family narrative that can transfer to the offspring's own future relationship goals and attitudes. Research has yet to examine how narrative coherence between the offspring report of conflict, or narrative coherence (i.e., the integrative understanding of why an event occurred and the offspring's role in the narrative), is predictive of the offspring's' optimism towards future marriage. The present study examined whether narrative coherence moderated the association between offspring's' reports of interparental conflict upon offspring's optimism towards marriage. This study is a secondary analysis of Jennifer Willet Howell's dissertation study examining the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns (2012). Data was initially collected from 119 offspring participants (*M* age = 22.4 years; 48.7% female; 88.2% white) and their mothers (*M* age = 50.7; 91. 1% white). Offspring and mothers had narrative coherence measured using structured-interview questions and themes were coded using trained research assistants (Fiese, et al., 1999). Offspring self-reported their experience of interparental conflict using The Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) and optimism towards marriage was measured using the Marriage Expectations Survey (Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001). Results found that offspring narrative coherence did not moderate the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. However, the study found that total coherence, both offsprings' and the mothers' narrative coherence averaged together, moderated the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. At high levels of total coherence (*M* = 15.16), perceptions of interparental conflict significantly predicted offsprings' optimism towards marriage. At low (*M* = 11.83) and moderate (*M* = 13.67) levels of total coherence, the association between interparental conflict and optimism toward marriage was not significant. Findings suggest that high levels of narrative coherence (both offsprings and the total combined narrative coherence of both mother and offspring) may be an indicator that offspring are more aware of the negative aspects of their parents' relationship, as were their mothers as well, and able to reflect upon these to infer upon their own relationship goals and future optimism towards marriage. Further findings are discussed.

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Introduction

Attitudes and/or actions that children observe from their parents often influence children and their future cognitions (Bandura, 1986). As such, witnessing interparental conflict has been associated with maladaptive functioning in various domains, such as internalizing and externalizing behaviors, coping, and self-perceptions (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002; Fear, Champion, Reeslund, Forehand, Colletti, Roberts, & Compas, 2009; Grych, Harold, & Miles, 2003; McDonald & Grych, 2006). These effects extend into the children's futures as well, as studies have found that offspring who reported high interparental conflict had less favorable attitudes about marriage and their own future marriages compared with those from less conflictual families-of-origin (e.g., Jennings, Salts, & Smith, 1991).

Using the theoretical lens of Social Cognitive Theory, offspring may adopt their social cognitions, such as their optimism towards future marriage, from observing their parent's relationship (Bandura, 1986). This viewpoint could demonstrate how interparental conflict may influence offsprings' later optimism about marriage. However, many studies looking at interparental conflict and offspring's future relationship attitudes are in the context of marital dissolution versus just in the context of interparental conflict. Research has yet to examine what factors may influence offspring's future relationship attitudes in the presence of just interparental conflict. One possible factor that may influence this transmission is an offspring's understanding of the events that have occurred. Narrative coherence (i.e., the integrative understanding of why an event occurred and a person's role in the narrative) is measured by looking at the internal consistency, organization, and flexibility of the narrative to understand if individuals are able to understand the intentions, motivations, thoughts, and feelings of other individuals and how an individual makes sense of their own part (Linde, 1993; Reese, Haden, Baker-Ward, Bauer, Fivush & Ornstein, 2011). The present study is a secondary analysis of Jennifer Willet Howell's

dissertation study examining the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns (2012). In this study we use unpublished data to examine whether narrative coherence may moderate the association between offspring's' reports of interparental conflict upon offspring's optimism towards marriage.

Interparental Conflict upon Offspring Functioning

The thoughts and appraisals that children acquire regarding the interparental conflict that they experience impacts their later outcomes. As such, it is important to understand the effect that interparental conflict can have upon children later in their adult life in order to capture the complexity of their future functioning. Often when interparental conflict is present within a family the relationship between children and their parents can be dysfunctional. This dysfunction paired with the interparental conflict may cause significant stress upon the family system, thus creating a cycle of conflict (i.e. interparental conflict exacerbates parent-child conflict). Sherrill, Lochman, DeCoster, and Stromeyer (2017) found that the presence of interparental conflict significantly predicted the presence of parent-child conflict, as well as the reciprocal effect of parent-child conflict predicting interparental conflict over the period of the longitudinal study. Thus, interparental conflict may disrupt how offspring perceive interpersonal relationships, including their current and possibly their future romantic relationships as well.

Many studies examining interparental conflict upon offspring's functioning are focused around divorce and marital dissolution, however, there is evidence that interparental conflict has a separate effect outside of divorce (Amato & Booth, 2001). Moreover, interparental conflict can occur outside of divorce and within families that are intact. Understanding the occurrence of interparental conflict in addition to divorce also allows for a broader understanding of the impact of interparental conflict upon offspring's' future functioning outside of divorce.

Studies examining interparental conflict have found that interparental conflict following divorce was associated with offsprings' increased perceived risk of intimacy (Morris &West, 2001). However, it is well established that interparental conflict, such as the disagreements, arguments, and disputes between parents, has a relationship with later child adjustment, regardless of parents' marital status (Buehler, Anthony, Krishuakumar, Stone, Gerard, & Pemberton, 1997). These adjustment issues can lead to negative behaviors that can be directed at themselves and others, such as external and internal aggression, anxiety, and depression (Mash & Dozois, 2003, p.27). This internal and external disorganization may be reflected in offsprings' social cognitions about their futures and in their actions within their own relationships. However, Laura Minze (2009) found that children's narrative coherence mediated the association between interparental violence and externalizing problems, suggesting that a child's inability to organize and communicate what happens in a conflict situation is a potential mechanism for how interparental violence influences externalizing behavioral problems.

There are many pathways and factors that may influence how offspring perceive their own relationships and optimism towards marriage due to interparental conflict. To gather an in-depth understanding of offspring's' subsequent functioning due to interparental conflict, the context in which it occurs within the family system, and how offspring process this adversity should be examined in more detail in order to better understand how this may influence their optimism towards marriage.

Schwartz, Kaslow, Seeley, and Lewinsohn (2000) looked at levels of optimism in children exposed to interparental conflict. They found that children with greater amounts of optimism who have experienced interparental conflict are likely to have higher self-esteem and adaptive coping skills when compared to less optimistic children (Schwartz, Kaslow, Seeley, &

Lewinsohn, 2000). Furthermore, children's social cognitions and how they perceive the environments may be protective factors. Studies looking at narrative coherence have also found that the ability to identify and organize a narrative of conflict is beneficial for offspring's functioning (Minze, 2009; Müller & Perren, 2014). Identifying what may serve to alleviate the negative effects of interparental conflict, such as environmental, social, and emotional factors may aid in understanding offsprings' future functioning and their optimism towards marriage.

Narrative Coherence

Parents play a major role in the development and formation of social cognitions in offspring (Bandura, 1986), and parental influences have been found to affect offsprings' ability to develop coherent memories (Milojevich & Quas, 2017). Narrative coherence is how an individual makes sense of the narrative of a situation, in this case their parents' relationships, as well as how the individual organizes their thoughts and the willingness and/or ability of the individual to consider differing perspectives. Müller and Perren (2014) propose that narrative coherence is the process of "meaning making" and that the coherence of a narrative is assumed as an indicator of how well an underlying memory is organized and interpreted. Studies have found that exposure to parental violence and conflict is associated with adverse ability to understand and achieve coherence within family systems (Grych, Wachsmuth-Schlaefer, & Klockow, 2002; Minze, McDonald, Rosentraub, & Jouriles, 2010; Müller & Perren 2014). Stadelmann, Otto, Andreas, Klitzing, and Klein (2015) suggest that in the presence of conflict, children's cognitive-emotional organization may buffer their mental health when exposed to adversity within their family. As such, narrative coherence may serve as a protective factor for offspring who have been exposed to increased interparental conflict during their childhood/adolescents (i.e. Minze, 2009; Müller & Perren, 2014). It is possible that this is because narrative coherence can be influential in an individual's future goals and expectations

and has been found to be a useful measure of adolescents and young adults identity formation (i.e. McAdams, 2001; Fiese, Sameroff, Grotevant, Wamboldt, Dicksstein, Fravel, Marjinsky, Gorall, Piper, St. Andre, Seifer, & Schiler, 1999). Research has also found that mentalization, or the ability to infer mental states in self and others, is predictive of more coherent narratives as adults (Köber, Kuhn, Peters, & Habermas, 2018). These findings suggest that narrative coherence can serve to help offspring to understand and organize events that occur within their family and serve as a positive influence for their future goals and expectations as well as their ability to mentalize.

Parents are an important factor in the development of coherence and understanding for children. The ability to acquire coherence and future functioning is heavy influenced by parental interactions and their parants cognitions and intentions. It has been suggested that when parents and children reminisce (i.e. to recall and process past experiences and negative events) that this can help their socioemotional development and later narrative identity (Fivush, 2007; Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). Further research has found that children who engage in elaborate discussions pertaining to past events by their mothers are able to produce more coherent narratives and memories accounting for the events (Farrant & Reese, 2000; Haden, Ornstein, Rudek, & Cameron, 2009; Larkina & Bauer, 2010; Reese, Macfarlane, McAnally, Robertson, & Taumoepeau, 2020). Reese and colleagues (2020) expanded on this and found that children whose mothers took part in an elaborative reminiscing training told more coherent low-point narratives (i.e. narratives containing the negative themes) as adolescents (with respect to context and theme) than adolescents of mothers in the control group. These studies indicate that the ability to form a coherent narrative may be taught and fostered from parental interactions, thus it is possible there is a positive association between parent's and offspring's narrative

coherence. In the instance of interparental conflict within families, parents play a major role in how offspring process and interpret the conflict. If parents are unable to provide sufficient care to offspring and interactions are filled with ambivalence, uncertainty, and/or conflict, then this may disrupt the offspring's ability to form a coherent narrative, which would possibly influence their future functioning.

Moreover, in a longitudinal study, adolescent narrative coherence was found to be a significant predictor of adult well-being and indirectly linked to inferred loving parental care (Borelli, Brugnera, Zarbo, Rabboni, Bondi, Tasca, & Compare, 2018). These findings suggest that it may be possible that having a strong narrative coherence in the face of adversity, i.e. interparental conflict, may serve as a protective factor for offspring. Moreover, parents who themselves are able to foster the ability in offspring to organizes thoughts and the ability to consider differing perspectives may also be considered highly coherent (i.e. Farrant & Reese, 2000; Haden, Ornstein, Rudek, & Cameron, 2009; Larkina & Bauer, 2010; Reese, Macfarlane, McAnally, Robertson, & Taumoepeau, 2020). Thus, the ability to understand and organize ones' own thoughts and perspectives related to their parents' relationships, via narrative coherence, may be intergenerational and help offspring integrate positive aspects of their parents' relationships onto their own and influence their future attitudes as well.

Optimism Towards Future Marriage

Bandura (1986) emphasized the importance of observing and modeling of behaviors, attitudes, and emotion from others by means of reciprocal interactions. This has been observed in studies examining offspring who witness marital dissolution and/or conflict within their parents' relationship. Studies have found that offspring acquire unfavorable attitudes towards marriage, negative relationship qualities and expectations when there are high levels of interparental conflict within their family (Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008; Kirk, 2002; Jennings, Salts, & Smith,

1991). However, McGregor and colleagues (2012) suggested that positive parental influences may negate the negative effects associated with interparental conflict and offsprings' future relationship expectations. It is also possible that positive romantic relationships experiences could protect offspring from unfavorable attitudes towards marriage due to their parent's relationship, however, Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman (1992) found that while offspring's experiences in their own dating relationships predicted optimism about future romantic relationships it was their parents' relationships that predicted optimism about future marriage.

Through intergenerational transmission, offsprings' parent's relationship may influence offspring future optimism towards marriage because their relationships mimic a similar pattern to their parents (i.e. interparental conflict in parent's relationship predicts conflict within offsprings romantic relationships). Exposure to interparental conflict may cause offspring to reflect upon their own past and hold negative attitudes towards marriage. It is possible that through protective factors, such as parental support and/or narrative coherence, that offspring may be able to break the intergenerational transmission of relational discord.

Overview of Current Study

This study is a secondary analysis of Jennifer Willet Howell's dissertation study (2012) examining the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns and aims to add to the current literature regarding narrative coherence and how it may influence perceptions of past experiences (i.e. past narratives). Currently, few studies have examined narrative coherence and the recollections of interparental conflict during offsprings' childhood and the implications that it may have later in life. The current study facilitates the examination of both offspring and mothers' coherence to understand the potential intergenerational transmission of narrative coherence due to research regarding coherent memories being fostered by parental influences. In addition, this study adds to the literature regarding interparental conflict upon future relationship

cognitions apart from divorce and marital dissolution that often accompanies these studies. When assessing the literature regarding narrative coherence, the influence that parents have upon their children's future functioning and ability to form coherent narratives is apparent (Farrant and Reese, 2000; Haden, Ornstein, Rudek, & Cameron, 2009; Larkina and Bauer, 2010; Reese, Macfarlane, McAnally, Robertson, and Taumoepeau, 2020). As such, this study aims to examine both offspring's individual narrative coherence as well as both the offspring's and mother's narrative coherence as a total combined. The total combined narrative coherence is being used to examine the intergenerational aspect of narrative coherence, using the theoretical framework that the ability to acquire coherence is heavy influenced by parents' interactions. The hypotheses, based upon the literature, is that higher offspring and/or total (the combined narrative coherence of both mother and offspring) narrative coherence will moderate the relationship between interparental conflict and offspring's future optimism towards marriage.

Method

Participants

Data was collected from a recruited sample of 119 offspring participants and their mothers. Offspring ages ranged from 18 to 30 years of age, with an average of 22.4 years. The average length of the offspring's relationship was 22.5 months, or almost 2 years, with a range of 3 months to 96 months (8 years). The sample of offspring had a roughly equal distribution in gender (48.7% female) with the majority of the sample being white (88.2%). Other ethnicities included in the sample were African-American (3.4%), Asian (3.4%), Hispanic (1.7%), and those who identified as "other" (3.4%). The mothers' ages ranged from 38 to 69. They were predominately white (91.1%), with (3.3%) of Asian descent, (4.1%) of African-American descent, and (1.6%) who reported their race as "other" represented in the sample.

Participants were recruited within the community in the city of Knoxville, TN and neighboring counties. Flyers with study information and eligibility were posted in community centers, such as supermarkets, apartment complexes, healthcare facilities, and restaurants in the recruitment area. The study was also advertised on a social networking site. Participants' mothers were compensated $10 (in cash) via mail following completion of their telephone survey; offspring participants were compensated $40 cash at the end of their in-person data collection session.

To be eligible, offspring participants were required to be unmarried, not engaged to be married, between 18 and 30 years of age, and involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship lasting at least 3 months prior to the time of their participation in the study. Offspring participants had to have a willing mother figure that was present for most of their childhood and adolescence that was willing to answer a short questionnaire over the phone. Both offspring and mother participants had to be fluent in English.

Procedure

Potential offspring participants were screened over the phone by trained undergraduate research assistants to determine eligibility to participate in the study. Information gathered during this call included offspring participants' mother's contact information, the name of their father figure and his relation to them as well as their judgment of their mothers' willingness to answer questions about this father figure. Next, eligible participants were given information to provide to their mothers regarding their mother's telephone interview. Telephone interviews with the mother took place prior to the offspring lab visit to reduce attrition. After the initial phone call with offspring, offspring participants left a message on the study phone number verifying their mother's informed assent to be contacted by the study staff.

The mothers' telephone interview lasted approximately 30 minutes where they performed the verbal consent procedure and recorded their questionnaire responses over the phone. Following the mother's telephone interview, the offspring participants were seen in the lab for their study visit, which involved informed consent, a questionnaire, and audiotaped structured interview, which took an average of 45 minutes to an hour in total.

Measures

Demographics. Offspring participants reported their gender, age, race and length of relationship. Mother participants reported their age and race.

Optimism about marriage. The Marriage Expectations Survey (ATMS; Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001) is used to assess offsprings' expectations and optimism regarding marriage. Nine items used in the survey are from the Attitudes toward Marriage Scale, a self-report questionnaire that measures the expectations regarding the quality of one's own future marriage (Wallin, 1954). Two items used in the survey are from a revised version of the 1954 ATMS (Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986). Example items include, "How happy do you think you will be if you marry?" and "Do you ever have doubts about your chance of having a successful marriage?" The validity was examined comparing the scores on three scales measuring attitudes towards marriage and divorce, using the Family Atmosphere Questionnaire (Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986), the original version of Attitudes Towards Marriage Scale (Boyer-Pennington, et al., 2001) and the Attitudes Towards Divorce Scale (Boyer-Pennington, et al., 2001). All results proved to be significant and positively correlated at $p < .05$ (Boyer-Pennington, et al., 2001). The revised version of the ATMS has a Cronbach's alpha of .88 and a test-retest reliability score of .87 (Boyer-Pennington, et al., 2001). The Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .86.

Perceived interparental conflict. The Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) is a 48-item scale assessing children's views of 9

dimensions of interparental conflict: frequency, intensity, resolution, content, perceived threat, coping efficacy, self-blame, triangulation, and stability. Example items include, “My parents’ arguments are usually about something I did” And “When my parents argue I’m afraid that they will yell at me too”. The CPIC has demonstrated adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas for the 3 scales well over the .70 recommended for research use. The validity was examined comparing the scores on three CPIC scales with established parent-rated measures of marital conflict (OPS; Porter & O’Leary, 1980) and interspousal aggression (Conflict Tactics Scale; Straus, 1979) as well as examining if children’s perceptions of conflict were associated to their adjustment, all results proved to be significant and positively correlated at $p < .05$ (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). In the current study, the Cronbach’s alpha for the Conflict Properties factor was .96 and the Cronbach’s alpha for the Interparental Conflict Resolution subscale was .92. When responding, offspring participants were asked to consider their primary parental figures (which included the mother figure participating with them in the study) and were asked to report on their parents’ interactions during their adolescence, rather than currently. Low CPIC scores indicates high levels of interparental conflict.

Narrative coherence structured interview. Both offspring and mother participants completed a structured audiotaped interview with a trained research assistant in which they were prompted to describe their primary parental figures’ relationship (for offspring this included their participating mother figure and the father figure they reported on in their study questionnaire). The structured interview questions are included in the Appendix. Research assistants recorded these interviews using a digital voice recorder, which were allowed for transcribed narrative form of the structured interviews and was used for the procedure of coding, as the portion of the coding system used in this study relies on coding only the narrative structure. These narratives

were coded for narrative coherence by 4 trained undergraduate coders using the same coding system developed by Fiese and colleagues (1999). This system is based upon the theory that individuals are influenced by intergenerational processes that both bind together families across generations and allow the individuals to break from problematic familial patterns. The system was developed to help test systemic theories about how individuals make sense of their narrative and how they process and interpret them through multiple generations. The coding system also allows a reflection of the ways individuals construct their beliefs about relationships based upon their family interactions and memories.

The narrative coherence scale is made up of three constructs, coded individually and then averaged together for each narrative: internal consistency, organization, and flexibility of the narrative. This scale is designed to measure how an individual makes sense in his or her narrative of his or her parents' relationships, how the individual organizes his or her thoughts, and the willingness and/or ability of the individual to consider differing perspectives. It is possible for individuals to vary across these constructs of narrative coherence. The validity of the measure has been assessed in a cross-site data analyses by Fiese and colleagues (1999) in the Washington, DC, Couple Formation, the Syacuse Dinnertime Study, the Minnesota Adaoption Study, and the Providence Family Study. The measure was reliable using four different samples and was able to identify distinct dimensions of the narrative process (Fiese et al., 1999). Each construct (Internal Consistency, Organization, and Flexibility) was coded on a numerical scale of 1 through 5, higher numbers indicating increased evidence of coherence regarding parental relationships, the total scale ranged from 4-20. Cronbach's alpha for the narrative coherence structured interview was .90. Inter-rater reliability for narrative internal consistency was .90; for narrative organization, .86; and for narrative flexibility, .92. The intra-class correlation coefficient for the

3 combined discussed subscales was .92. For use in analyses, the 4 research assistants' codes for the 3 coherence constructs were averaged together, yielding an average narrative coherence score between 5-20 that accounted for the internal consistency, organization, and flexibility of each narrative.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are presented in *Table 1*, correlations are presented for each model in *Table 2*. Multilevel modeling analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics in PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). First, we evaluated the hypothesis that offspring's narrative coherence moderates the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. The first analysis had optimism towards marriage as the outcome variable and predictor variables as offspring narrative coherence and interparental conflict. The overall model was not significant, $R = .25$, $R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 598) = 115.00$, $p = .0557$. Results indicate that offspring narrative coherence did not significantly moderate the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage see *Table 3*. However, because the data was approaching significance, probing analyses were conducted to understand the conditional effects of offspring's' narrative coherence as the moderator of the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. The results showed that low offspring narrative coherence at $M = 11.33$ ($p = .79$) and moderate offspring narrative coherence at $M = 13.33$ ($p = .16$) were not significant moderators for this model, however high narrative coherence at $M = 14.67$ was significant at $p = .0408$. This indicates that at high levels of narrative coherence in offspring who report low levels of interparental conflict have greater optimism towards marriage relative to individuals with high coherence who report less interparental conflict. However, while this finding statistically significant, the model as a whole

was not significant. Moderate and low levels of narrative coherence in offspring may indicate that higher coherence is necessary for the change in the relationship between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage to occur.

The second hypothesis, that total coherence (i.e., combined mother and offspring coherence) moderated the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage was evaluated. This analysis had optimism towards marriage as the outcome variable and predictor variables as total narrative coherence and interparental conflict. The overall model was significant, $R = .27$, $R^2 = .07$, $F(2, 951) = 115.00$, $p = .0357$. Results indicated that total coherence significantly moderated the association between interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage see *Table 4* and *Figure 1*. To evaluate the statistical significance of the observed moderated model, further evaluation into the conditional effects of total narrative coherence was evaluated. The results revealed that those high levels of total coherence (15.16; p = 0.134) who reported high levels of interparental conflict have greater optimism towards marriage relative to reports of high total coherence with low levels of interparental conflict. A similar but less robust trend is seen in moderate levels of total coherence (13.67; p = .22) with those who report high levels of interparental conflict having greater optimism towards marriage compared to lower levels of interparental conflict. Low total narrative coherence (11.83; p = .40) who reported high levels of interparental conflict have less optimism towards marriage then those who report less interparental conflict, however low and moderate total narrative coherence was not significant in the model overall.

The model observed that overall, those who reported low levels of interparental conflict, regardless of levels of coherence, had no difference in their optimism towards marriage.

Discussion

The current study is the first to examine the role of narrative coherence about parental relationship in the context of offsprings' future optimism towards marriage and perceptions of interparental conflict. The results are consistent with the theory and prior research, suggesting that narrative coherence is a process of "meaning making" (Grych, Wachsmuth-Schlaefer, & Klockow, 2002; Minze, McDonald, Rosentraub, & Jouriles, 2010; Müller & Perren 2014). This is seen in our results showing that both higher offsprings' (trending) and combined narrative coherence can serve as a buffer against high levels of interparental conflict and allow for more optimism towards marriage. Results were partially consistent with my hypothesis, as total narrative coherence (the combined narrative coherence of both mother and offspring) significantly influenced the relationship between offsprings optimism towards marriage and perceptions of interparental conflict, but the model for offspring narrative coherence was not statistically significant. It is possible that offspring's narrative coherence alone was not strong enough to influence the relationship between their optimism towards marriage and their perceptions of interparental conflict. These results suggest that narrative coherence is an intergenerational trait that is fostered dyadically or relationally within in families and requires a shared role in its creation. Thus, the total narrative coherence was able to influence the relationship between offsprings' future optimism towards marriage and perceptions of interparental conflict where offspring's narrative coherence was not able to alone.

Our findings suggest that higher coherence in the presence of higher levels of interparental conflict is relevant for later offspring optimism towards marriage. This corresponds to previous researching findings suggesting high levels of narrative coherence may serve as a buffer to adversity and promote positive functioning (Minze, 2009; Müller & Perren, 2014;

Stadelmann, Otto, Andreas, Klitzing, & Klein, 2015). Previous findings that parents foster the trait of high coherence in their children (Farrant and Reese, 2000; Haden, Ornstein, Rudek, & Cameron, 2009; Larkina and Bauer, 2010; Reese, Macfarlane, McAnally, Robertson, and Taumoepeau, 2020) is relevant to our current findings that the total narrative coherence was a significant model compared to just offsprings narrative coherence. This indicates that the ability to understand and organize ones' own thoughts and perspectives (i.e. narrative coherence) is possibly passed down intergenerationally, similar to Reese and colleagues (2020) findings that mothers who took part in an elaborative reminiscing training had children that told more coherent narratives.

The results indicated that only high narrative coherence was significant in influencing the association between offspring's perceptions of interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. Even while moderate levels of narrative coherence was close to being significant, it is possible that both low and moderate levels of narrative coherence may signify inability to integrate the effects of interparental conflict upon their future optimism towards marriage. Minze and colleagues (2010) findings suggest that while interparental conflict may disrupt coherence and offspring's ability to understand events in an organized manner, it is possible that high coherence can be a protective factor for malfunctioning. It is possible too that in low to moderate narrative coherence there is an inability or reluctance of offspring to understand or learn from their parents' relationships via narrative coherence. This lack of coherence may also be passed down intergenerationally, similar to findings that by studies showing that parents level of coherence is a predictor of offsprings' coherence (i.e., Farrant and Reese, 2000; Haden, Ornstein, Rudek, & Cameron, 2009; Larkina and Bauer, 2010; Reese, Macfarlane, McAnally, Robertson, and Taumoepeau, 2020). This points towards higher levels of

narrative coherence (both offsprings and the total combined narrative coherence of both mother and offspring) as a possible indicator that offspring are more aware of the negative aspects of their parents' relationship, as were their mothers as well, and able to reflect upon these to infer upon their own relationship goals and future optimism towards marriage. These results can inform our understanding of the way individuals make sense of these relationship processes through multiple generations and how they interpret them.

Several limitations also need to be considered in interpreting the findings. Offsprings narrative coherence, while trending, did not moderate the association between offspring's perceptions of interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. It is possible that this is because parental influences play a larger role then what was anticipated in offsprings narrative coherence and their optimism towards marriage. Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman (1992) found that it was the parent's relationship, not offsprings own experiences with dating relationship, that predicted optimism about future romantic relationships. This paired with how parents may influence offsprings narrative coherence intergenerationally, indicates that further research should examine both parents and the mothers perceptions of interparental conflict, offsprings relationship satisfaction and history for a more detailed understanding on the difference between offsprings individual narrative coherence compared to the total combined narrative coherence of the mother and offspring. However, the availability of resources, such as my funds for compensation, limited our ability to obtain data from as many sources as would be ideal. Further, it would be relevant to examine the mother-offspring dyad and how mothers may influence more coherence in their offspring later in life.

Other limitations include the choice of sample inclusion criteria, sample diversity and methodology. Because of our criteria we did not include individual offspring participants that

were not in a relationship or married already. Diversity also posed another issue; it is possible that our findings are not generalizable to other ethnicities due to our largely white Caucasian, well-educated, sample that is not representative of the ethnic makeup of most cities in the United State, including Knoxville, TN. Moreover, this study was done cross-sectionally versus longitudinally, which means that any conclusions made from the current results regarding intergenerational influences on relationships are tentative explanations based upon correlations, rather than causation. It should also be noted that this study was composed mainly of self-report data, rather than observational data, and therefore our conclusions regarding interparental conflict and offsprings optimism towards marriage and are reliant upon the perspectives of the offspring who participated in this study. However, this study bears the strengths of incorporating both coder-rated offspring and mother participant interviews using a multi-informant design for the measure of narrative coherence.

Despite these limitations, this study enhances our understanding of narrative coherence within both an individual and intergenerational aspect. It is the first to indicate that high narrative coherence in both offspring and mothers combined may influence the relationship between offsprings' perceptions of interparental conflict and offspring's optimism towards marriage. These findings, in combination with other studies looking at narrative coherence upon offsprings' functioning (Minze, 2009; Minze, 2009; Müller & Perren, 2014) might prove useful in informing clinicians the importance of how individual organizes their thoughts and the willingness and/or ability of the individual to consider differing perspectives. It may also help in the development of interventions that focus on the importance of parental influence upon offsprings future cognition and functioning, in combination with the findings regarding elaborate discussion procedures to help facilitate coherence in offspring (Farrant and Reese, 2000; Haden,

Ornstein, Rudek, & Cameron, 2009; Larkina and Bauer, 2010; Reese, Macfarlane, McAnally, Robertson, and Taumoepeau, 2020). These results inform our understanding of the way individuals make sense of these relationship processes through multiple generations and how they interpret them. Researchers and clinicians should take care to consider how individuals understand their parental relationships and how these attitudes inform their current interpersonal functioning.

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Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Interparental Conflict	119	19.00	57.00	35.2521	11.47452
Optimism Towards Marriage	119	12.00	46.00	31.6193	8.67455
Offsprings' Coherence	119	6.67	19.00	12.9122	1.96431
Total Coherence	119	7.33	18.83	13.5303	1.78120

Table 2.

Correlations		Interparental Conflict	Optimism Towards Marriage	Offspring's Coherence	Mother's Coherence	Total Coherence
Interparental Conflict	Pearson Correlation	-	-.137	-.203*	-.302**	-.269**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.137	.026	.001	.003
	N	119	119	119	119	119
Optimism Towards Marriage	Pearson Correlation	-.137	-	.154	.024	.097
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.137		.095	.799	.295
	N	119	119	119	119	119
Offspring Coherence	Pearson Correlation	-.203*	.154	-	.749**	.939**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.095		.000	.000
	N	119	119	119	119	119
Mother's Coherence	Pearson Correlation	-.302**	.024	.749**	-	.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.799	.000		.000
	N	119	119	119	119	119
Total Coherence	Pearson Correlation	-.269**	.097	.939**	.931**	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.295	.000	.000	
	N	119	119	119	119	119

*. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

**. *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Table 3.

	β	**Std. Error**	**t**	**p value**
Interparental Conflict	.065	.039	1.645	.102
Offsprings' Coherence	.273	.124	2.200	.029*
Interparental Conflict x Offsprings' Coherence	-.005	.003	1.862	. 065

*Table 4. Interaction effect: offspring's report of interparental conflict x offsprings' narrative coherence about parental relationships; notes: ** = p < .01, * = p < .05*

Table 4.

	β	Std. Error	t	p value
Interparental Conflict	.107	.047	2.26	.026*
Total Coherence	.374	.146	2.55	.012*
Interparental Conflict x Total Coherence	-.008	.003	-2.46	.015*

*Table 5. Interaction effect: offspring's report of interparental conflict x total narrative coherence (mothers' and offsprings') about parental relationships; notes: ** = p < .01, * = p < .05*

Figure 1.

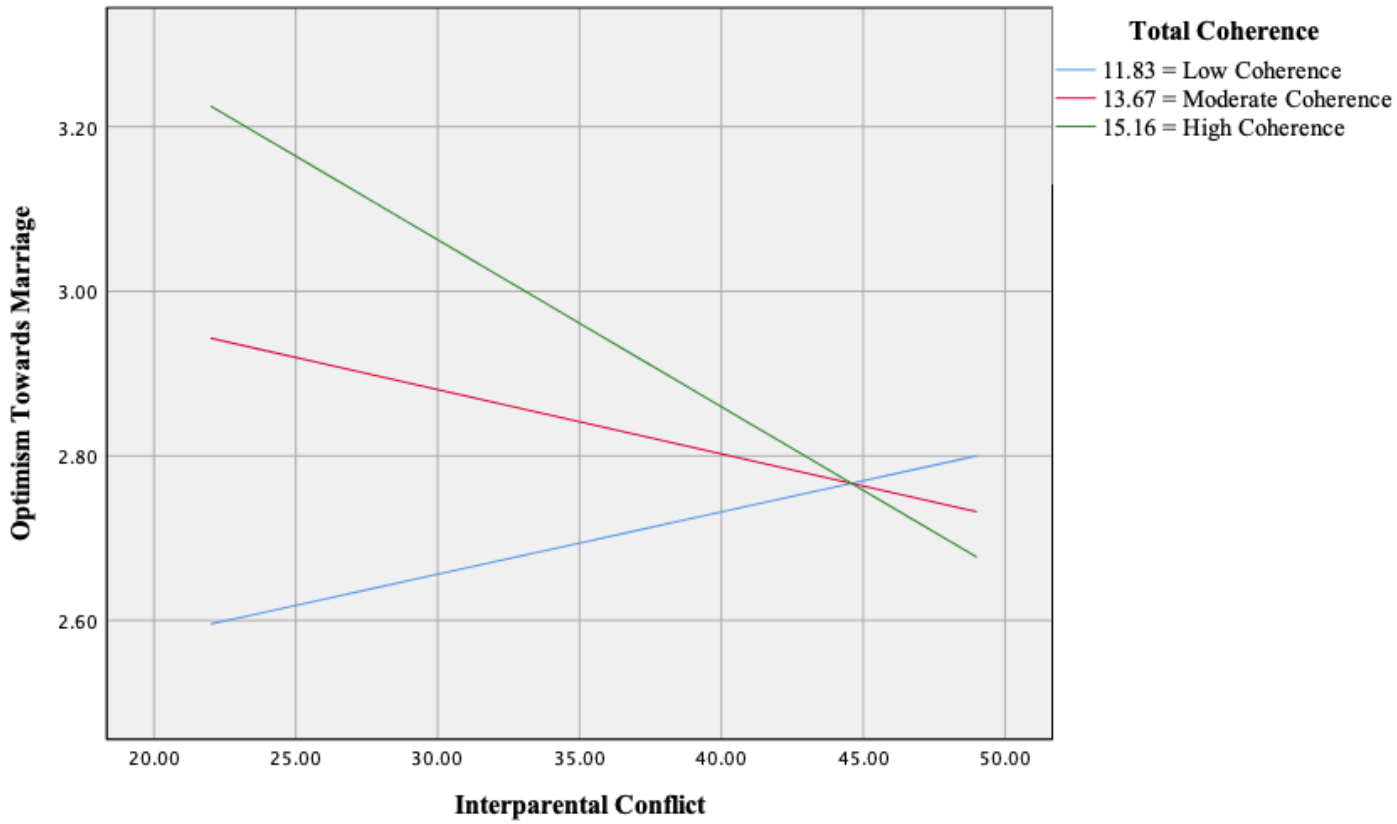


Figure 1. Interaction effect: offspring's report of interparental conflict x total narrative coherence (mothers' and offsprings') about parental relationships; notes: low interparental conflict scores (CPIC scores) indicates high interparental conflict.

Attitudes toward Marriage Scale
(Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001)

1. If you marry, to what extent will you miss the life you have had as a single person?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. In your opinion, to what extent will it trouble you to give up your personal freedom when you marry?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

3. In your opinion, will adjustment to married life be difficult for you?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

4. Do you ever have doubts as to whether you will enjoy living exclusively in marriage with one person after marriage?

Never					Frequently
0	1	2	3	4	5

5. In your opinion, to what extent will the responsibilities of married life be enjoyable to you?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. How happy do you think you will be if you marry?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

7. Do you think you will find (or have found) a person who is a suitable marriage partner for you? ☐ Yes ☐ No

8. Do you ever have doubts about your chance of having a successful marriage?

Never					Frequently
0	1	2	3	4	5

9. Do you think it would be advisable for you always to remain single? Yes No

10. Do you worry ever that the person you marry wouldn't fulfill his/her responsibilities in the marriage?

Never					Frequently
0	1	2	3	4	5

11. A bad marriage is better than no marriage at all. Yes ☐ No

Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992)

In every family there are times when the parents don't get along. When their parents argue or disagree, kids can feel a lot of different ways. We would like to know what kinds of feelings *you* have when *your* parents (primary parental figures) have arguments or disagreements. Circle the answer for each sentence that best describes your parents.

T = True ST = Sort of True F = False

1.	I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing.	T	ST	F
2.	When my parents have an argument they usually work it out.	T	ST	F
3.	My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school.	T	ST	F
4.	My parents get really mad when they argue.	T	ST	F
5.	When my parents argue I can do something to make myself feel better.	T	ST	F
6.	I get scared when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
7.	I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
8.	I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments.	T	ST	F
9.	They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot.	T	ST	F
10.	Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other.	T	ST	F
11.	My parents have arguments because they are not happy together.	T	ST	F
12.	When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly.	T	ST	F
13.	I don't know what to do when my parents have arguments.	T	ST	F
14.	My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around.	T	ST	F
15.	When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me.	T	ST	F
16.	It's usually my fault when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
17.	I often see my parents arguing.	T	ST	F
18.	When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution.	T	ST	F
19.	My parents' arguments are usually about something I did.	T	ST	F

20.	The reasons my parents argue never change.	T	ST	F
21.	When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other.	T	ST	F
22.	When my parents argue or disagree I can usually make things better.	T	ST	F
23.	When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen.	T	ST	F
24.	My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue.	T	ST	F
25.	Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
26.	My parents hardly ever argue.	T	ST	F
27.	When my parents argue they usually make up right away.	T	ST	F
28.	My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do.	T	ST	F
29.	My parents argue because they don't really love each other.	T	ST	F
30.	When my parents have an argument they yell a lot.	T	ST	F
31.	When my parents argue there's nothing I can do to stop them.	T	ST	F
32.	When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt.	T	ST	F
33.	I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.	T	ST	F
34.	My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house.	T	ST	F
35.	My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement.	T	ST	F
36.	My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong.	T	ST	F
37.	My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument.	T	ST	F
38.	After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly toward each other.	T	ST	F
39.	When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too.	T	ST	F
40.	My parents blame me when they have arguments.	T	ST	F
41.	My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue.	T	ST	F
42.	My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument.	T	ST	F
43.	When my parents argue or disagree there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better.	T	ST	F
44.	When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced.	T	ST	F
45.	My parents still act mean after they have had an argument.	T	ST	F
46.	My parents have arguments because they don't know how to get along.	T	ST	F

47.	Usually it's not my fault when my parents have arguments.	T	ST	F
48.	When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say.	T	ST	F

Structured Interview Questions

1. Please describe your parents' relationship with each other.

    - Give an example of an interaction that "sums up" your parents' relationship for you.
    - Why do you think your parents' relationship is the way that it is?
    - What was your mother's role in the relationship?
    - What was your father's role in the relationship?
    - What was your role in the family?
    - How did your parents show each other love?
    - How did your parents show each other support?
    - What did your parents' disagreements look like?
    - What did making-up look like with your parents?
    - How did your parents' relationship make you feel about getting married?

2. Please describe if and how your parents' relationship with each other has affected your current and/or past romantic relationships?

    - What did you learn about relationships from watching your parents interact?
    - (If their parents are divorced) How did you learn that your parents were going to get divorced?
    - (If they have a step-family) Did you learn anything different watching your step-parents?

Narrative Coding Form

ID: _____Date:_____Coder: _____

Section Codes (1-5)

		Parent's Relationship
Narrative Coherence	Internal Consistency	
	Organization	
	Flexibility	
Narrative Beliefs	Relationship Expectations	

Global Codes

View of parent's relationship (circle one): positive ambivalent negative

Short replies/little elaboration/requires multiple prompts from interviewer: Yes No