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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Katherine Suzanne Rowinski entitled “Clinic-Referred Mothers' Autobiographical Narratives as Markers of Their Parenting Styles.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

Robert G. Wahler, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

James Lawler

Daniela Corbetta

R. Steve McCallum

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges
Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Clinic-Referred Mothers' Autobiographical Narratives as Markers of
Their Parenting Styles

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Katherine Suzanne Rowinski
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Abstract

In theory, parents should use their autobiographical narratives to describe their parenting experiences, which should reflect their parenting style. Past correlational studies show that parents with coherent narratives tend to be more sensitive to their children. Since we know that authoritative parents are able to recognize the needs of their child and respond more appropriately and sensitively, it is likely that this capacity will also be referenced in their narratives. This study looked at the narratives of 40 mothers in relation to their parenting style and child's behavior. Results showed that narrative coherence was negatively associated with authoritarian parenting style. Authoritative parenting style was positively associated with child behavior problems, while authoritarian parenting style was negatively associated with child behavior problems. The implication of narrative coherence in relation to parenting is discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Parenting Style

Parenting is arguably one of the most important influences on the development of a child's life. The attitudes, beliefs, and practices that parents implement in raising their child can have beneficial or detrimental effects on the child's development. For example, parents have critical influences on children's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development (Holden & Edwards, 1989; Maccoby, 1984). The basic skills that children acquire and the lessons they learn are largely dependent on their interactions with their parents. Furthermore, poor parenting is considered a risk factor that contributes to the development of behavioral and emotional problems (Sanders & Morawska, 2005). Given that the parenting process has a very significant influence on child development and outcome, a detailed examination of parenting is warranted.

In child development research, it is often helpful to conceptualize parenting as a broad psychological construct which captures the standard strategies, beliefs, and attitudes parents use in raising their children. Theory and research tend to emphasize three important aspects of parenting: 1) parenting *goals and values*, 2) parenting *practices* used to help the child reach those goals, and 3) parenting *style*, which can be thought of as the general attitude or emotional context in which the parent carries out his/her goals through specific practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Diana Baumrind (1967) was the first to operationalize and empirically validate the construct of parenting style, a construct she created to describe the normal variations in parents' attempts to control and socialize their children (Baumrind, 1991). She found that parents differed in their attitudes about control, maturity demands, communication, and nurturance, which led her to specify three distinct parenting styles: *authoritative* parenting style, *authoritarian* parenting style, and *permissive* parenting style. Maccoby and Martin (1983) concluded that Baumrind's construct of parenting style has proven exceptionally robust because it combines a variety of heavily researched and empirically supported parenting constructs, such as affection, warmth, involvement, control, and punitiveness (Baumrind, 1971; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Maccoby, 1984).

More recently, Baumrind's three parenting styles have been conceptualized in terms of the relative amount of *responsiveness* and *demandingness* parents show to their child (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). *Responsiveness*, also known as warmth, refers to "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991). *Demandingness*, on the other hand, refers to behavioral control or "the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind, 1991). Similarly, Darling and Steinberg (1993) consider responsiveness as the parent's recognition of the child's individuality, and demandingness as the parent's willingness to act as a socializing agent. Both

responsiveness and demandingness are healthy and necessary components of good parenting.

Authoritative parenting style comprises a healthy balance of responsiveness and demandingness. Baumrind (1991) describes authoritative parents as parents who are warm and supportive, but also in control. These parents allow their children to form their own opinions and to justify or explain their behavior. These parents also monitor their children and set clear standards for their behavior. Punishment is always measured and consistent, rather than harsh or arbitrary. Some of the positive parenting qualities that authoritative parents demonstrate are warmth, non-punitive discipline, consistency, and bidirectional communication (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In particular, authoritative parenting seems to be characterized by effective parent-child communication (Reitman, Rhode, Hupp, & Altobello, 2002).

In general, authoritative parenting is the preferred style of parenting because of its repeated association with positive child outcomes. For example, children of authoritative parents score higher on measures of competence, social development, self-esteem, mental health (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and academic achievement (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Baumrind (1991) found that children of authoritative parents tend to be self-reliant, self-controlled, inquisitive, competent, and popular with peers, and they report high self-esteem. As adolescents, children of authoritative parents tend to be socially and academically competent, self-reliant, and well-behaved (Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Mayseless, Scharf, & Sholt, 2003). Extensive literature indicates

that positive parenting, indicated by warmth and appropriate discipline, is associated with fewer child behavior problems (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). Furthermore, maternal warmth is a protective factor against child problem behaviors when paternal harsh physical discipline is high (McKee et al., 2007). Overall, authoritative parenting can lead to children who are more articulate, happy, confident, and successful.

In contrast to authoritative parents, *authoritarian* parents tend to be overly demanding and they are unresponsive to their children. These parents show low amounts of support and warmth by being cold and insensitive to the child's needs. They often threaten to withdraw love and attention as a means of psychological control, and they use more punitive and physical discipline (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritarian parenting style is characterized by a chronic inclination to become coercive and harsh, with high expectations of conformity and compliance to parental rules; rules that are seldom explained to the child (Baumrind, 1991). Communication between authoritarian parents and their child tends to be less effective and more one-sided. In fact, two measures of authoritarian parenting include "family communication" items that emphasize high demands without democratic or open communication (Kochanska, 1990; Dornbusch et al., 1987). It is possible that the lack of bidirectional communication between a parent and child contributes to the problems experienced by children of authoritarian parents.

The adverse effects of authoritarian parenting on child development are salient. Children of authoritarian parents often suffer from low self-esteem and low self-confidence, and they tend to be socially and academically incompetent (Baumrind, 1991). They are also more likely to be socially withdrawn and unhappy (Baumrind, 1991). As

adolescents, children of authoritarian parents tend to have lower social competence and lower academic achievement compared to children of authoritative parents (Lamborn et al., 1991; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg et al., 1989). Furthermore, harsh punishment, a defining feature of authoritarian parenting, is not an appropriate way to discipline children (Straus & Field, 2003; Straus & Stewart, 1999). Past research has shown an association between harsh discipline and higher levels of child externalizing disorders (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002; Kim, Conger, Elder Jr., & Lorenz, 2003; Strassberg, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992). McKee et al. (2007) found that, despite positive parenting practices, harsh discipline was associated with child internalizing and externalizing problems. Although harsh discipline is an almost universal parenting practice in the United States (Straus & Field, 2003), it has been considered the most crippling and problematic parenting practice of all (Patterson, 1982).

Permissive parenting style is characterized by the tendency to be over-responsive and undemanding. Permissive parents are usually warm, nurturing, indulgent, and sensitive, but have few behavioral expectations for their child. Reitman et al. (2002) found that permissiveness was correlated with lax and nonrestrictive disciplinary practices. Although permissive parents exhibit some of the positive parenting qualities that are observed in authoritative parents (e.g., warmth and sensitivity), this type of parenting is problematic because the parent lacks behavioral control over the child. Behavioral control is important since this is how the child becomes socialized and learns

how to function in society. Therefore, it is crucial that parents implement appropriate disciplinary and limit-setting efforts in raising their child.

Since children of permissive parents are not required to regulate themselves or their behavior appropriately, they are often impulsive, immature, and irresponsible (Baumrind, 1991). They usually lack self-reliance and inquisitiveness (Baumrind, 1970, 1971). As adolescents, they are more prone to engage in misconduct and drug use. Higher parental permissiveness is associated with lower academic achievement (Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg et al., 1989). For the most part, children of permissive parents are unhappy and dependent (Baumrind, 1991).

In summary, authoritative parenting style, with a healthy balance of parental responsiveness and demandingness, appears superior to authoritarian and permissive parenting styles in terms of fostering academic achievement and social adjustment (Baumrind, 1991; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Reitman & Gross, 1997). Although much is known about the effect of parenting style on child development, little is known about the *process* through which parenting style influences child development. To understand this process, one must recognize three different aspects of parenting: 1) the socialization goals, 2) the parenting practices used to reach those goals, and 3) the parenting style, or emotional climate, within which socialization occurs (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

In an integrative model of two socialization theories, one focused on the study of specific practices and the other focused on the study of global parent characteristics, Darling and Steinberg (1993) propose that parenting style is a context that facilitates or undermines parents' efforts to socialize their children. In other words, parenting style is a

constellation of attitudes about the child that is communicated to the child, which creates an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviors and specific practices are expressed (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Essentially, parenting *style* is what influences the child's willingness to comply, whereas parenting *practices* are the specific behaviors used to teach the child how to comply.

Therefore, the right kind of parenting style, such as authoritative parenting style, will generate attitudes that promote bidirectional communication (i.e., the parent is willing to listen to the child). On the other hand, a maladaptive parenting style, such as authoritarian parenting style, will generate attitudes that disfavor bidirectional communication (i.e., the parent discourages parent-child discourse). Permissive parents may overvalue the child's contribution to the relationship, which may be equally detrimental. Darling and Steinberg (1993) have theorized that it is important for a parent to promote bidirectional communication with the child because this will promote the child's willingness to comply, or to be socialized. In other words, open communication between parent and child will moderate the influence of parenting practices on child outcome, making parenting practices more effective.

If parenting style serves as the context that influences: 1) a parent's attitudes about bidirectional communication with the child, 2) the parent's behaviors, and 3) the child's willingness to comply, then the next question of interest concerns how parents might acquire their parenting style. Evidence of parenting style can be found by asking parents to talk about their parenting experiences via their autobiographical narratives. Research studies suggest that mothers who are able to tell narratives through clear and

elaborate pictures of who, what, where, how, and why, manifest more appropriate and sensitive parenting practices (van IJzendoorn, 1995; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Koren-Karie, Oppenheim, Dolev, Sher, & Etzion-Carasso, 2002). On the other hand, inappropriate parenting has been found to covary with ambiguous, sparse, and tangential narrative accounts of the past (van IJzendoorn, 1995). These studies are important because they point to parents' coherently-told autobiographical narratives as markers of their capacity to respond appropriately or inappropriately during interactions with their children.

In theory, parents should use their autobiographical narratives to describe their parenting experiences, which should reflect their parenting style. Since we know that authoritative parents are able to recognize the needs of their child and respond more appropriately and sensitively (van IJzendoorn, 1995; Main et al., 1985), it is likely that this capacity will also be referenced in their narratives. If a parent's style is authoritarian or permissive, we must assume that evidence of this will be found in that parent's narratives about their children and themselves. We turn now to the research on the function of parents' autobiographical narratives.

Parents' Autobiographical Narratives

The approach used to investigate parents' autobiographical narratives in the current study follows Vygotsky's (1962) social-developmental model in which parents' narratives acquire coherence through the guidance of their parents who helped them co-construct narratives of past events. According to social constructivism theory (Vygotsky,

1978), a more detailed and better organized narrative should promote awareness of others' perspectives (e.g., empathy), through two closely connected processes. First, improvements in a narrator's story-telling coherence are partly due to the listener's input, meaning that the narrator can compare his/her perspective with that of the listener (Astington, 1996; Dunn, Brown, Slomkowski, Tesla, & Youngblade, 1991). Second, these comparisons of "my experience as distinct from yours" ought to enhance and stabilize the narrator's sense of self, a prerequisite for appreciating another person's very different viewpoint (Bird & Reese, 2006; Fivush, 1993). Similarly, research based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive development has focused on the importance of parent-child conversations about the past to the development of one's clear and rich autobiographical recall (Fivush, 1991; Hudson, 1990; Nelson, 1993). As these researchers discovered, one's clear and rich stories of personal experiences are markers of that narrator's ability to empathize with people in the present (see Welch-Ross, 1997). In this study, we assumed that parents' autobiographical narratives of their past experiences acquire coherence through the guidance provided by their own parents who encouraged story organization skills.

In this study, *narrative coherence* is defined by the structural components of parents' autobiographical narratives: how the content of the narrative is presented, rather than the content itself. While some notions of narrative coherence test the accuracy of recall of specific memories, we are primarily interested in how well a narrative is organized or presented. It does not matter if the memory is true or false. In order for a narrative to be considered coherent, the content can be true or false, positive or negative,

as long as it is structured into an easily understood story. Thus, a coherent narrative should reference structural qualities that enhance the *clarity* and *richness* of one's autobiographical narrative.

The *clarity* of one's autobiographical narrative should evidence three important features: *central point*, *happenings*, and *organization*. First, a narrative must have a central point, which presents the main facts and events, justifying the reason for telling the story. Second, the happenings, or events, throughout the narrative should be detailed enough to allow a listener to visualize what took place. Third, these events should be presented in an organized way, usually with a beginning, middle, and end, constituting a developmental process in which the central point unfolds as the story is told. When a narrative demonstrates central point, happenings, and organization, it is considered a clearly-told story.

While the clarity of one's autobiographical narrative is one aspect of coherence, the *richness* of one's story provides another facet. The richness of one's autobiographical narrative adds to coherence through three important features: *orientation*, *internal states*, and *causality*. First, the narrative should be anchored by referencing specific times and places, which orients the listener to when and where the happenings took place. Second, the narrator should reference his/her internal states by describing personal thoughts and feelings, which make the story come to life. Third, there should be some indication of contemplation about why things happened the way they did, demonstrating a complex view of causality that implies deliberation and free-will. Since this kind of contemplating will likely incorporate others' perspectives, we believe the causality dimension of

narrative coherence most closely resembles empathy, the ability to identify with the feelings and thoughts of another.

When parents are able to tell detailed, organized, complex, and insightful stories (i.e., coherent narratives), they are more likely to entertain the child's point of view and express empathy, a primary quality of authoritative parenting. These parents are more likely to see the necessity of warmth and discipline in child-rearing. According to Dix (1992), empathy is an important parenting goal, which involves establishing a nurturing and responsive environment. Empathy is also important in generating bidirectional communication between parent and child. When parents promote bidirectional communication by showing a genuine interest in what the child says, the child may be more willing to comply (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parents, who manifest inappropriate and insensitive practices, should tell autobiographical narratives that are more dismissive, ambiguous, and disorganized (van IJzendoorn, 1995). One would expect these narratives to be narrow-minded and one-sided, because these parents do not see, nor encourage the child's point of view. Permissive parents allow the child to use his/her point of view without constraints. Without valuing the child's unique perspective or encouraging bidirectional communication, the parent has an inaccurate appraisal of the situation, which could easily lead to inappropriate parenting practices that are too harsh or too lax.

In summary, parents' autobiographical narratives should reflect the parents' attitudes about their child and parenting in general. If parental attitudes are authoritative, then parents' narrative should be coherent, providing the understanding that allows them

to interact with their child appropriately. If parental attitudes are authoritarian or permissive, then parents' narratives should be incoherent, interfering with their understanding of their child, and potentially leading to inappropriate parenting practices.

Hypotheses

The first objective of this study was to replicate the connection between parenting style and child behavior. Specifically, we hypothesized that authoritative parenting style would be associated with fewer child behavior problems, and authoritarian and permissive parenting styles would be associated with more child behavior problems.

The second objective of this study was to examine the connection between parenting style and the coherence of parent narratives. If parenting style does, in fact, influence parental attitudes about bidirectional communication with the child, then we expect the evidence of these components to be found in parent narratives. We believe that when parents tell coherent narratives about their parenting experiences, they will show more authoritative parenting qualities and fewer authoritarian and permissive parenting qualities. Similarly, an incoherent narrative should be associated with authoritarianism and permissiveness. We do not expect to see a relation between narrative coherence and child behavior problems because there is no clear or direct linkage between the way a parent tells his/her narrative and the child's behavior; rather, the effects are expected to operate through parenting style.

Lastly, if narrative coherence is shown to be a marker of parenting style, we will examine the predictive values of the various components comprising our coherence

construct. Although all of the components of narrative coherence should be important, we expected causality to be the driving force of narrative coherence in predicting parenting style, since causality most closely resembles empathy. Causality, which should reflect the ability of the parent to entertain the child's point of view, is what allows a parent to be empathic, and hence more authoritative. Therefore, examining narrative coherence and its relation to parenting style may provide insight into the process through which parenting style affects child outcome.

Chapter 2

Method

Participants

The participants of this study were 40 primary caregivers (37 mothers, 2 stepmothers, and 1 grandmother) residing in eastern Tennessee. Only female participants were included in this study because we planned for a smaller sample and usually the primary caregiver in the family is the mother. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 54 years old, with an average age of 38 years. These participants had at least one child who was taken or being taken to a psychological clinic. There was no age limit for the child (ages ranged from 4 to 31 years old; Mean = 11.5, SD = 5.3) and there were 25 boys and 9 girls. An earlier version of the demographic questionnaire did not require participants to report child age and gender, thus 7 children had unidentified ages and 6 children had unreported gender. Most participants identified themselves as Caucasian, one identified herself as African-American, one identified herself as Hispanic-American, and two participants did not respond. With respect to marital status, 19 participants reported being currently married, 13 reported being divorced, 4 reported being remarried, 2 reported being single and never married, 1 reported being separated, and 1 did not respond. Mean education level was 13.85 years, with a range of “some high school” education to graduate school completion. Most participants reported an annual household income between \$20-50,000 per year. 14 participants reported residing in an urban

setting, 13 in a small town, 11 in a rural setting, and 2 did not respond. Demographic data for the sample are presented in Table 1.

All participants were contacted by phone after they had filled out a recruitment flier at the University of Tennessee Psychological Clinic stating they were interested in participating in a research study to tell about their parenting experiences. The only inclusion criterion for this study was that the participant must be taking or have taken at least one of their children to a psychological clinic for any reason. Of the 43 participants that were interviewed, only 3 participants were excluded because of missing data on one or more variables of interest.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics

	Number (%)	Range	Mean (SD)
Age (years)		24 – 54	38.10 (8.32)
Child Age (years)		4 – 31	11.45 (5.33)
Child Gender			
Male	25 (62.5)		
Female	9 (22.5)		
Not Reported	6 (15)		
Ethnicity			
Caucasian	36 (90)		
African-American	1 (2.5)		
Hispanic-American	1 (2.5)		
Not Reported	2 (5)		
Education ¹		1 – 5	2.90 (1.10)
Annual Income ²		1 – 4	2.68 (.99)

¹ Education level was coded on a 5-point scale where 1 = some high school, 2 = high school diploma, 3 = two-year college and/or associate degree, 4 = college (B.A. or B.S.), 5 = graduate work. (1 participant did not respond).

² Annual income was coded on a 4-point scale where 1 = <\$10,000, 2 = \$10,000-20,000, 3 = \$20,000-50,000, 4 = >\$50,000. (2 participants did not respond).

Procedure

Participants came to the University of Tennessee Psychological Clinic for an interview lasting 45 to 60 minutes. Undergraduate and graduate research assistants were trained to conduct the standardized interview. In order to reduce interviewer-based variance, the research assistants were trained to make standardized introductory conversation, read through the informed consent, briefly explain the study, ask the same four questions to prompt autobiographical narratives, and provide standard responses following each narrative, such as “Can you tell me anything more?” or “Is there anything you’d like to add?”

The first five minutes of the interview consisted of a brief explanation of the study and review of the informed consent. The participants also filled out a brief questionnaire about demographic characteristics. The next 30 minutes of the interview consisted of participants telling four basic autobiographical narratives in response to four standard questions about parenting. Two self-report questionnaires, one measuring parenting style and the other measuring child behavior problems, were administered to the participants during the remaining time of the interview. Several other questionnaires were administered, which were not pertinent to the current study. Participants were compensated with a \$40 gift-card to Walmart or Best Buy upon completion of their participation in the study.

Measures

Participants completed a demographics questionnaire along with several other self-report measures and four autobiographical narratives. The measures that were analyzed for this study were part of a larger battery of questionnaires.

Demographic and background variables

A demographic questionnaire was administered to obtain data on participants' age, ethnicity, highest education level, marital status, annual household income, place of residence, and age/gender of child.

Parenting style

The Parental Authority Questionnaire – Revised (PAQ-R; Reitman et al., 2002) is a 30-item, self-report questionnaire used to examine the parenting styles used by participants in raising their own child/children. The PAQ-R is a parent version of Buri's (1991) Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ), a reliable 30-item, self-report instrument used to measure adolescents' ratings of their parents' parenting style, based on Baumrind's (1971) typology of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive parenting styles. In designing the PAQ-R, item content from the PAQ was retained and questions were edited to convert the second-person grammatical format to first-person pronominals. No items were deleted from the original PAQ, but 13 items were altered slightly for content, grammar, and/or readability.

Like the PAQ, the PAQ-R consists of 30 items comprising an authoritative parenting subscale, an authoritarian parenting subscale, and a permissive parenting subscale of 10 items per subscale. The authoritative subscale includes statements such as: “I have directed my children’s activities and decisions through reasoning and discipline.” The authoritarian subscale includes items such as: “Whenever I tell my children to do something, I expect them to do it immediately without asking any questions.” The permissive subscale includes statements such as: “I seldom give my children expectations and guidelines for their behavior.” Items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Subscale scores range from 10 to 50, with higher scores representing greater appraised levels of the parental authority prototype. Since the PAQ-R is intended for parents with children ranging from 3 to 8 years old, the participants in this study with children over the age of 8 were instructed to think about (and rate) their general parenting behavior and beliefs when their child was younger.

Reitman et al. (2002) obtained factor analytic and reliability data for the PAQ-R from three diverse samples. Reliability data were generally consistent. Internal consistency of the PAQ-R subscales ranged from .56 to .77, with coefficient alphas averaging .66 for the authoritative subscale, .74 for the authoritarian subscale, and .74 for the permissive subscale. Modest convergent validity was demonstrated for the PAQ-R subscales via their predicted correlations with conceptually similar scales on other parenting measures (PS; Arnold, O’Leary, Wolff, & Acker, 1993; PCRI; Gerard, 1994).

Child behavior problems

The Shortform Assessment for Children (SAC; Glisson, Hemmelgarn, & Post, 2002) was used to assess the overall mental health and psychosocial functioning of the participants' child. If the participant had more than one child, she was asked to focus on the child who was taken or being taken to a psychological clinic. The SAC consists of 48 items comprising two subscales: 24 items to assess internalizing behaviors, such as withdrawal, somatization, depression and anxiety, and 24 items to assess externalizing behaviors, such as fighting, lying, stealing. Each item has a 3-point response format to describe the frequency of behaviors, such that 0 = never occurs, 1 = sometimes occurs, and 2 = often occurs. The two subscales can be summed for a measure of total child behavior problems. Scores can range from 0 to 48 for each subscale and 0 to 96 for the total scale, with higher scores representing more behavioral problems observed in the child. Since the SAC is intended for parents with children ranging from 4 to 18 years old, the three participants in this study with children over the age of 18 were instructed to think about (and rate) their child's behavior when he/she was younger.

The SAC is a shorter version of the Child Behavior Checklist - parent version (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991a) and Teacher Report Form (TRF; Achenbach, 1991b); two measures that have been widely used to measure children's overall mental health. Hemmelgarn, Glisson, and Sharp (2003) found the SAC to be highly correlated with the CBCL (parent version). Previous studies have confirmed the validity of the SAC, all using distinct and separate samples of children (Glisson et al., 2002; Hemmelgarn et al., 2003; Tyson & Glisson, 2005). All of these studies used large samples to establish

construct validity, criterion validity, and cross-ethnic validity of the SAC when used to assess children who had been referred to child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Reliability alphas ranging from .86 to .90 for the internalizing subscale and .94 to .96 for the externalizing subscale provide support for the internal consistency of the items as indicators of internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Glisson et al., 2002).

Autobiographical narratives

Participants spent approximately twenty minutes telling four autobiographical narratives in response to four open-ended questions about their parenting experience and being parented in their families of origin. Oral narratives were used instead of written narratives following a precedent set by Main et al. (1985). Unlike written narratives which allow for more deliberate processing and revision, spontaneous oral narratives are more likely to be influenced by the narrator's emotions and thus, are more likely to reveal the narrator's organizational ability to immediately draw upon his or her memories of personal experiences. The narratives were audio-taped on a cassette recorder and then transcribed, word-for-word, into written format.

The autobiographical narratives were prompted by the following four questions:

- a. Can you tell me why you decided to bring your child to this clinic?
- b. What's it like to live with your child?
- c. When your child was younger, what do you remember about being a parent?
- d. Can you tell me what you can remember about life with your parents?

These questions were used because they are open-ended, general questions that prompt participants to tell the personal stories of their life. The first two questions were aimed at generating a recent history of child care experiences, while the last two questions prompted stories about the far past history of the participant's broader experiences. By telling two narratives from the recent past and two narratives from the far past, participants were expected to give representative samples of their personal experiences as parents. If participants gave less than a five-minute narrative for any one question, the interviewer gave only one prompt such as "Can you tell me more about that?" or "Do you have anything to add?" No interpretations, reflections, or direct suggestions were made. Each session was completely transcribed and then coded for narrative coherence.

Coding narrative coherence

The construct of narrative coherence was operationalized in a coding system created by Wahler, Rowinski, and Williams (unpublished), and consists of six indices: central point, happenings, organization, orientation, internal states, and causality. Central point, happenings, and organization make a story clear, while orientation, internal states, and causality make a story rich. Ideally, one's narrative should be clear and rich: the specific events should be presented in an organized manner supporting the central point; and the story should be enhanced by referring to time and place, personal thoughts and feelings, and why things happened the way they did.

The *central point* index of narrative coherence refers to the manner in which the narrator describes one main point, constituting the gist of the story. It is the reason for

telling the story. If there are several central points, these points must be connected meaningfully. Narratives that score high on the central point index should have a main point that is clear and consistently evident throughout the narrative. In contrast, narratives that score low on the central point index are disconnected or vague, with no main point. This kind of narrative may seem like it is rambling, with no apparent purpose or direction in the story. Narratives receiving a moderate score on the central point index may have two or more main points that are not connected meaningfully.

The *happenings* index of narrative coherence addresses the extent to which the narrative contains specific, detailed events that allow the listener to visualize what took place. High-scoring narratives on the happenings index describe at least one event with concrete words and actions, which is detailed enough to provide clarity. Narratives scoring low on this index are global and abstract, with no clear picture of events. In other words, a listener would have to use great imagination to visualize what happened, which may or may not be what the narrator is trying to describe. Narratives receiving a moderate score on the happenings index may summarize some events, but have little or no details to describe these events.

The *organization* index of narrative coherence refers to the presence of a logical framework for the story. The events, or happenings, must be presented in an organized way, usually with a beginning, middle, and end, constituting a developmental process in which the central point unfolds as the story is told. Narratives scoring high on the organization index have a holistic and well-organized quality, and support the central point. Low-scoring narratives on this index are confusing and disorganized, with no clear

pattern of events. Narratives receiving a moderate score on the organization index have no clear connection across the events, and some of the events do not relate to the central point.

The *orientation* index of narrative coherence gives information about when and where the happenings occurred. Time is indicated by specific dates, days, hours, and ages, while place is indicated by locations such as home, school, and work. Narratives scoring high on the orientation index will reference at least one specific time and one specific place. Narratives scoring low on this index will not reference any time or place. A moderate score is given when the narrator makes a vague reference to time and place (e.g., “Growing up” or “Where I lived”).

The *internal states* index of narrative coherence addresses the extent to which internal thoughts and feelings are referenced. A story can come to life when the narrator makes evaluative comments about what he/she was thinking and how he/she was feeling. A narrator may also reference others’ thoughts and feelings. High-scoring narratives on the internal states index disclose thoughts and feelings that are well-integrated. Low-scoring narratives do not reference thoughts or feelings and may seem like a purely factual account. Narratives receiving a moderate score on this index might reference thoughts or feelings, but not both.

The *causality* index of narrative coherence captures the narrator’s ability to reflect on the different reasons the happenings may have occurred. The ideas and explanations about why the happenings occurred reflect the narrator’s interest in contemplating cause and effect. High-scoring narratives on the causality index demonstrate complex views of

causality that imply deliberation and free-will. The narrator attempts to explain the events by considering personal choice and multiple causes. In contrast, low-scoring narratives will not reference any causality. These narratives are purely descriptive, with no consideration for why the happenings occurred. A moderate score demonstrates a very simple and linear view of causality. Only a singular, external cause is referenced, implying little or no deliberation on the narrator's part. With simplistic causality, the narrator describes being compelled to act, rather than taking ownership and demonstrating personal choice and free-will.

For each narrative account, a narrative coherence coding system (Wahler et al., unpublished) yielded six discrete scores (one for each of the indices described above) on a 5-point Likert-type scale in which 1 = very poor or non-existent, 2 = poor, 3 = satisfactory, 4 = good, 5 = excellent (see Appendix A). Each narrative was then given a total score, which was the sum of the six individual index scores given for that narrative, with a possible range of 6 to 30. An overall coherence score was calculated by summing all scores across the four narratives for each participant, with a possible range of 24 to 120. Three raters trained in the Wahler et al. (unpublished) coding system independently coded all of the narratives.

An example of a narrative that scored low across all six indices (central point = 1, happenings = 1, organization = 1, orientation = 1, internal states = 2, and causality = 1) was provided by a participant who recalled what she remembered about being a parent when her child was younger:

I've always been a hands-on parent. I've either been at home or his father has. He was, he still is, a very loving child. And he's been a great joy, but

he has his moments that push us all over. He's always been very sweet, very kind. You know, fun, mischievous. He was a good little boy, and still is.

Since this narrative scored consistently low across all six indices it is considered an incoherent narrative. This narrative is ambiguous and sparse. It does not seem to have a central point and it lacks a description of specific happenings. There is little content to be organized, and even so, it is disorganized and confusing. No personal thoughts or feelings are referenced. There are no time or place references, leaving the listener confused about when and where the story takes place. Overall, it doesn't seem like a story at all.

An example of a particularly coherent narrative which scored moderate to high across all six indices (central point = 3, happenings = 4, organization = 4, orientation = 5, internal states = 5, and causality = 4) was provided by a participant who described what she remembered about life with her parents:

Well, I remember a lot of mostly good things about being a child. I was thinking just yesterday about playing outside all the time. As far as actual interaction with my parents, I remember thinking my mother was the most wonderful mother in the whole world. When I was about 13, we started to not get along at all and we still have rough things going on and I remember thinking my mother was a really good mother for little children, but she didn't do as good of a job as a mother of a teenager. But that may have just been because I was a teenager, I don't know. My father, what I remember about him, this probably isn't fair, but I remember him watching TV a lot and lying on the sofa and falling asleep watching TV. I was always wanting to play... having to beg him. I have one memory of being spanked because I wanted him to play with me. He was babysitting me while my mother went somewhere and I wanted him to play outside with me and he said he would after he took a nap. I got bored of waiting and I went off. We lived in ministry housing in Cedar Range Apartments at the time, and I was 3 probably and I wandered off to one of the other playgrounds. There used to be a swing set at each building and I wandered off to one of the other buildings' swing sets and he came down

and he smacked me outside. But that was really rare. That's why I remember that because he never spanked me. That was one of the times he ever laid a hand on me, so that's why I remember it I guess. My parents were really young when I was born. My father was 20 and my mother was 22. And I was an only child for 4 and half years and lived there at Cedar Range Apartments. I remember a lot of fun things there. Picnics outside, running around with freedom, playing with the other kids, and just running around the place. It's funny, my sister lives there now and she lives in the apartment exactly across from the one we lived in when I was little. And she's got two little kids and they run around there and they have the best time and she just loves living there, and I love going over there because it gives me a warm fuzzy feeling to be over there. I was happy, I was really happy when I was little.

Given that this narrative scored moderate to high across the six indices, it is considered a coherent narrative. This narrator gives a clear picture of the circumstances surrounding her life at the time of the different events. The narrative received a moderate score for central point because there were several main points that were not clearly connected. Although the overarching theme seems to be about the participant's positive childhood experience, the narrative seems to occasionally diverge from the central point. The narrative incorporates detailed happenings that are easy to visualize. This narrative also references detailed times and places, such as "13 years old" and "Cedar Range apartments", while also referencing integrated thoughts and feelings, such as "that's why I remember it" and "I was happy". Causality is referenced when the participant makes the connection of going to the playground without her father and then getting spanked. Although she does not directly state it, she implies that her actions caused the response from her father.

It is important to note that the length of the narrative does not necessarily determine its coherence. While the first example is notably short, this does not make it

an incoherent narrative. Rather, it is the lack of key components of a good story that make the first narrative incoherent. Although the second example is lengthy, it is coherent because it has components that make the story clear and elaborate. If this narrative was confusing and hard-to-follow, it would be considered an incoherent narrative.

Chapter 3

Results

Data Analysis

First, we provide an overall description of all self-report variables and narrative coherence variables. Then, we present the scale characteristics calculated from the current sample. Next, we describe a series of correlational analyses that we conducted to assess the relationships between parenting style and child behavior problems, and between parenting style and narrative coherence. Finally, we present the regression analyses that reveal the relative contributions of the three parenting styles to child behavior problems and the relative contributions of the narrative coherence indices to parenting style.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics of all self-report variables (i.e., parenting style and child behavior problems) and narrative coherence indices are presented in Table 2. Most participants rated themselves as having high levels of authoritative parenting style ($M = 42.53$, $SD = 3.68$). Participants generally rated themselves as having lower levels of authoritarian parenting style ($M = 29.23$, $SD = 5.62$) and permissive parenting style ($M = 21.63$, $SD = 4.07$). Participants reported more child externalizing behaviors ($M = 19.63$, $SD = 11.17$) than internalizing behaviors ($M = 14.98$, $SD = 9.28$), with a mean score of 34.60 ($SD = 17.97$) for total child behavior problems. Overall narrative coherence scores

ranged from 47 to 87, with participants showing low to mid coherence on average ($M = 68.19$, $SD = 10.89$). The six indices of narrative coherence (central point, happenings, organization, orientation, internal states, and causality) had similar ranges and averages, with means ranging from 10.27 ($SD = 2.22$) for orientation to 12.51 ($SD = 2.73$) for causality.

Table 2 Scale characteristics and descriptive statistics

	Range	Mean (SD)
Parenting Style		
Authoritative	35 – 49	42.53 (3.68)
Authoritarian	18 – 32	29.23 (5.62)
Permissive	16 – 32	21.63 (4.07)
Child Behavior problems		
Total	5 – 74	34.60 (17.97)
Externalizing	1 – 43	19.63 (11.17)
Internalizing	2 – 38	14.98 (9.28)
Narrative Coherence	47 – 87	68.19 (10.89)
Central Point	5 – 17	11.96 (2.16)
Happenings	4 – 16	10.83 (2.45)
Organization	5 – 17	11.25 (2.13)
Orientation	4 – 17	10.27 (2.22)
Internal States	4 – 19	11.38 (2.92)
Causality	4 – 18	12.51 (2.73)

Scale characteristics

In the current sample, the PAQ-R parenting style subscales showed moderate internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas equal to .68 for the authoritative parenting style subscale, .71 for the authoritarian parenting style subscale, and .51 for the permissive parenting style subscale. As one can see, only the authoritative and authoritarian parenting style subscales proved to be good scales in the current study, and participants tended to rate themselves as one or the other. The SAC showed good internal consistency within the current sample, with Cronbach's alphas equal to .95 for the overall total, .90 for the internalizing subscale, and .94 for the externalizing subscale, providing support for our use of these scales as dependable indicators of internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and overall child behavior problems. The narrative coherence measure showed good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha equal to .71 for overall coherence. Cronbach's alphas for each of the six indices were also good: $\alpha = .75$ for central point, $\alpha = .84$ for happenings, $\alpha = .71$ for organization, $\alpha = .76$ for orientation, $\alpha = .84$ for internal states, and $\alpha = .79$ for causality.

The three raters' who coded the narratives achieved low to high inter-rater reliability, with overall coherence having good rater agreement. The raters' agreement was computed through intra-class correlation coefficients (ICC) and were as follows: .63 for central point, .77 for happenings, .45 for organization, .74 for orientation, .71 for internal states, .57 for causality, and .67 for overall narrative coherence. Since all three raters achieved good inter-rater agreement, averages of all three raters' scores were used for all data analyses involving the overall coherence score and the six index scores.

Intercorrelations of the six indices of narrative coherence showed varied correlations between most indices, ranging from .13 to .71. The strongest correlations were found between the happenings and orientation indices, $r = .71$, and between the internal states and causality indices, $r = .71$. The weakest correlations were found between the central point and happenings indices, $r = .14$, and between the central point and orientation indices, $r = .13$. The correlated indices of narrative coherence, with the exception of central point, provide additional support for the creation of an average coherence variable for use in analyses, as seen in previous research of narrative coherence (Adler, Wagner, & McAdams, 2007; Baerger & McAdams, 1999).

Relationships between variables

There were no significant correlations between any of the demographic variables and the other variables. Table 3 displays the bivariate correlations between the major variables: parenting style, child behavior problems, and narrative coherence. There was a significant negative correlation between authoritative parenting style and total child behavior problems, $r = -.38$, $p < .05$, suggesting that authoritative parenting is associated with fewer child behavior problems. Authoritative parenting was also associated with fewer internalizing behaviors, $r = -.46$, $p < .01$.

In contrast, authoritarian parenting was found to be maladaptive. There was a significant positive correlation between authoritarian parenting style and total child behavior problems, $r = .34$, $p < .05$, suggesting that authoritarian parenting is associated with more child behavior problems. Authoritarian parenting style was also associated

with more externalizing behaviors, $r = .40$, $p < .01$. These correlations support Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1978) well-established associations between parenting style and child behavior; authoritative parenting style is associated with better child behavior, while authoritarian parenting style is associated with worse child behavior. There was no correlation between permissive parenting style and child behavior problems, which is likely a result of the low internal consistency ($\alpha = .51$) of the permissive parenting style subscale in our sample.

Narrative coherence did not correlate with child behavior; however, there was a significant negative correlation between narrative coherence and authoritarian parenting style, $r = -.34$, $p < .05$, suggesting that authoritarian parenting is associated with incoherent narratives. When looking at the individual indices of narrative coherence, there were only negative correlations between authoritarian parenting style and the following indices of narrative coherence: central point, $r = -.39$, $p < .05$; organization, $r = -.35$, $p < .05$; and causality, $r = -.42$, $p < .01$.

Table 3 Correlations of variables

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Narrative Coherence
Parenting Style				
Authoritative				
Authoritarian	-.09			
Permissive	-.19	-.19		
Child Behavior Problems				
Total	-.38*	.34*	-.22	.08
Externalizing	-.23	.40**	-.25	.02
Internalizing	-.46**	.17	-.13	.13

Narrative Coherence	.03	-.34*	.10
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* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Regression analyses

Based on previous research and our bivariate correlations, we hypothesized that authoritative parenting style should predict fewer child behavior problems, while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles should predict more child behavior problems. To test these hypotheses, a stepwise multiple regression model was constructed in which total child behavior problems was regressed on all three parenting styles. The multiple regression model revealed a significant linear relationship between parenting style and child behavior problems, $F(3, 36) = 4.93$, $p < .01$, with 29.1% of the variability in child behavior problems attributed to parenting style, of which 14% was accounted for by authoritative parenting style, 11% by authoritarian parenting style, and 4% by permissive parenting style. Figure 1 shows the distribution of variance in child behavior problems accounted for by parenting style. Authoritative parenting style was a negative significant predictor of child behavior problems, $t = -2.86$, $p < .01$, while authoritarian parenting style was a positive significant predictor of child behavior problems, $t = 2.25$, $p < .05$. In other words, authoritative parenting was related to fewer child behavior problems, while authoritarian parenting was related to more child behavior problems. A summary of this regression analysis is presented in Table 4 and 5.

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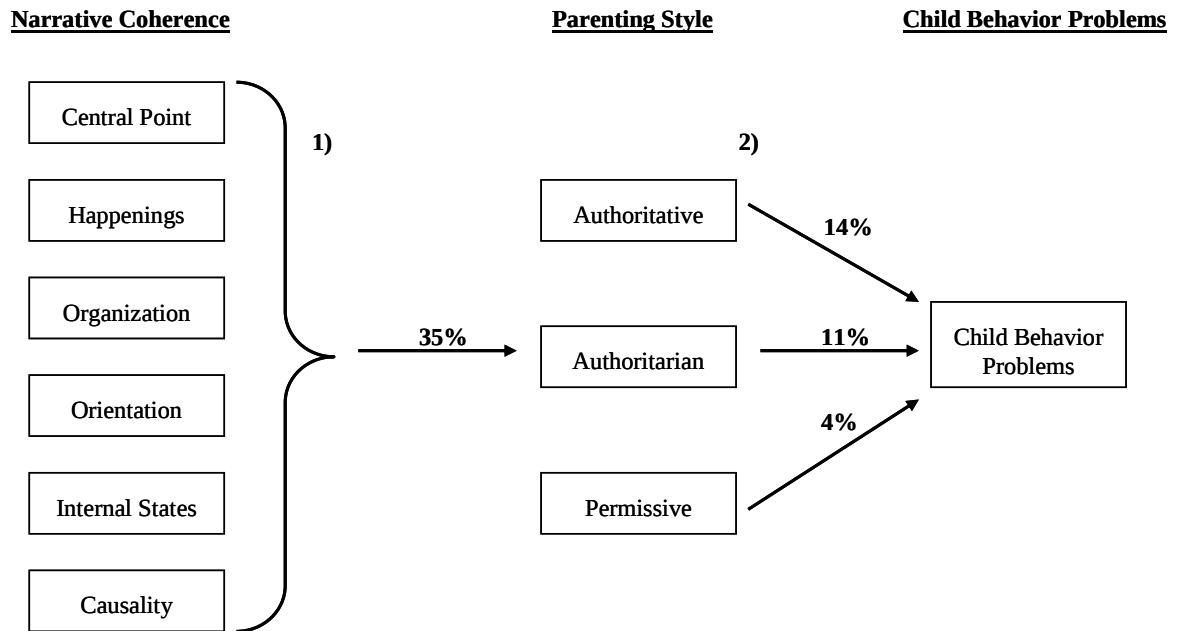


Figure 1 Path model of the variance accounted for by narrative coherence and parenting style

Stepwise multiple regression analyses revealed that **1)** the collective dimensions of narrative coherence accounted for 35% of the variance found in authoritarian parenting style, and **2)** parenting style accounted for 29.1% of the variance found in child behavior problems, with 14% of the variance accounted for by authoritative parenting style, 11% accounted for by authoritarian parenting style, and 4% accounted for by permissive parenting style.

Table 4 Summary of regression analysis for variables predicting child behavior problems

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Authoritative parenting style	-1.96	.70	-.40*
Authoritarian parenting style	.82	.46	.26
Permissive parenting style	-1.07	.64	-.24

Note. $R^2 = .29$ ($p < .01$)

* $p < .01$

Table 5 Summary of regression analysis for variables predicting authoritarian parenting style

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Central Point	-.60	.52	-.23
Happenings	.78	.50	.34
Organization	-.28	.64	-.11
Orientation	.23	.55	.09
Internal States	-.01	.41	.00
Causality	-1.13	.50	-.55*

Note. $R^2 = .35$ ($p < .05$)

* $p < .05$

When total child behavior problems was separated into internalizing and externalizing behaviors, a stepwise multiple regression analysis in which externalizing behavior was regressed on all three parenting styles showed that authoritarian parenting style significantly predicted externalizing problems, $F(3, 36) = 3.987$, $p < .05$; $t = 2.307$, $p < .05$. A stepwise multiple regression analysis in which internalizing behavior was regressed on all three parenting styles revealed that authoritative parenting style was a protective factor of internalizing problems, since it was the only significant predictor of internalizing problems, in a negative way, $F(3, 36) = 4.291$, $p < .05$; $t = -3.325$, $p < .01$.

Given the robust findings that parenting style significantly predicts total child behavior problems, we now turn to the bivariate correlation between narrative coherence and authoritarian parenting style. A stepwise multiple regression model was constructed

in which authoritarian parenting style was regressed on all six indices of narrative coherence (central point, happenings, organization, orientation, internal states, and causality). There was a significant linear relationship between authoritarian parenting style and narrative coherence, with 35% of the variability in authoritarian parenting style attributed to overall narrative coherence, $F(6, 33) = 2.96, p < .05$. The regression coefficients showed causality as the only significant predictor of authoritarian parenting style, $t = -2.27, p < .05$.

It is interesting to note that causality was negatively associated with authoritarian parenting style, suggesting that an incoherent narrative, marked by simple causality, may lead to a more authoritarian parent. On the other hand, a coherent narrative, incorporating complex causality, may lead to a less authoritarian parent. We suspect that complex causality, the leading predictor in a well-constructed narrative, might “open a parent’s mind” to the child’s point of view (i.e., parental empathy). In other words, narrative coherence, including its key component, complex causality, somehow inoculates a parent against authoritarian parenting. Figure 1 shows the pathway model of the variance in parenting style collectively accounted for by the six indices of narrative coherence, and the variance in child behavior problems accounted for by parenting style.

Chapter 4

Discussion

Overview

The current study was designed to replicate well-known associations between parenting style and child behavior, while adding new insight to the process by which parenting style is influenced by the parent's autobiographical narrative. Although much is known about the effect of parenting style on child development, little is known about the link between narrative coherence and parenting style. There were two main hypotheses that guided this study. The first was that parenting style would be associated with child behavior, and the second was that narrative coherence would be associated with parenting style. Both hypotheses received support.

Parenting Style

The first objective of this study was to confirm the connection between parenting style and child behavior. Based on previous research, we hypothesized that authoritative parenting style would be associated with fewer child behavior problems and authoritarian and permissive parenting styles would be associated with more child behavior problems. We found support for the hypotheses regarding authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, but did not find support for the connection between permissive parenting style and child behavior problems – most likely due to the psychometric problems associated with that scale (i.e., low internal consistency). In our sample, authoritative parenting was

associated with fewer child behavior problems, particularly with internalizing behaviors. Authoritarian parenting was associated with more child behavior problems, particularly with externalizing behaviors.

These findings support Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1978) well-established associations between parenting style and child outcome, and are especially important in light of past research indicating that parenting style has an impact on the academic performance of children (Dornbusch et al., 1987), adolescent development of autonomy (Pardeck & Pardeck, 1990), and prosocial values (Greenberger & Goldberg, 1989). Most importantly, our findings support previous research associating inappropriate parenting, such as authoritarian parenting, with child behavior problems (Bohrnstedt & Fisher, 1986; Buri, 1989; Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, & Mueller, 1988; Fischer & Crawford, 1992).

Parents' Autobiographical Narratives

The second objective of this study was to examine the possible link between narrative coherence and parenting style. We hypothesized that narrative coherence would be positively associated with authoritative parenting style and negatively associated with authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. However, narrative coherence should not predict child behavior because there is no clear or direct linkage between the way a parent tells his/her narrative and the child's behavior; rather, the effects are expected to operate through parenting style. Narrative coherence, which we thought should also reflect the ability of the parent to entertain the child's point of view, should allow a

parent to be empathic and therefore, more authoritative and less authoritarian. Although all of the components of narrative coherence should be important, we expected parents' causal reasoning to be the driving force of narrative coherence in predicting parenting style. This assumption was based on the idea that one's ability to understand complex pictures of why things happened in the past includes the narrator's ability to view the happenings from multiple perspectives, including the child's perspective.

Our hypotheses received partial support. We found that mothers who scored higher on the authoritarian parenting style subscale were likely to have less coherent narratives, indicated by low scores on the central point, organization, and causality indices. Contrary to our predictions, narrative coherence was not correlated with authoritative parenting style. The explanation for this remains a mystery; however, we speculate that authoritative parenting style is a much more complex parenting style than authoritarian parenting style, making it harder to see the components responsible for this type of parenting. While authoritarian parenting style is fairly straightforward (i.e., high demandingness and low responsiveness), authoritative parenting style is more complex, such that authoritative parents must be able to see the child's present needs and respond appropriately. It is also important to remember that authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles are not correlated, meaning that even if a mother becomes less authoritarian, she does not necessarily become more authoritative. Thus, we believe the function of narrative coherence is to decrease authoritarianism, but not necessarily to increase authoritativeness.

To further examine the relationship between narrative coherence and authoritarian parenting style, we found that causality inversely predicted authoritarian parenting style, suggesting that an incoherent narrative, marked by simple causality, may be associated with authoritarian parenting. On the other hand, a coherent narrative with complex levels of causality is associated with lower levels of authoritarianism, perhaps because the parent is able to see the child's perspective and thus be more empathic. These findings are consistent with van IJzendoorn's (1995) meta-analysis in which insensitive parenting was found to covary with ambiguous, sparse, and tangential narrative accounts of the past.

Implications

The findings described above suggest that in order to understand parenting style, it is important to take into consideration the internal processes underlying parenting (Slade & Cohen, 1996), such as a parent's autobiographical narrative. In a study of mothers and their secure infants, what appeared to be salient in these mothers was their capacity to provide a complex narrative of the child's likely view of day-to-day experience (Koren-Karie et al., 2002). Autobiographical narratives enable humans to integrate diverse experiences (McAdams, 2001). These narratives allow us to make sense of our lives amidst chaos and confusion (McAdams, 2006). More particularly, parents' autobiographical narratives may facilitate their understanding of how to parent their children, but only if these narratives are well-organized and complex.

When mothers tell a coherent narrative of their parenting experience through clear and elaborate qualities, we suspect that they are seeing a more objective picture of what is going on in the present. With open-mindedness, parents are more likely to see their child's point of view, enabling these parents to be empathic. Empathy should promote bidirectional communication, which then influences the child's willingness to comply (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Essentially, the ability to tell a clear and rich story may protect a parent from adopting an authoritarian parenting style. It is important to stress the importance of examining narrative coherence through the structural qualities of clarity and richness. If we examined the content of narratives, it is likely that mothers who tell stories about themselves being authoritarian would likely score higher on the authoritarian parenting style subscale. Since we do not test the accuracy or content of one's autobiographical recall, the results are more likely to show a true effect.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study which may limit the validity of our findings. First, the sample used in the study was small. Unfortunately, the sample was not large enough to represent all components of the parenting style scale (i.e., the permissive parenting style subscale). Most of the participants reported themselves to be primarily authoritative, and there were few parents who reported high permissive or authoritarian characteristics. The fact that significant results were still found despite such a small sample underscores the importance of these variables and justifies replication of our findings within a larger sample.

The second limitation of this study concerned demographic variables within the sample. The sample consisted mostly of self-selected Caucasian mothers who were recruited because they were already coming to a psychological clinic for services for their child. Additionally, the range of the children's ages was too broad, ranging from ages 4 to 31 years old. The limited demographic characteristics of our sample warrants caution for the generalizability of our findings. We cannot assume that the results of our study can be true for other cultures and ethnicities. Furthermore, mothers who have not taken their child to a psychological clinic may have different results.

A third limitation of this study was that, except for narrative coherence, all data used in this study were based on parents' self-report. Although the self-report measures used in this study are valid and reliable, parents who rate themselves as more authoritarian may also be more likely to rate their child as having more behavioral problems, rather than the child actually demonstrating these behaviors. It is possible that at least part of the association between parenting style and child behavior may be a result of a self-serving bias in parents' reports of their own parenting style and their child's behavior.

A final limitation of this study concerns the issue of correlation. Parents that report more authoritarian qualities may be more likely to perceive their children as having more behavior problems. Similarly, children who are experiencing more behavior problems may cause a mother to react in a more authoritarian way. In order to prove a causal link between variables, we would have to show a time sequence where one variable precedes the other, and we would have to rule out other explanations of the

relationship between variables by explaining other alternatives. Our study does neither; however, future research should aim to prove a causal link between narrative coherence and parenting style.

Future Study

These limitations provide many suggestions for future studies. Ideally, future research on this topic should encompass a larger sample, including more diverse ethnicities and mothers that are not necessarily bringing their child to a psychological clinic. Participants should be selected more carefully to ensure a narrower range of child ages and presenting problems. A better sample of permissive parents should be included. Fathers could be included in future research on narrative coherence and parenting style, as well as mother-father dyads. Different methods should be utilized to measure and confirm parenting style and child behavior, such as observations and secondary reports from another parent, a teacher, and the child.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study presents a new way of conceptualizing and understanding parenting style and its relation to child behavior through the coherence of parents' autobiographical narratives. This adds to the growing number of studies documenting the importance of personal narratives (McAdams, 2001; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; van IJzendoorn, 1995). Further research is warranted, including research on the link between parenting style and narrative coherence, the consistency of

narrative coherence, and the impact of parents' childhood experiences on their narrative coherence. Finally, the impact of mothers' narrative coherence on children's development of self and the child's own development of narrative coherence, is worthy of investigation.

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Appendix

Coding Narrative Coherence

Clarity

Central Point

Vague and scattered;
no apparent central point

1

2

Two or more central
points that are not
connected, but they stand
out as central points

3

Clear and consistently
evident;
if more than one central
point, they're connected
meaningfully

4

5

Happenings

Global, abstract, no clear
picture of events;
rater must use
imagination to visualize
what happened

1

2

A summary of events, but
with little or no clear
description

3

At least one event is
detailed enough to see a
clear picture, described
with concrete words/
actions; easy to visualize

4

5

Organization

Confusing, no clear
pattern of events

1

2

Effort required to see
temporal pattern of events;
no clear connections across
the events;
or not all events are
connected

3

Easy to follow the events;
holistic and well-
organized;
the sequence of events
follow
a clear temporal pattern

4

5

Credibility

**All Credibility ratings must connect to the story*

Orientation

No reference to time or place		Vague reference to time <u>and</u> place (“Growing up” or “Where I lived”)		At least one specific time <u>and</u> place reference (dates within a year, ages, hours, addresses, counties, location of school/work)
1	2	3	4	5

Internal States

**Can reference personal or empathic states*

No reference to feelings or thoughts		Reference to either feelings or thoughts, but not both		Disclosures of feelings <u>and</u> thoughts that are well-integrated (“I thought,” “She felt” or “My perspective”)
1	2	3	4	5

Causality

No reference of causality; purely descriptive accounts (“I walked around the block and came home”)		Simple views of causality; singular causes and external control (“My addiction” or “She pushed me”)		Complex views of causality that imply deliberation and free-will (“Because,” “I decided,” “I chose,” “Therefore” or “That’s why”)
1	2	3	4	5

Vita

Katherine was born in Wisconsin, but spent most of her life in Rhode Island growing up. She has attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for the last four years and has enjoyed it very much.