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Exploring Thematic Balance In Personal Narrative as a Marker for Responsiveness

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Robert G. Wahler, Major Professor

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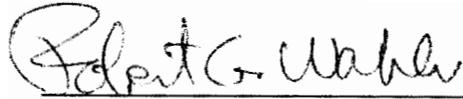
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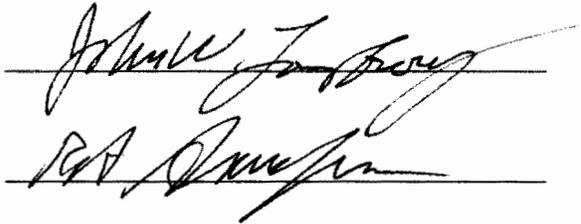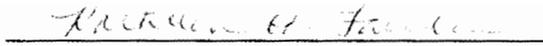
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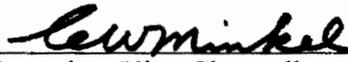
Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

Exploring Thematic Balance

In Personal Narrative

as a Marker for Responsiveness

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Laura G. Porter

August 1999

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Abstract

Research on personal narrative as a template or map that organizes experience and creates a lens for the interpretation of reality has largely relied on structural analysis for its assessments of adequacy. As a synthesis of beliefs and values with actions, thoughts, and feelings, however, the tone and thematic quality of an individual's life story must also shape the narrative compass that guides interactions in the social world. Among these elements, one's theory of reality will exert a significant impact on the overall context within which the specific unfolding of narrative plots occurs. In Western societies in particular, this perspective on life and reality develops in the everyday experiences of a culture in search of perfection, carefree living, and happily-ever-after endings. Based upon this partial and inaccurate view of life, a narrative so characterized might be narrowly focused, poorly differentiated, and only moderately able to guide sensitive responding to inevitably encountered conflicts. A personal narrative which is instead built upon a holistic, integrated, and grounded philosophy of reality should serve as a more coherent, complex, and articulate guideline for responsive behavior.

This study attempts to revise traditional conceptions of healthy tone and content by integrating Eastern philosophical thought on the wholeness of reality and the "good life" with approaches to narrative analysis. The personal narratives of 34 mother-child-teacher triads were coded according to a new categorical system for content analysis based on the narrator's relationship with conflict. Four independent categories were defined and hierarchically arranged to produce a developmental continuum of content sophistication. Level one described a relationship of struggle with the inevitability of

conflict, while level four represented an acceptance of conflict with the recognition of a balancing silver lining.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the power of the "balance" variable to predict mother and teacher responsiveness. While child negativity was the strongest predictor of responsiveness in both cases, narrative balance accounted for significant variance in the school setting. The balance variable did not reach significance in models from the home setting.

Introduction of this new paradigm supports the relevance and importance of content in personal narrative. Future research should investigate differences in the use of narrative maps in school and home settings to explore one hypothesized explanation of this study's results, namely that the intense familiarity between mother and child precludes the necessity of a balanced and elaborate narrative to guide responsive parenting behavior.

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I. Introduction and Review of Literature

The present study is an exploration of the relationship between personal narrative and actual behavior. Narrative, understood as a reflection of an individual's personal style of interpreting and organizing experience, functions as a template that frames our perceptions and guides our responses to events in the social world. While structure and content each contribute to the overall quality of this map, analysis of narrative typically focuses on structure alone. Content, however, reveals the substance of the narrator's thoughts, values, and feelings, which are believed to be important to the shape and function of his or her personal lens on reality. A rich and integrated view of life where positives and negatives are in balance is proposed as the ideal for this organizational perspective. It is, therefore, hypothesized that narratives built upon a philosophical orientation of wholeness, where conflict and struggle are accepted as inevitable but grounded in an optimistic context, will provide the most balanced and elaborate guidelines for sensitive responding to life's experiences. A categorical system for the analysis of narrative content was created to assess the degree to which personal stories expressed this outlook. For the mothers and teachers who participated in this study, it was expected that this narrative quality would be predictive of highly responsive behaviors in their daily interactions with children. A review of the function and developmental history of personal narrative along with a discussion of the philosophy underlying the proposed paradigm for content analysis will lead to a more specific presentation of our rationale and hypothesis.

Function of Personal Narrative

Our world is a storied one. From the first years of life onward, we create and tell stories to organize and communicate our experiences, emotions, and actions. From a child's recollection of a nightmare to water cooler discussions of office politics, stories are expressions of the narrator's unique voice and are windows into his or her world of meaning. A story focuses those aspects of experience which are most important and organizes them into a cohesive whole that adds to the speaker's personal sense of self by clarifying his or her place in the world (Engel, 1995). Indeed, "*Identity is a life story* - an internalized narrative integration of past, present and anticipated future which provides lives with a sense of unity and purpose" (McAdams, 1989, p. 162).

Narrative, or self-story, might as aptly be referred to as a life map, a topographical chart for understanding and relating constructed by one's pattern of interpreting social roles and interactions. The network of paths and trails, the metaphorical stories of this map, not only represent the record of past experience but also provide a key to the assumptions that guide identity development and interpersonal behaviors. These stories, in their weaving together of discrete events, reveal the lens through which the narrator understands the social world. The overall contours of our narrative map represent the trait-like dispositional patterns that describe, in aggregate, our behaviors and personality. The hills and valleys highlight organizational regularities, consistencies that alone do not allow prediction of specific behaviors, but together shed light on the beliefs and values which form the foundation of the narrator's theory of reality (Epstein & O'Brien, 1985).

Whether constructing narrative accounts of experience within a therapeutic setting, for casual conversation, formal publication, or sheer amusement, our stories are

hardly haphazard creations. Identified by Theodore R. Sarbin as the narratory principle, as humans, "we do much more than catalog a series of events. Rather, we *render* the events into a story" (1994, p. 8). Motivated characters are developed within a setting of time and place; actions are logically described such that the overall tale has a beginning, middle, and end; the chains of experience that constitute life assume a storied form (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). The process of rendering distinct incidents into a united whole, emplottment, utilizes a "thematic thread to lay out happenings as parts of an unfolding movement that culminates in an outcome" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). The plot is the structure by which the singular events of a story are thematically and temporally joined in a way that produces meaning. It is this ordering of events to reflect the natural flow of activity within the stream of time that elevates storytelling as a uniquely human activity; "Other things exist in time, but only humans possess the capacity to perceive the connectedness of life and to seek its coherence" (Vanhoozer, 1991, pp. 42-43).

Storytelling, however, is an inherently social process, an interactive sport. Embedded in the interpersonal milieu, stories are not merely exchanged in transactions, but are sculpted, around central cores, by and for the relational context with repercussions for all players. Born of personal experience and nurtured within the drama of human relationships, narratives are social constructions that weave the multi-colored and textured threads of life into a tapestry based on the narrator's organizational pattern. As we recount our experiences with words, the emerging stories mold not only the speaker's future actions, but also the stories and actions of those with whom the narrator interacts. In this manner, our stories intertwine in a symbolic reality which dynamically exerts

influence over the world of lived experience from which they were created (McAdams, 1993).

Inasmuch as the human motivation for storytelling is founded in our need for relatedness and that the success of these communicative attempts requires a certain degree of shared convention, stylistic agreement, and interpersonal support, the creation of a life story is not the solitary activity of its individual narrator, but occurs in the connectedness of relational dances (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Early in life we develop internal models of relationships, beginning with those interactions between infant and caregiver. These models develop as relational schemas, or "cognitive structures representing regularities in patterns of interpersonal relatedness" (Baldwin, 1992, p. 461). Serving as maps for the functional navigation of social realms, these models intertwine with cognitive generalizations about the self, emotional responses, motivations, and thoughts to guide our expectations and interactions with others (Baldwin, 1992). The interpersonal experiences, then, that bring life to our narratives are similarly guided by the stories they engender.

The template used to emplot narratives, or to create from the discrete events of daily life a coherent and meaningful stream, is largely a function of the individual's beliefs and experiences about self, others, and relating in the social world. Filtered through the idiosyncratic map which structures our perception of new information and our responses to new experiences, the narrative we create from life, which in turn guides present living, facilitates understanding and directs behavior according to its own biases (Baldwin, 1992). Thus, as each individual, interacting in the ecosystem, develops his or her own theories of reality, their summation into a narrative identity will vary in

coherence and richness just as the personal beliefs and internal models which comprise it differ in style and character (Spence, 1982). Hardly just an internal psychological structure which categorizes or classifies stimuli or input, a personal narrative is a living symbol, the creation of which consolidates assumptions, expectations, and generalized patterns into a unique summary of experience which then guides behavior and interpretation in the present (Gergen & Gergen, 1988).

Given the complexity of circumstances and the diversity of interpersonal situations that occur within a single day, much less an entire lifetime, successful navigation of these social waters requires a similarly differentiated and detailed map. What is needed is a narrative, or internalized compass, built of a coherent and elaborated synthesis of experience and belief that is reality-based and sufficiently contextualized to allow sensitive responding to each of life's encounters. Having reviewed the important functions of narrative, it is now necessary to explore more thoroughly the developmental history of our life story, for it is in the nuances of this timeline that one discovers those qualities and experiences that seem most crucial for the construction of a healthy and adaptive narrative map.

Developmental History of Personal Narrative

Although the ability to cognitively experience life in storied form comes years later, our collection of narrative themes and chapters begins at birth (McAdams, 1993). While the dependence of infancy renders the child helpless to satisfy his or her own needs, the basic instincts of sucking and clinging or crying and smiling serve to bond the infant and mother in mutual attachment (Bretherton, 1992). In the timeliness of a soothing embrace to cries of distress, the return of a searching gaze and smile, and the

appropriateness of attention and stimulation, the caregiver lays the foundation for the child to experience the world as a place of acceptance where others are trustworthy and their responses predictable. From these early experiences and beliefs, the context, or setting, for narrative identity develops (McAdams, 1993).

The infant's expectations of caregiver attention are derived from the pattern of caregiver behaviors and responses and are internalized as a working model of attachment. Sensitive parenting, wherein mothers are "consistent in their perception, accurate interpretation, and contingent and appropriate responsiveness to their infants' signals," (Isabella, Belsky, & von Eye, 1989, p. 18) fosters the development of secure attachment. In the unfolding of narrative identity, the model of the attachment figure complementarily molds the development of the theory of self. Parenting that is protective, perceptive of subtleties in child behavior, and appropriately responsive while permissive of exploration and autonomy facilitates development of a representation of the self as competent, active, and valued (Bretherton, 1992). These internal representations of self and other become the most prominent components of the growing child's theory, or map, of reality. As guides, these models are frameworks for ordering experiences and directing our responses to life; "The more adequate an organism's internal working model, the more accurately the organism can predict the future" (Bretherton, 1992, p. 766).

Thus, even before an individual formally begins to integrate images and experiences into a history of self, the tone of his or her story is being affected by the synchronicity of relationships with prominent caregivers and the resulting sense of the world at large (McAdams, 1993). A significant milestone in the development of a narrative identity typically occurs between 18 and 24 months of age when the child gains

knowledge of him or herself as an independent person. With this sense of autonomy and recognition of boundary, the individual becomes able to systematically and meaningfully organize personal experience into a history of "me." With a new model for the conceptualization and cognitive ordering of experience, namely that of the self as a separate entity, memory of past events becomes more discriminable and the symbolic writing of the child's autobiography begins (Howe & Courage, 1993).

A second important step along the path to the development of identity and narrative map of reality comes when the child gains the ability to define and discuss the self with language. Recognition of the continuity of self in time closely follows (Howe & Courage, 1993). Now able to identify and discuss the self as a unique and distinct individual who, while living in the moment, has both a past and a future, the child's internal representations and experiential tone coalesce into a dynamically evolving story of self.

Recent research on autobiographical memory and narrative suggests the importance of two particular skills for the development of coherent and well-structured life stories. The first is the ability to reconcile different mental representations (Welch-Ross, 1997). A child who is able to simultaneously hold his or her own memory of a personal event along with another's mental representation of the same event may be better equipped not only to discuss the past, but also to logically integrate his or her own past with the present. Comfortable handling of these conflicting mental perspectives allows the child to more actively participate in conversations about past events; in so doing he or she is able to benefit from the adult partner's efforts to support the child's acquisition of the proper framework for organizing previous experiences. In the dynamics of

interpersonal relatedness are the blueprints for the storytelling of the internal self.
Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky, whose work centers on the notion of development
as a cooperative product of individuals acting with the environment, speaks of the social
origins of narrative and other cognitive abilities:

> . . .it is through others that we develop into ourselves and. . . this is true not only
> with regard to the individual but with regard to the history of every function. . .
> Any higher mental function was external because it was social at some point
> before becoming an internal, truly mental functioning.
>
> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two
> planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane.
> First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category, and then
> within the child as an intra-psychological category. (Vygotsky, 1981, pp. 161-
> 163)

As the parent guides the child, with elaborative questions, to provide a detailed context
and setting for memory recall, the child learns independently to structure his or her own
memories and narrative identity (Welch-Ross, 1997). Development of our storying
abilities occurs as the tools and guidelines used in the social domain become internalized
and transformed from interpersonal to intrapersonal functions (Peterson & McCabe,
1992; Meadows, 1993).

The second representational achievement important for construction of an
autobiographical history is the ability to relate experience and knowledge. With the
gradual recognition that experience begets worldly information, children learn to relate
the content of their own lives with the experience-derived knowledge that becomes the

substance of their social conversations. Again, this linkage of self-experience to knowledge enables a child to participate more fully in recollective conversations which are themselves the transmitters of mature and sophisticated narrative structure (Welch-Ross, 1997).

Beginning with infant-caregiver exchanges, maturing through cognitive and representational developments, and influenced by characteristics of the parent-child relationship, our personal encounters provide much of the tone and structure for the organization of identity. While the developmental quality and consequent navigational function of an individual's personal narrative might seem inextricably tied to the security of attachment to primary caregivers, the link is hardly so direct or concretized. Indeed, efforts to detail the specific nature of this relationship instead paint quite an ambiguous picture.

Developed to test the relationship between a parent's model of childhood experiences with the quality of attachment to his or her own children, the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) was created as a tool for predicting current parental responsiveness. Research with narrative responses to the Adult Attachment Interview relies primarily on the coherence of the elicited narratives in making inferences about the adult speaker's childhood attachment experiences. Content, seemingly less relevant to the functional utility of a narrative map, is considered only in relation to its compatibility with response coherence (van IJzendoorn, 1995). From his own meta-analytic review, van IJzendoorn concludes that the coherence-based coding system of the AAI demonstrates both valid and reliable classification of adult attachment into three distinct styles. Similar to infant attachment styles as assessed in the Ainsworth

Strange Situation, adult attachment representations range from autonomous, or secure, to dismissing and preoccupied. The level of security in adult attachment, as evaluated by the relative coherence of interview responses, is said to behaviorally manifest in the degree of responsiveness with which the adult interacts with his or her children (van IJzendoorn, 1995). Adults who themselves felt secure parental attachment consistently offer coherent and well-structured narrative accounts of their relationships and are highly responsive with their own children. On the other hand, parents with less secure reminiscences of their own childhood experiences present more confused and inarticulate life stories and are likewise less synchronous in their relationships.

Fox, however, questions this posited association between adult attachment representation and responsiveness with children in the present (1995). In his commentary on van IJzendoorn, he points out that the coherence of the narratives elicited by the AAI may, instead, be much more closely linked with the speaker's current psychological state. Indeed, it follows intuitive logic that present feelings and attributions would be better predictors of parental behavior than remembrances of their own senses of maternal attachment, especially given that the continuity of attachment classification over time has not been evidenced with empirical research. While Fox does not deny the impact of developmental experiences on present behavior, he suggests that current functioning, including a multiplicity of factors rather than attachment alone, is more closely tied to the individual's style of narrative reconstruction. The impact of attachment on narrative identity and behavioral guidance may be less related to the representation of the mother-child relationship than to the individual's more generalized ability to synthesize experiences into a sensitive and reliable map of social responding (Fox, 1995). The link

between narrative coherence and responsiveness may in fact be a function of personality or cognitive skills and integration. The objective of the present study was to explore, by focusing on content rather than structure, but one of the possible personality styles or philosophical orientations that might further illuminate the narrative-responsiveness relationship.

Dimensions of Narrative or Self-Theory: Structure and Content

Epstein (1973), in his exposition of a new understanding of self-concept, redefined the elusive construct as a self-theory, and as such it became subject to evaluation by the same criteria against which other theories are assessed, namely extensivity, parsimony, empirical validity, internal consistency, testability, and usefulness. In many ways, these attributes correspond to the two dimensions along which the quality of narrative map is typically analyzed: structure and content. Likening Epstein's self-theory to identity to personal narrative, the similarities among evaluative criteria become entirely logical. Just as a good theory must be extensive and expansive while having both global governing beliefs and a well-organized set of specific postulates, a narrative capable of providing guidance for adaptive responding to a vast array of situations must be constructed around central, integrative values with an adequate number of situational guidelines and must be accommodating of new information. While features of differentiation and integration are primarily found in the structural components of personal narrative, the empirical validity and internal consistency crucial to useful theories are seen in the content. Conscious awareness of the beliefs and values which become the chapters of our life story and recognition of the

relationship between these ideas and our behavior are essential for the construction of a reality-based map of the living world (Epstein, 1973).

Given the conceptual similarities of personal narrative and self-theory, mapping the criteria for evaluating theory onto the two dimensions of narrative analysis is a useful means for expanding the depth of narrative study within a simple two-part framework. It must be remembered, however, that even this most basic categorical division is artificial. The inherent interdependence of the structural and content aspects of narrative prohibits discrimination into two distinct components. Despite this limitation, the theoretical separation facilitates analysis and discussion and will therefore be used here, as in much of the literature on this topic.

While structure reveals the organization of the narrator's beliefs, content reveals the substance of these values (McAdams, 1993). With respect to structure, one finds richness to be the most relevant feature of narrative for qualitatively assessing the narrator's ability to maintain a high level of organized integration with sufficient specificity to allow adaptation in the changing social world (Castlebury & Wahler, 1998). Richness refers to the degree to which the narrator provides not only descriptive information to create a setting for his or her tale, but also imbues the story with personal meaning and evaluation. Inclusive of the more traditional measure of coherence, richness incorporates contextualization and clarity with the narrator's subjective sense of the reality being described. As such, richness becomes a more viable indicant of the narrator's ability to adequately perceive both the general themes and momentary contingencies that characterize our social ecosystem (Castlebury & Wahler, 1998).

While plot contributes to the structure and coherence of a story, content relates more directly to the tone of the tale. Narratives, as reflections and re-presentations of lived experiences, convey by valence the attitude the speaker holds about his or her world. Seen as a template that integrates the many facets of one's journey through life into a communicable self-story, the thematic quality of a personal narrative reveals the narrator's emotional perspective and sense of reality. Just as cognitive abilities differ, the degree to which individuals are able to create a coherent and elaborate narrative reflecting a richness of emotional experiences while maintaining an overall perspective of hope also varies. On the whole, optimistic narratives convey the narrator's sense that the world is a predictable place where intention is meaningful, goals can be realized, and where "things work out in the long run" (McAdams, 1989, p. 163). A narrative characterized by a hopeless tone suggests a personal perspective on life that is quite the opposite: that wishes and desires are but foolish whims to be tossed and scattered in the unpredictable winds of life, where unhappy endings are the rule rather than the exception.

The Myth of Happily Ever After

Western culture seduces us with the myth that a self-narrative free of pessimism or doubt is both possible and desirable, that with cunning and effort one can in fact overcome any obstacle that might dim the cheerful stories that constitute our narrative maps. From very early ages, we hear fanciful stories wherein star-crossed princes and princesses, after overcoming a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, ride into the sunset to live "happily ever after," where beauty knows no bounds, and the hero always saves the day. In these fantasied worlds, evil is forever vanquished and the kingdom is restored to its natural order of complete harmony. Life is portrayed as a garden of roses, one from

which thorns and stinging bumblebees are conspicuously absent. Indeed, quite prevalent are messages proclaiming that the natural state of affairs is a life free of conflict or hardship, while "bad things" are mistakes or abnormal events caused by disruptions in the proper order of the universe.

American attitudes toward death and dying are among the best illustrations of this cultural perspective. Based solely on the fervor with which the search for the elusive fountain of youth continues, our society's belief that death is something to be avoided at all costs is readily apparent. From mysterious herbal elixirs to dietary fads and reconstructive surgery, the lengths to which our society goes to deny the reality of a natural part of the life cycle creates a cultural narrative that clearly reveals our belief in "happily ever after." While death is truly inescapable, for many, human mortality is among the most taboo of topics. It is, indeed, not merely a "bad thing" that is feared and denied, but one that is seen as wrong, as a deviation from or unjust twist of the natural order. With this and similar notions that conflict and negativity can be avoided or eliminated so engrained in our cultural ethos, and at the heart of our national identity, it becomes easy to see how such perspectives color our individual lives and developing ideas about the truth of reality. While fairy tales show us a world where the monster living in the closet always disappears with the light of day, the real world reminds us that demons coexist with angels and both must be accepted if the truth of life is to be known.

In Search of Balance

This more accurate characterization of human reality includes conflict as an inevitable and even instructive element in addition to those more desirable, positively-

valenced or neutral events. Reflected in our self-stories, the richness of a healthy narrative is

> built in a continuously ongoing process of balancing and synchronizing individual and societal dynamics and conditions. Hence, every biography at any point of one's life encompasses manifold conflicting tensions, which can be regarded as dialectical structures which the biographizing process has to balance: a time-space tension, a subjectivity-objectivity tension, a singularity-collectivity tensions, a self-regulation-alienation tension (internal vs. external locus of control), a construction-reconstruction tension, a past-future tension, and a continuity-development tension. (Mader, 1996, p. 42)

It is hypothesized that this understanding of connectedness with a balanced integration of the positive and negative aspects of life is both more realistic and more adaptive than the "happily ever after" perspective commonly held in the West. Personal narratives, then, which reflect this philosophy of experience should serve as better templates for cognitive organization and more effective guides for interpersonal interaction.

This alternative view of what constitutes the content of a well-constructed narrative map builds upon and expands the currently prevalent perspective of the good life in the Western world. America is a nation built upon the quest for perfection. The media is filled with images of the perfect body and the steps to achieve it, tips to eliminate stress, manage clutter, make a million dollars from the comfort of your own living room. . .As consumers we have an insatiable appetite for products making promises of bigger, better, faster, and easier performance, all in service of minimizing or eliminating the troubles that get in our way on the journey to happiness. On the road of

life, the ideal is unquestionably without speed bumps, toll booths, detours, or traffic lights. Our society might be well characterized as driven to "Accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative." Is this, however, a realistic goal? Is the constant battle to rid life of all its "downs" a reasonable, much less healthy, approach to discover happiness and meaning?

Certainly, positive thinking is not without merit. Indeed, common sense alone tells us that an optimistic view is healthier than a gloomy one. Scientific research also supports the wisdom of this intuition: Positive thinkers are, in fact, more adaptive in coping with stress and illness than pessimists (Scheier, et al., 1989). While an optimistic outlook tends to bolster confidence, security, and sense of control, the penchant toward positive thinking becomes much less healthy when the shading of those rose-colored glasses blinds us to reality (McAdams, 1993). We need only reflect on the goal and practice of psychotherapy for further evidence that the "happily ever after" view of life is a myth, and one with unhealthy consequences; "The analytic therapist aims not only to help clients feel better and function better but also to extend their perspective - their view of reality - and to recognize and accept that even with improvement, life is inevitably a mixture of comic, ironic, romantic, and tragic elements" (Messer & Winokur, 1980, p. 824). While the relative weight of these elements varies, that each will be present is guaranteed. In the hope of improved living lies the comedic vision of reality; in the romantic and ironic are lessons about the challenge of life's ambiguities, surprises, and contradictions. Lastly, the tragic perspective teaches us that conflict is inherent in human existence, that it cannot be avoided or extinguished, but instead must be accepted as the companion of life's many joys (Messer & Winokur, 1980).

It is such a paradoxical concept, to view the negative as a part of human existence to be embraced rather than battled, as instructive rather than demonic. Isn't it indeed from the negative that we know the positive, from the bad that we recognize good? Flip sides of the same coin, each gives meaning to the other, together creating balance. The ancient wisdom of the *Tao Te Ching* reminds us of the harmony of life's seeming dualities: "Being and non-being create each other./Difficult and easy support each other./Long and short define each other./High and low depend on each other./Before and after follow each other" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 2). In the ongoing stream of life, wholeness emerges from the union of opposites.

While Western thinkers typically rely on Cartesian dualism and reductionism to understand the universe, Eastern philosophies honor the essential oneness and connectedness of reality, and in so doing revere the unity and balance of all forces in life (Bolen, 1979). Indeed, Taoist thought tells us that, "She who is centered in the Tao/can go where she wishes, without danger,/She perceives the universal harmony,/even amid great pain,/because she has found peace in her heart" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 35). While distinguishing and dichotomizing produce the segments that shape our lives, when based upon fragmented views of reality, our constructed worlds become impossible fabrications that influence our behavior in an ecosystem where such ideas are deceptive and misleading (Gregson, 1994). That the individual reunites the objectified and fragmented elements of experience is a crucial step toward authentic living:

When we, with our Western-focused consciousness, also become able to perceive spiritual reality, it is then possible for us to be aware of being separate individuals and also conscious of relating to a greater whole; of living in a world

of linear time, yet capable of experiencing the timelessness of an eternal reality of

which we are a part; of seeing with daylight perception as well as starlight vision.

Our consciousness is then expanded as moving rather than fixed. (Bolen, 1979,

p. 9)

Bringing the centuries-old wisdom of Eastern philosophy into the less distant past,

holonomy, an ethic for living based on David Bohm's theory of reality, reflects many of

the same ideas on what is true and good (Ravn, 1988). The ethic begins with the basic

assumption that reality is characterized by the distinction between flux and form. Flux

can be understood as the uncontained energy of potential or wholeness. Stated in human

terms, flux is the stream of experience and activity. Form, its essential counterpart, gives

shape and defined structure to flux. "Flux gives rise to and feeds forms, and forms lend

distinctness and stability to flux" (Ravn, 1988, p. 100); the human flow of activity, or

flux, becomes organized and sensible when social conventions, roles, and symbolic

systems grant it form. While flux is the transcendent power of possibility, form is the

"manifest actuality" (Ravn, 1988, p. 104) that becomes differentiated from the essential

wholeness.

An ethic of holonomy finds value in both unity and differentiation; truly, said best

by Heraclitus, "Life is a harmony of opposite tensions" (as cited in Gregson, 1994, p. 36).

Just as successful psychotherapy seeks a realistic perspective that is grounded in truth and

balances the positive and negative, the good life is one that allows us, across the many

activities, roles, and feelings that are the parts of life, to "experience ourselves as being in

contact or harmony with a larger whole, whether this whole is the rest of one's

personality, one's life plan or personal philosophy, the community of one's peers, family

or kin, society or world, or God" (Ravn, 1988, p. 107).

One finds proponents for conceptualizing life as a delicate balance of good and

bad, conflict and resolution, personal desires and communal responsibilities not only in

fields relating to psychological and emotional health, but physical wellness as well. One

holistic health care system, in attempt to incorporate the entirety of human experience in

its diagnostic and treatment plans, utilizes a program based on six independent and

hierarchically-arranged levels of wellness (Cassel, 1987). Only two of these levels focus

exclusively on physical health; the remaining four find their bases in the philosophies of

grounded optimism and holonomic order just reviewed. As the dissonance between

wishes and needs is a primary source of stress, resulting in less than optimal functioning,

Level II uses both self-report and physiological measures to identify the congruity of

conscious and unconscious desires and need fulfillment. Level III assesses the degree to

which the individual has achieved self-actualization, an evaluation based on responses to

questions regarding intimacy and openness, acceptance of self and others, willingness to

forgive and give of oneself without expectation of return. Level IV addresses the

patient's "balance of psychological states" (Cassel, 1987, p. 50) through inquiries about

coping style, assertiveness, patterns of adapting, confidence, esteem, and locus of control.

Finally, level VI investigates the patient's sense of consciousness, purpose, responsibility,

and serenity (Cassel, 1987).

When juxtaposed with the more inclusive, grounded, and authentic philosophies

of reality adopted by the sages of old and practiced by both medical healers and clinicians

who endeavor to help clients find healthier living, the flaws of the "happily ever after"

view of life become clear. Indeed, many are the virtues of a perspective that is at once broad and expansive, while sensitive to the moment, that is accepting of the truth that positive and negative are both integral and meaningful aspects of life, which, in balance, blanket the imperfection of reality in the comfort of a greater realm of order and unity.

From Narrative Balance to Responsiveness

Returning now to discussion of personal narrative, one can apply the preceding review of the philosophical bases of the "good life" to the evaluation of self-stories as templates for adaptive and responsive behaviors in the social world. Personal narratives, or self-theories, can be regarded as unique and idiographic stories that reflect the narrator's style of connecting, explaining, and evaluating the isolated events of his or her life. From the specific tales highlighted in these historical accounts, we learn about the speaker's sense of meaning and importance. In the flow of moment to moment, we gain insight into the narrator's understanding of causality and responsibility. Authenticity reveals itself through the contextual-sensitivity, descriptiveness, and truthfulness of the story.

Taken together, these attributes paint, with bold strokes, a picture of the narrator's senses of self and other as well as his or her place in the world. As a dynamic summary of experiences and beliefs, the structure and content of personal narrative mutually interact to represent the narrator's patterns for understanding and integrating life's varied situations and circumstances. Whereas structure more closely reveals the organization of beliefs, narrative content contains the philosophical truths that form the narrator's theory of reality. United, these elements function as a working template or map which charts the speaker's perception of the ecosystem and consequently guides his or her actions in it;

"Meanings that live in language and powerfully contribute to our experience of reality are predictive of behaviour" (Gregson, 1994, p. 35).

To serve its navigational function well, a narrative must be detailed and articulate, global in scope but with situational specificity, based in the truth of human existence and balanced with respect to life's inherent contradictions. It is hypothesized that individuals whose personal map is built upon a philosophy of wholeness will be able to perceive and relate in the social ecosystem most adaptively. With vision that simultaneously sees broad patterns and situational dynamics, one gains freedom to be fully present in the moment with the security and stability of narrative continuity to guide objective and sensitive responding. Similarly, individuals guided by self-theories that accept the inherent contradictions of life achieve, in the integration of conflicting tensions, greater complexity and richness. More specifically, it is hypothesized that the essential utility of narrative content is the narrator's expressed ability to integrate the positive and negative. Accepting that, on the whole, an optimistic outlook is the preferred perspective, the degree to which the narrator can interweave negative themes within a positive context represents a developmental sophistication characteristic of more coherent and elaborate narratives, which in turn should serve as more comprehensive and articulated maps for guiding actual behavior.

Findings from numerous research studies support this rationale. Although the maturity required to fully reconcile mental representations of conflicting elements does not occur until adulthood (McAdams, 1993), the emotional coherence found in the narratives of very young children seems to be related to concurrent and future behavioral adjustment (Oppenheim, Nir, Warren, & Emde, 1997). At ages 4 1/2 and 5 1/2, children

were asked to construct with their mothers "a story about a Mommy and a Daddy going on a trip without the little boy (girl) and later coming back" (Oppenheim, Nir, Warren, & Emde, 1997, p. 286). The resulting stories were divided into three sections: the family before and until parental departure, Mother and Father away on a trip, and homecoming. Each section was evaluated on a five-point scale for emotional coherence, a rating determined by the extent to which the narrative organized themes of both positive and negative feelings about the parental separation and reunion into a logical story.

A second set of narratives was elicited using the MacArthur Story-Stem Battery (MSSB; Bretherton, I., Oppenheim, D., Buchsbaum, H., Emde, R. N., & The MacArthur Narrative Group, 1990). These stories were coded on a ten-point scale with the coherence rating related to the child's handling of the conflict implicit in the stem. For example, a poorly structured story that failed to offer resolution to the presenting problem would receive a score of three, while one that showed understanding as well as elaborated closure to the conflict would earn a score of nine. At both ages 4 1/2 and 5 1/2, children with high emotional coherence ratings created similarly coherent MSSB stories with many prosocial themes and few aggressive themes. These children also had fewer behavior problems, particularly externalizing problems (Oppenheim, Nir, Warren, & Emde, 1997).

A similar study assessing the relationship between children's internal representations of self and other with perceptions of conflicted parent-child interactions found a positive relationship between the narrative representations of mother and father and self-perception. Skillfulness of conflict resolution was also related to narrative representations of parents. In other words, children with narrative maps, expressed

through parental descriptions, characterized by tolerance for ambiguity, complex integration, and differentiation between self and other had better self images and were more adept in managing problematic relationships (Priel, Myodovnik, & Rivlin-Beniaminy, 1995).

Evidence from responses to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Morgan & Murry, 1935) also suggests a link between representational complexity and the integration of positive and negative with behavioral adaptiveness and responsiveness (McGrew & Teglasi, 1990). Based on characteristics of the stories presented by a sample of 80 boys between the ages of six and twelve, trained doctoral researchers achieved a 90% overall accuracy rate for correctly identifying the narrator as belonging to the emotionally disturbed or normal group (95% and 85%, respectively). Formal features of the narrative accounts most useful for group differentiation were: organization, logic of causal relationships, emotional regulation, and the ability to overcome the negative tone of the stimulus to construct realistic and positive conclusions (McGrew & Teglasi, 1990).

Finally, and most directly related to our hypothesis on the relationship of narrative content to behavioral responsiveness, is a quantitative study which not only supports the connection between a cognitive balance of positive and negative with adaptive behavior, but also presents a model for identifying the optimum level of integration (Schwartz & Garamoni, 1989). Called the States of Mind (SOM) Model, it is proposed that deviation from the most desirable and functional mental integration of positive and negative results in varying degrees of psychopathology. This optimum balance level is an asymptotic mix of good and bad, a level that maintains an optimistic context while allowing negative

aspects adaptive and instructive salience. Quantitative research pinpoints this ideal at 0.618, also known as the golden section proportion (Schwartz & Garamoni, 1989).

To test the relationship of this balance point to psychological health, five states of mind were defined, each reflecting a unique ratio of positive and negative. Two of these, positive and negative monologue, are characterized by an almost exclusive dominance of one cognitive style over the other. The remaining three states (positive dialogue, internal dialogue of conflict, negative dialogue) each represent the substantive interaction of both positive and negative. Hypothesized as ideal is the positive dialogue state of mind, which maintains "general positivity in cognition and mood, while preserving maximal attentiveness to negative, threatening events" (Schwartz & Garamoni, 1989, p. 276). Negative dialogue, on the other hand, might be the cognitive structure, or narrative quality, of a depressed or anxious individual who expects and finds continuous negativity. An exact equivalence between positive and negative is obtained in the internal dialogue of conflict state of mind. The perfect symmetry, however, is less than adaptive as the equal press of good and bad creates paralyzing doubt, nonassertion, or indecision. As mentioned, the positive and negative monologue states are characterized by an absence of tension between opposing thoughts or feelings. Based on partial and unrealistic perceptions of the world, these two states of mind are unstable and insensitive guides for social interaction and navigation (Schwartz & Garamoni, 1989).

Analysis of the "fit" of these states of mind with psychological functioning involved 63 cases from 27 previously conducted, cognitive-behavioral studies with normal, depressed, and anxious individuals. From the cognitive assessments reported for each case, a state of mind set point and classification were assigned. Likewise, each case,

based on criteria from its particular study, was classified as functional, mildly or

moderately dysfunctional. Analysis of the match between SOM and psychological health

confirmed positive dialogue to be the cognitive style of functional individuals. Indeed,

the set point for these cases was not significantly different from the golden section

proportion, evidence supporting the adaptiveness of this state of cognitive balance. With

increased distance from this balanced state of mind, indices of psychopathology likewise

increased (Schwartz & Garamoni, 1989).

Objective and Hypothesis

Given the convergence of philosophical discussion with recent findings in

research related to cognitive schemas and healthy functioning, popular reliance on purely

positive thinking and happily-ever-after dreams suggests a misinformed view of the

optimal vision of reality and thus a skewed setting for personal narrative. The objective

of the present study was to develop a system for reliably coding the thematic content of

personal narrative based instead on a more integrated and realistic perspective. It was

expected that narratives expressing such perspectives would provide guidance for more

adaptive and responsive behaviors. Convinced of the meaningful interaction of content

with structure in the guidance quality of narrative, the new paradigm focused on negative

themes, as these have been shown to add complexity as well as authenticity to personal

narrative. Four hierarchically arranged categories were defined, each depicting a specific

style of handling the conflicts and struggles inevitably encountered in our journeys

through life. The resulting paradigm for assessing narrative content represented a

developmental continuum of least to most sophisticated relationships. Narratives

primarily characterized by the lowest level were predicted to be poorer maps by virtue of

their narrow and largely negative view of reality. On the other hand, narrative maps based on an integrated and well-developed sense of balance with respect to conflict were expected to provide elaborate and grounded templates for behaviors. Individuals with this maturity in self-theory should then be more appropriate and timely in their social interactions.

Integrating these hypotheses on narrative with interests in the behavioral synchrony of mother-child and teacher-student dyads, it was predicted that adults whose narratives reflect balanced ways of perceiving and interpreting reality, as defined by the categorical system, would be more responsive in interactions with others than those with less sophisticated relationships with conflict. The focus was restricted to the adult narratives as the content analysis proposed here requires cognitive development that is atypical for elementary school children;

A good story raises tough issues and dynamic contradictions. And a good story provides narrative solutions that affirm the harmony and integrity of the self. Reconciliation is one of the most challenging tasks in the making of personal myth. Psychologically, we are not generally prepared to face this challenge until our middle adult years. (McAdams, 1993, p. 112)

For the mother and teacher participants in this study, the narrative interview focuses on feelings and reflections about their roles in the home or classroom. For these adults, whether it be a mother who simultaneously juggles the many responsibilities that accompany care for but one child or a teacher who works to inspire and shape the minds and behaviors of twenty or more, the benefits of a coherent and balanced narrative map for guiding interactions seem clear. However, research analyzing the structural

contributions of these same narratives to the responsiveness of adult interactions with children found richness, the integrative and elaborative quality of the story, to be significantly related to teacher responsiveness alone (r = .5313, p < .0036). For mothers, this aspect of narrative quality did not contribute to the responsiveness of their parental behaviors (F. Castlebury, personal communication, June 16, 1999).

Explanations for this finding are, as yet, unclear. The present study, by focusing on a different but related quality of narrative maps, will provide further and perhaps enlightening data about personal templates as behavioral regulators. Since the newly created balance system of analysis and the richness construct are both distal influences on behavior and given the demonstrated contribution of richness to teacher responsiveness, it was expected that narrative balance would play a comparable role for this subgroup. Despite the finding that richness was not valuable in models predicting mother responsiveness and because the proposed coding system was as yet untested, the possible impact of narrative balance on the responsiveness of mothers remained open. Therefore, it was not only expected that individuals whose narrative content is developmentally sophisticated would be more responsive than those with less advanced philosophies about life and conflict, but that this relationship would be stronger for teachers than for mothers.

II. Method

Participants

Thirty-four mother-child-teacher triads were recruited from eleven elementary

schools in an urban area in northeast Tennessee by a letter to the parents of children in

classes of consenting teachers. The participants were predominantly Caucasian and

middle to upper class. Average yearly incomes were $57,842 and $78,683 for mothers

and teachers, respectively. Mothers had, on average, 14.8 years of education while

teachers had 16.3. Mean ages in years were as follows: mothers = 35.9 (range 25-51);

teachers = 40.8 (range 23-60); children (16 males and 18 females) = 8.6 (range 6-12).

The average years of experience for teachers in the sample was 12.4 years (range 1-33).

Procedure

One-hour home observations of mother-child interactions were arranged as

parents and children volunteered to participate (see Appendix A for Letters of Informed

Consent). Trained undergraduate observers, aided by tape-recorded time intervals,

logged mother-child behaviors and interactions in a scoring book according to the

Standardized Observation Codes-Revised (SOC-R; Cerezo, 1988) which has

demonstrated reliability and validity. Similar observations were held in the classroom to

record teacher-child interactions.

On separate occasions, individual interview sessions were conducted in the home

with mother and child and at school with teacher and child. Two distinct interviews were

held in each setting such that the participating adults were not immediately present during

the child interview and vice versa. Audiotaped interviews consisted of six questions

(Appendix B), adapted from those in the Adult Attachment Interview, each followed by

the prompt, "Is there anything more you would like to add?" Interviewers were trained to adhere strictly to the script so as to prevent scaffolding from directing the nature and quantity of responses.

For children, both interview sessions began with a warm-up picture-drawing exercise to facilitate the development of a rapport between experimenter and child and to ease the child's anxiety with the experimental procedure. At home, the child was given a blank piece of paper and a pencil and asked to draw a picture of everyone in his or her family and to show each person doing something. At school, however, the child was asked to draw a picture of at least him or herself and the teacher doing something, but could include others if he or she chose. When the child completed each drawing, the experimenter asked the identity of each individual in the picture as well as what he or she was doing and feeling. The experimenter labeled the drawing according to the child's description.

Mothers and teachers completed a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix C) in addition to the structured interview. The recorded interviews from mothers, children, and teachers were then transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

Development of Narrative Coding System

The categorical system created and employed to analyze narrative content was based upon the notion that conflict is an inevitable element of life, and further upon the philosophical tenet that individuals who recognize this fundamental truth and are able to integrate the inherent struggles of day-to-day existence into a framework that remains positive will be the most adaptive and responsive. To assess each narrator's ability to meaningfully weave negative events into a positive context, the focus was the individual's

expressed relationship with conflict. For the purposes of this study, conflict was defined by traditional approach and avoidance motives. Conflict, conceptualized as such, became any situation or circumstance in which the narrator was blocked from attaining a desired state or prevented from escaping an unpleasant one.

Given these general ideas as a conceptual foundation for the development of an analytic framework, the specific structure and content of the categorical system was largely driven by a preliminary review of the narrative data themselves. Four distinct categories emerged from this review: balance, conflict resolution, resignation, struggle. In order to test the hypothesis that narrative content can indeed be a valid predictor of responsiveness, the four categories were meaningfully arranged so as to represent a continuum of developmental sophistication whereby narratives characterized by the most adaptive relationship with conflict earned the highest numerical score. Content suggesting less adaptive abilities to integrate conflict received successively lower scores such that the most primitive relationship received the minimal score.

Ordering of the four categories followed from a belief in the functional supremacy of a realistic and balanced approach to life. With this as a guiding philosophy, the most and least sophisticated categories were self-identified. The placement of the remaining resignation and conflict resolution categories within the developmental continuum was less intuitively clear. The attitude adopted in response to the recognition of conflict became the criterion for making this decision. Faced with conflict, an attitude of resignation suggested powerlessness and passivity, while active efforts, however successful, to face the struggle with a sense of purpose and meaning indicated personal control and motivation. For this reason, the alignment of the four categories, progressing

from least to most adaptive, became: *Struggling with the Inevitability of Conflict, Attitude of Resignation toward the Inevitability of Conflict, Conflict Resolution,* and *Acceptance of Conflict with a Sense of Balance.*

Formally named *Struggling with the Inevitability of Conflict,* the "struggle" category represents the base level. Narrative phrases earn this code and its assigned value of one when conditions or situations blocking either approach or avoidance goals are mentioned with a sense of unfairness or injustice. There is no expressed recognition that dissatisfying circumstances are natural parts of life's patterns. Instead, the speaker believes conflict to be an undeserved and unnatural affliction of burden in what should rightfully be a tension-free life. Advancing to the next level, content reflecting an *Attitude of Resignation toward the Inevitability of Conflict (Acceptance without Balance)* receives a score of two. The inevitability of conflict is recognized and accepted; however, the narrator is unable to clearly appreciate the counterbalancing happy times. The "way of the world" is accepted, but without recognition of hope or the "silver lining" that imbues life with balance and serenity. *Conflict Resolution,* category three, is just as its name suggests. Coded here are phrases that describe the end of a problematic situation. Although the outcome may be either positive or negative, the struggle at hand is fully resolved. For appropriate coding, the conflict must not be a potential one, but must be either a past or current incident. Additionally, while the struggle need not be the narrator's own, he or she must be actively involved in its resolution. The most advanced category, *Acceptance of Conflict with a Sense of Balance,* earns our highest score and reflects the belief that inclusive and holistic perspectives which integrate negative with positive will predominate the narratives of highly responsive adults. Here, the

inevitability of conflict is recognized and incorporated into one's understanding of the human condition. This truth, however, finds expression in positive tolerance of one's current position and level of control. The silver lining found in the process of accepting conflict lends a sense of balance to the speaker's overall relationship with conflict and the reality of life. Acceptance of life as it comes, troubles and all, releases the individual who holds this perspective from the struggle to change the unchangeable and control the uncontrollable, and brings in return relief and serenity as well as a clearer and more expansive vision (Breathnach, 1995).

Table 1 shows the formal organization, including exemplars, of the four categories which comprised the coding system. Undergraduate researchers participated in six months of practice and training with the narrative coding system. Once 80% reliability was established for practice narratives, provided by fellow graduate students for training purposes only, formal coding began. While maintaining an equal distribution of each of the four narrative types to each of two undergraduate assistants, narratives were randomly assigned for coding. Narratives were scored in groups of twelve. After every set, the author met with each narrative coder to review the categorical system in order to prevent "drift" from previously established reliability during independent scoring. During these sessions, the author and coder independently coded at least one entire narrative. Any differences in scoring were discussed and reconciled according to the categorical definitions.

Within a narrative, each chapter was coded independently. All exemplars fitting any of the four categories were coded. However, each chapter's final score was

Table 1.   Structure, Scoring Assignments, and Narrative Examples of the Four
               Category System

Category	Score	Exemplar
Struggling with the Inevitability of Conflict	1	"I hate the paperwork."
Attitude of Resignation toward the Inevitability of Conflict	2	"I wish I could do more of the enrichment kind of activities. . .but you know we do two plays a year and it is just that's all we can do. There is just so much neat stuff that you can do but you can't cram it all in one day."
Conflict Resolution	3	"I spend most of my day trying to make sure he's on task and. . .not hurting others . . .and if I ever have to leave the room to go to the office or run an errand, I always take him with me."
Acceptance of Conflict with a Sense of Balance	4	"It's a lot of planning; it's a lot of time. . . and a whole lot of stress but I think eventually when you teach a lesson or when a child goes 'This is the most fun I've ever had in math'. . .That to me is just so rewarding. That is the best part about teaching."

determined by the single codeable response with the highest assigned value. This policy, following a procedure outlined by Blatt and colleagues and observed in a related study by Priel, Myodovnik, and Rivlin-Beniaminy (1995), maintained the integrity of the developmental continuum underlying the categorical system. For chapters earning scores from two or more conceptual categories, the score representing the most sophisticated developmental level became the chapter total. Thus, a single chapter earned a score of 0 in the absence of codeable expressions, a score of 1 if one or more ideas fitting the "struggling with conflict" category were found, a score of 2 for one or more instances from the "resignation" category or both resignation and struggle categories, a score of 3 for one or more examples of the conflict resolution category or any combination of responses from the conflict resolution, resignation, and struggle categories, or a score of 4 for one or more instances of the balance category or any combination of exemplars from any of the four categories. Overall narrative scores were determined by dividing the sum of the chapter scores by the number of chapters within the narrative that contained codeable material. This formulation prevented absent data or responses whose content was not scoreable under this system from contaminating or deflating the overall narrative score.

For a 25% sample of the complete narrative data set, coders attained 93.04% agreement. By narrative chapter, percentage agreements also maintained conventionally acceptable levels. For chapters one and two, complete agreement was reached. Percentages for chapters three, four, five, and six were 87.5, 96.97, 91.18, and 82.35, respectively. The kappa statistic likewise indicated good overall agreement between coders, $K = .8491, p < .0001$. Although the frequency of narrative chapters with codeable

content was relatively small, only one narrative from each of the adult groups sampled had an overall score of zero. Thus, most narratives did include spontaneous discussion of at least one conflict and the obtained rater agreement suggests that, when present, exemplars reflecting the four content categories developed and described here can be reliably coded.

III. Results

Intended as an exploration of the predictors of adult responsiveness, this study added thematic balance in personal narrative to the variables studied in previous work, namely child negativity and narrative richness (Castlebury & Wahler, 1997; Herring, 1998).

Table 2 presents mean scores and standard deviations for measures of the criterion and predictor variables derived from the maternal interview and home observation. With the span of possible balance scores for each individual ranging from one to four, the mean score obtained from this sample can be interpreted as an indication of the average developmental level of the adults interviewed. As indicated by the mean score, the

Table 2.   Summary Statistics from Home Setting

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Narrative Balance	1.4187	0.6762
Narrative Richness	21.5455	4.2507
Child Negativity	0.0220	0.0247
Maternal Responsiveness	0.9645	0.0665

average expressed relationship fell between the first two categories of our system, struggling with and resignation toward the inevitability of conflict.

For each chapter, narrative richness, a variable assessing elaboration and complexity, was coded as a sum of the "yes" responses to five criteria questions (see Castlebury & Wahler, 1997). Thus, for any single narrative, each with six chapters, the possible range for this variable extended from zero to thirty. While the narratives from this sample did vary in richness, the average level suggests that these mothers are quite skilled in the presentation of detailed and contextualized stories.

Child negativity and maternal responsiveness scores were based on the behaviors and interpersonal dynamics observed during the one-hour home visit. Minimum and maximum values for both variables were zero and one, respectively. Child negativity indices were computed as the frequency of rule violations, opposition, complaints, negative approaches, and instructions divided by the total number of 15-second time intervals in the observation. Indices of responsiveness (see Herring, 1998) were calculated as the ratio of maternal responsive behaviors to responsive and unresponsive behaviors. Among the specific actions that constituted responsive behaviors were: neutral or positive approaches following like child approaches, praise for child compliance, or maternal compliance in response to a child instruction. Thus, the mean scores for these behavioral variables, 0.0220 and 0.9645, respectively, provide a global profile of the children and their mothers, one characterized by negligible oppositionality, frequent compliance, and a high degree of behavioral synchrony (Herring, 1998).

Table 3 presents similar summary data derived from teacher interviews and observation in the school setting. Calculations of means and standard deviations for teacher scores are identical to those used with data from the home setting and interpretations closely resemble those previously discussed with regard to maternal data. Evidence of the narrative skillfulness of these adults, narrative balance and richness scores are slightly higher for teachers than for mothers. Child negativity and

Table 3.   Summary Statistics from School Setting

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Narrative Balance	1.9271	0.8325
Narrative Richness	22.4848	3.3831
Child Negativity	0.0123	0.0208
Teacher Responsiveness	0.9758	0.0660

responsiveness means reveal a strong level of synchrony between teachers and their compliant, well-behaved students.

To investigate possible differences between mothers and teachers on each of these variables, four t-tests were performed. Of these, only one significant difference was discovered, that of narrative balance ($t = -2.51$, $p < .0147$).

Pearson correlations revealed a significant relationship between child negativity and responsiveness in both the home setting ($r = -.8576$, $p < .0001$) and the school setting ($r = -.6864$, $p < .0001$), reproducing the findings reported elsewhere which showed this variable to be the strongest predictor of mother and teacher responsiveness (see Herring, 1998). Given the power of this immediate influence on responsiveness, the narrative balance and richness variables could, at best, offer only a distal impact on an individual's behavior. Compared to the potency of in-the-moment child negativity, the narrative qualities of richness and balance were expected to play small, but nonetheless meaningful, parts in the guidance of adult behavior.

Following Castlebury's finding (personal communication, June 16, 1999) that narrative richness was a valuable addition to child negativity in the model predicting teacher, but not mother, responsiveness ($t = 3.20$, $p < .0036$), we expected that the narrative quality measured by thematic balance would function similarly. Spearman Rho correlations, however, failed to detect a significant relationship between narrative balance and either maternal or teacher responsiveness. Although neither reached significance, the relationship between balance and responsiveness was stronger for teachers ($r_s = .1942$, $p < .3317$) than for mothers ($r_s = -.06$, $p < .7081$), a significant difference ($p < .0001$) in the direction congruent with our expectation. Despite negligible correlations, further

analysis was warranted since the strength of relationships between balance, in isolation, and responsiveness would be misleading and less relevant than the power of this variable along with other influences. To determine the unique variance accounted for by narrative balance, its impact in combination with these factors must be considered. Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test the specific hypothesis that narrative balance, in conjunction with child negativity and narrative richness, would account for significant variance in the prediction of adult responsiveness.

Table 4 presents the three regression models tested in the prediction of maternal responsiveness. Child negativity was entered first into each model given its demonstrated power to influence adult responsiveness (see Herring, 1998) and proved to be the sole predictor of significance. Neither narrative balance nor richness, whether alone or in combination, accounted for significant variance when included in the model.

Table 5 presents the models used to test the relative contribution of narrative balance as a predictor of teacher responsiveness. As in the home setting, child negativity alone accounted for a large portion of the variance (47%). When narrative balance was entered into the model, the variable only approached significance ($p < .0561$), yet contributed an additional 8% to the prediction of responsiveness. The third model reproduced Castlebury's finding (personal communication, June 16, 1999) and was included given the result of regression model two and to provide a context for the model including balance and richness with child negativity. In support of our hypothesis, model four indicated that narrative balance accounted for a small, but unique, portion of the variance in teacher responsiveness when combined with these other two variables (ΔR^2 from model 1 to 2 = .0793, ΔR^2 from model 1 to 4 = .1546).

Table 4.   Hierarchical Regression Models with Mother Responsiveness as
               Dependent Variable

Model	Variables (in order of entrance)	β	Standard Error of β	F	R^2
1	Child Negativity	-2.3081****	0.2486	86.21****	.7355
2	Child Negativity	-2.3242****	0.2624	40.88****	.7382
	Narrative Balance	0.0006	0.0096		
3	Child Negativity	-2.3067****	0.2731	25.36****	.7380
	Narrative Balance	0.0023	0.0108		
	Narrative Richness	-0.0005	0.0017		

* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.   **** $p < .0001$.

Table 5.   Hierarchical Regression Models with Teacher Responsiveness as
            Dependent Variable

Model	Variables (in order of entrance)	β	Standard Error of β	F	R^2
1	Child Negativity	1.0029****	0.0106	24.05****	.4711
2	Child Negativity	-2.2922****	0.4333	14.69****	.5504
	Narrative Balance	0.0216	0.0108		
3	Child Negativity	-1.7486***	0.4837	14.02****	.5287
	Narrative Richness	0.0052	0.0029		
4	Child Negativity	-1.8515***	0.4528	12.82****	.6257
	Narrative Balance	0.0221*	0.0100		
	Narrative Richness	0.0059*	0.0027		

$*\ p < .05.$ $**\ p < .01.$ $***\ p < .001.$ $****\ p < .0001.$

IV. Discussion

As an exploratory study, the primary value of this effort lies in the presentation and analysis of a new paradigm for understanding the content of personal narratives as well as in the opening of directions and questions to be examined in future research. Two primary goals motivated this research endeavor: (1) to develop a reliable system for content analysis based on the belief that the most adaptive and healthy perspective on life is one that achieves balance in the integration of positive and negative experiences, (2) to test the relationship between the degree to which this ideal outlook is achieved and the responsiveness of adults who interact with children. The specific hypothesis to be tested by this coding system is that thematic balance found in personal narrative will account for unique and significant variance in the prediction of adult responsiveness, above and beyond the contribution of child negativity. The results are in partial support of this hypothesis.

Given the insignificance of the correlations between narrative balance and responsiveness for both mothers and teachers, one might be tempted to dismiss the construct as meaningless. Relative to the contributions of immediate behaviors like child negativity, the guidance potential of these narrative characteristics does seem remote. However, these less proximal influences are internalized biases that continually affect perception and organization of experience. Their potency lies in the cumulative effect of this personal perspective across time and settings. It is for this reason that the findings of this study are exciting. Although the categorical system for analyzing the thematic balance of narrative presented here is primitive, our findings indicate that the construct can be reliably coded and that in combination with child negativity, the driving force

behind adult responsiveness, thematic balance does hold explanatory significance in the prediction of responsive behavior for classroom teachers. The small percentage (10%) of variance accounted for by balance in the model including both child negativity and richness is, in fact, similar to the contribution of coherence (12%) in research on the Adult Attachment Interview (van IJzendoorn, 1995).

Although consistent with data on richness, the reason for the differential importance of narrative balance for mothers and teachers is as yet unclear. Explanations are speculative at best; the lack of compelling justifications invites future exploration. The differences in economic status and education alone may, in fact, account for this finding. An alternate proposal compares the nature of the mother-child relationship with that of teacher and student. The intense familiarity of highly synchronous mothers and children, like those in this study, may create such closeness and coexistence within the flow of everyday life that a narrative map is less useful than for teachers whose relationships with students are less intimate, casual, and historied. Introduction of this new paradigm for content analysis encourages questioning into the effects of role and setting on the development of narrative. To further investigate these distinctions, one exciting possibility would involve as participants mothers whose relationships with their children are strained or distant and who might, like teachers, need the integration and articulation of a balanced narrative to guide responsive parenting. Additional value could be found from similar study with fathers as well as mothers with teaching careers.

While this study provides an interesting look at the power of intrapersonal perspectives, evidenced by narrative content and organization, to affect ongoing behavior, it is not without limitations. The foremost of these is the correlational nature of

the study. By definition, findings are but associations and cannot provide answers on causality or direction of effect. That significant correlations or strongly predictive relationships between narrative balance and responsiveness were not found should, in fact, not be a great surprise given a number of measurement considerations. First among these is the difference in scope and specificity of the two coding systems. Balance, on the one hand, is a characterological assessment based on a rather narrow aspect of life and scored on a very basic and limited range. Responsiveness, however, is very specific and detailed in its coding and is based on actual behavior. That the general one-time measurement of balance was not strongly associated with the minute-to-minute dynamics of adult-child interactions may be largely due to these differences in metric and construct.

Secondly, although acceptable reliability was obtained among raters using the developed system for coding content, the infrequency of scoreable phrases restrict the extent of our analysis. To obtain a more comprehensive sense of the narrator's philosophical orientation and relationship with conflict, interview questions directly related to such issues might be valuable. Further elaboration of the levels in the categorical system as well as expansion to encompass additional indicants of balance might enrich its meaning and usefulness.

Demographic limitations of this project include the small sample size as well as the overrepresentation of middle-class Caucasian participants.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Personal Narrative and Social Interactions
of Children, Parents, and Teachers

Mother Informed Consent

This is a research study on parents' personal views about home and family. A graduate student interviewer will ask you to talk about your experiences in parenting, in being a family member and in being a part of your extended family and community. The interview will last about 60 minutes, it will be audio taped, transcribed at the University and transformed into word summaries and numerical ratings. Whatever you say will be kept strictly confidential and used only for research purposes, but we are required by law to report admissions of physical and psychological abuse. Only University members of the research team will have access to the interview records which will be stored in locked files in 226F Austin Peay, University of Tennessee. The audio tapes will be erased after transcription and all transcripts will be destroyed one year after the data analyses are completed.

Your participation in this study, based solely on your interest, is voluntary; you can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have questions about the study and/or your participation, please call Robert G. Wahler, Ph.D., at 974-2165. Once the study is completed, Dr. Wahler will discuss the findings in a group meeting with you and other interested parents.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, that I can withdraw at any time and still hear about the study results in the later parent group meeting.

Signed _____   Date _____

Witnessed _____   Date _____

Personal Narrative and Social Interactions
of Children, Parents, and Teachers

Teacher Informed Consent

This is a research study on teachers' personal views about school and how they interact with their pupils in the classroom. A graduate student interviewer will ask you to talk about your experiences in teaching, in being a faculty member, and in your other contacts with the children and their parents. The interview will last about 60 minutes, it will be audio taped, transcribed at the University and transformed into word summaries and numerical ratings. Whatever you say will be kept strictly confidential and used only for research purposes. In addition, we will wish to conduct a later 60-minute observation of one child in your classroom, including the interactions between that child and peers as well as you. We will also want you to complete a checklist describing this child's personality and a questionnaire outlining your self perceptions. The checklist questionnaires will also be confidential and both will be transformed into coded numbers. Only University members of the research team will have access to the interview and observation records which will be stored in locked files in 226F Austin Peay, University of Tennessee. The audio tapes will be erased after transcription and all transcripts and observation records will be destroyed one year after the data analyses are completed.

Your participation in this study, based solely on your interest, is voluntary; you can withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have questions about the study and/or your participation, please call Robert G. Wahler, Ph.D., at 974-2165. Once the study is completed, Dr. Wahler will discuss the findings in a faculty meeting at your school.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, that I can withdraw at any time and still hear about the study results in the later faculty meeting.

Signed _____   Date _____

Witnessed _____   Date _____

Appendix B

Child Personal Narrative about Life at Home

1. Tell me about what you do at home.
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

2. What do you like best about being there?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

3. What don't you like about being there?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

4. What was the most interesting thing that happened at home during the last month?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

5. Who do you usually do things with at home? Try to remember the last time you did something with this person.
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

6. What did your parents expect from you when you were little and what did you expect from them? How have things changed from then to now?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

Parent Personal Narrative about Life at Home

1. Can you give me an idea of what you do as a parent and as a family member?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

2. What do you like best about it?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

3. What don't you like about it?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

4. What was the most interesting thing you were involved in during the last month?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

5. Who takes up the biggest share of your time? Try to remember the last time you did something with this person.
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

6. Compare your current family with your family when you were growing up. What are the differences and similarities?
   Is there anything more you'd like to add?

Child Personal Narrative about Life at School

1. Tell me about what you do at school.
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

2. What do you like best about being there?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

3. What don't you like about being there?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

4. What was the most interesting thing that happened at school during the last
    month?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

5. Who do you usually do things with at school? Try to remember the last time you
    did something with this person.
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

6. What did your teacher expect from you when you first started school and what did
    you expect from your teacher? How have things changed from then to now?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

Teacher Personal Narrative about Life at School

1. Can you give me an idea of what you do as a teacher and as a faculty member?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

2. What do you like best about it?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

3. What don't you like about it?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

4. What was the most interesting thing you were involved in during the last month?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

5. Who takes up the biggest share of your time? Try to remember the last time you
    did something with this person.
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

6. What were you expectations about teaching when you decided to be a teacher?
    How are they the same or different now?
    Is there anything more you'd like to add?

Appendix C

Demographic Questionnaire
Personal Narrative Study

Subject # _____   Date:_____
                                       Interviewer:_____

CHILD:
1. Gender: 1) Male
              2) Female
2. Age: _____
3. Race: 1) American Indian or Alaskan Native
              2) Asian or Pacific Islander
              3) Black or African American
              4) Hispanic or Latino
              5) Caucasian/White
              6) Other (please specify _____)
4. Birth Date: _____
5. Grade: _____
6. Name of School: _____

MOTHER:
1. Age: _____
2. Marital Status: 1) Single
                      2) Married
                      3) Divorced
                      4) Remarried
                      5) Widowed
3. Race: 1) American Indian or Alaskan Native
              2) Asian or Pacific Islander
              3) Black or African American
              4) Hispanic or Latino
              5) Caucasian/White
              6) Other (please specify _____)
4. Education (Number of years, i.e. high school grad = 12 years): _____
5. Highest Level of Academic Achievement: 1) Grade School
                                             2) High School Graduate
                                             3) College Graduate
                                             4) Masters Degree
                                             5) Ph.D. or Professional
                                                (MD, JD, etc.)
6. Approximate Gross Family Income: _____

Demographic Questionnaire
Personal Narrative Study

Subject # _____   **Date:** _____
                                 Interviewer: _____

CHILD:

1. Gender: 1) Male
             2) Female
2. Age: _____
3. Race: 1) American Indian or Alaskan Native
             2) Asian or Pacific Islander
             3) Black or African American
             4) Hispanic or Latino
             5) Caucasian/White
             6) Other (please specify _____)
4. Birth Date: _____
5. Grade: _____
6. Name of School: _____

TEACHER:

1. Gender: 1) Male
             2) Female
2. Age: _____
3. Marital Status: 1) Single
                     2) Married
                     3) Divorced
                     4) Remarried
                     5) Widowed
4. Race: 1) American Indian or Alaskan Native
             2) Asian or Pacific Islander
             3) Black or African American
             4) Hispanic or Latino
             5) Caucasian/White
             6) Other (please specify _____)
5. Education (Number of years, i.e. high school grad = 12 years): _____
6. Highest Level of Academic Achievement: 1) Grade School
                                            2) High School Graduate
                                            3) College Graduate
                                            4) Masters Degree
                                            5) Ph.D. or Professional
                                               (MD, JD, etc.)
7. Number of Years Teaching: _____
8. Approximate Gross Family Income: _____

VITA

Laura Porter was born in Fort Belvoir, Virginia on March 25, 1971. She spent her childhood in Kingsport, Tennessee where she attended public schools and graduated from Dobyns-Bennett High School in June 1989. In August of that year, she matriculated at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. With a major in International Studies and minors in Japanese and Asian Studies, she received the Bachelor of Arts degree in May 1993.

She entered the Master's Program in Experimental Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the fall of 1996, officially receiving the Master's degree in August 1999. She formally entered the University's doctoral program in Clinical Psychology in August 1998.

In pursuit of her doctorate, she continues her exploration of personal narrative and of the concept of balance as a marker of developmental maturity and responsiveness in interpersonal interactions. She is currently involved in research investigating the conditional antecedents of compliance in the interactions of mothers and their oppositionally-defiant children.