7-20-2012

Narrative Processing Predicts Well-Being and Communion in Victims of Intimate Partner Violence

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Narratives may play an important role in understanding and healing from traumas among victims of intimate partner violence. This study investigated whether narrative processes of overcoming and integrating traumas into overall life stories (i.e., narrative resolution, complexity, and growth) relate to female victims' overall psychological well-being and capacities for close, meaningful relationships following intimate partner violence (N=32). To assess predictor and outcome variables, a narrative protocol and questionnaires examining participants' well-being, relationship attitudes, and relationship engagement were used. Results showed that victims' levels of narrative processing were generally predictive of their intimate relationship attitudes, positive relations with others, and overall well-being. Decreased rumination partially mediated the relationship between narrative resolution and well being. Overall, findings indicate the importance of narratives in trauma recovery in the case of intimate partner violence.

Storytelling is pertinent to an individual's self-insight and development both in the therapy setting and in life overall. Storytelling, or narrative processing, is the narration, interpretation, and incorporation of past experiences into individuals' life stories (Pals, 2006). Consequently, narrative processing is important in making meaning of past events, particularly traumatic experiences, within the context of the life story as a whole. People's stories vary in their inclusion of narrative components, such as complexity, resolution, and growth. Overall, the sharing of one's experiences is linked to identity development, well-being, positive relationship development, and meaning in one's life (e.g., King, 2001; Linley & Joseph, 2003). Past research has shaped the current study's focus on a particular trauma in women, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and its relationship to narrative processing, which has the potential to be a powerful coping mechanism in trauma victims.

Understanding coping in IPV victims is essential, as being able to identify successful coping mechanisms has positive implications for recovery and therapy for victims. The present study centers on one main question: What narrative processes (i.e., complexity, resolution, and growth) predict IPV victims' well-being and capacities for close relationships?

The Role of Life Stories and Narratives in Personal Development

Life stories are complex, evolving, psychosocial constructions (i.e., both individuals and their cultures author and shape these stories) associated with identity development (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Individuals constantly revise their unique life stories to comply with cultural expectations and to incorporate past, present, and future events into these stories (McAdams, 1998, in McLean, 2008). Furthermore, meaningful storytelling, reflection on

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experiences, and differences in life experiences are pertinent to identity development within a culture (McLean, 2008). Essentially, identity is an internalized, evolving life story (McAdams, 2001).

Past research has shown the importance of how individuals convey and conceptualize narratives within the context of their overall lives. In a study by Sanderson and McKeough (2005), the experimenters found that narrative thought is useful in understanding life events, human intentions/actions, and different event outcomes. Specifically, the results revealed that, relative to a therapy setting, narrative language helps clients work through how events are causally related and how one's *internal* 'intention state' (i.e., emotion, motivation) shapes one's *external* actions (Sanderson & McKeough, 2005). These findings are related to this study's examination of how narrative processes of growth, complexity, and resolution relate to a person's relationship goals, needs, and overall feelings of well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, daily functioning, and positive emotion) (King, 2001). In addition to the importance of the content of a narrative, Sanderson & McKeough also emphasize the importance of individuals' manner of conveying their narratives; this is important because the narrative can highlight participants' unresolved issues, meaning making abilities, and manner of incorporating stories and negative events into their overall lives.

Narrative processing is also beneficial for one's ability to better understand, positively transform, and

process difficult life experiences. For example, a study by Pennebaker and Seagal (1999) found that narrative writing helps organize, understand, and create a coherent, integrative account of complex experiences over time. In other words, speaking about an emotionally stigmatizing experience (e.g., IPV) can turn a complex event into a simpler, more efficient story. On the other hand, failure to address difficult experiences and traumas has negative effects on the individual. Specifically, the silencing of abuse, both individually and culturally, leads abusive experiences and accompanying stories to be perceived as uninteresting, irrelevant, or unacceptable, which further leads to reluctance in individuals to speak about their experiences. It is vital, however, for individuals to talk about the difficult events in their lives, as it gives those events meaning and enhances self-concept and self-understanding (Fivush, 2004). Overall, narrative processing is significant in personal identity development and also increases one's ability to understand, resolve, and incorporate trauma into an overall life story.

Individual Differences in Narrative Processing: Implications for Well-Being

Narrative Processing: Importance to the Life Story Model of Identity

Although life narratives have the potential to promote positive development in individuals, narratives vary substantially in their ability to do so. Various processes are integral to one's narrative and illustrate individual

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differences in thought processes and emotional maturity. The current study mainly addresses three of these components: narrative complexity, narrative growth, and narrative resolution. First, *narrative growth* is a positive change in thinking that occurs when reflecting on a difficult event, leading to maturity, strength, and positive functioning (Mansfield, 2009). Second, *narrative resolution* occurs when an individual makes peace with difficult life experiences within the context of his or her life story (Mansfield, 2009). Third, *narrative complexity* refers to individuals' depth of thought in narratives and their abilities to see different perspectives and outcomes (Mansfield, 2009); this narrative process is reflected in plots, themes, characters, and settings that are intertwined into a person's overall life story (Singer, 2005). In the current study, IPV experiences can be classified as *self defining memories*. Such memories are significant scenes in the life story, as the construction and interpretation of these memories in the midst of personal, long-term goals gives life unity and purpose (Singer & Salovey, 2003; Singer, 2004; Tomkins, 1987, in McAdams et al., 2006). Narrative resolution may be especially important for handling traumatic self defining memories such as IPV. Each of these three aspects of narrative processing—narrative complexity, narrative growth, and narrative resolution—may play a critical role in the development of well-being, particularly following trauma, as reviewed next.

Narrative Growth

The ability of individuals to positively change their thinking, set

goals, and find redemption in their traumas is related to an individual's overall well-being. While a few studies have shown growth to be marginally predictive of well-being (see Mansfield, 2009), other studies have found growth to be significantly linked to well-being (see Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005a; Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2006; Bauer & McAdams, 2004). Bauer, McAdams, and Pals (2006) discuss how high levels of *eudaimonic* well-being (i.e., an individual's overall ego development, psychosocial integration of difficult experiences, and psychological well-being) are linked to an accentuation of personal growth, development, and viewing of traumatic experiences as transformative and insightful in life stories. As such, a narrative focus on growth is related to an overall sense of well-being in an individual.

The presence of redemption sequences in individuals' life stories is also indicative of growth from the trauma. Redemption sequences occur when a negative life experience is followed by or transformed into a positive life experience scene (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). Conversely, contamination sequences occur when a positive life experience is followed by or transformed into a negative life experience scene. For example, a redemption sequence occurs if a person who descends into heavy drinking then decides to make the positive life change of becoming sober; contrarily, a sober individual deciding to heavily drink would be an example of a contamination sequence. In samples of both midlife adults and undergraduate students, McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis,

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Patten, and Bowman (2001) found that, in contrast to contamination sequences, redemption sequences in narratives were correlated with high levels of well-being, life satisfaction, self-disclosure, and self esteem. Recovery from traumas such as IPV may similarly be linked to an enhanced self-view and overall changed life philosophy. Ultimately, the presence of redemption sequences in narratives is related to higher levels of well-being, enabling healing and resolution to occur.

Growth also results from life goals, which are linked to narrative well-being and identity development. When setting life goals, an individual seeks to become the best version of him or herself, which is referred to as one's 'best possible self' (King & Hicks, 2006). In narratives, the ease, vividness, and emotional depth with which individuals think about their best possible selves is pertinent to growth. Several studies have found that investing in attainable goals and letting go of unattainable goals is strongly associated with well-being and ego development (King & Hicks, 2006). Overall, positive change after difficult experiences (i.e., growth) and establishment of achievable goals are linked to individuals' well-being levels.

Narrative Resolution

Like growth narratives, narrative resolution is also linked to positive well-being. In this sense, resolution indicates individuals' ability to make peace with their traumas, create a positive solution for their traumatic experiences, and disallow such traumas from continually negatively affecting their daily lives. There are variations in individuals' levels of narrative resolution, including narratives' presence of crystallization of desire vs. discontent and coherent positive resolution.

Individuals' perception about important events in their lives, particularly traumatic ones, is important to their well-being levels. In looking at adults' narratives of life changing decisions, Bauer, McAdams, and Sakaeda (2005b) found that crystallization of desire (focusing on "approaching a desired future") leads to a greater level of well-being/life satisfaction, more positive self-view, and less trauma avoidance than does crystallization of discontent (focusing on "escaping an undesired past"). For example, following negative experiences, crystallization of desire leads individuals to seek happiness, pleasure, and success whereas crystallization of discontent leads individuals to escape failures and negativity. Thus, a dichotomy exists between a positive approach orientation (i.e., crystallization of desire) and negative avoidance orientation (i.e., crystallization of discontent).

Within this context, confronting trauma in a positive manner is also linked to increased trauma resolution and well being. Pals (2006) describes a two step process in narrative reasoning and post-trauma growth: exploring the impact of a meaningful, negative experience in depth and constructing a resolved, positive ending of self-transformation. In a longitudinal study of adults who have had difficult life experiences, Pals found that positive self transformation is likely to lead to well-being. She looked at "*coherent positive*

resolution", which occurs when a well integrated life story of a difficult experience ends positively and leads to adult identity development. It follows that "coherent positive resolution" leads to higher levels of overall well-being (e.g., resiliency, life satisfaction), which is an important outcome measure in the present study.

Furthermore, in studies assessing post-trauma recovery and counteraction of past traumas, present control (i.e., control over recovery) and positive life changes were found to be associated with less distress, fewer depressive symptoms (e.g., social withdrawal), greater cognitive restructuring, and higher effectiveness in recovery than past (i.e., self-blame) or even future control (Frazier, Mortensen, & Steward, 2005; Frazier, 2003; Frazier, Tashiro, Berman, Steger, & Long, 2004). Overall, victims' levels of peace with their trauma, control over their recovery from trauma, and focus on positive solutions to their trauma are related to their psychological well-being. In victims, approaching a desired future and creating a coherent and resolved narrative are linked to increased positive identity development, life satisfaction, and resiliency.

Narrative Complexity

In the midst of processing and understanding difficult life events, narrative complexity can occur, which is linked to well-being. Following from the previous discussion, narrative complexity is an important predictor of well-being, even in the presence of narrative resolution (Mansfield et al., 2009). If individuals have high levels of eudaimonic well-being, they view traumatic experiences as transformative and capable of offering insight; furthermore, in addition to having positive feelings, individuals with high levels of well-being are able to perceive and integrate difficult events into their overall self-view. Overall, the integration and incorporation of thoughts, feelings, and experiences into one's life story is the hallmark of narrative complexity.

Happiness and maturity are also linked to narrative complexity and well-being. King (2001) discusses how happiness and maturity are two aspects of the good life. The good life results from the incorporation of difficult life experiences into one's narrative (e.g., including change, suffering, regret, and a positive ending). Individuals with complex narratives are able to see and experience differing outcomes, including, regret, agony, and positive change. Contrary to having an outcome of regret, the ability to find redemption after considering different perspectives in a difficult life event is linked positive psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989, in King, 2001). Particularly in adult women who have lived in an unequal, limiting environment, difficult life experiences have the opportunity to enhance complexity of life perspectives, which is, in turn, related to the 'good life' (see Helson, 1992, in King, 2001).

In individuals facing difficult experiences, specific words in narratives denote depth of processing and predict overall well-being. Using a meta-data analysis from previous studies, Pennebaker, Mayne, and Francis (1997) found that positive-emotion words in

narratives are predictive of increased psychological health and individuals with a mixture of many positive-emotion words and some negative-emotion words have the highest amount of well-being. These narratives are considered to have high levels of narrative complexity, as the inclusion of both positive and negative emotion words illustrates individuals' abilities to see differing perspectives/outcomes and to intertwine differing emotions in their narratives. Overall, the integration of fragmented negative and positive emotions is indicative of narrative complexity and consequent overall psychological well-being.

Failure to acknowledge difficult life events leads to a lack of narrative complexity, well-being, and identity development. Because negative events are emotionally difficult for individuals to explain within the context of the life story, the most common response is to deny or discount such events; this repression can cause individuals to have positive illusions about difficult experiences, leading to a focus more on potential positive meanings of events rather than acknowledging their negative aspects (McAdams, 2008). Failing to process and understand the negative aspects hinders individuals from confronting the reality of these situations. Furthermore, these illusions will not last indefinitely, resulting ultimately in lowered levels of well-being. An individual who pushes traumatic experiences out of consciousness is more likely to have a long-lasting obsession with trauma (i.e., rumination) and lack an integrated self, identity, and coherent life story (Fivush,

2004; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999). Overall, individuals' integration of multiple emotions and perspectives into their trauma narratives is predictive of increased well-being, life satisfaction, and positive identity development.

The Relationship between Narrative Processes and Communion

Communion can be defined as individuals' experiences with love and intimacy as well as their connections to others shown through helping, nurturing, and affection (Bakan, 1966, in McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996; Singer, 2005). In my study, communion is examined as an individual's intimate relationship attitudes and positive relations with others. Although communion is mainly an outcome measure in this study, McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, and Day (1996) found that communion themes in narratives (i.e., love/friendship, care/help) are positively associated with intimacy motivation/attainment and personal needs for close, warm affiliation and nurturance. In essence, communion themes encompass individuals' sentiments towards their interpersonal relationships; these themes are then associated with the externalized outcome of communion, which is the playing out of individuals' relationship attitudes and behaviors in their daily lives. Therefore, an individual's relationship attitudes are both contained in and highly correlated with narratives.

Several studies have demonstrated that positive relationship development is linked to growth and well-being. Individuals who experience positive

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change after trauma alter their life philosophy and enhance their relationships (Linley & Joseph, 2003). Bauer, McAdams, and Sakaeda (2005a) found that happy people (i.e., people with connections to other people/things beyond self) interpret and understand their lives according to meaningful relationships; the study also found that having meaningful relationships is correlated strongly with psychological well-being. Bauer, McAdams, and Pals (2006) discuss how high levels of eudaimonic well-being are linked to, among other things, a richer, more mature understanding of one's relationship to self and others. Therefore, growth and happiness are linked to positive relationship development and, in turn, these relationships are linked to overall positive well-being.

The Present Study

The present study seeks to contribute to narrative processing research on Intimate Partner Violence by empirically investigating the relationship between processes in individuals' narratives (i.e., growth, complexity, and resolution) and their sense of well-being, relationships with others, and attitudes about intimate relationships. To accomplish this, the participants completed questionnaires about their social relational engagement, relationship attitudes, and overall psychological well-being. The experimenter also conducted an interview with the participant, which focused on participants' experience of intimate partner violence within the context of their overall life stories (e.g., treatment decisions, future goals,

beliefs/values). In this study, IPV was operationally defined to include physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, and financial abuse. Although extensive past research on narrative processing has helped structure the current study's focus (see studies in King & Hicks, 2006), the rationale for this study stems from past research gaps on IPV's relationship to narrative processing. IPV victims are a particularly important population to study because they have experienced challenges such as emotional and interpersonal trauma that they attempt to fit into their life stories. These stories provide insight into how individuals positively recover from difficult experiences and how these traumas affect individuals' outlooks on life. The dependent measures in the present study—psychological well-being and communion—reflect individuals' overall functioning levels both internally and externally. These measures provide information about an individual's overall well-being (e.g., independence, life purpose, self-acceptance, general affect) and interpersonal relationship functioning and attitudes (e.g., relationship fear, motivation, and stability). Overall, I hypothesized that higher levels of complexity, resolution, and growth in IPV women's narratives would be related to enhanced well-being, intimate relationship attitudes, and positive relations with others.

This study also has several subsidiary predictions about intimate relationship motivation and perpetrator punishment satisfaction. In the context of narratives, I examined how participants' incorporation of post-abuse intimate relationship willingness and

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contentment with their abusers' punishments were related to the outcome measures of well-being, intimate relationship attitudes, and positive relations with others. Based on past research (e.g., see McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005a), I predicted that increased willingness to enter into new intimate relationships would be related to increased well being, positive intimate relationship attitudes, and positive relations with others. Secondly, I also predicted that increased satisfaction with perpetrator punishment would be positively correlated with these outcome measures. This prediction is based on past research that has found that, within a certain time frame of their perpetrator's punishment, victims' revenge feelings were significantly decreased if punishment severity were higher (Orth, 2004).

I also posed the question of whether participants' level of rumination about their abusive trauma is a mediator between the effects of the narrative processes and participants' outcomes. Past research has shown rumination's significant relationship to negative mood (e.g., depression and anxiety) and negative correlation with individuals' forgiveness of themselves, others, and situations; specifically, goal interruption and lack of processing emotions in individuals potentially causes rumination, which, in turn, leads to negative mood states (Segerstrom, Tsao, Alden, & Craske, 2000; Thompson, et al., 2005). Further research has also shown that rumination is a mediator between a person's forgivingness level and revenge motivations following transgressions

(e.g., in this case, IPV) (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005). Therefore, I predicted that rumination would be a mediator between narrative processes and outcome measures of well-being and relationship; specifically, I predicted rumination would mediate narrative resolution's effect on both well-being and intimate relationship attitudes. Past research particularly points to rumination's role in the context of narrative resolution (e.g., forgivingness), well-being (e.g., mood state), and intimate relationship attitudes (e.g., vengeful/negative feelings post-abuse).

Method

Participants

The participants (N=32) for this study were recruited from non-profit agencies in upstate New York (N=16) and Texas (N=16) that provide services for victims of domestic violence. In keeping with confidentiality concerns, therapists and advocates at both non-profit agencies gave their clients information about this study and the clients then volunteered to take part in this study. The experimenter contacted the potential participants by telephone and set up a time to meet in-person to run the study session. The participants were compensated for taking part in this study with a $15 gift card.

The participants in this study ranged in age from 22 to 57 years (M=39.2, SD=10.7). In terms of education, 15.6% had less than high school level, 18.8% had a high school/GED degree, 37.5% had completed some college, 12.5% had an Associates degree, 12.5% had a 4-

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year college degree, and 3.1% had a Master's degree. Most of participants in the study were either white or black/African American (56.3% and 31.3%, respectively), and a smaller percentage were Hispanic (9.4%) and of mixed race (3.1%). In terms of marital status, 6.3% of the participants were legally married, 25.0% divorced, 31.3% separated, 6.3% widowed, and 31.3% single. Occupationally, 34.4% were workers for pay, 18.8% maintained households, 3.1% were students, 3.1% were retired, 28.1% were unemployed, 3.1% were both students and maintained households, and 9.4% were both students and workers for pay. In terms of income, 71.9% of the participants had income less than $15,000, 22% had income between $15,001-$55,000, and 6.2% had income over $55,000.

In terms of intimate relationships, 21.9% of the participants were currently in relationships (12.5% still with perpetrators and 9.4% with new partners). The mean amount of time the abuse had been occurring, if occurring currently, was 135.8 months (Range=3.0-192.0 months, SD=89.0). If the abuse was not current, the mean length of the abuse was 108.1 months (Range=.75-360.0 months, SD=108.7) and the mean amount of time that it had been since the abuse stopped was 11.8 months (Range=.50-54.0 months, SD=16.0). Many of the participants had experienced multiple types of abuse, including physical (84.4%), verbal (96.9%), emotional (90.6%), sexual (50.0%), and financial (65.6%). In terms of types of perpetrators (sometimes spanning numerous abusive relationships of differing types), 50.0% of the perpetrators were boyfriends, 3.1%

were casual partners, 50.0% were spouses, and 9.4% were other types of perpetrators. Therapy-wise, 18.8% of the women were part of a support group, 65.6% were attending individual therapy, 15.6% had never attended therapy, and 15.6% were past recipients of therapy.

Procedures

Data were gathered over a period of 4 months via an individual, one-time meeting session at either an upstate New York or Texas non-profit agency. The hour-long study session occurred in an enclosed room at the agency to ensure confidentiality. After finishing a consent form and a demographics questionnaire, participants completed various scales/questionnaires that addressed well-being, control over healing from trauma, relationship engagement and attitudes, and overall functioning levels. Participants filled out the scales and questionnaires by hand unless they preferred an alternative means or had a reading impairment, in which case, the experimenter and participant verbally filled out the questionnaires and scales together. Then, participants verbally participated in an interview, which examined their overall life reflections and IPV experiences. The experimenter recorded all interviews via an audio-taping device, so that trained research assistants could later code the interviews. Specific scales/questionnaires and the narrative protocol are discussed in detail below (see Table 1 in the appendix for descriptive information).

Measures of Narrative Processing

The interview protocol used was an adapted version of McAdams' "Life

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Story Interview" (McAdams, 1995; Helson, 1992). McAdams' original interview is a longer protocol that is divided into life chapters, key scenes, future scripts, life challenges, personal ideologies, life themes, and an overall life reflection. This study's adaptation was more specific to the IPV experiences of participants. Specific questions addressed participants' role models, IPV experiences, treatment/therapy decisions, perpetrator punishment, life beliefs, future chapters, and overall life reflection (see Table 2 for more detail).

Coding Procedure

Upon conclusion of data collection, the narratives were coded by four research assistants who were all undergraduate students. A coding manual was prepared to score participants on their depth of thought and perspective taking (narrative complexity), ability to make peace with their abuse (narrative resolution), and redemption from their traumatic experience (narrative growth) (see Appendix A). The narratives were also scored on participants' satisfaction with punishment of their abusers and also motivation to engage in new intimate relationships. The coders listened to the interviews and scored each interview according to the manual's parameters. The two coders assigned to each interview rated interviews independently first and then verbally agreed upon an overall score for each narrative measure, ranging from a score of 1-5 for each item. There was a high level of inter-rater reliability between scorers for all narrative measures (narrative complexity (r=.76), narrative resolution (r=.77),

narrative growth (r=.80), perpetrator punishment satisfaction (r=.95), intimate relationship willingness (r=.93)).

Questionnaire Measures

IPV experience. Targeted questions were used to obtain specific data about participants' IPV experiences. Participants were asked to complete questions about the kind of IPV experienced, whether the violence was currently on-going, type of perpetrator involved, and the extent of therapy that had been sought.

Well-being. To obtain an overall outcome measure of well-being, Ryff et al.'s (1994) *Scales of Psychological Well-Being* and the *Hopkins Symptom Checklist-10* (Syed, et al., 2008) were combined. Ryff's original 84-item scale (14-items per subscale) was shortened to serve as this study's 9-item scale (α=.85). Three subscales with 3 items each were used from the PWB scale: Autonomy, which measures independence (e.g., "Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me"); Purpose in Life, which measures life direction and belief system (e.g., "I have a sense of direction and purpose in my life"); and Self-Acceptance, which measures overall self-attitude (e.g., "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out"). Participants answered each item on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Secondly, the *Hopkins Symptom Checklist-10* contains 10 items that pertain to feelings of fear, weakness, tension, fatigue, worthlessness, and hopelessness that have occurred in the

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previous week (α=.92). Participants filled out each item on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). The symptoms checklist was scored in the opposite direction to reflect an absence of symptoms. In order to combine the two scales, standardized values (z-scores) were obtained for each score, and the participants' scores on the two scales were averaged (α=.81 for these two scales).

Intimate relationship attitudes. The outcome measure of relationship attitudes was assessed via an adapted version of the *Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire* (Snell, Schicke, & Arbeiter, 2002). The original scale had 61 items with 12 subscales. However, the 20-item questionnaire used in this study had 3 subscales: Relationship Esteem, which measures one's confidence in intimate relationships (e.g., "I am confident about myself as an intimate partner"); Relationship Motivation, which measures one's desire to be in an intimate relationship (e.g., "I strive to keep myself involved in an intimate relationship" (*reversed*)); and Relationship Fear, which measures one's aversion to becoming involved in intimate relationships (e.g., "I sometimes have a fear of intimate relationships"). Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me). The Relationship Fear scale was reversed so that high scores indicated a relative absence of fear in relationships. To compute an overall score for intimate relationship attitudes, the scores on the 3 subscales were averaged (α=.81).

Positive relations with others. The *Positive Relations with Others* subscale from Ryff et al.'s (1994) *Scales of Psychological Well-Being* (α=.73) was used to ascertain participants' experiences of engagement, empathy, and intimacy in current relationships. This subscale consisted of 8 items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), including "Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me" (*reversed*) and "Most people see me as loving and affectionate".

Rumination. To assess levels of rumination about IPV experiences, the rumination subscale from the *Event Management Questionnaire* (Mansfield, 2009) was used (α=.90). The scale had 4 items, including statements such as "I often find myself thinking of this event" and "When I think about this event I feel sad". Participants responded to items on a 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) scale.

Results

The present study assessed whether the narrative processes of resolution, complexity, and growth (additionally, relationship willingness and punishment satisfaction) were predictive of key outcomes: psychological well-being, intimate relationship attitudes, and positive relations with others. To assess these relationships, a rumination measure was also used to determine its mediating effect on outcomes. Descriptive statistics for all measures are included in Table 1.

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Relationships between Narrative Processes and Outcome Measures Narratives and Well-being

In seeking to answer the central question of whether narrative processing predicts participants' self-reported well-being, I obtained the correlations between these two sets of measures (see Table 3). I found strong correlations between narrative complexity, resolution, and growth and participants' well-being. Additionally, there was a moderate correlation between well-being and participants' overall willingness and enthusiasm to engage in romantic relationships post-IPV. However, surprisingly the narrative measure of punishment satisfaction did not significantly correlate with well-being. These findings suggest that participants' depth of reflection, multiple perspective taking, optimism, and ability to make peace with their intimate partner violence experiences is related to higher levels of overall emotional and psychological well-being. Furthermore, these results suggest a victim's motivation to engage in an intimate relationship is positively linked to well-being and is an indicator of a person's overall functioning level. Unexpectedly, these results also suggest that a victim's level of satisfaction with the punishment of her perpetrator does not significantly relate to her overall psychological well-being and livelihood.

Narratives and Relationships: Intimate Relationship Attitudes and Positive Relations with Others

In seeking to answer the central question of whether narrative processing predicts participants' relationship attitudes and relations, I obtained correlations between narrative processes and participants' intimate relationship attitudes and positive relations with others (see Table 3). I found that narrative resolution moderately correlated with participants' intimate relationship attitudes; interestingly, however, none of the other narrative processes (including the questions on satisfaction with perpetrator punishment and motivation to engage in intimate/romantic relationships) had a significant relationship with this outcome measure. Yet, narrative complexity, resolution (moderately strong), and growth were strongly correlated with the positive relations with others outcome measure. Victims' level of satisfaction with their perpetrator's punishments and enthusiasm to engage in intimate relationships were also strongly correlated with participants' report of their level of positive relations with others. These results suggest that the ability of victims to rise above and understand their abuse is linked to their overall sentiments towards intimate relationships (e.g., fear of relationships, motivation to engage in relationships). Furthermore, victims' ability to make peace with their abuse, grow from their trauma, and understand multiple perspectives about their experiences predicts their general experiences with relationships. Participants' contentment with their perpetrators' punishments and engagement in intimate relationships also relates to the overall positivity of their relationships with others.

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Regression Analyses Examining Multiple Aspects of Narrative Processing on Participants' Outcomes

To probe the relationship between narratives and well-being, I conducted a linear regression analysis to look at narrative processing variables simultaneously as predictors of well-being. Taking all the three variables of narrative complexity, resolution, and growth together, narrative resolution most strongly predicted well-being (see Table 4). This finding suggests that the ability of intimate partner violence victims to make peace with their situations is a more important predictor of their overall emotional and psychological functioning than narrative growth and complexity.

Additionally, I conducted a linear regression analysis to ascertain the relationship between narrative processes (i.e., narrative complexity, resolution, and growth) as simultaneously predictors of intimate relationship attitudes (see Table 5). I found that narrative resolution was the most important predictor of these attitudes, suggesting victims' abilities to rise above their traumatic abuse experiences is more predictive of their outlooks on romantic relationships than narrative complexity and growth.

Lastly, I conducted a linear regression analysis to determine the relationship between all three narrative processes and participants' positive relations with others (see Table 6). Surprisingly, narrative complexity was the most predictive factor of this outcome measure compared to narrative

growth and resolution. Thus, participants' depth of thought about their abusive experiences and ability to take multiple perspectives when contemplating such experiences are very important in predicting their quality of interpersonal relationships.

Regression Analyses Examining Rumination's Role as a Mediator between Narrative Resolution and Outcome Measures

I examined whether rumination accounts for the relationships that might emerge between narrative resolution and well-being and between narrative resolution and intimate relationship attitudes. I conducted two separate regression analyses predicting intimate relationship attitudes and well-being. In both cases, narrative resolution was entered as a predictor in Step 1 and narrative resolution and rumination were entered simultaneously as predictors in Step 2. This protocol tested whether narrative resolution still had a significant effect on well-being or intimate relationship attitudes when also considering the relationship between rumination and those variables.

Following standard procedures for examining possible mediators, I first established narrative resolution's strong correlation with rumination ($r=-.50$, $p<.01$), and, in turn, rumination's strong correlation with well-being ($r=-.69$, $p<.01$). I then conducted a mediator analysis in which narrative resolution significantly predicted well-being scores ($\beta=.59$, $p=.00$); however, when I entered rumination in the second step, I found both resolution ($\beta=.33$, $p=.03$) and

rumination (β=-.52, p=.001) to be significant predictors of well-being, with resolution's significance now being less robust. Therefore, I found rumination to be a partial mediator of the link between narrative resolution and well-being. This finding suggests that resolution has an impact on well-being partly because of its effect on rumination (e.g., as narrative resolution increases, participant's rumination about IPV decreases, and well-being increases).

Additionally, I established that rumination was moderately correlated with participants' intimate relationship attitudes (r=-.44, p<.05). I then conducted a mediator analysis in which narrative resolution significantly predicted intimate relationship attitude scores (β=.42, p=.02). However, when I entered rumination into the model as a predictor at Step 2, I found that rumination was not a significant predictor of intimate relationship attitudes (β=-.30, p=.12). Therefore, this second mediator analysis showed rumination to not be a mediator when looking at the relationship between narrative resolution and intimate relationship attitudes. This finding suggests that narrative resolution's relationship with intimate relationship attitudes is not dependent on its effect on rumination.

Discussion

The present study sought to examine whether different aspects of narratives were predictive of intimate partner violence victims' well-being, positive relationships with others, and intimate relationship attitudes. Overall, I

hypothesized that higher levels of narrative complexity, resolution, and growth in the women's narratives would predict higher levels of well-being and communion (i.e., more positive intimate relationship attitudes and relations with others). I also hypothesized that perpetrator punishment satisfaction and romantic/intimate relationship willingness (both included in the narratives) would also be predictive of more positive outcomes. Lastly, I hypothesized that rumination would mediate the effects of narrative processes on outcome measures; particularly, I predicted that rumination would be a mediator between the effect of narrative resolution on both well-being and intimate relationship attitudes. My results generally supported my hypotheses as most narrative processes were related to my outcome measures and, furthermore, rumination was a partial mediator between narrative resolution and well-being.

Well-being

Generally, as predicted, most of the narrative measures were moderately to strongly predictive of participants' well-being. Specifically, I found that narrative complexity, resolution, and growth were all strongly related to victims' well-being levels. Participants' willingness to engage in romantic, intimate relationships after their abusive experiences (as denoted in their narratives) was moderately correlated with their levels of well-being. However, the narrative measure of satisfaction with the perpetrators' punishment did not significantly correlate with participants' well-being levels.

Narrative complexity's strong relationship with well-being suggests that a victim's ability to reflect deeply on her abuse, integrate the abuse and self-view into an overall life story, and to see other individuals' perspectives (e.g., children's, perpetrator's, family's) is linked to higher levels of overall psychological well-being. This finding is supported by past research that has found that individuals who push traumatic experiences out of consciousness are more likely to have a long-lasting obsession with trauma and lack an integrated self, resulting in lowered levels of well-being; however, the integration of negative and positive emotions in narratives is indicative of narrative complexity and consequent overall well-being (Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997; Fivush, 2004; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).

The strong link between narrative resolution and well-being suggests that a victim's ability to make peace with the event by viewing her present situation or state of mind in a positive light is related to higher levels of overall psychological functioning. For example, 'coherent positive resolution', which occurs when a well integrated life story of a difficult experience ends positively, is likely to lead to higher resiliency and well-being levels (Pals, 2006).

Narrative growth's large correlation with participants' well-being levels indicates that victims' ability to find redemption in their traumas and to focus on a positive, goal-oriented future is linked to their overall sense of well-being. Therefore, an intimate partner violence victim's perception of benefit in

adversity (versus regret and rumination on the negative) is related to heightened self understanding and positive life philosophy, which allow for healing to occur (see also McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001).

The moderate correlation between participants' intimate relationship willingness and well-being suggests that intimate partner violence victims' eagerness or openness to engage in an intimate relationship post-abuse is at least modestly related to their overall psychological functioning and welfare. This finding is related to past research that has shown the positive relationship of happiness and well-being to meaningful relationship engagement as well as post-trauma growth's link to relationship improvement (Linley & Joseph, 2003; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005a).

Contrary to my predictions, participants' satisfaction with the punishment of their perpetrators was did not significantly correlate with their levels of well-being, although a moderate correlation did exist between these two measures. This finding may be due to the fact that when victims have higher levels of other narrative processes (i.e., complexity, resolution, and growth), they may care less about their perpetrator having a more intense punishment. For example, if a victim has made peace with her experiences of relationship violence, she may not be as emotionally invested in the intensity of her abuser's punishment than someone who still is quite vengeful about her intimate partner violence (see Orth, 2004). However, a moderate relationship does

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exist, so there is some link between increased well-being and increased punishment satisfaction. Importantly, the correlation probably did not reach statistical significance because of the small study sample size, but such a link is likely to exist.

Given that these narrative processes were all significantly correlated with well-being, it was important to examine which process was the most important predictor of well-being. Therefore, I also conducted a linear regression analysis between narrative processes (i.e., narrative complexity, resolution, and growth) and well-being, in which I found narrative resolution to be the most accurate predictor of participants' well-being levels. This result made intuitive sense as victims' understanding of their abuse, integration of their abuse into a coherent life story to avoid negative effects, and positive perception of their current life situations and decisions are instrumental in having positive psychological functioning and overall life satisfaction. However, narrative complexity and growth are important, too, as victims' ability to find redemption (narrative growth) after considering multiple perspectives (narrative complexity) when reflecting on the abuse leads to less regret (i.e., higher levels of resolution) and increased well-being (Ryff, 1989, in King, 2001).

In light of research suggesting that rumination on negative events has negative effects on well-being (see Segerstrom, Tsao, Alden, & Craske, 2000; Thompson, et al., 2005), I examined whether rumination played a role in the relationship between narrative resolution

and participants' well-being. In general support of my predictions, I found that rumination was a partial mediator between narrative resolution and well-being. This finding suggests that narrative resolution's effect on well-being is also due to its effect on rumination; therefore, narrative resolution and rumination interact, resulting in a victim's well-being level. For example, higher levels of narrative resolution lead to lower levels of rumination, which, in turn, are predictive of higher levels of well-being in intimate partner violence victims. Past research supports this finding as individuals who repress trauma (i.e., fail to resolve it) have a higher likelihood of obsessing over the trauma and failing to incorporate the trauma into their overall life stories (Fivush, 2004; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).

Overall, my results suggest that storytelling is a powerful force in an individual's well-being development. Different narrative processes pinpoint intimate partner violence victims' overall, daily psychological health and functioning. Within this context, narrative resolution, or victims' abilities to focus on the positives in their current situations, is the most powerful predictor of their well-being levels.

Communion: Intimate Relationship Attitudes and Positive Relations with Others

Generally, narrative processes correlated to and were predictive of both relationship outcome measures. Narrative resolution was the only narrative process significantly related to

victims' attitudes toward intimate relationships. However, narrative complexity, resolution, and growth were all strongly correlated with participants' positive relationships with others; additionally, participants' satisfaction with the punishment of their perpetrators and also willingness to engage in intimate relationships were strongly correlated with their general relationships with others. Rumination mediator analyses were also telling, as narrative resolution was also the most accurate predictor of intimate relationship attitudes.

Intimate Relationship Attitudes

In terms of the effects of narrative processes on IPV victims' intimate relationship attitudes, narrative resolution was the only narrative process that significantly correlated with these attitudes. This result suggests that victims' level of acceptance about their abuse is predictive of their intimate relationship fear, confidence, and motivation. For example, if a victim has resolved the abuse trauma to a greater extent, she will be more confident and willing to be an intimate partner.

However, although I predicted that higher levels of narrative complexity and growth would also be related to more positive relationship attitudes, these correlations were surprisingly not significant. A possible explanation for the lack of a strong relationship between narrative growth and such relationship attitudes may have to do with the difference between individuals' sentiments towards relationships and actual engagement in relationships; for

example, even though past research has found positive change post-trauma to relate to relationship enhancement (see Linley & Joseph, 2003), this does not mean *attitudes* of victims not currently in relationships about potential romantic relationship involvement will be any more positive per se. Secondly, past research has supported a link between well-being and a trauma victim's ability to understand multiple perspectives in relationships (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2006); thus, a victim's overall sense of well-being (e.g., hope, lack of fear in daily life) may relate to a victim's specific attitudes towards intimate relationships. In fact, in this study, although well-being and intimate relationship attitudes were not significantly correlated ($r=.35$, $p>.05$) probably due a small sample size, a substantial relationship does exist

Lastly, contrary to my predictions, victims' levels of contentment with their perpetrators' punishments and their intimate relationship willingness were not significantly correlated with their intimate relationship attitudes. Even if a victim is content with her previous perpetrator's punishment level, this does not necessarily mean that she lacks fear or has confidence as an intimate partner; her satisfaction with the perpetrator's punishment is just one sentiment pertaining to her abusive experience and does not necessarily represent how she feels overall (e.g., punishment satisfaction was not significantly correlated with well-being ($r=.34$, $p>.05$); however, a substantial relationship does exist, which could potentially be significant in larger studies).

I also conducted a linear regression analysis to ascertain which narrative process was the most accurate predictor of participants' intimate relationship attitudes. I found that narrative resolution was the most predictive of participants' attitudes concerning romantic involvement with potential partners. This result makes intuitive sense as victims' abilities to make peace with and overcome their past abusive experiences should be foretelling of how open they are to engage in a new intimate relationship.

Lastly, I conducted a regression analysis to see if rumination was a mediator between narrative resolution and intimate relationship attitudes, in which I found rumination to not be a mediator between these two measures. Surprisingly, rumination was not even significantly predictive of intimate relationship attitudes when I conducted the mediator analyses, indicating that narrative resolution's effect on these relationship attitudes is purely due to a participant's ability to make peace with her trauma, and not her level of rumination about the trauma. This result is important as it solidifies the importance of narrative resolution's predictability and relationship to outcome measures, particularly resolution's role in more positive intimate relationship attitudes.

Positive Relations with Others

In support of my predictions, all narrative processes (i.e., narrative complexity, resolution, and growth) were strongly correlated with the position relations with others outcome measure.

Such a strong relationship between these measures suggests that a victim's level of acceptance of the abuse, redemption, and integration of multiple emotions and perspectives into her narrative are indicative of her general trust, comfort, and intimacy level in relationships. These results relate to past research that has shown post-trauma growth and happiness to be linked to relationship development, understanding, and well-being (Linley & Joseph, 2003; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005a).

Secondly, I also found that punishment satisfaction and intimate relationship willingness were strongly correlated with the outcome measure of positive relations with others. These findings are interesting in that, for example, a victim's contentment with her perpetrator's level of punishment is then indicative of her overall contentment in her general relationships with other individuals. This may suggest that a victim's feelings of validation and that justice has been achieved relate to her ability to then gain satisfaction, validation, and trust in her general interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the strong correlation between intimate relationship willingness and positive relations with others suggests that victims' motivation to engage in an intimate relationship is very indicative of their overall enthusiasm and comfort in their relationships besides purely intimate ones. This is in conjunction with past research that has found that communion themes in narratives (e.g., love) are positively related to the development of and need for warm, close relationships (McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996).

In conducting a linear regression analysis to see which narrative process was the most indicative of the positive relations with others outcome measure, I found narrative complexity to be the most accurate predictor of this outcome measure. This result was unexpected as I thought narrative resolution or growth would be more predictive of individuals' general relationship engagement than narrative complexity. However, this finding can be explained by past research that has shown complexity to buffer the effects of resolution, indicating complexity's pertinent role as a narrative processing tool in lieu of the other processes (see Mansfield et al., 2009). Therefore, the ability of individuals to see multiple perspectives (e.g., perpetrator's or children's perspective) and to integrate numerous emotions about their trauma into a coherent life story is predictive of how healthy their general relationships are and how they conduct themselves in these relationships.

Significance of the Study

The present study's focus on narrative processing in victims of intimate partner violence is an important addition to the literature on coping with trauma. Although past research has examined the role of narrative processing in various types of trauma victims, research to date lacks in its examination of the relationship between narrative processing, well-being, and capacity for relationships in this specific type of IPV trauma. Finding numerous significant relationships between narrative processes, rumination, and outcome measures is significant in further

showing the potent importance of storytelling, especially since intimate partner violence is culturally silenced to a great extent in our society (see Fivush, 2004). Individuals vary in their integration of past experiences into their life stories, and, in effect, their abilities to recover from traumas such as relationship violence; however, as my research indicates, different ways of processing such traumatic experiences are linked to and predictive of different outcomes.

This study also has important implications for the conduct of therapy with intimate partner violence victims. Therapists should emphasize storytelling, particularly how different negative experiences fit into an overall life narrative. This conceptualization of events is significant as it helps prevent traumas from overtaking life narratives, and, instead, helps individuals realize that their abusive experiences do not encompass their entire identity.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the main limitations in my study is the issue of causality. Although I conducted linear regression analyses examining which narrative processes were the most predictive of outcome measures, I did not consider whether such outcome measures of well-being and capacities for relationships were predictive of individuals' narrative processing. For example, a victim's level of well-being could influence how she tells her story; higher levels of well-being could lead to enhanced resolution or growth in one's story, whereas lower well-being levels could predict less

emotional processing of traumas in one's life story. Future research should address these limitations by not only looking at the effect of narrative processing on well-being and other proposed outcome measures, but also seeing if such outcome measures are indeed predictive of proposed predictor variables (see McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). However, the most effective way to address this limitation would be for researchers to conduct a longitudinal study in which they assessed narratives at time 1 and then assessed changes in well-being from time 1 to time 2.

Another main limitation in my study is its small sample size and the fact that all of the participants were females. The small sample size prevented my results from being more significant and also prevented me from using variables I initially wanted to include in my study. The all female sample is also limiting, as past research indicates that women are more likely to view themselves as victims than are men (Sanderson & McKeough, 2005), so my study may not be generalized across genders.

Future research should address these limitations by duplicating this study with a larger, more diverse sample. This way, researchers could see whether there are marked differences across

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genders in the way respective genders narrate and interpret events, and how such processing is related to well-being levels. Conducting the study with a larger sample from more diverse venues would also be interesting; although I conducted my study at two advocacy non-profits for relationship violence victims and obtained a quite diverse sample, it would also be helpful to obtain participants from college campuses to examine differences in victim experiences in a close university setting versus in the larger community. Also, it would be interesting to study the effects of therapy length and age on intimate partner violence victims' stories and overall well-being. Some past research has shown, for example, the beneficial effects of therapy on individuals' storytelling abilities, understanding of traumas, and psychological well-being (Pals, 2006). Furthermore, past research has found a positive relationship between age, life story development, understanding of traumas, and overall self-view (Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006; McAdams et al., 2006). These future research endeavors would give us a better understanding of other forces that are important in shaping victims' narratives, particularly how individual differences emerge and how such individuals cope with traumas in their lives.

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Appendix

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Processes, Well-being, and Relationship Outcome Measures

	M	SD	Range	Scale
Narrative Processes				
Narrative Complexity	3.22	1.21	1.00-5.00	1-5
Narrative Resolution	3.47	1.19	2.00-5.00	1-5

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Narrative Growth	3.25	1.24	1.00-5.00	1-5
Additional Narrative Components				
Punishment Satisfaction	2.96	1.07	1.00-5.00	1-5
Intimate Relationship Willingness	3.03	1.23	1.00-5.00	1-5
Well-being				
Symptoms Checklist	2.73	0.83	1.20-3.90	1-4
Psychological Well-being	4.09	1.14	2.00-5.89	1-6
Relationship Measures				
Positive Relations with Others	4.22	0.86	1.75-5.75	1-6
Intimate Relationship Attitudes	2.79	1.01	1.00-4.87	1-5

Table 2

Interview Protocol Sections and Specific Questions

Interview section	Question types
I. Role model	How this individual is a role model
II. Intimate Partner Violence Description	Basic information about IPV
	Effect on values, self-concept, and world view
	How feelings about IPV have changed over time
III. Treatment	Path to treatment decision
	Path to escaping abusive relationship
	Effect on life overall and view of self
IV. Punishment of Perpetrator	Has perpetrator been punished
	If punishment led to satisfaction/relief in victim
V. Life beliefs	Fundamental beliefs and values about life/world Overall philosophy of life
VI. Future Chapters	Next life chapter
	Ability to engage in future intimate relationships

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VII. Reflection   Thoughts and feelings during interview

                                         Additional comments about interview process
_____

IPV=Intimate Partner Violence

Table 3

Correlations: Narrative Processes, Well-being, and Relationships

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Narrative Complexity	-	.46**	.58**	.48**	.41**	-	-	-	-
2. Narrative Resolution	.46**	-	.64**	.42*	.47**	-	-	-	-
3. Narrative Growth	.58**	.64**	-	.36	.67**	-	-	-	-
4. Punishment Satisfaction	.48**	.42**	.36	-	.38*	-	-	-	-
5. Relationship Willingness	.41**	.47**	.67**	.38*	-	-	-	-	-

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6. Well-being	.52**	.59**	.51**	.34	.43*	-	-	-
7. Intimate Relationship Attitudes	.00	.42**	.16	.13	.34	.35	-	-
8. Positive Relations with Others	.58**	.49**	.53**	.58**	.55**	.51**	.06	-
9. Rumination	-.31	-.50**	-.58**	-.44*	-.64**	-.69**	-.44*	-.47**

p<.05*, p<.01**

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Table 4

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Narrative Processes and Well-being (N=32)

Variable	*B*	SE *B*	β
Narrative Growth	.06	.15	.07
Narrative Resolution	.32	.14	.41*
Narrative Complexity	.22	.13	.29

Note: R² =. 43, p<.05*

Table 5

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Narrative Processes and Intimate Relationship

Attitudes (N=32)

Variable	*B*	SE *B*	β

Variable	B	SE B	β
Narrative Growth	-.06	.19	-.07
Narrative Resolution	.48	.19	.57*
Narrative Complexity	-.18	.17	-.22

Note: $R^2 =$. 23, p<.05*

Table 6

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Narrative Processes and Positive Relations with

Others (N=32)

Variable	B	SE B	β
Narrative Growth	.13	.14	.18
Narrative Resolution	.14	.14	.19
Narrative Complexity	.27	.13	.38*

Note: $R^2 =$. 41, p<.05*

Appendix A

NARRATIVE CODING MANUAL

Complexity

Narrative complexity refers to the depth of thought in narratives and individuals' abilities to see different perspectives and outcomes (Mansfield, 2009), and is reflected in plots, themes, characters, and settings that are intertwined into an overall life narrative (Singer, 2005).

Scoring: Listed below are different sub-scales to consider while deciding on an overall score for complexity. A participant will be given one overall score for complexity, ranging from a 1-5.

- Multiple Perspective Taking
    a. Seeing/experiencing the IPV experience from someone else's point of view
    b. Reporting how event has affected other people besides oneself
    c. *Examples:*
        i. Seeing experience from children's point of view ("The abuse was very difficult for my children."; "I had to get out of the relationship for my children's sake.")
        ii. Seeing experience from perpetrator's point of view ("I don't think he realized what the impact of his actions was/is."; "It seemed like he felt like it was my fault only.")
        iii. Seeing friend/parent perspective

- Emotion
    a. Participant identified various emotions (at least two different, contrasting emotions)
    b. The coder must identify the first emotion and then compare it to other emotions, thereby ensuring that at least 2 different emotions are present
    c. Crying is not sufficient for presence of an emotion—emotions must be explicitly stated
    d. The variety of emotions applies to the narrative as a whole. The participant may identify two emotions in the same sentence or an emotion may be stated and then later a different emotion about the same subject/event may be stated. It is important that there is a very clear differentiation between

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emotions (i.e., "I was sad but now I am still sad, but to a lesser degree" would not count as two different emotions)

    e. *Examples:*
        i. "I felt sad at the time... but now I am happy to be out of the relationship."
        ii. "I am so angry that I let it go on for so long... I felt helpless at the time, though. I'm pleased the abuse is over at least."
        iii. "I am glad we did the interview today...I get sad thinking about the event, though."

- Analytical Reasoning
  a. The participant communicates clear cause and effect by identifying causes or effects of behavior, psychological states, self-examination, and weighing multiple options in a situation to determine the most appropriate course of action.
  b. *Examples:*
    i. "I wanted to change my negative outlook about my IPV, so I realized I needed to strive to think positively and change my negative thoughts."
    ii. "I was depressed, lonely, and downtrodden during the abuse, but I made an effort to live a purposeful, fruitful life even though this event had scarred me."

- Meaning/Implications
  a. Participant has found meaning from the event, has learned from the event, or has found the event self-transforming
  b. Change in the way participant views self or behaves/acts
  c. Participant may change the way she thinks about others or how she treats others
  d. Discussion of far-reaching implications of IPV event
  e. Discussion about past IPV impacts participant's present self or overall life story
  f. *Examples:*
    i. "The event happened for a reason and it has impacted how I view myself and those individuals surrounding me."
    ii. "I have learned that I am not alone—other women are victims of IPV as well. I think of my life in that way and the others who suffer from this abuse, too—I have learned we are all fighting this together."

Complexity Scoring:

(1) <u>Absence of complexity: ~0 of the above items</u>
   a. The woman sees herself as the total victim and focuses on the emotional wreckage she personally is experiencing
   b. The woman has overall one emotion present (e.g., sadness, anger)
   c. The woman conveys explicitly or implicitly that she is not ready to change her negative self outlook, behaviors, or psychological/mental state or is unaware of the cause/effect relationship between these phenomena
   d. The woman does not believe she has learned anything meaningful from the IPV experience or that the experience impacts her or her life story

(2) <u>Minimum complexity: ~1 of the above items</u>
   a. Woman has presence of approximately 1 of the above criteria
   b. *Examples:*
      i. Woman explicitly conveys various emotions in her narrative (i.e., sadness, happiness, regret, hope). General presence of only woman's perspective of events. Woman is still unable/not willing to see how negative outlook impacts her well-being and does not really see meaningfulness or the learning value of her IPV experience.
      ii. Woman has gained meaning from the event and believes the event has made her a stronger person. General presence of only woman's perspective of events. Woman is still generally unable/not willing to reason how her negative outlook inhibits her from fully changing her behavior into actions that are more productive. Overall, only one emotion present.
   c. Overall, a general lack of diverse emotions in narrative and presence of only woman's perspective of events. Woman still lacks reasoning in the causal nature of her mindset and behavior and has yet to see the meaningfulness of the event.

(3) <u>Moderate complexity: ~2 of the above items</u>
   a. Woman has presence of approximately 2 of the above criteria
   b. *Examples:*
      i. The woman has presence of both sadness and happiness in her narrative and sees how her previous negative outlook was causing her sadness, which then caused her to be proactive in striving for happiness and contentment. It is still not clear that the woman has gained meaning or has learned from her IPV experience and she still tells the story in a way that only implicates her.
      ii. The woman conveys clear analytical reasoning as she states how she recognized how her negative outlook was bringing her down and then proactively tried to change her negative ways/thoughts. The woman is also cognizant of how the IPV experience has affected her children as she notes the emotional toll of the abuse on her children; the woman sees her children as one reason for escaping the abusive relationship. However, the woman has not gained positive meaning

from the abuse and does not clearly convey multiple, differing emotions (e.g., the narrative is very one-dimensional—blunted affect)

    c. Overall, the woman is starting to gain meaning from the IPV experience and shows some diversity of emotion, even though one emotion is dominant. Woman has some reasoning and insight into the IPV experience, but still spends a lot of the time focusing on how the event has mainly affected her.

(4) <u>Advanced complexity: ~3 of the above items</u>

    a. Woman has presence of approximately 3 of the above criteria

    b. *Examples:*

        i. The woman identifies various emotions in her narrative, has gained meaning from the IPV event, and has clear reasoning as to how her negative view on life prompted a positive behavioral/mental change in herself. The woman's narrative, however, is still one-dimensional, as she tends to focus on how the IPV experience has affected her only.

        ii. The woman identifies various emotions in her narrative, has clear reasoning as to how her negative view on life prompted a positive behavioral/mental change in herself, and encompasses multiple perspectives (children's, perpetrator's, etc.). The woman has not gained a clear meaning from the IPV experience and does not clearly define what she has learned from it.

    c. Overall, the woman has multiple emotions present in the narrative and most likely notes how the event has affected her children, perpetrator, etc. The woman sees the cause and effect nature of her thought processes and behaviors/outlook and has a general sense of having gained positive meaning from the IPV experience.

(5) <u>Highest complexity: ~4 of the above items</u>

    a. The woman expresses having gained a comprehensive understanding of the event and has developed positive meaning from the event

    b. The woman clearly identifies causes and effects of her thoughts and outlook on life and wants to change such sentiments

    c. Definite presence of multiple, contrasting emotions that the woman integrates into narrative

    d. Presence of multiple perspective taking (e.g., how this event affects her children; woman feeling horrible for children; woman's perpetrator has done some bad things, but she doesn't believe that makes the perpetrator a terrible person, etc.)

Resolution

Narrative resolution occurs when an individual makes peace with difficult life events and experiences within context of life story (Mansfield, 2009).

Scoring: Listed below are different sub-scales to consider while deciding on an overall score for resolution. A participant will be given one overall score for resolution, ranging from a 1-5.

- Closed Influence vs. Continuing Influence
    a. *Closed influence:* This means that the IPV event is still influential in the participant's life, but the event is not affecting the participant in negative ways (e.g., disrupting daily routine, letting event take over thought processes)
    b. *Continuing influence:* This means that the participant is still overly concerned with event details and ruminates over such details and has a negative affect due to the event
    c. *Examples:*
        i. Closed: "I think about the event still, but I don't get sad and start crying about it anymore."; "I don't let my past experience with abuse rule my life anymore."
        ii. Continuing: Participant is audibly distraught by event; participant goes into unnecessarily long detail about the event; "I still feel like I can't go places or do things that I used to like to do... I live in fear."; "I don't feel like I have a new outlook on life due to the abuse...I still feel angry, upset, and degraded."

- Positivity of the Solution
    a. The participant describes the solution (e.g., if applicable, getting out of the relationship, receiving treatment) in a positive manner and views it as a 'positive course of action'
    b. If no solution has been found (e.g., participant is still in abusive relationship, participant is trying to get out of relationship), participant can still gain credit for this section if she is feeling positively/ok at the moment
    c. *Examples:*
        i. "I am so thankful I got out of the abusive relationship and joined a support group. I feel like I am such a strong woman."

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ii. "Although I am still in the relationship, I am feeling good about my plan of action—that is, to get a separation and take care of my kids."

- Present Counteracts Past
  a. Participant's current situation or current events in participant's life counteract, or offset, the past abusive event
  b. If abusive is current: a change in the participant's outlook even though abuse is still on-going; participant has taken initial steps to address abuse and make the situation better
  c. There is a contrast of emotions in participant's narrative, which implies that thoughts, feelings, etc. are different now, which further demonstrates resolution and emotional positivity
  d. Examples:
      i. "That was the worst period of my life."
      ii. "I was so angry and sad about the abuse for the longest time...now I've realized that everything happens for a reason and life is going to work out all right for me."
      iii. "I am trying to get out of the relationship at the moment...hopefully I can get a separation from my spouse...I am just glad that I joined a support group to start the healing process."

- Overt statements that event is resolved/unresolved

Resolution Scoring:

(1) No resolution
  a. The IPV issue is completely unresolved and the woman is still immersed in it.
  b. Overt statement of no resolution or, if overt statement of no resolution is accompanied by presence of resolution (i.e., by meeting the criteria for one of the other resolution items), coder must make the decision of whether to move the participant to 2.
(2) Beginning resolution
  a. The woman is in the beginning/initial stage of resolving the IPV experience.
  b. The woman has begun the resolution process but still has lots more work to do before she will have the IPV experience behind her.
  c. Small amount of closure and a stronger lack of resolution.
(3) Mixed/neutral resolution
  a. Woman shows moderate amount of resolution.
  b. The woman may also say nothing about resolution at all—narrative neutral.

    c. The woman seems to be making genuine progress in her resolution of the event but still states things that make it apparent that the situation is still not resolved.

    d. The woman will appear neither more nor less resolved but in the middle.

(4) <u>Advanced resolution</u>
    a. The woman is on her way to resolving the issue, but the issue is still not closed.
    b. The woman makes a lot of statements that suggest the situation is almost resolved, but doubt still lingers in the coder as to how much peace or closure the woman is actually experiencing.
    c. The woman's actions must show that the event is nearly resolved (words are not sufficient).

(5) <u>Complete resolution</u>
    a. Woman communicates complete/overt evidence of resolution.
    b. The woman will typically see the event as part of her past (the event can still be influential, though).
    c. The woman is no longer processing the event and explicitly or implicitly conveys acceptance of the event and that it is closed.
    d. The woman can still feel sad/angry/etc. but her feelings are a normal, negative affect that is to be expected.
    e. The woman's actions must show that the event is resolved (words are not sufficient).

Growth

Growth is a positive change in thinking that occurs when reflecting on a difficult event, leading to maturity, strength, and health (Mansfield, 2009).

Scoring: Listed below are different sub-scales to consider while deciding on an overall score for growth. A participant will be given one overall score for growth, ranging from a 1-5.

- <u>Life Goals and Best Possible Self: Personal and Communal</u>
    a. When setting life goals, an individual seeks to become the best version of him or herself, which is referred to as one's 'best possible self' (King & Hicks, 2006). In narratives, the amount, ease, vividness, and emotional depth with which individuals think about their best possible selves is pertinent to growth.

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    b. *Examples:*
       i. "Next in my life story, I am going to get an apartment, a job, etc....I am going to be an independent woman."
       ii. "I do envision myself having intimate relationships in the future...maybe not right now...but I think someone is out there for me."
       iii. "I am hopeful about the future...there is a plan for me and I know it's good."

- Redemption Sequences
  a. Redemption sequences/redemption imagery occur when a negative life experience is followed by or transformed into a positive life experience scene.
  b. Thematic categories/examples:
    i. Redemption imagery
    ii. Enhanced agency
    iii. Enhanced communion
    iv. Ultimate concerns
  c. *Redemption imagery*: movement from demonstrably negative (can be a negative feeling or a negative event) to demonstrably positive scene (e.g., positive emotion, positive cognitive state (self understanding, self insight, etc.), and events leading to positive feelings in most people (e.g., healing, growth, close relationships, learning, reconciliation, etc.).
    i. The positive state does not need to be positive to the same degree that the negative state is negative.
    ii. If conceptualized as A→ B, A may cause B or a may just precede B in time
      1. A → B examples:
        a. *Sacrifice:* Person endures negative A to get to a benefit of B (Woman leaves abusive husband and is homeless → finds support in shelter)
        b. *Recovery:* Physical/psychological negative state is followed by healing state (Depression → regaining of positive outlook on life)
        c. *Growth:* Negative experience leads to psychological/interpersonal growth/benefit (Woman endures and eventually ends unhappy relationship with perpetrator → woman becomes more confident, happier, and experiences self-understanding)
        d. *Learning:* Negative event leads person to gain new knowledge, wisdom, skills, etc. (Woman almost dies from perpetrator's extreme abuse → woman learns to no longer fear death)

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      e. *Improvement/Other:* Covers areas not included in the other categories but are still under the umbrella of bad situation containing negative affect becoming a better situation containing positive affect (very bad marriage → very good relationship; lonely/depressed → conversion to Christianity, feels ecstatic)

d. <u>*Common Redemption Examples*</u>*:*
   i. *Enhanced agency*
      1. Transformation from negative to positive leads to enhancement of woman's personal power or agency (e.g., self-confidence, efficacy, personal resolve, or insight into personal identity)
   ii. *Enhanced communion*
      1. Transformation from negative to positive leads to enhancement of woman's personal relationships of love, friendship, family ties, etc.
   iii. *Ultimate concerns*
      1. Transformation from negative to positive contains involvement in or confrontation with existential issues or ultimate concerns. For example, this event brings the woman face-to-face with death, God, or other religious/spiritual dimensions of life.

Growth Scoring:

(1) <u>No growth</u>
   a. Woman does not show any signs of growth from the IPV experience.
   b. The negative event (i.e., IPV) has not led to any positive outcome.
(2) <u>Minimum growth</u>
   a. The woman is in the beginning/initial stage of growing from the IPV experience.
   b. The woman has begun to show signs of growth from the negative event but still needs to grow a lot more from the IPV experience.
   c. Minimal presence of redemption sequences in narratives and minimal positive outlook on the future.
(3) <u>Moderate growth</u>
   a. Woman shows modest amount of growth.
   b. The woman seems to have grown somewhat from the event but still states things that make it apparent that she is still in the process of growing and learning things from the IPV experience.

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(4) <u>Advanced growth</u>
    a. The woman is well on her way to fully growing from the event, but the issue is still not closed.
    b. The woman makes a lot of statements that suggest that she is in the advanced stages of growth from the event, but doubt still lingers in the coder as to how much growth or closure the woman is actually experiencing.
    c. Overall inclusion of redemption sequences and statements that lead the coder to believe the woman is envisioning her best possible self.

(5) <u>Complete growth</u>
    a. Woman communicates complete/overt evidence of growth.
    b. The woman will typically see the event as part of her past self (the event can still be influential, though) and she has grown from this event in many ways.
    c. The woman exhibits a strong commitment to her best possible self and sees her future in a clear, positive way.
    d. An overall very strong presence of redemption sequences.

Perpetrator Punishment Response

Participant's level of satisfaction with the consequences for the perpetrator:

1   2   3   4   5

Punishment Satisfaction Scoring:

(1) <u>No satisfaction</u>
    • The participant is not satisfied at all with her perpetrator's punishment/lack of punishment.
(2) <u>Minimum satisfaction</u>
    • The participant is largely dissatisfied with perpetrator's level of punishment and is not happy with the result.
(3) <u>Moderate satisfaction</u>
    • The participant has some satisfaction with her perpetrator's degree of punishment but the coder senses she is still not very satisfied.

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(4) <u>Strong satisfaction</u>
- The participant is overall satisfied with her perpetrator's punishment and does not convey that she wants any large changes to his/her punishment.

(5) <u>Complete satisfaction</u>
- The participant is totally satisfied and content with her perpetrator's punishment and does not see any changes that need to be made.

Intimate Relationship Response

Participant's level of willingness to enter into intimate relationship:

1   2   3   4   5

Intimate Relationship Willingness Scoring:

(1) <u>No willingness</u>
- The participant is not willing at all to engage in an intimate relationship.

(2) <u>Minimum willingness</u>
- The participant is largely unwilling to engage in an intimate relationship.

(3) <u>Moderate willingness</u>
- The participant has some willingness to engage in an intimate relationship but the coder senses she is still not very willing.

(4) <u>Strong willingness</u>
- The participant is overall willing to engage in an intimate relationship.

(5) <u>Complete willingness</u>

- The participant is totally willing to engage in an intimate relationship. The coder senses no hesitation in participant's willingness.

The participant is currently in a successful intimate relationship (not abusive).

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