

# Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Its Relation to Low Point Narration and Identity Status in Emerging Adulthood: A Longitudinal Analysis

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In this longitudinal study, we examined identity development using the life story model (McAdams, 2001), in addition to a traditional identity status approach, in order to explore the association between perceived parenting in adolescence and the subsequent quality of life story narration in emerging adulthood. Participants ( $N = 100$ ) were given a battery of questionnaires at ages 17 and 26 years and were asked to narrate a story at age 26 about their most difficult life experience. Low point narratives were analyzed for evidence of concluding clarity, resolution, and affective tone, termed *coherent positive resolution* (Pals, 2006). Structural equation modeling showed that participants who experienced more positive parenting at age 17 narrated their low points with clearer evidence of coherent positive resolution at age 26. Coherent positive resolution of the low point was also related to concurrent measures of identity achievement and emotional adjustment at age 26. Discussion centers on the potential impact of positive parenting as a contributor to healthy low point narration and identity in emerging adulthood.

*Keywords:* narrative, identity, adolescence, emerging adulthood, parenting

Narrative approaches are becoming increasingly important in understanding the complexity of identity development (McAdams, 2006). In the present longitudinal study, we focus on how narratives of personal “low point” life events by emerging adults may be associated with traditional identity status development, and may be in part predicted from earlier parenting experiences.

To accomplish these goals, we employed two distinct approaches to measuring adolescent identity, through both traditional identity status measures (Marcia, 1966) and the narrative life story (McAdams, 1993), in order to provide a rich conceptualization of the characteristics and processes that define identity development. Both approaches emerge from Erikson’s (1968) early theorizing; however, researchers using the identity status methodology investigate identity achievement by measuring the extent of adolescent life choices and actions, whereas advocates of the narrative life story, such as McAdams (1993), view identity as defined by a personal life story that helps people to understand and give continuity and meaning to their life experiences.

In terms of the narrative life story, we were interested in examining late adolescents’ perceptions of positive parenting in relation to their tendency to later narrate more resolved and integrated low point stories as emerging adults. Difficult life events

disrupt the expected flow of life, often necessitating increased cognitive effort and reflection to assimilate them into the greater life story (e.g., McLean & Thorne, 2003; Piaget, 1965). The experience of positive parenting in adolescence may equip emerging adults with the support, encouragement, and security that they need to explore and resolve their difficult life events in a coherent and adaptive manner. This effective narrative understanding of low points has been previously linked to greater life satisfaction in midlife adults (Pals, 2006). It may influence emerging adults to further explore and understand their life events, thereby promoting greater identity achievement. We have found no research to date that has explored the potential connection between parenting in adolescence and the subsequent narration of life stories. In this longitudinal study, we examined positive parenting in late adolescence as a potential predictor of the tendency to narrate low points with a clear and positive resolution 9 years later, in emerging adulthood. As well, we were interested in the relationship between positive low point narration, identity status, and emotional adjustment at age 26. We first review research on the life story approach to identity development and then consider the possible role of earlier parenting in such development.

## The Emergence of Identity and the Life Story

Identity development begins in late adolescence and remains a significant developmental concern well into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1950, 1968; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). In order to conceptualize identity development, we used Marcia’s (1966) ego-identity status model. This methodology identifies four distinct identity statuses, characterized by varying levels of identity exploration and commitment. Ideally, development moves toward *identity achievement*, characterized by evidence of both identity exploration and commitment. Identity achievement is related to stable self-esteem and healthy psychological functioning

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(Marcia, 1987). The other three less advanced identity statuses are *moratorium*, characterized by evidence of identity exploration but a lack of commitment; *foreclosure*, depicted by commitment to an adult identity but failure to explore different options before settling; and *diffusion*, characterized by the lack of both identity exploration and commitment.

Concurrent to the development of a sense of identity through adolescence and emerging adulthood is the development of the life story (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). According to McAdams (2001), narrative accounts of momentous life events, such as high points, low points, and turning points (life experiences that cause a person to change in some significant way) combine to constitute people's identities, or their personal narrative life stories: the way in which they perceive their lives and the roles that they play within them (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1993). The process of incorporating past experiences into the life story and interpreting the event or the life story to maintain a sense of continuity, termed *narrative identity processing* (Singer & Blagov, 2004), is important for life story coherence and may influence further identity development, psychological functioning, and well-being (e.g., Dumas & Pratt, 2007; McAdams, 2001; Singer, 2004; Singer & Blagov, 2004).

There has been a modest amount of prior research concerning the relation between characteristics of life stories and identity status. One such characteristic of life stories that has become the focus of some current research is narrative coherence. Habermas and Bluck (2000) suggested that narrative coherence is a vital part of a healthy life story. The ability to coherently narrate a momentous story reflects a clear understanding of the event, as well as the self across time and situations, because coherence binds the different aspects of the life story together (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999). Tieu, Dumas, and Pratt (2007) examined coherence in emerging adults' turning point narratives and found a significant relationship between advanced identity development and strong causal connections within these stories. Similarly, in their study of adopted adolescents, Dunbar and Grotevant (2004) found that participants' adoption narratives mapped onto Marcia's (1966) identity statuses and were related to coherence, with greater coherence found in narratives that demonstrated a sense of integrated or achieved identity. These results suggest that identity status should be related to the ability to develop coherent life narration.

In addition, the tendency to extract meaning from a momentous life event may reflect patterns of narrative exploration and integration as related to identity status. McLean and Pratt (2006) found that late adolescents' progression through identity statuses was related to the depth of meaning extracted from their turning point narratives in emerging adulthood. In particular, higher levels of diffusion and foreclosure identity statuses were associated with lower levels of meaning making in participants' life narratives. In sum, previous research regarding narrative coherence and meaning making provides evidence linking identity status and aspects of exploration and commitment to the construction of life story narratives.

Examining individuals' narration of difficult life events may be particularly insightful. Life events that involve a level of disruption and conflict, such as low points, often produce a great deal of identity questioning (McAdams, 1985). The cognitive dissonance that results from the failure to understand how a painful and unexpected event fits into one's overall life story may result in

deeper exploration of the difficult event and the self on the whole in order to bring clarity and continuity back to one's narrative identity. We reasoned that the examination of narrative low points, thus, ought to provide a rich example of how individuals explore and attempt to understand and integrate their life events.

In this study, we were interested in the relationship between identity status and low point narration. Following methodology outlined by Pals (2006), we examined *coherent positive resolution* in participants' narratives, defined as the ability to conclude low point life narratives with a positive tone and with evidence of coherence and emotional resolution. A low point that has been integrated into the life story may be narrated with signs of emotional resolution, as well as increased coherence, indicating understanding and acceptance of the difficult event as a part of the life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Positive affect in low point narratives may also reflect integration into the overall life story (Pals & McAdams, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). For example, individuals may extract positive gains from their low points, such as new lessons or insights that may help them to integrate the low point into their greater life stories (McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean & Thorne, 2003).

It is important to note that in this study, participants who narrated a more negative and disruptive life event may have had an especially difficult time making sense of the event in a positive way, as opposed to participants who narrated a less severe low point. This may have affected participants' ability to bring coherent positive resolution to their low point narratives. Consequently, we took into account a general measure of the magnitude of life disruption when analyzing and comparing the coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives.

### Emotional Development and Life Narratives

A connection has also been found between individuals' life story narratives and emotional well-being. Previous research has found that positive affect in life narratives is significantly related to emotional well-being (e.g., King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). More specifically, McAdams and colleagues (2001) revealed the importance of transformations in narrative tone from negative to positive, coined as the *redemptive* sequence, which was more predictive of psychological well-being than the average level of positivity in young and midlife adults' narrative life stories. Further, previous research indicates that increases in positive narrative tone across time, regarding difficult or problematic life events, may predict subsequent improvement in certain areas of well-being, such as self-acceptance (Hemenover, 2003), and recovery from depression (Watt & Cappeliez, 2000). Taken together, ending positivity, or a lack of negativity, in momentous life narratives appears to be especially important for emotional adjustment.

Only one previous researcher has examined low point narration in relation to positive emotional adjustment. Pals (2006) found that coherent positive resolution in midlife women's low point narratives was positively related to their subsequent life satisfaction 9 years later. Thus, it appears that the ability to perceive and represent difficult life events with a clear sense of positivity and resolution may have beneficial effects on emotional adjustment in the future.

Several researchers have examined the distinction between emotional and cognitive development through the narrative qualities of momentous or challenging life stories and the benefits that follow when one has reached a state of mature happiness (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; King et al., 2000; Pals, 2006). For instance, King et al. (2000) found that parents of children recently diagnosed with Down syndrome who narrated stories of their child's diagnoses with evidence of a positive ending had higher levels of subjective well-being 2 years later, whereas parents who were able to actively accommodate the diagnoses of their child into their life story had increased levels of ego development. These findings seem to indicate that cognitive and emotional maturity may develop along two discrete developmental pathways, with cognitive development related more to the development of maturity, and emotional development related more to happiness (e.g., King et al., 2000). Further research (e.g., McAdams, 2006) suggests that the positive perception of past events may be more important for emotional adjustment, whereas identity development may instead require an exploration of conflict and loss, followed by a coherent interpretation of momentous life events. Therefore, in this study, we took into account the possibility that emotional adjustment and identity status might show different patterns of relationships with the various subcomponents of coherent positive resolution (ending affect, coherence, and resolution).

In sum, we hypothesized that the tendency to narrate low points with evidence of narrative integration, emotional resolution, and positive affect may be associated with both identity achievement and emotional health, albeit through somewhat different paths, contributing toward both personal growth and mature happiness. It is important to note, however, that the narrative reworking and integration of difficult life events has the potential to be quite emotionally wearing and cognitively demanding. This narrative reworking may be especially challenging for late adolescents and emerging adults, who are in the process of transitioning toward their adult identities and whose thoughts and beliefs are thus especially vulnerable to change and flux (Erikson, 1968). Consequently, parents might have an especially important role to play in supporting this process.

#### Parent Relationships, Well-Being, and Identity

As noted, positive parent-child relationships may be particularly important during difficult times in adolescence and emerging adulthood. By providing support, encouragement, and a safe environment to explore emotions, parents may facilitate the healthy narration of their child's low points and subsequently aid in maintaining their child's cognitive and emotional development. However, no researchers to date, who we are aware of, have analyzed the potential influence of positive parenting in late adolescence on subsequent life story narration.

Positive parenting has been found to be related to emotional health and well-being in adolescents and young adults. For example, Bell and Bell (2005) found that healthy family interactions and a cohesive family atmosphere experienced in adolescence were directly related to well-being in these same adolescents 25 years later, demonstrating the potential long-term effects that family interaction may have on adolescent emotional development and life satisfaction. Additionally, Steinberg and colleagues (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, & Mounts, 1994)

found that adolescents who were raised with authoritative parenting styles—a parenting style that is nurturing, accepting, and autonomy promoting yet also firm and assertive (Baumrind, 1971)—had higher adjustment levels (i.e., lower anxiety and depression scores) and higher self-esteem. These adolescents were also more likely to characterize their authoritative parents as more responsive and involved in their lives, which was important in predicting their global well-being (Gray & Steinberg, 1999).

Past research also indicates that during adolescence, parents remain the main source of emotional support for their offspring (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). McLean (2005) found that participants between the ages of 16 and 27 were more likely to share a self-defining memory with family sooner on average (within 1 week) than with peers or romantic partners (after 1 month). Adolescents reported that these stories were often told to family for the purpose of emotional regulation, whereas stories were told to peers or romantic partners for the purpose of self-communication or to develop intimacy. With parents serving as the initial audience for an adolescent child's self-defining memories, we reasoned that a supportive parent-child relationship may directly aid in the narrative reworking of an adolescent's difficult or confusing life events.

Further research has demonstrated that parental behaviors are also important for identity development (e.g., Adams, Dyk, & Bennion, 1990; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). The relationship between positive parenting in adolescence and identity development can be conceptualized using Barber's (1997) theory of the family role in adolescent socialization (Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Sartor and Youniss (2002) argued that parents who promote autonomy and who are supportive and warm provide their adolescent children with a sense of security as well as independence that allows them to feel safe and comfortable enough to explore their personal identities.

Whereas adolescence is typically described as a time for autonomy development and moving away from one's parents, it can also be seen as a time when the parent-child relationship is transformed into one made up of increasingly mutual dialogue, where a mix of both connectedness to the family and independence is seen as being important for adolescent growth and development. Previous research indicates that parent encouragement of independence and connectedness is related to identity achievement (Adams et al., 1990; Cooper, Grotevant, & Condon, 1983; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Sartor & Youniss, 2002), and this encouragement remains important into emerging adulthood (White, Speisman, & Costos, 1983). For instance, Grotevant and Cooper (1985) found that patterns of family interaction, including sharing differing ideas and viewpoints in a respectful and supportive environment, were related to adolescents' level of identity exploration. Also, Sartor and Youniss (2002) reported that parental support and involvement, with the latter defined by monitoring of school and social activities, were significant positive predictors of identity achievement in late adolescence.

Existing research thus points to a link between positive parent-child relationships and the ability to develop and narrate a coherent life story. In sum, it appears that positive parenting has an important impact on adolescents' emotional health and well-being. Additionally, positive parent-child relationships are associated with skills important in the development of life story narration and identity development.

## Purpose and Hypotheses

In this study, we examined the relation between adolescents' reports of positive family parenting obtained at age 17 and the coherent positive resolution of their low point narratives told at age 26, using Pal's (2006) story coding system. We also assessed the concurrent relation between coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives and their identity status patterns and emotional adjustment at age 26. Our general hypotheses are outlined below.

*Hypothesis 1:* We expected that participants who perceived themselves as being recipients of more positive parenting at age 17 would narrate their low point stories with greater coherent positive resolution at age 26 than would those participants who felt that they had been the recipients of less positive parenting.

*Hypothesis 2:* We expected that participants who narrated their low points with greater coherent positive resolution at age 26 would have more advanced identity status development at age 26 than would those participants who had lower levels of coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives.

*Hypothesis 3:* We expected that participants who narrated their low points with coherent positive resolution at age 26 would have better emotional adjustment at age 26 than would those participants who had lower levels of coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were originally recruited on a voluntary basis from 16 high schools in a region of central Ontario, Canada. The original sample consisted of 896 predominantly White adolescents (544 female adolescents, 61%) who were mostly born in Canada (88%) and who came from unilingual, English-speaking homes (82%). Participants were initially assessed at a mean age of 17.4 years ( $SD = 0.80$ ) and were subsequently examined at ages 19, 23, and 26 (e.g., Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005). In the current study, we focused on the age 26 data and their longitudinal relationships with age 17 reports of parenting.

At age 26, 100 participants (70% women) completed an extensive interview procedure. Participants consisted of 35% of the age 23 sample reported on previously (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Comparisons of participants who remained in the study until age 26 versus those who did not participate at this testing period indicated no differences in the age 17 variables of gender, emotional adjustment, perception of parenting, or average self-reported high school grade. Participants who dropped out prior to the age 26 testing did have higher foreclosure scores ( $M = 20.76$ ) on the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS; Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989) at age 17 than did participants who completed the age 26 measures ( $M = 18.65$ ),  $F(1, 895) = 5.52, p < .05$ . There were no differences between participants who dropped out and those who completed age 26 testing on the other three identity status measures from the OM-EIS.

At the time of age 26 data collection, 98% of participants had completed high school, 74% had completed a college or university program, and 19% were enrolled in or had completed graduate programs. Ninety-two percent of participants were employed, and 27% were currently enrolled in an educational institution. Approximately 70% of participants reported being in a committed romantic relationship, and nearly 20% were parents. Participants' social class information was not requested. Concerning participants' mothers' and fathers' education levels, respectively, 86% and 84% had completed high school, 44% and 48% had completed a college or university program, and 7% and 13% had completed graduate school.

## Tasks and Measures

### Perceived Parenting Measures

*Authoritative parenting.* At age 17, participants rated the level of authoritative parenting within their families. Authoritative parenting is characterized by high levels of both strictness and responsiveness (Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). Using questionnaire items, we standardized and summed together adolescents' perception of their parents' strictness and responsiveness on a six-item and 10-item scale, respectively, to create an Authoritative Parenting scale (adapted from Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). On a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from  $-4$  (*very strongly disagree*) to  $4$  (*very strongly agree*), participants responded to statements such as "My parents spend time just talking with me" (responsiveness scale) and "My parents REALLY know what I do with my free time" (strictness scale). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was .80 for the strictness scale and .87 for the responsiveness scale.

*Family Assessment Device.* Participants completed the 12-item General Functioning scale of the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD) at age 17 (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983). This scale provides a global assessment of family health and cohesion in terms of issues such as relationship functioning and emotional communication in the family. Participants' scores on each item of the FAD range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) on a 4-point Likert scale. An example item of the FAD is "We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems." Higher scores on the FAD indicate more effective family functioning. Cronbach's alpha for the FAD in this study was .92.

*Parent Interaction Inventory.* At age 17, participants completed the 18-item Parent Interaction Inventory that was designed for this study. Participants were asked the following three questions pertaining to parent interaction in six areas of the participants' lives (academics, family issues, future career plans, religion, moral values, and politics): "How much do you discuss this topic with your parent(s)?" "How much do you enjoy discussing this topic with your parent(s)?" and "How much influence do you feel your parent(s) have on you in this area?" Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*none*) to 4 (*a great deal*). Cronbach's alpha for the Parent Interaction Inventory in this study was .84.

*Positive parenting index.* For participants at age 17, we aggregated their standardized scores on the Family Assessment Device, the authoritative parenting scale, and the Parent Interaction Inventory to produce an overall measure of good parenting, de-

veloped for this study. These measures were substantially inter-correlated, and Cronbach's alpha for this three-item summary measure of positive parenting was .84.

### *Emotional Adjustment Measures*

*Life Orientation Test.* Participants completed Scheier and Carver's (1985) Life Orientation Test, an eight-item self-report measure that assesses dispositional optimism at age 26. On a 9-point Likert scale, participants recorded agreement with statements such as "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best" ranging from -4 (*very strongly disagree*) to 4 (*very strongly agree*). Higher scores on the Life Orientation Test indicate greater dispositional optimism levels. Cronbach's alpha for the Life Orientation Test in this sample was .86.

*Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD).* The CESD, developed by Radloff (1977), was administered to participants at age 26. The 20-item CESD measures symptoms of depression on a 4-point Likert scale. Participants record how often they have felt or behaved in certain ways reflecting depressive symptoms such as "I thought that my life had been a failure" on a scale ranging from 0 (*rarely or none of the time*) to 3 (*most of the time*). Higher scores on the CESD indicate greater symptoms of depression. Cronbach's alpha for the CESD in this sample was .89.

*Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP).* Stones et al.'s (1996) SHARP that assesses subjective well-being was completed by participants at age 26. The SHARP is a 12-item self-report measure on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants record how well statements such as "During the past month I have felt particularly content with my life" apply to them, ranging from -2 (*strongly disagree*) to 2 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores on the SHARP indicate greater self-reported subjective well-being. Cronbach's alpha for the SHARP in this study was .89. Because the SHARP was not included within the first few interviews of the current study, missing data were replaced by the overall mean of participants' SHARP scores for these early participants ( $n = 20$ ) only.

### *Identity Status Measure*

*OM-EIS.* At age 26, participants completed Adams et al.'s (1989) OM-EIS. The OM-EIS is a self-report measure that targets how well people have explored, and made a commitment in, each of the following areas in life: religion, politics, and career. The 24 statements on the OM-EIS are separated into four 6-item categories and provide participants with a continuous score on each of Marcia's (1966) four identity statuses: diffusion (e.g., "I haven't really thought about politics. It just doesn't excite me very much"), foreclosure (e.g., "I attend the same church as my family has always attended. I've never really questioned why"), moratorium (e.g., "I'm still trying to decide how capable I am as a person and what jobs will be right for me"), and identity achievement (e.g., "I've gone through a period of serious questioning about faith and can now say I understand what I believe in as an individual"). On a 9-point Likert scale, participants rated how well they agree with the statements, ranging from -4 (*very strongly disagree*) to 4 (*very strongly agree*). We also calculated a summary measure of advanced identity development by subtracting participants' scores on the foreclosure, diffusion, and moratorium categories of the OM-

EIS from their scores on the identity achievement category to arrive at an identity maturity index at age 26, following McLean and Pratt (2006). In this study, the Cronbach's alphas for the subscales of the OM-EIS ranged from .46 to .70. While rather low, these alphas are comparable with those reported for this measure in other samples (Adams et al., 1989).

### *Narrative Coding*

*Coherent positive resolution.* The coding of coherent positive resolution followed Pals's (2006) methodology. Coherent positive resolution consisted of four different characteristics of the ending of participants' narratives: positive tone, negative tone, coherence, and resolution. We rated positive and negative tone separately to distinguish between stories consisting of both negative and positive affect and stories demonstrating more neutral affect. Negative tone ranged from 1 (*not negative*) to 3 (*very negative*), and positive tone ranged from 1 (*not positive*) to 3 (*very positive*), with 2 (*somewhat negative/positive*) as the intermediate level for each variable. Ending coherence, defined as the clarity and distinct closure of a story, was coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*very incoherent*) to 4 (*very coherent*). Lastly, ending resolution, defined as the evidence of settled conflict and emotion, was coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*very unresolved*) to 4 (*very resolved*). Using a random sample of 20 low point stories in the data set, two independent raters obtained a correlation of .96 (95% exact agreement rate) for positive tone, .72 (80% agreement rate) for negative tone, .81 (90% agreement rate) for ending coherence, and .93 (90% agreement rate) for ending resolution. We also aggregated the ending positivity, negativity (reverse scored), resolution, and coherence of participants' low point narratives to generate an index of coherent positive resolution.

*Event severity.* The magnitude of life disruption was measured in participants' low point stories using Miller and Rahe's (1997) Recent Life Changes Questionnaire. This research tool ranks 74 life-changing episodes in terms of accompanying life stress and intensity of change. We ranked the overall themes of each participant's low point story using the Recent Life Changes Questionnaire in order to assess objective event severity. The correlation between two independent raters, using a randomly chosen set of 20 low point stories, was .99 (90% exact agreement rate).

The following example low point narrative received a life change unit (LCU) score of 47 for *falling out of close personal relationship*. It was coded 1 for ending positivity (*not positive*), 3 for ending negativity (*very negative*), 1 for ending coherence (*very incoherent*), and 1 for ending resolution (*very unresolved*).

Um, my parents divorced. I was about 8 years old and I think even though, you know, it's been so many years I think you never, you never sort of like . . . If I cry it's just cause it's . . . Um, yeah it stays with you, it does. And, ironically enough my fiancé comes from a divorced family too. So, it's just, uh, one of those things that we've had to sort of have each other to feel the support through. But just with the aftereffects, there's statistics to say that we're not going to make it, that I think is the fuel for us, you know? So my dad's always been in the area, so it's not for lack that I have access to him if I choose to. It's just the family divorce half basically . . . various issues with my parents. Now looking back I can say that obviously as a child you don't know what's going on and having taken so many counseling courses myself you kind of, you can separate, you don't personalize it,

you know, or internalize it. I mean, you'll always have traces of that and question, you know, my dad struggled with alcoholism and to this day he does, I just, the family violence would have got too out of, sort of that just kind of, um, I mean there was a time in my life like a breaking point where I had to say I have to take care of me emotionally because it's really affecting me, to have to maybe screen your calls because you don't want to hear your drunk dad on the phone. Just, it's not something that . . . That's just how it is sometimes. And I mean you can't really change it.

### Procedure

During the initial research session, Grade 12 students ( $M$  age = 17.4 years) from 16 different high schools completed questionnaire packages within their classrooms. The questionnaire packages consisted of measures of parenting, emotional adjustment, and identity status as well as a number of other measures (e.g., Jackson, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005). Classrooms received a \$2 honorarium for each participating student.

For the most recent follow-up of the study ( $M$  age = 26 years), research assistants contacted participants by phone, using a standard script. Participants were invited to participate in a 2-hr research session at a university in central Ontario, Canada. During an audiotaped, interview section, conducted by one of four different interviewers, participants were asked to tell a low point narrative (as well as some other stories). Participants were instructed to "think back over your entire life and try to remember a specific experience or event in which you felt extremely negative emotions, such as deep sadness, fear, strong anxiety, terror, despair, guilt, or shame." Participants were given a cue card to refer to, outlining each of the details that they were to include in their narrative, including what they were thinking and feeling, who was involved, what impact the event had upon their lives, and what that event said about who they are as a person. After the interview, participants completed questionnaire packages containing measures of emotional adjustment and identity status, among other measures (see Jackson et al., 2005). Participants were compensated for their participation with a check for \$50.

### Results

Because we were interested in both general and specific associations regarding the variables of interest, we initially used correlational analyses to examine specific associations between the subcomponents of our latent constructs: positive parenting (age 17), narrative coherent positive resolution (age 26), identity status (age 26), and emotional adjustment (age 26). Primarily, we were interested in examining the relations between subcomponents of narrative coherent positive resolution (ending positivity, negativity, coherence, and resolution) with other variables of interest (e.g., identity status).

Secondly, we used structural equation modeling with EQS (Bentler, 1995) to test an overall model of our hypotheses. This permitted us to examine all associations simultaneously, using a path model. Additionally, we created more reliable measures of overall constructs through latent variables, which eliminated error variance. Our analytic strategies are further described in the following sections.

### Preliminary Analyses

Potential gender differences were examined regarding each relevant variable. Using biserial correlations, we found that male and female adolescents differed only in terms of age 17 perceptions of authoritative parenting, with female adolescents perceiving their parents as more authoritative than did male adolescents. At age 26, there were no significant differences between the average scores of men versus women in terms of either questionnaire or narrative measures. Furthermore, the patterns of relationships between narrative and questionnaire measures tested for the hypotheses appeared to be consistent across gender. Therefore, gender is not considered further as a variable in the analyses below.

The means and standard deviations for all measures can be found in Table 1. Event severity of low point narratives, as measured by LCUs (Miller & Rahe, 1997) and story length, were used in this study as potential control variables. The amount of LCUs allocated to narratives varied, with a fairly high overall mean (64.58; roughly equaling the LCU of a miscarriage or abortion) due to several narratives that were quite severe, involving traumatic experiences, such as death of a family member, divorce, and serious illness. The mean story length for low point narratives was 457.3 words ( $SD = 313.6$ ), indicating that story length varied considerably among participants. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients revealed a modest positive relation between event severity and ending positivity in participants' low point stories,  $r(98) = .22, p < .05$ . Otherwise, neither story length nor event severity was significantly related to the coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives (see Table 2). Consequently, we did not control for event severity or story length in analyses reported below.

Overall, there was a moderate amount of ending positivity and ending negativity in participants' low point narratives (see Table 1). Ending coherence and resolution of participants' low point narratives were, on the whole, fairly high; however, descriptive results for skewness and kurtosis showed that all of the variables in the current data set had absolute values less than 1.4 for each. According to Kline (2005), these data meet the criteria for univariate normality in both instances (absolute values less than 3.0 for skew and less than 8.0 for kurtosis).

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients revealed that the subcategories of coherent positive resolution (ending positivity, coherence, and resolution) were all positively related to one another, and negatively related with ending negativity (all  $ps < .01$ ; see Table 2). None of these variables accounted for more than 25% of the variance in another subcategory of coherent positive resolution, however, and so it seemed reasonable to examine their individual relationships with positive parenting, identity status, and emotional development, as described below.

### Testing the Hypotheses

On the whole, correlational analyses supported Hypothesis 1. When we examined the four subcategories of coherent positive resolution independently, we found that positive parenting was negatively related to ending negativity,  $r(98) = -.22, p < .05$ , as expected, and was positively related to ending resolution,  $r(98) = .24, p < .05$ , and ending positivity (albeit marginally),  $r(98) = .17, p < .10$ . Positive parenting was not related to the ending coherence

Table 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for all Variables

Measure	N	M	SD	Possible range
Age 17 positive parenting	98	0.42	0.26	-3 to 3
Authoritative Parenting	98	0.12	0.99	-3 to 3
Parent Interaction Inventory	98	0.22	1.03	-3 to 3
Family Assessment Device	98	0.05	0.98	-3 to 3
Age 26 Coherent positive resolution	100	5.21	2.51	0 to 10
Ending positivity	100	2.05	0.72	1 to 3
Ending negativity	100	2.19	0.66	1 to 3
Ending coherence	100	2.88	0.87	1 to 4
Ending resolution	100	2.47	1.03	1 to 4
Age 26 Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status				
Achievement	100	31.71	6.41	6 to 54
Moratorium	100	17.52	9.07	6 to 54
Foreclosure	100	8.37	6.77	6 to 54
Diffusion	100	17.26	8.22	6 to 54
Identity maturity index	100	-11.44	20.85	-156 to 36
Age 26 Life Orientation Test	100	43.70	10.29	8 to 72
Age 26 depressive symptoms (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale)	100	11.95	8.60	0 to 60
Age 26 well-being (Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol)	100	35.29	8.06	-24 to 24

of participants' narrative low point stories,  $r(96) = .14, ns$ . However, this nonsignificant relationship was in the predicted direction (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 2 was generally supported; the coherent positive resolution of participants' low point narratives was positively related to the identity maturity index (participants' identity achievement scores, subtracted by their diffusion, foreclosure, and moratorium scores on the OM-EIS),  $r(98) = .33, p = .001$ . Coherent positive resolution was positively related to participants' achievement scores,  $r(98) = .32$ , and was negatively related to their diffusion,  $r(98) = -.31$ , and moratorium,  $r(98) = -.24$ , scores, as predicted ( $ps < .05$ ; see Table 3). However, the coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives was not significantly related to participants' foreclosure scores on the OM-EIS,  $r(98) = -.10, ns$ . When we analyzed each of the subcomponents of coherent positive resolution individually, we found that only ending negativity and resolution were significant predictors of identity status, with ending resolution positively related to identity achievement and negatively related to diffusion and moratorium, whereas ending negativity related positively to diffusion and moratorium scores on the OM-EIS (see Table 3).

Regarding Hypothesis 3, findings were also generally supportive. The level of coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives was significantly positively related to each of the specific measures of emotional adjustment, namely, optimism, depressive symptoms, and well-being ( $ps \leq .001$ ; see Table 3). When we analyzed the subcategories of coherent positive resolution individually, we found that ending positivity and ending resolution were positively related to participants' level of optimism and well-being,  $rs(98) = .23-.36, ps < .05$ . Also, ending positivity and resolution were negatively related to participants' levels of depressive symptoms,  $r(98) = -.17, p < .10$ , and  $r(98) = -.38, p < .001$ , respectively, although the relationship between ending positivity and participants' depressive symptoms did not reach significance. Ending negativity was negatively related to participants' level of optimism and well-being,  $r = -.31$  and  $r = -.25$ , respectively ( $ps \leq .05$ ), and marginally related to participants' levels of depression in a positive direction,  $r(98) = .17, p = .05$ . Participants' level of ending coherence in their low point narratives was related only to level of depressive symptoms,  $r(98) = -.20, p < .05$  (see Table 3).

Table 2  
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Subcategories of Coherent Positive Resolution, Event Severity, and Word Count

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Coherent positive resolution	—	.75**	-.77**	.72**	.83**	.05	.00
2. Ending positivity		—	-.51**	.37**	.49**	.22*	.07
3. Ending negativity			—	-.40**	-.53**	.04	.06
4. Ending coherence				—	.39**	.05	-.02
5. Ending resolution					—	-.04	.01
6. Event severity (Life Change Units)						—	.03
7. Word count							—

$n = 100$ .  
\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3

*Pearson Product–Moment Correlations Between Coherent Positive Resolution and Measures of Positive Parenting, Identity Status (Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status), and Measures of Emotional Adjustment*

Measure	Coherent positive resolution	Ending positivity	Ending negativity	Ending coherence	Ending resolution
Positive Parenting Index	.25*	.17	-.22*	.14	.24*
Authoritative Parenting	.15	.12	-.10	.14	.14
Family Assessment Device	.25*	.13	-.27**	.14	.24*
Parent Interaction Inventory	.29**	.21*	-.18	.18	.29**
Achievement	.32**	.11	-.18	.08	.32**
Moratorium	-.24*	-.12	.28**	.01	-.34**
Foreclosure	-.10	-.03	.01	-.08	-.16
Diffusion	-.31**	-.13	.23*	-.13	-.41**
Optimism (Life Orientation Test)	.35**	.28**	-.31**	.15	.33**
Depressive Symptoms (Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale)	-.32**	-.17	.17	-.20*	-.38**
Well-being (Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol)	.33**	.23*	-.25*	.14	.36**

$n = 98-100$ .

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

### Structural Equation Modeling

In order to view associations in an overall model, we used structural equation modeling with EQS (Bentler, 1995) to create latent variables of reports of positive parenting (age 17), quality of low point narrative resolution (age 26), identity maturity (age 26), and emotional adjustment (age 26). First we computed a confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the latent factors represented the constructs appropriately. To determine which paths to use in the final model, we used analysis of path residuals and chi-squared difference statistics. A nonsignificant chi-square indicates that the overall model is a good fit for the data. We also examined the comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1995), which is a normed index with a maximum of 1. CFI scores equal to or greater than .9 are acceptable, whereas CFI scores equal to or greater than .95 indicate a good overall fit of the model. The root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993), a residual-based fit, was also utilized. RMSEA scores equal to or less than .05 are acceptable and thus suggest a good overall fit of the model.

Confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the manifest variable foreclosure did not contribute significantly to the overall identity maturity latent variable ( $\beta = .22$ ) and therefore was dropped from the model. All other variables were associated with their corresponding latent variables above  $\beta = .40$ ; most were around .70. The final confirmatory factor analysis model showed an acceptable fit, CFI = .96,  $\chi^2(59) = 79.27$ ,  $p = .04$ , and an RMSEA of .06.

Next, we added a path analysis to the model, where originally, age 17 positive parenting predicted narrative coherent positive resolution, identity status, and emotional adjustment at age 26. Further, narrative coherent positive resolution predicted identity maturity and emotional adjustment, and finally emotional adjustment and identity status were correlated. As shown in the final model (see Figure 1) reports of positive parenting at age 17 predicted positively narrative coherent positive resolution 9 years later ( $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Coherent positive resolution was also associated with identity maturity ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ) at age 26. Positive parenting was associated with identity maturity at age 26 ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The concurrent association between identity

maturity and emotional adjustment was also significant ( $\beta = .81$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The path from narrative coherent positive resolution to emotional adjustment was no longer significant (although they were significantly associated in the confirmatory factor analysis). Further, positive parenting no longer predicted emotional adjustment. The disappearance of these two paths could be explained by the strong association between identity maturity and emotional adjustment (.81). Thus, the associations from narrative coherent positive resolution (and positive parenting) to identity maturity and from identity maturity to emotional adjustment overlap with the association from narrative coherent positive resolution (and positive parenting) to emotional adjustment. The final model showed a good fit, CFI = .99,  $\chi^2(53) = 59.15$ ,  $ns$ , and a low RMSEA of .035 (see Figure 1).

### Discussion

Our main goal of this research project was to examine the narrative characteristics of emerging adults' personal low point stories in relation to reported parenting in adolescence and as a reflection of the adults' current identity development and emotional adjustment. The overall structural equation model used in this study provided us with the most general analysis of the hypotheses of interest. As predicted, a significant relationship was found between perceptions of positive parenting in late adolescence and the subsequent tendency to narrate low points with a clear and positive resolution in emerging adulthood. Although correlational and therefore not conclusive, the longitudinal nature of this result, over an extensive 9-year time span, is at least consistent with the interpretation that supportive and involved parents may influence adolescents' subsequent ability to assimilate difficult life events into their greater life stories. Additionally, the overall findings in the model suggested a significant, concurrent relationship between coherent positive resolution in low point narratives, identity maturity, and emotional adjustment in emerging adulthood at age 26. Thus, in this study emerging adults who were able to clearly and positively resolve their low point narratives had a more mature identity and were better emotionally

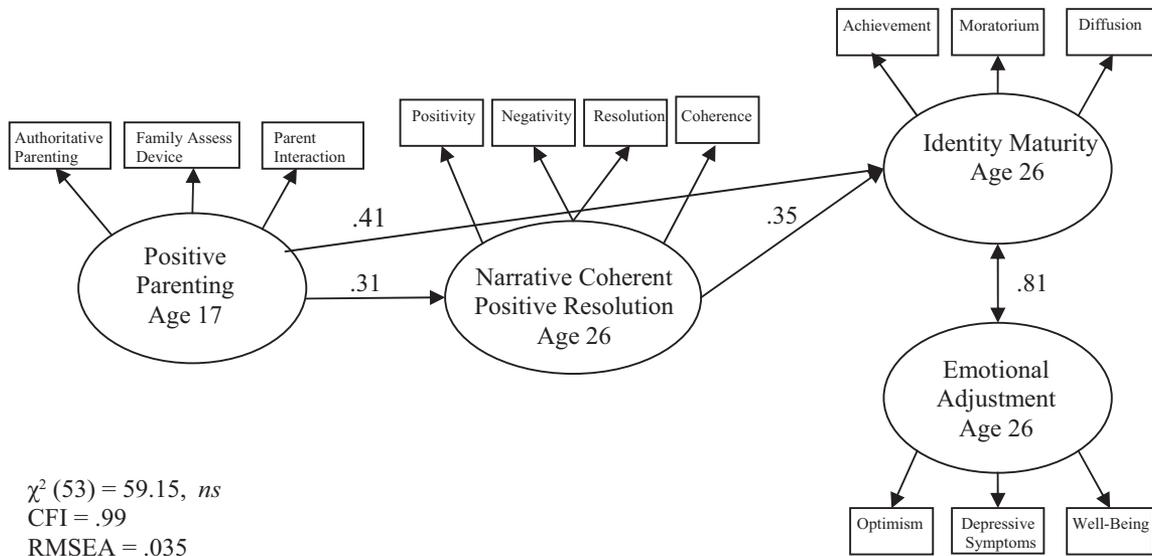


Figure 1. Structural equation model of the relationships between positive parenting, narrative coherent positive resolution, identity maturity, and emotional adjustment.

adjusted than were those individuals with less coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives.

*Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Identity Development and Emotional Adjustment in Emerging Adulthood*

At age 17, participants in this study completed a set of parenting measures that consisted of ratings of the amount and quality of contact with parents, perceived level of authoritative parenting, and the degree to which family of origin relationships functioned in an emotionally healthy way. In line with past research, we found that perceptions of parenting in adolescence were positively related to subsequent identity status and emotional development in emerging adulthood. Parents who are emotionally supportive and involved have been shown to create a sense of both autonomy and security in their adolescent children, which in turn allows adolescents to feel comfortable to explore and commit more effectively to an adult identity (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Sartor & Youniss, 2002). Likewise, adolescents who have been raised with effective parenting practices (e.g., an authoritative parenting style) have been found to have higher self-reported emotional adjustment and well-being (Bell & Bell, 2005; Steinberg et al., 1994). These results provide additional longitudinal evidence that positive parenting in adolescence predicts over time positive identity and emotional development in emerging adulthood.

*Positive Parenting in Adolescence and Personal Narratives in Emerging Adulthood*

In addition to using the more typical status methodology of Marcia (1966), we sought in the present study to examine identity development using personal narratives (McAdams, 2001). Participants' narratives about their most difficult life experiences were

assessed for coherent positive resolution, defined as the tendency to narrate a low point with evidence of ending positive affect, clarity, and resolution (Pals, 2006). Overall, the positive parenting index used in this study was positively related to coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives at age 26 and, more specifically, to the patterns of ending affect and resolution in participants' stories. Those who perceived family parenting as more positive at age 17 narrated low points at age 26 that were more resolved and positive, as well as less negative, than those of other participants.

There are numerous ways in which parents might influence how their children view and narrate their personal low point events. For instance, parents may provide their children with coping skills that they are able to apply directly to difficult life situations (e.g., McIntyre & Dusek, 1995). The feelings of security that are promoted through effective parenting may allow adolescents to feel safe exploring their low point life events in a more open, proactive way. In addition to providing adolescents with the tools and support that they need to subsequently face difficult life events, parents may also be important directly in the initial working through of difficult or disruptive life events. McLean (2005) found that older adolescents and young adults are more likely to initially share their self-defining memories with family than with peers, and to do so for the purpose of emotional regulation. Thus, parents have the opportunity to play an active role in how their adolescent children initially understand challenging personal life events. Fivush, Reese, and Haden (2006) have demonstrated that parents scaffold their children's own telling of emotionally difficult experiences. Parents may also be able to directly structure the ways that their children think about low points, guiding them to understand, reconstruct, and resolve their difficult life experiences. Indeed, a key feature of authoritative parenting is supporting the gradual autonomy of adolescents through supporting the emergence of their independent decision making and analytic processes (e.g.,

Dornbusch et al., 1985). A positive relationship with parents should foster such parental scaffolding activity and eventually lead to more independent functioning in the maturing child.

Our longitudinal study on life narratives of low points thus emphasizes the importance of maintaining a trusting and open relationship with children throughout the period of adolescence and into young adulthood. Of course, both parents and adolescent children likely play an important role in maintaining this positive relationship. The finding that these relations with parenting extended over a 9-year time period suggests considerable robustness in these effects. These results are certainly compatible with findings by many researchers on the importance of positive family parenting in predicting children's subsequent adaptation in emerging adulthood (e.g., Jackson et al., 2005; Slicker, 1998) and suggest that a capacity to understand and resolve difficult life events may be one way in which these patterns of effects may be transmitted.

### *Identity Development and Life Narratives in Emerging Adulthood*

The pattern of results concerning the relationship between narrative resolution of low point stories and participants' scores on the subscales of the OM-EIS (Adams et al., 1989) suggest that those participants who were more identity achieved were also better able to coherently resolve their low point narratives. In contrast, participants who showed higher levels of identity diffusion or moratorium, both statuses low in identity commitment, had a more difficult time bringing coherent positive resolution to their low point narratives. Specifically, it was the resolution coding in participants' low point narratives that significantly differentiated between identity achievement and moratorium and between identity achievement and diffusion statuses (see Table 3). Diffusion and moratorium statuses are in fact characterized by low levels of commitment in the Marcia (1966) system. In addition, participants with higher moratorium and diffusion scores had significantly more ending negative affect in their low point narratives than did others.

Identity achieved individuals have made a commitment regarding who they are as a person and thus may feel a sense of security with their chosen identities. Past research indicates that identity achievement is closely related to a stable sense of self-esteem (Marcia, 1987). This may help individuals faced with hardships to have the confidence to delve into their low point experiences and bring them to an emotional resolution. On the other hand, persons with higher levels of diffused or moratorium identity statuses, who have yet to come to a clear conclusion as to who they are as a person, might have less confidence in themselves and thus may be less likely to actively cope with and move on from negative emotions that result from difficult life experiences. If someone does not have a clear idea of who he or she is as a person, it may be quite difficult to grasp why negative, possibly confusing events have occurred in his or her life and challenging to assimilate and move past them emotionally. For example, the following narrative comes from a participant with a comparatively high moratorium score on the OM-EIS at age 26 and illustrates someone who has yet to resolve her low point experience.

I started in the workforce 2 years ago this summer. Two years ago I received my master's degree and started my first full-time job. You

don't know what to expect. It's going to be different from being in school all the time, but I had done co-ops and thought "oh, this isn't going to be too bad." And just the pressure of having so much work to do and not having enough time, and the demands. So, I ended up working late the first few months. I was going insane because I didn't know how to balance those two demands on my time. And not knowing what to do and having to jump in late, it was really a sink or swim atmosphere where you have to do this and figure it out, and if it takes you 15 hours to do it and we were only budgeted for five, well, you're just going to have to figure it out, and it really was difficult because you think during school "I'm finally going to have weekends to myself; I'm finally going to have evenings to myself." And, yeah, it just didn't happen and you think you work toward something and then all of a sudden it doesn't turn out to be what you thought it was going to be, so it was very difficult. It impacted me and it makes me question what I want to do with the rest of my life. There are a lot of days where I think, "this isn't what I want to be doing and what else is out there for me?" So, definitely you question why you worked so hard in school, because you're like, "If I wasn't working toward this, then why was I doing that?"

It is clear that this person is still trying to discover what vocation is best for her, and her lack of commitment (reflected in high moratorium scores on the OM-EIS; Adams et al., 1989) regarding the self may be restricting her from settling into a career path that might be more suitable to her personality and skill. Thus, this narrative demonstrates the possibility that some individuals may have trouble resolving their low points because they have difficulties understanding who they are as a person. Of course, this narrative also may reflect the reciprocal idea that such an unresolved low point experience itself (in this case concerning vocation) may also be an important factor in the storyteller's presently elevated moratorium status. It is important to acknowledge that in this study some participants may have been in the initial stages of exploring a recent low point, which would be reflected in their identity status scores as well as in their ability to narrate the recent low point with coherent positive resolution.

Given that both measures of identity development in this study, the OM-EIS and the narrative data, were taken concurrently at age 26, causal ordering and even longitudinal prediction cannot be established. Individuals with more advanced identity statuses may feel more comfortable exploring and integrating difficult life events into their life stories, perhaps because they already possess a clearer and more coherent narrative identity, which facilitates future narrative identity processing. In turn, it is also possible that the process of exploring and coming to a resolution of negative life experiences may help people to understand and develop their sense of self on the whole, further advancing their overall identity achievement. Thus, it seems plausible that narrative identity processing, as identified in this study by coherent positive resolution of low points, and identity status development, are mutually influential (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Future research, with more extensive measurement across development, is needed to clarify this complex pattern. Nevertheless, the moderate positive associations between the two types of identity measures generally support previous findings (e.g., McLean & Pratt, 2006). They also demonstrate some degree of predictable empirical overlap between the status and life story conceptions of identity, both derived from the work of Erikson (1968).

It is appropriate to comment here on the pattern of relations between both emotional adjustment and identity development, on

the one hand, and the various measures of low point resolution, on the other. As shown in Table 3, ending resolution was rather consistently the most strongly related of the four narrative components to adjustment and identity development. This rating focused particularly on the level of emotional and conflict resolution expressed in the story and was best suited to capture the sense of emotional ambivalence that might linger regarding these difficult issues. Resolving these emotional conflicts, regardless of the simple levels of positive or negative emotion expressed, seems to be associated with a clearer sense of identity development and with the resources of a positive family background. Indeed, Erikson (1968) has argued that a sense of underlying, unconscious comfort with the self is a hallmark of advanced identity development, and this pattern of relations to the story resolution measure may capture something of this broad adaptive capacity.

It should also be noted here that identity foreclosure as a status was unrelated to the narratives, in contrast to scores on the other identity status variables, which generally were related as predicted. As was discussed above, there was some evidence of selective dropout over time on the basis of high levels of foreclosure at age 17 in the present sample, which may have led to a more restricted range on this variable. It is also true that foreclosure is a somewhat complex status, given that it shows some positive features of commitment but without the experience of identity exploration that is also thought to be necessary to a fully mature identity, and thus its relations to other adaptive measures may prove to be more complicated than those for the other statuses.

#### *Emotional Adjustment and Life Narratives*

In this study, emerging adult participants who narrated their low points with coherent positive resolution were also found to have higher emotional adjustment scores. This finding is in line with past research by Pals (2006), who found that greater coherent positive resolution in midlife women's low point narratives was positively related to their subsequent life satisfaction 9 years later. In this study, participants who narrated their low points with greater ending resolution and positive affect, and lower levels of ending negative affect, were found to have higher levels of optimism, well-being, and lower levels of depressive symptoms than other participants with less healthy narration patterns in early adulthood. Again, ending coherence rated from participants' low points was not related to their overall emotional adjustment scores. Power analyses revealed that low power for detecting this relation may be partly responsible for these nonsignificant results. However, participants with greater ending coherence did have significantly fewer symptoms of depression than did others.

This finding is generally in line with past research that has indicated that certain characteristics in momentous life narratives, such as evidence of understanding and exploration, are more related to measures of cognitive development, whereas narrative characteristics associated with emotion or affect are more related to emotional development and well-being (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Pals, 2006). In this study, we expected that the positive perception of past events might be more important for emotional adjustment than would a clear understanding of the event, represented by ending coherence. Thus, positive feelings about oneself and one's environment may be reflected in the positivity and resolution of personal low point narratives, whereas one's cogni-

tive capacities, and openness to exploring conflict and loss, may be reflected in identity status as well as the coherence of personal low point narratives. Indeed, we did find that narrative affect, as opposed to coherence, was related to participants' emotional adjustment scores (see Table 3).

It is important to further note that in our final structural equation model, the coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives was only indirectly related to emotional adjustment, via identity maturity. The loss of the direct path from coherent positive resolution to emotional adjustment in our model was likely due to the strong relationship between emotional adjustment and identity maturity. After all, coherent positive resolution and emotional adjustment were significantly associated in the confirmatory factor analysis. It is plausible, however, that one of the routes through which narrative processing of low points is related to emotional adjustment is through identity maturity. Indeed, low point reflection and narrative reworking may stimulate identity growth (e.g., McAdams, 1985). Further, past research suggests a strong relationship between identity development and emotional adjustment (e.g., Waterman, 2007). However, due to the concurrent measurement of these variables of interest in our model, we are unable to make causal inferences. One should also note in this regard that some sort of third variable such as an underlying personality disposition toward rumination or neuroticism could also be linked to both poor adjustment and a lack of low point resolution and might also account for the present correlational findings. Clearly, further exploration of the complex relations between life stories and adjustment is needed, and future researchers should at least attempt to examine this relation longitudinally and to rule out competing alternative explanations. Overall, however, consistent with Hypothesis 3, it appeared that the ability to perceive difficult life events with a clear sense of positivity and resolution measured from narratives was correlated with positive emotional adjustment measured simultaneously. Individuals with greater emotional adjustment may have been better able to find positivity within difficult situations and may be more proactive in their coping, delving into their low points in order to understand and resolve these difficult life events more actively as has been found in previous work on optimism and coping (e.g., Taylor & Armor, 1996). Results for these young adults on narrative and concurrent emotional adjustment thus were broadly consistent with previous narrative research (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; King, 2001).

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Several limitations of the present study must be noted. To begin, low point narratives are a key part of the overall life story. However, they clearly are not the whole life story. A fuller depiction of participants' narrative identity would have been captured through the use of the entire life story interview (e.g., McAdams, 1985). In this study however, we sought to focus on and better understand the low point life narrative from this protocol specifically because events that involve greater disruption and conflict have been found to promote greater identity exploration and questioning (e.g., McAdams, 1985; McLean & Thorne, 2003; McLean et al., 2007). Our results support these points by demonstrating robust associations with various standard measures for the coding of this particular story type.

In retrospect, it also would have been beneficial to have had participants narrate their low point stories as well as complete questionnaires at both times of data collection (ages 17 and 26) in order to examine the changes in low point narration, identity status, and emotional development over time. Unfortunately, low point stories were not obtained at age 17, and so this remains a task for the future. Additional limitations result from the inability to derive causal relationships from these correlational data. It is, of course, difficult to imagine many types of experimental studies within this domain, but more systematic longitudinal data would have helped to suggest potential causal direction more clearly. Nevertheless, the early parenting data provide a clear and compelling prediction of subsequent narrative outcomes that was at least consistent with theory and previous research ideas (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006; McLean et al., 2007).

Participants of the present study were predominantly White, North American youth from middle-class families. In light of research that highlights some distinctive parenting style effects across cultures (e.g., Chao, 1994), it is important to acknowledge that the relation between adolescents' perceptions of parenting and identity development, or the narrative interpretation of their life events, may differ across cultural contexts. Regarding socioeconomic status, past research has suggested that the positive relation between perceptions of authoritative parenting in adolescence and positive adjustment remain significant across populations of differing socioeconomic status (Steinberg et al., 1991). In any case, for the present time we should be cautious about extending our findings to populations of other ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Finally, the issue of sample selectivity should be noted. While the number of participants in this intensive follow-up was much lower than in the initial sample, we showed that this dropout was not selective on any of our questionnaire-based measures except identity foreclosure. Moreover, this variable was not used in the final structural equation modeling, suggesting our subsample was relatively representative on the measures that could be tested. Nevertheless, the lack of interview data at age 17 makes it impossible to test for selective dropout that might be associated with narrative characteristics and skills over time. This remains a potential question for future study.

So far, because we have mainly studied elicited stories, we know relatively little about the landscape of actual narrative patterns in the family (e.g., Thorne, 2000). Given the findings here that family parenting predicts different types of subsequent narration by children, it would seem important to examine the processes of direct parent-child interaction around storytelling in adolescence. Studies of families with younger children do point to the role of parents in helping them to learn to understand and narrate negative emotional experiences (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006). Some recent research suggests that this may also be the case for families of preadolescents as well (Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, 2008). A key future direction for this research might include gathering detailed information from adolescents about how and with whom low point stories have been shared in the family, as well as recollections of the responses of parents to these stories as reported by adolescents (e.g., McLean, 2005). Structured observational studies of such family discussions might also be attempted to examine exactly how supportive parents and families might differentially help adolescents to reconstruct their life stories and the

role that narratives play within more or less supportive households over time.

In conclusion, the ways in which people bring resolution, positive affect, and coherence to their low point narratives seem to be important reflections of their coping with difficult life experiences in midlife (Pals, 2006). The present study extended this work by identifying relations between aspects of identity status development and low point life story narration as well as between general emotional adjustment and effective low point narration during emerging adulthood. Most interestingly, the longitudinal data show that more responsive and involved parenting at age 17 was a significant predictor of a coherent low point story in emerging adulthood as well as of identity development (see Figure 1). These findings during this key period of emerging adulthood thus support a narrative framework on identity development (e.g., McAdams, 2001) as well as linking life story research to more traditional measures of family process. More broadly, the results add to an increasing body of evidence in developmental psychology that personal narratives can help to illuminate the theories, processes, and constructs of traditional research (e.g., McAdams, 2006; McLean & Pratt, 2006). All in all, it appears that the way in which people perceive and narrate their challenging life experiences provides a window into their identity development and emotional well-being over time.

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### Call for Nominations: *Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics*

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorship of the *Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics*, for the years 2011–2016. The editor search committee is chaired by Peter Ornstein, PhD.

The *Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics (JNPE)*, first published by Educational Publishing Foundation of the APA in 2009, publishes original research dealing with the application of psychological theories and/or neuroscientific methods to business and economics. Therefore, it is the first peer-reviewed scholarly journal that publishes research on neuroeconomics, decision neuroscience, consumer neuroscience, and neurofinance, besides more classical topics from economics and business research.

As an interdisciplinary journal, *JNPE* serves academicians in the fields of neuroscience, psychology, business, and economics and is an appropriate outlet for articles designed to be of interest, concern, and value to its audience of scholars and professionals.

Editorial candidates should be available to start receiving manuscripts in July 2010 to prepare for issues published in 2011. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Candidates should be nominated by accessing APA's EditorQuest site on the Web. Using your Web browser, go to <http://editorquest.apa.org>. On the Home menu on the left, find "Guests." Next, click on the link "Submit a Nomination," enter your nominee's information, and click "Submit."

Prepared statements of one page or less in support of a nominee can also be submitted by e-mail to Molly Douglas-Fujimoto, Managing Director, Education Publishing Foundation, at [mdouglas-fujimoto@apa.org](mailto:mdouglas-fujimoto@apa.org).

The deadline for accepting nominations is January 31, 2010, when reviews will begin.