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## Analyzing structure, process and content in narratives of patients diagnosed with agoraphobia

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**ABSTRACT.** This research constitutes a first effort testing the possibilities of three rating systems intended to evaluate narrative structure, process and content in psychological disorders. More specifically, the objective of this research is twofold: (1) to explore the reliability of three different rating manuals designed to evaluate, respectively, narrative structure, process and content; (2) to explore the validity of these same manuals in analyzing and discriminating Zenith (i.e., successful) from Nadir (i.e., unsuccessful). Forty patients primarily diagnosed with agoraphobia participated in this study. All the participants followed a protocol interview eliciting two different types of personal narratives: (1) *nadir* narrative (i.e., unsuccessful life narrative); (2) *zenith* narrative (i.e., successful life narrative). All the narratives were transcribed for further analysis using three coding manuals for the analysis of narrative structure, process and content. The results found show: (1) a high level of inter-rater reliability for both, each individual dimension of the three rating manuals as well as for the total scores; (2) a high level of internal consistency for each manual both in terms of intercategory correlation coefficients and alpha Cronbach scores; (3) the manuals were effective in discriminating the participants narratives in terms of narrative structure, process and content; (4) *Zenith* and *Nadir* narratives did not differ in terms of narrative structure, process and content, with the single exception of the *objectifying* dimension from the *process/complexity* rating manual, showing that agoraphobic patients tend to *objectify* significantly more in *Nadir* narratives than in *Zenith* narratives.

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**KEYWORDS.** Narrative. Reliability. Validity. Agoraphobia.

**RESUMO.** Esta investigação constitui um primeiro esforço para testar a viabilidade de três sistemas de classificação das narrativas a nível da estrutura, do processo e do conteúdo, no contexto de perturbações emocionais mais especificamente, os objectivos desta investigação são os seguintes: (1) explorar a fiabilidade de três manuais, destinados a avaliar, respectivamente, a estrutura, o processo e o conteúdo da narrativa; (2) explorar a validade destes manuais na análise e discriminação de narrativas de *Zénith* (i.e. sucesso) e de *Nadir* (i.e. insucesso). Este estudo teve como participantes 40 pacientes com o diagnóstico principal de agorafobia. A cada participante foi aplicada uma entrevista de elicitación de dois tipos diferentes de narrativas pessoais significativas: (1) *Nadir* (i.e., narrativas de vivências associadas a insucesso, fracasso); (2) *Zénith* (i.e., narrativas de sucesso). Todas as narrativas foram transcritas para posterior análise, através dos três manuais, respectivamente, da estrutura, processo e conteúdo. Os resultados revelam o seguinte: (1) um nível elevado de acordo inter-juizes quer para cada dimensão dos três manuais de avaliação, quer para o total; (2) um nível elevado de consistência interna para cada manual, tanto em termos de coeficientes de correlação inter-categorias, como dos valores do *alfa* de Cronbach; (3) os manuais permitiram discriminar as narrativas dos participantes a nível da estrutura, do processo e do conteúdo; (4) as narrativas de *Zénith* e de *Nadir* não diferiram quanto à sua estrutura, processo e conteúdo, com excepção da dimensão da objectivação no manual de avaliação do processo/complexidade narrativa, sendo que os pacientes com agorafobia tendem a objectivar significativamente mais nas narrativas de *Nadir* do que nas narrativas de *Zénith*.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE.** Narrativas. Fiabilidade. Validade. Agorafobia.

**RESUMEN.** Esta investigación constituye el primer intento por validar tres sistemas de clasificación de las narrativas a nivel de estructura, proceso y contenido, en el contexto de los trastornos emocionales. Concretamente los objetivos son los siguientes: (1) calcular la fiabilidad de tres manuales destinados a evaluar respectivamente la estructura, el proceso y el contenido de la narrativa; (2) establecer la validez de estos manuales en el análisis y discriminación de las narrativas de *Zénith* (por ejemplo, acertado) y de *Nadir* (por ejemplo, no acertado). El estudio incluye 40 pacientes con diagnóstico principal de agorafobia. A cada paciente se le aplicó una entrevista de elicitación de dos tipos diferentes de narrativas personales significativas: (1) *Nadir* (por ejemplo, narrativas de vivencias asociadas a fracaso); (2) *Zénith* (por ejemplo, narrativas de éxito). Todas las narrativas fueron transcritas para posterior análisis a través de tres manuales de estructura, proceso y contenido, respectivamente. Los resultados muestran (1) un nivel elevado de acuerdo interjueces para cada dimensión de los tres manuales de evaluación y para el total; (2) una adecuada consistencia interna para cada manual, tanto en términos de coeficientes de correlación intercategorías, como de los valores de alfa de Cronbach; (3) los manuales permiten discriminar las narrativas de los participantes a nivel de estructura, proceso y contenido; (4) las narrativas del *Zénith* y del *Nadir* no difieren en cuanto a estructura, proceso y contenido, a excepción de la dimensión de la objetivización en el manual de evaluación del proceso/complexidad narrativa:

los pacientes con agorafobia tienden a objetivar significativamente más las narrativas del *Nadir* que las narrativas del *Zénith*.

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** Narrativas. Fiabilidad. Validez. Agorafobia.

### Introduction

Internationally, there is a growing movement of therapists, from different theoretical orientations, towards conceptualizing the clinical phenomena in terms of narrative. See, for instances, White and Epston (1990) in Australia and New Zealand, Angus, Levitt and Hardtke (1999) in Canada, Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) in Holland, Omer and Alon (1999) in Israel, Dimaggio and Semerari (2001) in Italy, Gonçalves (1995) in Portugal, Botella and Herrero (2000) in Spain, McLeod (1997) in U.K., and Neimeyer (2000) in USA, just to name a few. There has been also an increased interest in researching narratives in psychopathology and psychotherapy, namely in terms of narrative coherence (e.g., Baeger and McAdams, 1999), narrative modes (e.g., Angus, Hardtke and Levitt, 1996), narrative themes (Crits-Christoph, Connolly and Schaffer, 1999; Luborsky, Barber and Digver, 1992), narrative valuations (Hermans and Hermans-Jansen, 1995), narrative prototypes (Gonçalves and Machado, 1999), narrative structure, subjectivity and linguistic complexity (Russell and van den Broek, 1992). There are some central assumptions common to most of these narrative formulations of the clinical phenomena, namely (Gonçalves, 1995, 2000, 2002):

- At every moment the individual is facing a virtually infinite, random and chaotic sequence of phenomena with a multitude of external and self-generated stimulation (sensory, emotional and cognitive).
- In face of this stimulation the individual is confronted with a double task: how to give account of this creative potentiality of stimulation while, simultaneously, imposing some type of coherence.
- Psychopathology can be understood as a narrative unable to provide an account of the diversity of this sensorial, emotional and cognitive stimulation while, simultaneously, failing to provide narrative coherence.

Recently, several authors have claimed that there are three central elements in any narrative that we should look for in order to understand how the individual constructs his/her personal experience: narrative structure, narrative process and narrative content (Gonçalves, Korman, and Angus, 2000; Gonçalves, Machado, Korman, Angus, in press). In this taxonomy, narrative structure refers to the way in which the narrative provides elements of orientation, structural sequence, evaluative commitment and integration in order to establish a coherent and connected story. Secondly, narrative processes include the diversity of sensorial, emotional, cognitive and meaning experiences that are responsible to provide a sense of story complexity. Finally, narrative content refers to the way in which the narrative provides a diversity of narrative themes, events, settings and characters, which, altogether, differentiate the level of multiplicity on one's story.

Despite the diversity of studies of narrative processes in clinical situations, there have been, to the best of our knowledge, very few attempts to look at psychopathology from these three different narrative aspects (i.e., structure process and content). We believe that searching for typical configurations of narrative organization in different psychological disorders will increase our understanding of psychopathology and will open new possibilities for psychotherapy. This study, constitutes a first effort testing the possibilities of three rating systems intended to evaluate narrative structure, process and content in psychological disorders. More specifically, the objective of this research is twofold:

- To explore the reliability of three different rating manuals designed to evaluate, respectively, narrative structure, process and content.
- To explore the validity of these same manuals in analyzing and discriminating Zenith (i.e., successful) from Nadir (i.e., unsuccessful) narratives of patients diagnosed with agoraphobia.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Forty patients primarily diagnosed with agoraphobia participated in this study - 37 participants with the diagnosis of panic disorder with agoraphobia, and 3 with agoraphobia without history of panic. Twenty-one of these participants were female (52.5%) and 19 were male (47.5%). In terms of marital status, 22 were married (55%), 17 single (42.5%) and one widow. The socio-economic distribution of the participants was: very low (10%); low (32.5%), average (27.5%); high (22.5%); and very-high (7.5%). The average years of education level was 12 (s.d.= 4.6). Finally, the great majority of participants currently hold a job (72.5%).

### *Instruments*

- *Interview for the Elicitation of Significant Life Narratives.* All the participants followed a protocol interview in which the interviewed reads two open questions about significant life narratives and immediately leaves the room with the instructions for the participants to register their narratives on a tape recorder. These questions were intended to elicit two distinct types of narratives: (1) *nadir* narrative – free elicitation of an unsuccessful life narrative; (2) *zenith* narrative – free elicitation of a successful life narrative. All the narratives were transcribed for further analysis using the three manuals described below.
- *Narrative Structure and Coherence Evaluation Manual* (Gonçalves, Henriques and Cardoso, 2001) - This manual was conceived for the training of observers in the evaluation of narrative coherence as it is developed in the context of oral discourse in a clinical interview. This model is, in wide measure, based on the narrative structure models proposed by Labov and colleagues (Labov

and Waletzky, 1967), Baeger and McAdams (1999), and Ferreira-Alves and Gonçalves (1999). The coding of a transcript implies that we have first determined the presence of a narrative within the clinical interview. The second phase is the evaluation of the narrative's coherence, through a coding system composed of four indexes: *orientation*, *structural sequence*, *evaluative commitment*, and *integration*. Each one of these indexes is coded according to the degree of elaboration in the narrative, using a 5 point Likert scale. The narrative is read several times, with a specific objective for each subsequent reading:

*1st reading:* A general reading of the subject's transcript.

*2nd reading:* Determination of the existence of a narrative in the subject's speech. If a narrative exists, coding begins with the third reading.

*3rd reading:* Identification of *orientation* elements, followed by a rating of the level of coherence of these elements; *orientation* is defined the dimension informing on the characters, personal, social and temporal context of the narrative.

*4th reading:* Identification of *structural sequence* elements, followed by a rating of the level of coherence of these elements; *structural sequence* refers to the sequence of events of the narrative (i.e., initial event, internal response, action and consequences).

*5th reading:* Identification of *evaluation commitment*, followed by a rating of the level of coherence of these elements; *evaluative commitment* is the dimension informing on the degree of the emotional and dramatic commitment of the narrator with the narrative telling.

*6th reading:* Identification of *integration elements*, followed by a rating of the level of coherence of these elements; *integration informs how the different elements of the narrative are connected with one another.*

Besides the coding of each of the individual indexes, a global coding can be obtained by summing each of the individual scores corrected for the deviations, using the following formula:  $[\sum \pi_i + \text{sgn}(\pi_i - 3)(\pi_i - 3)2] + 4$  (where  $\pi_i$ =value of each parameter).

- *Narrative Process and Complexity Evaluation Manual* (Gonçalves, Henriques, Alves and Rocha, 2001) - This evaluation manual is inspired by the *Narrative Process Coding Systems* proposed by Lynne Angus (Angus *et al.*, 1996) and developed from the model of cognitive narrative psychotherapy proposed by Gonçalves (1995). According to this model, there are four central narrative processes: *objectifying*, *emotional subjectifying*, *cognitive subjectifying*, and *metaphorizing*. *Objectifying* is the dimension informing on the complexity of sensorial aspects of the narrative, including the following aspects: visual, auditory, olfactory, taste and physical sensations. *Emotional subjectifying* refers to the complexity and variety of the emotions present in the narrative while the *cognitive subjectifying* concerns the diversity and variety of cognitive aspects. Finally, in this context of this model, *metaphorizing* is the dimension informing of the diversity and complexity of meanings (i.e., meta-cognitive

processes) present in the narrative. The main goal of this model is to assess the degree to which these modes are expressed in the narrative process. First, the presence of the mode must be assessed, with further consideration given to the level of its elaboration. In other words, evaluators will judge the diversity of the sensorial experience, the complexity of the subjective states (emotional and cognitive), and the multiplicity of meanings revealed by the subject while narrating his or her experiences. Through this codification, the level of flexibility of the qualitative components of the narrative of each participant is assessed. The coding of a transcript implies that we have first determined the presence of a narrative. The second phase is the evaluation of the narrative process, through a coding system constituted by the four process indexes: *objectifying*, *emotional subjectifying*, *cognitive subjectifying*, and *metaphorizing*. Each of these elements is coded according to the degree of elaboration of the narrative, using a 5 point Likert Scale. The narrative is read several times, with a specific objective for each subsequent reading:

*1st reading:* A general reading of the subject's transcript.

*2nd reading:* Determination of the existence of a narrative in the subject's speech. If a narrative exists, coding begins with the third reading.

*3rd reading:* Identification of *objectifying* elements, followed by a rating of the level of complexity of these elements.

*4th reading:* Identification of *emotional subjectifying* elements, followed by a rating of the complexity of these elements.

*5th reading:* Identification of *cognitive subjectifying* elements, followed by a rating of the complexity of these elements.

*6th reading:* Identification of *metaphorizing* elements, followed by a rating of the complexity of these elements.

Again, and besides the individual coding of each of the indexes, a global coding can be obtained using the same formula presented above for the *Narrative Structure and Coherence Evaluation Manual*.

- *Manual for the Evaluation of Narrative Content and Multiplicity* (Gonçalves, Henriques, Soares and Monteiro, 2001). The purpose of this manual is to codify the narrative in terms of the diversity and multiplicity of narrative contents. Four elements are identified as central organizers of narrative content: the *themes*, the *events*, the *settings*, the *characters*. A content diversified narrative is a story in which several themes appear, and multiple characters interact in a great variety of settings within a complex and diversified net of events. On the contrary, a narrative plot with only one theme, only one character, in only one setting with a redundancy of events is, in at best, an expression of undifferentiated experience. The coding of a transcript implies that the presence of a narrative is first determined. The second phase is the evaluation of the narrative content, through a coding system constituted by four indexes: diversity of *themes*, diversity of *events*, diversity of *settings*, and the diversity of *characters*. Each one of these elements is coded according to the level of diversity (multiplicity) present in the narrative,

using a 5 point Likert Scale. The same narrative is read several times, with a specific objective for each subsequent reading:

*1st reading:* A general reading of the subject's transcript.

*2nd reading:* Determination of the existence of a narrative in the subject's speech. If a narrative exists, coding begins with the third reading.

*3rd reading:* Identification of narrative *themes*, followed by a rating of the degree to which there are a variety of *themes*.

*4th reading:* Identification of narrative *events*, followed by a rating of the degree to which there are a variety of *events*.

*5th reading:* Identification of narrative *settings*, followed by a rating of the degree to which there are a variety of *settings*.

*6th reading:* Identification of *characters*, followed by a rating of the degree to which there are a variety of *characters*.

Similar to the previous manual, a global coding can be obtained using the formula presented above.

#### *Interviewers and Raters*

All the interviews were conducted by an experienced clinical psychologist. Six clinical psychologists (two for each narrative manual) with above 60 hours of training with each manual, rated the narratives.

## Results

#### *Inter-rater Reliability*

All the observers rated the narratives individually and inter-rater agreement was computed for a total of 30 interviews (28.9%), the first 15 and last 15 of all the rated interviews, using the *Within Class Correlation Coefficient* (Everitt and Hay, 1992). All the disagreements were solved by consensus. As can be seen in Tables 1, 2 and 3, high levels of inter-rater agreement were found for all the manuals (i.e., structure, process and content) and both, for each dimension of the manual and for total score (ranging from 83% to 96%).

**TABLE 1.** Inter-rater agreement for the structure and coherence manual.

<i>Structure Dimensions</i>	<i>Inter-rater agreement</i>
Orientation	86%
Structural Sequence	87%
Evaluative Commitment	86%
Integration	86%
Total coherence score	96%



**TABLE 2.** Inter-rater agreement for narrative process and complexity manual.

<i>Process Dimensions</i>	<i>Inter-rater agreement</i>
Objectifying	88%
Emotional Subjectifying	88%
Cognitive Subjectifying	85%
Metaphorizing	88%
Total complexity score	89%

**TABLE 3.** Inter-rater agreement for narrative content and multiplicity manual.

<i>Content Dimensions</i>	<i>Inter-rater agreement</i>
Themes	88%
Events	90%
Settings	88%
Characters	83%
Total multiplicity score	94%

*Internal Consistency*

In order to analyze the internal consistency of each manual the intercategory correlation coefficient was computed for all dimensions as well as total scores of each manual. As can be seen by the inspection of Table 4, all dimensions of the *Narrative Structure and Coherence Evaluation Manual* correlated significantly with one-another and with the total score ( $p < .01$ ).

**TABLE 4.** Correlation between narrative structure dimensions and the total.

<i>Structure Categories</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Structural Sequence</i>	<i>Evaluative Commitment</i>	<i>Integration</i>	<i>Total</i>
Orientation	1.00				
Structural Sequence	.67**	1.00			
Evaluative Commitment	.41**	.39**	1.00		
Integration	.62**	.77**	.49**	1.00	
Total	.82**	.87**	.66**	.84**	1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the level .01

Generally speaking, the same results were found for the *Narrative Process and Complexity Evaluation Manual*, where most of the dimensions correlated significantly with one-another ( $p < .01$ ). However, as illustrated in Table 5, two exceptions are worth mention here: the dimension of *objectifying* had a low correlation with both, *cognitive subjectifying* ( $r = .13$ ) and *metaphorizing* ( $r = .10$ ).

**TABLE 5.** Correlation between narrative process dimensions and the total.

<i>Process Categories</i>	<i>Objectifying</i>	<i>Emotional Subjectifying</i>	<i>Cognitive Subjectifying</i>	<i>Metaphorizing</i>	<i>Total</i>
Objectifying	1.00				
Emotional Subjectifying	.33**	1.00			
Cognitive Subjectifying	.13	.40**	1.00		
Metaphorizing	.10	.45**	.48**	1.00	
Total	.50**	.77**	.75**	.75**	1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the level 0.01

Finally, the inspection of Table 6 shows, again, that the existence of significant correlations among all the dimensions and between each dimension and the total score ( $p < .01$ ).

**TABLE 6.** Correlation between narrative content dimensions and the total

<i>Content Categories</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Events</i>	<i>Scenarios</i>	<i>Characters</i>	<i>Total</i>
Themes	1.00				
Events	.55**	1.00			
Scenarios	.50**	.63**	1.00		
Characters	.39**	.54**	.59**	1.00	
Total	.78**	.79**	.83**	.76**	1.00

\*\* Correlation is significant at the level .01.

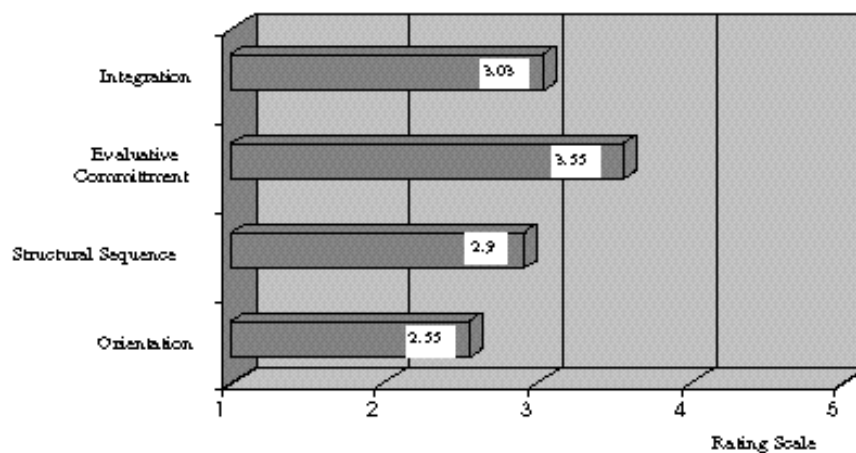
Table 7 shows the Alpha Cronbach values for all the dimension of each manual. As can be seen, all the results, ranging from alpha Cronbach values of .66 and .92, show appropriate levels of internal consistency for each Manual. As it was expected, given the smaller correlation for the *objectifying* dimension of the *Narrative Process and Complexity Narrative Manual*, the lower alpha values were also found for this dimension (.66).

**TABLE 7.** Correlation between narrative content dimensions and the total.

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Alpha Value</i>
Structure Orientation	.8995
Structural Sequence	.9286
Evaluative Commitment	.7963
Integration	.9100
Process	
Objectifying	.6663
Emotional Subjectifying	.8719
Cognitive Subjectifying	.8559
Metaphorizing	.8587
Content Themes	.8732
Events	.8831
Scenarios	.9086
Characters	.8613

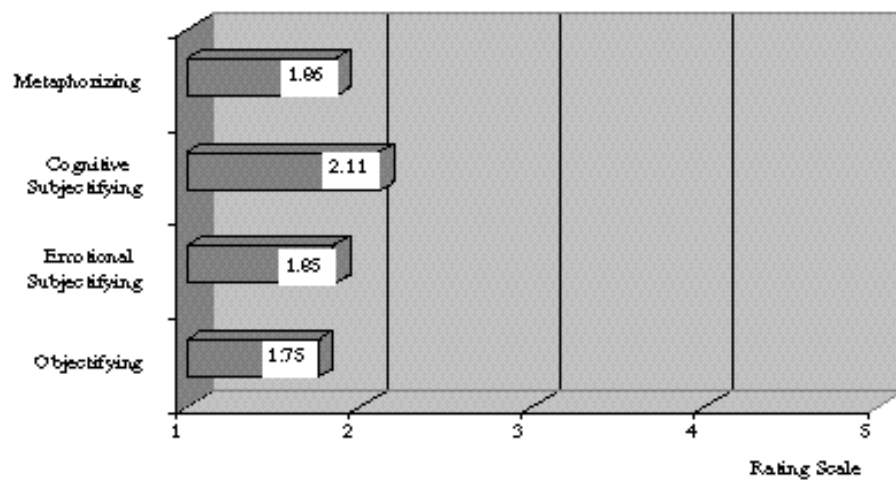
*Overall Results of The Narrative Structure, Process and Outcome*

Figure 1 presents the values for each dimension of the narrative structure and coherence. As can be seen, the narratives can be generally situated around moderate scores in terms of *integration* (3.03) and *structural sequence* (2.90), between moderate and high scores for *evaluative commitment* (3.55) and between low and moderate scores for the *orientation* dimension (2.55).

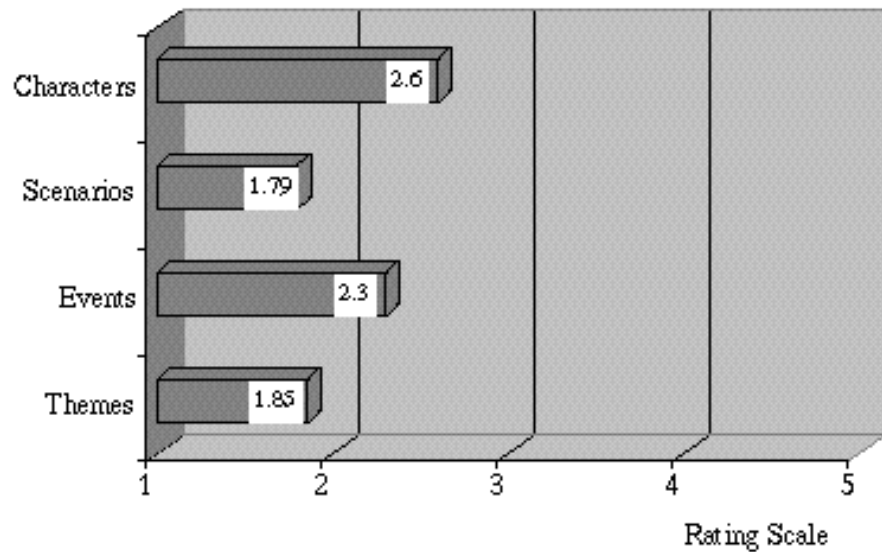
**FIGURE 1.** Results on the narrative structure and coherence.

The results of narrative process and complexity are shown in Figure 2. Overall, the results show that narratives are rated between very low and low levels for all the dimensions of the narrative process, namely: *objectifying* (1.75), *emotional subjectifying* (1.85), *cognitive subjectifying* (2.11) and *metaphorizing* (1.86).

**FIGURE 2.** Results on the narrative process and complexity.

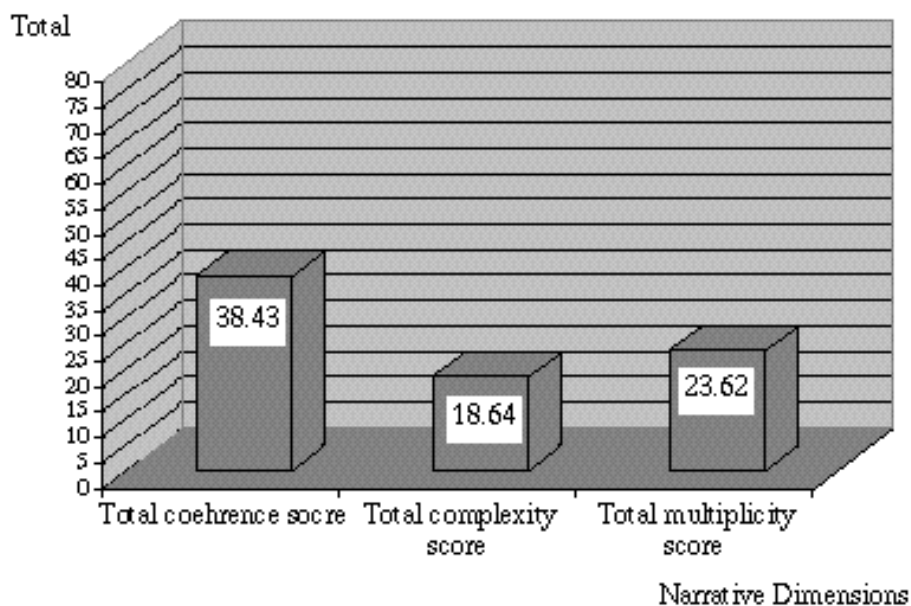


In terms of narrative content and multiplicity, the results presented in Figure 3 show a diversity of *characters* between low and moderate levels (2.6), low level of *events* diversity (2.3) and approach low levels of diversity of *settings* (1.79) and *themes* (1.85).

**FIGURE 3.** Results on the narrative content and multiplicity.

Finally, Figure 4, shows the results of each manual total scores. The results *show that these narratives obtain significantly higher structure/coherence scores when compared with both, narrative process/ complexity* ( $t=9.36$ ;  $p<.0001$ ) and *content/multiplicity* ( $t=6.87$ ;  $p<.0001$ ). Additionally, the difference between narrative *process/complexity* and narrative *content/multiplicity* was found to be statistically significant ( $t=2.40$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

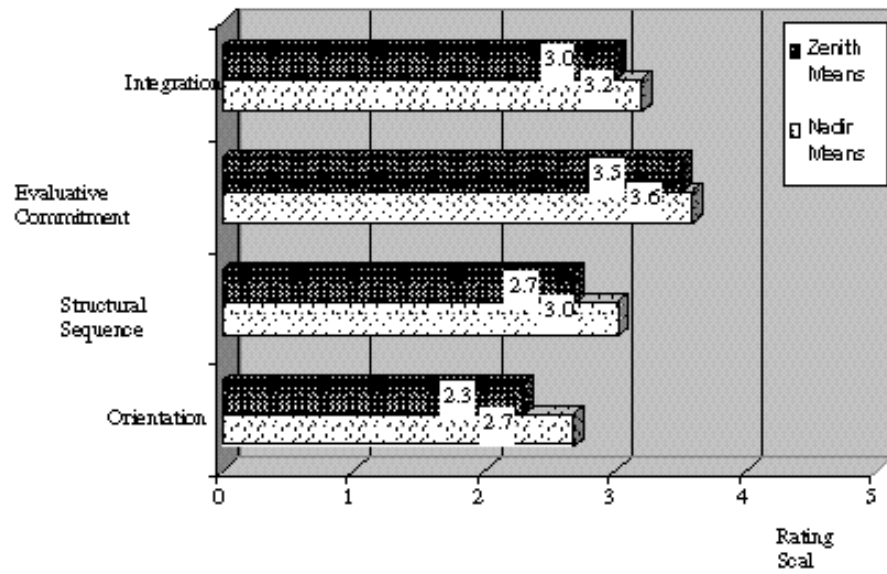
**FIGURE 4.** Results on comparison among total scores narrative structure, process and content.



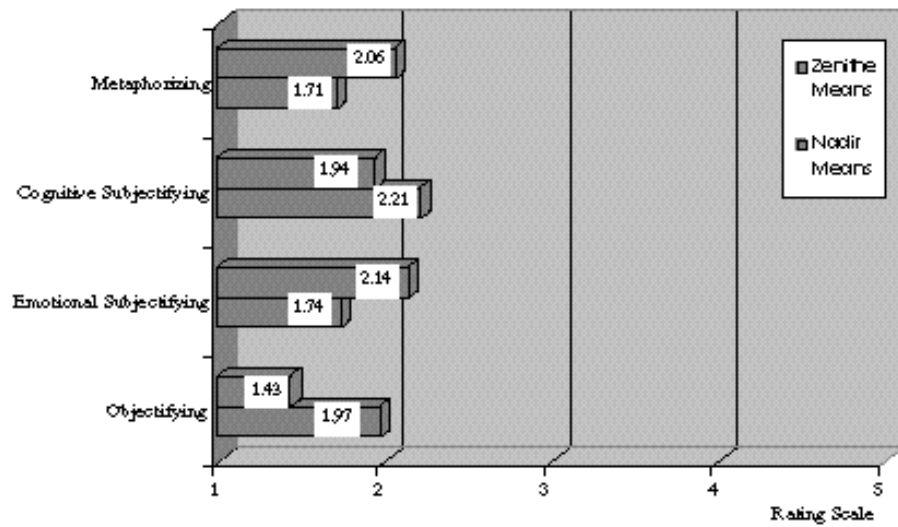
#### *Results of Comparing Zenith and Nadir Narratives*

A final objective of this study was to compare *zenith* (i.e., successful) with *nadir* (i.e., unsuccessful) narratives in terms of narrative structure, process and outcome. The results presented in Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 show that, overall, there were no significant differences between *zenith* and *nadir* experiences in terms of narrative structure, process and outcome, and that the profile of results presented before for all the narratives is maintained despite the positive or negative nature of the narrative. There was, however, one single statistically significant difference found: *nadir* narratives were found to be significantly higher on the *objectifying* dimension of the *Narrative Process and Complexity Evaluation Manual* ( $t=2.86$ ;  $p<.01$ ).

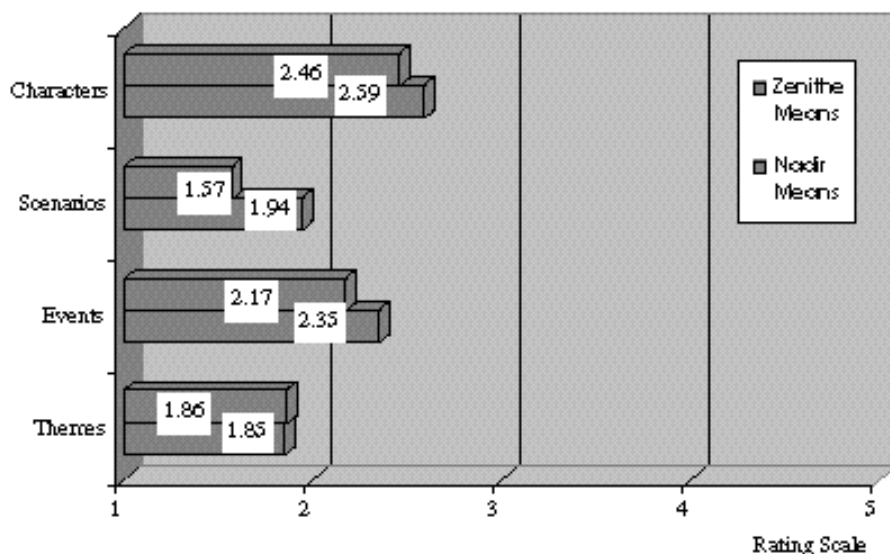
**FIGURE 5.** Comparing *Zenith* and *Nadir* narrative structure and coherence.



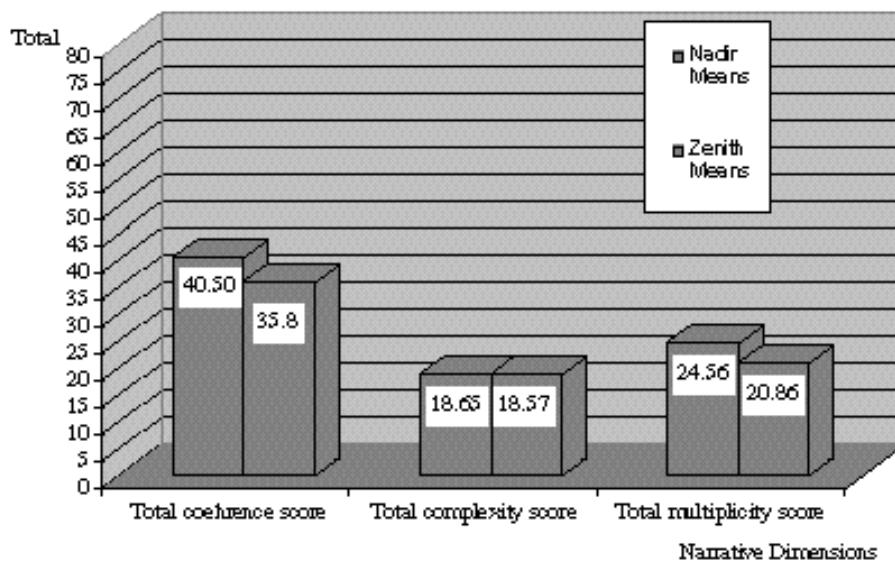
**FIGURE 6.** Comparing *Zenith* and *Nadir* narrative process and complexity.



**FIGURE 7.** Comparing *Zenith* and *Nadir* narrative content and multiplicity.



**FIGURE 8.** Comparing *Zenith* and *Nadir* narratives total scores narrative structure, process and content.





### Discussion

Let us remember that the overall objective of this study was twofold. First, to explore the reliability of the rating manuals designed to evaluate, narrative structure, process and content and; second, to explore the validity of these manuals in analyzing and discriminating *Zenith* from *Nadir* narratives of patients diagnosed with agoraphobia. Overall, the main results can be summarized as follows:

- A high level of inter-rater reliability was found for both, each individual dimension of the three rating manuals as well as for the total scores.
- A high level of internal consistency was found for each manual both in terms of intercategory correlation coefficients and alpha Cronbach scores.
- The manuals were effective in discriminating the participants narratives in terms of narrative structure, process and outcome. Patients diagnosed with agoraphobia have shown significantly higher levels of narrative *structure/coherence* when compared with levels of *process/complexity* and *content/multiplicity* as well as an increased level of *content/multiplicity* over *process/complexity*.
- Finally, *Zenith* and *Nadir* narratives did not differ in terms of narrative structure, process and content, with the single exception of the *objectifying* dimension from the *process/complexity* rating manual, showing that agoraphobic patients tend to *objectify* significantly more in *Nadir* narratives than in *Zenith* narratives.

Let us now comment briefly on the main results. First, the high level of inter-rater reliability found for all the three rating manual systems, seems very promising of a new framework for the analysis of narrative structure, process and content. However some caution is advised when interpreting the present results. It is important to note that the observers were all very familiar with the theoretical framework underlying each one of the classification systems. One needs to see how the current results will be confirmed by other observers operating with different theoretical frameworks. Additionally, we need to recall that a significant amount of training (above 60 hours) was necessary to reach these levels of reliability and that further research is necessary to explore if the different coding system are still reliable with less amounts of observer's training. Second, the data from the inter-category correlation and alpha Cronbach supports that each category system seems to be satisfactorily homogeneous. One exception to these data deserves further comments. The *objectifying* dimension of the process/complexity manual was found to have a low correlation with both, the cognitive *subjectifying* and the *metaphorizing* dimension. Two interpretations can be drawn for these results. First, it is possible that this may be due to an increased difficulty of agoraphobic patients to construct the sensorial experience in terms of its complexity when compared with the diversity of cognitions and meanings. The significant difference found, when comparing *zenith* with *nadir* experience in terms of the *objectifying* dimension could indeed suggest that this may be a particularly discriminative dimension for this population. Alternatively, it may be possible that the low inter-correlation found is an artifact of the instrument and that *objectifying* dimension represents an outlier of the process/complexity manual.

Further research with different populations is needed in order to clarify this issue further. Third, the fact that the rating manuals were able to differentiate significantly the narratives in terms of narrative structure, process and content, brings initial data suggesting that these instruments may be useful to discriminate different characteristics of narrative production in clinical samples. However, before we have additional data from studies with other psychological disorders and control populations, no definitive conclusions can be drawn on the clinical validity of these instruments. Finally, the result the finding that agoraphobic patients seem to be constructing a narrative significantly more complex in terms of the sensorial dimension (i.e., *objectifying*) for the *nadir* experience than for the *zenith* narrative, may be seen as both, promising and puzzling. Promising, because it may be understood, as pointed out above, as an indication of the value of the instrument to discriminate different narratives. Puzzling, in the sense that the model would predict that the unsuccessful narratives (i.e., *nadir*) would be characterized by lower levels of complexity. Overall, the results found would suggest that agoraphobic patients do not elaborate differently their successful and unsuccessful narratives and in the only instances where they do it, it is in a direction contrary to what was expected. Again, further research with different clinical populations will help to understand if this is a typical feature of narrative construction of agoraphobic patients or, otherwise, an instrument artifact.

In sum, the results of the present research seem to be encouraging of the utilization of these manuals for the analysis of narrative structure, process and content with clinical populations. Further research is needed with different clinical and non-clinical populations in order to rule-out some potential artifacts of the present coding systems.

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