



The Effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy on Relational Identity Reconstruction, Marital Meaning-Making, and Post-Conflict Reconciliation

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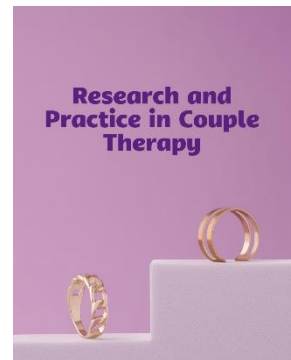
ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy on relational identity reconstruction, marital meaning-making, and post-conflict reconciliation among married couples experiencing relationship distress in Canada. This study employed a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest, and three-month follow-up assessments using a control group. The statistical population consisted of married couples who sought services from counseling centers and family therapy clinics in Canada during 2025. Following eligibility screening, 60 couples (120 individuals) were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental group (30 couples) and a control group (30 couples). The experimental group participated in a 12-session Narrative Couple Therapy program conducted weekly, while the control group received no intervention during the study period. Data were collected using the Relational Identity Reconstruction Scale, the Marital Meaning-Making Questionnaire, and the Post-Conflict Reconciliation Inventory. Data were analyzed using repeated-measures analysis of variance and Bonferroni post hoc comparisons in SPSS version 29. The results revealed significant time, group, and time-by-group interaction effects for all study variables. For relational identity reconstruction, a significant interaction effect was observed, $F(2,116) = 61.84, p < .001, \eta^2 = .52$. Marital meaning-making also demonstrated a significant interaction effect, $F(2,116) = 72.57, p < .001, \eta^2 = .56$. Similarly, post-conflict reconciliation showed a significant interaction effect, $F(2,116) = 69.44, p < .001, \eta^2 = .55$. Bonferroni pairwise comparisons indicated significant improvements from pretest to posttest and from pretest to follow-up across all outcome variables ($p < .001$). No significant differences were found between posttest and follow-up scores, indicating that treatment gains were maintained over time. The findings indicate that Narrative Couple Therapy is an effective intervention for enhancing relational identity reconstruction, strengthening marital meaning-making, and improving post-conflict reconciliation among married couples. By facilitating the reconstruction of relational narratives and promoting collaborative meaning-making processes, this therapeutic approach contributes to enduring improvements in relationship functioning and emotional connection. The stability of treatment effects at follow-up further supports the utility of Narrative Couple Therapy as a sustainable and evidence-based intervention for couples experiencing relational difficulties.

Keywords: Narrative Couple Therapy, Relational Identity Reconstruction, Marital Meaning-Making, Post-Conflict Reconciliation, Couple Counseling, Marital Relationships, Narrative Therapy, Relationship Adjustment.

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Introduction

Narrative approaches to couple therapy have gained increasing prominence within contemporary relationship research and clinical practice because of their emphasis on meaning, identity, and the stories individuals and couples construct about themselves and their relationships. Rather than conceptualizing relationship distress solely as a consequence of dysfunctional



behaviors or maladaptive cognitions, narrative perspectives propose that difficulties emerge when couples become trapped in problem-saturated stories that limit their ability to recognize strengths, resilience, and opportunities for growth. Through therapeutic conversations, couples are encouraged to externalize problems, challenge dominant negative narratives, and co-construct alternative stories that support intimacy, commitment, and relational development (Monk et al., 2021; Monk et al., 2025). As relationship science increasingly acknowledges the role of subjective meaning and interpersonal narratives in shaping marital outcomes, narrative couple therapy has become a promising intervention for addressing relational conflict, emotional disconnection, and difficulties in reconciliation.

The importance of interventions that strengthen couple functioning is underscored by growing evidence indicating that relationship instability and marital dissatisfaction remain prevalent challenges across diverse cultural contexts. Longitudinal research has demonstrated that fluctuations in commitment, emotional investment, and relational confidence are closely associated with relationship instability and dissolution (Monk et al., 2025). Similarly, studies examining separation and divorce transitions have shown that relationship distress often develops gradually through repeated cycles of conflict, uncertainty, and unsuccessful attempts at repair (Monk et al., 2021). Broader demographic investigations have further documented increasing concerns regarding marital dissolution and relational fragility, particularly during periods of social and economic stress (Puspitasari & Gayatri, 2022). These findings highlight the need for therapeutic approaches that address not only behavioral interactions but also the deeper meanings couples assign to their experiences and conflicts.

One of the central constructs relevant to contemporary couple therapy is relational identity. Relational identity refers to the manner in which individuals understand themselves within the context of an intimate partnership and the degree to which partners develop a shared sense of “we-ness” that transcends individual identities. Recent psychometric developments have emphasized the importance of couple identity as a distinct relational construct associated with relationship quality, commitment, and resilience (Pacheco et al., 2025). Relationship scholars increasingly recognize that successful intimate relationships involve ongoing processes of identity negotiation, mutual influence, and collaborative meaning construction (Nguyen, 2023). Relational identity is not static but evolves throughout the life course as couples encounter developmental transitions, stressors, and interpersonal challenges. Consequently, disruptions in relational identity may contribute to emotional distance, misunderstanding, and persistent conflict.

Research examining identity processes in intimate relationships has demonstrated that relational identity is deeply connected to psychological adjustment and relationship satisfaction. Investigations into self-differentiation and marital quality have shown that individuals who possess a coherent sense of self while maintaining emotional connection with their partners tend to report higher levels of dyadic adjustment and marital satisfaction (TÖNBÜL & ÖZDEMİR, 2023). Similarly, actor-partner studies have revealed that relationship power dynamics, social dominance, and interpersonal beliefs influence both partners’ perceptions of marital quality and relational functioning (Ymamgulyyeva et al., 2023). These findings suggest that relational identity emerges through ongoing interpersonal interactions and mutual interpretations, making it particularly amenable to interventions that focus on narrative reconstruction and shared storytelling.

The significance of identity reconstruction becomes even more apparent in contexts involving relational loss, disruption, or transformation. Research on individuals coping with the loss of a spouse has shown that identity reconstruction represents a critical component of psychological adaptation, as people must renegotiate their sense of self and relational meaning following major life changes (Wehrman, 2022). Although marital conflict differs from bereavement, both experiences may challenge established relational narratives and require individuals to redefine who they are within the relationship. Narrative approaches are uniquely positioned to facilitate this process by helping couples re-author stories that emphasize agency, resilience, and relational continuity rather than failure and disconnection.

Another construct that has received considerable attention in relationship research is marital meaning-making. Meaning-making refers to the cognitive and emotional process through which individuals interpret experiences, construct coherent narratives, and derive significance from life events. Within intimate relationships, meaning-making allows couples to integrate positive and negative experiences into a shared understanding of their partnership. Studies examining family transitions and significant life events have consistently demonstrated the importance of meaning-making for psychological adjustment and relational well-being. Research investigating childbirth experiences, for example, found that couples' capacity to create meaningful narratives about challenging experiences contributed substantially to subsequent adjustment and family functioning (Corner et al., 2023). Likewise, investigations involving bereaved families have highlighted the role of shared meaning construction in promoting emotional regulation and relational resilience during periods of profound loss (Barboza et al., 2024).

The capacity for meaning-making appears particularly relevant in the context of marital conflict. Couples frequently experience disagreements and relational ruptures that challenge their assumptions about themselves, their partners, and the future of their relationship. When conflicts are interpreted through rigid or negative narratives, partners may become increasingly polarized and less capable of understanding each other's perspectives. In contrast, shared meaning-making facilitates empathy, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem solving. Clinical evidence suggests that transformative change often occurs when couples begin to reinterpret conflicts as opportunities for growth rather than evidence of incompatibility or failure (Figueiredo et al., 2024). Such findings align closely with the goals of narrative therapy, which seeks to help couples develop more adaptive interpretations of their relational experiences.

Closely related to meaning-making is the concept of post-conflict reconciliation. Reconciliation refers to the process through which partners repair emotional injuries, restore trust, and reestablish relational connection following interpersonal disagreements or betrayals. Effective reconciliation is widely regarded as a fundamental component of healthy and enduring intimate relationships. Studies exploring conflict and reconciliation processes have demonstrated that successful reconciliation involves more than simply ending an argument; it requires the reconstruction of emotional safety, mutual understanding, and relational commitment (Patrissia & Jamalullail, 2024). Research has further shown that forgiveness and reconciliation contribute significantly to long-term relationship stability and satisfaction (Skipper et al., 2024).

The importance of reconciliation becomes especially evident in relationships affected by significant relational injuries. Investigations of couples coping with extramarital affairs have shown that therapeutic interventions aimed at enhancing forgiveness, intimacy, and emotional connection can produce meaningful improvements in marital adjustment (Torani & Fard, 2024). Systematic reviews of interventions designed to facilitate marital reconciliation similarly indicate that therapeutic approaches promoting empathy, acceptance, and collaborative understanding are associated with positive relational outcomes (Talib et al., 2025). These findings suggest that reconciliation is a dynamic process involving emotional, cognitive, and relational transformations, many of which are directly targeted within narrative therapeutic frameworks.

Narrative couple therapy offers a particularly compelling approach for addressing relational identity, meaning-making, and reconciliation because of its emphasis on language, storytelling, and the social construction of reality. Narrative theorists argue that individuals interpret their experiences through stories that organize perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. When couples become dominated by stories emphasizing blame, failure, or inadequacy, relationship distress often intensifies. Narrative interventions seek to challenge these dominant narratives and encourage the development of alternative stories that highlight strengths, values, and preferred relational identities (Monk et al., 2021; Monk et al., 2025). Through externalization, re-authoring conversations, and collaborative exploration of relationship experiences, couples may develop new understandings of themselves and their partners.

Several lines of empirical evidence indirectly support the mechanisms proposed by narrative approaches. Research examining relationship-defining memories has demonstrated that the ways couples remember and interpret significant experiences are strongly associated with marital outcomes and relationship satisfaction (Majzoobi & Forstmeier, 2022). Similarly, studies focusing on attachment processes have revealed that emotional regulation, attachment security, and relational outcomes are shaped by individuals' interpretations of relational experiences and interpersonal interactions (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Investigations of attachment patterns and interpersonal schemas further indicate that cognitive representations of self and others play a critical role in marital adjustment (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Narrative interventions may therefore exert their effects by transforming the interpretive frameworks through which couples understand themselves and their relationships.

Additional evidence highlights the importance of contextual and developmental influences on relational functioning. Research on childhood maltreatment has shown that adverse early experiences can influence adult relationship quality through their effects on trust, emotional regulation, and interpersonal expectations (Zamir, 2021). Studies of coparenting and family systems have similarly emphasized the complex interactions among individual, relational, and cultural factors in shaping couple dynamics (McHale & Jenkins, 2023). Furthermore, investigations involving couples facing chronic illness and significant life stressors demonstrate that shared coping, communication, and meaning-making are essential for maintaining relational well-being under challenging circumstances (Hasdenteufel & Quintard, 2022). These findings underscore the need for therapeutic approaches capable of addressing the multiple layers of meaning and identity embedded within intimate relationships.

The effectiveness of couple therapy more broadly provides additional support for interventions focused on relational transformation. Randomized controlled trials have demonstrated that relationship skills training programs can significantly improve marital adjustment and relationship functioning (Asfaw & Alene, 2023). Systematic reviews have further shown that couple therapy contributes positively to a wide range of psychological and relational outcomes across diverse populations (Thompson, 2021). Research examining processes of change within relationship interventions has highlighted the importance of existential reflection, emotional awareness, and narrative reinterpretation in facilitating therapeutic progress (Ramos & Ramos, 2022). Even experiences such as participation in structured interviews concerning divorce decision-making have been found to stimulate reflection and promote reconsideration of relationship narratives (Fenske et al., 2024).

Emerging scholarship also suggests that relational well-being is enhanced when couples maintain meaningful connections to significant relational experiences while simultaneously adapting to change. The concept of continuing bonds, originally developed within bereavement research, has been extended to marital and post-divorce contexts, emphasizing the enduring influence of relational narratives on personal identity and emotional functioning (Rubin et al., 2024). Likewise, studies examining predictors of marital adjustment have consistently identified conflict resolution styles, relationship beliefs, and personality characteristics as important determinants of relational outcomes (Tolan & Kılıç, 2021). Narrative approaches may help integrate these diverse influences by providing a framework through which couples can organize experiences, reinterpret conflicts, and construct more adaptive relational stories.

Despite growing theoretical interest in narrative therapy and increasing recognition of the roles of relational identity, meaning-making, and reconciliation in couple functioning, empirical studies directly examining the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy on these specific outcomes remain limited. Much of the existing literature has focused on marital satisfaction, communication, or general adjustment, leaving important questions regarding the mechanisms through which narrative interventions promote relational transformation unanswered. Furthermore, the recent development of measures assessing couple identity has created new opportunities to evaluate therapeutic change in domains that have historically been difficult to operationalize (Pacheco et al., 2025). Consequently, additional research is needed to determine whether Narrative Couple

Therapy can effectively facilitate relational identity reconstruction, enhance marital meaning-making, and strengthen post-conflict reconciliation among couples experiencing relationship difficulties.

The aim of the present study was to examine the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy on relational identity reconstruction, marital meaning-making, and post-conflict reconciliation among married couples in Canada.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a quasi-experimental design with a pretest–posttest control group framework and a three-month follow-up assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy on relational identity reconstruction, marital meaning-making, and post-conflict reconciliation among married couples. The study was conducted in Canada between January and September 2025. Participants were recruited from community counseling centers, family therapy clinics, and marital enrichment programs located in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia. Couples who reported persistent relationship conflicts, difficulties in restoring emotional connection after disagreements, and dissatisfaction with the meaning and direction of their marital relationship were invited to participate in the study.

A total of 68 couples were initially screened for eligibility. Following the screening process, 60 couples (120 individuals) met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate. Inclusion criteria consisted of being legally married or in a committed cohabiting relationship for at least two years, being between 25 and 60 years of age, possessing adequate English-language proficiency, and reporting moderate levels of relationship distress as determined through an initial clinical interview. Couples were excluded if either partner was experiencing severe psychiatric disorders, active substance dependence, ongoing intimate partner violence, or simultaneous participation in another form of couple therapy. Eligible couples were randomly assigned to either an experimental group (30 couples) receiving Narrative Couple Therapy or a waitlist control group (30 couples) receiving no intervention during the study period. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

Measures

Relational identity reconstruction was assessed using the Relational Identity Reconstruction Scale, a self-report instrument designed to evaluate the extent to which individuals reconstruct and redefine their sense of self within the context of their intimate relationship. The scale measures dimensions such as shared identity development, relational coherence, narrative integration, and partner-related self-concept. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Previous research has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, including strong internal consistency and construct validity across diverse couple populations.

Marital meaning-making was measured using the Marital Meaning-Making Questionnaire, which assesses couples' capacity to construct shared interpretations of relationship experiences, develop common life narratives, and derive meaning from both positive and challenging marital events. The instrument evaluates existential understanding, shared purpose, relational significance, and collaborative interpretation of life experiences. Responses are recorded on a seven-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater marital meaning-making capacity. Previous validation studies have reported high reliability coefficients and strong convergent validity with relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being measures.

Post-conflict reconciliation was evaluated using the Post-Conflict Reconciliation Inventory, a comprehensive instrument that examines couples' ability to restore emotional closeness, rebuild trust, engage in constructive dialogue, and achieve mutual forgiveness following interpersonal conflicts. The inventory consists of multiple subscales assessing emotional repair,

communication restoration, conflict resolution effectiveness, and reconciliation behaviors. Participants completed the inventory at baseline, immediately after the intervention, and during the follow-up assessment. Prior studies have demonstrated excellent internal consistency and sensitivity to therapeutic change among couples experiencing relationship distress.

In addition to the primary outcome measures, a demographic questionnaire was administered to collect information regarding age, gender, educational attainment, employment status, duration of relationship, number of children, and previous experiences with psychological counseling. These demographic variables were used to describe the sample and examine potential covariates during statistical analyses.

Intervention

The experimental group participated in a structured Narrative Couple Therapy program consisting of twelve weekly sessions, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The intervention was delivered by licensed marriage and family therapists who had received specialized training in narrative therapeutic approaches. The therapeutic process focused on helping couples externalize relationship problems, identify dominant conflict-saturated narratives, and explore alternative stories that highlighted resilience, strengths, commitment, and relational values. Early sessions emphasized building therapeutic alliance and facilitating the externalization of recurring marital difficulties. Middle sessions focused on deconstructing maladaptive relationship narratives, examining cultural and personal influences on relational identity, and identifying unique outcomes that contradicted negative assumptions about the relationship. Couples were encouraged to reconstruct shared narratives that promoted emotional connection, mutual understanding, and collaborative meaning-making. Later sessions emphasized strengthening preferred relational identities, integrating positive relationship experiences into coherent marital narratives, developing future-oriented relationship stories, and practicing reconciliation dialogues following conflict situations. Therapeutic exercises included narrative interviewing, reflective conversations, relationship timeline construction, therapeutic letter writing, re-authoring conversations, and collaborative storytelling activities. Throughout the intervention, therapists encouraged partners to recognize each other as active contributors to the relationship narrative and to develop more adaptive interpretations of conflict, forgiveness, and relational growth.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29 and AMOS version 29. Prior to conducting inferential analyses, data were screened for missing values, outliers, normality, homogeneity of variance, and multicollinearity. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Baseline equivalence between the experimental and control groups was examined using independent-samples t-tests and chi-square analyses.

To evaluate the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy over time, repeated-measures analysis of variance was performed with group membership as the between-subjects factor and measurement occasion (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) as the within-subjects factor. Main effects of time, group, and time-by-group interaction were examined for relational identity reconstruction, marital meaning-making, and post-conflict reconciliation. Effect sizes were calculated using partial eta squared values to determine the magnitude of treatment effects. Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were conducted to identify significant differences across measurement occasions within each group. Statistical significance was established at a probability level of $p < .05$. The overall analytical approach enabled a comprehensive assessment of both immediate and sustained intervention effects while controlling for baseline differences and evaluating longitudinal changes in the targeted relational outcomes.

Findings and Results

Among the 60 participating couples (120 individuals), 30 couples were assigned to the Narrative Couple Therapy group and 30 couples were assigned to the waitlist control group. The mean age of participants was 39.42 years (SD = 8.11), with ages ranging from 26 to 58 years. The average duration of marriage was 11.27 years (SD = 5.83). Approximately 63.3% of participants held a college or university degree, 71.7% were employed full-time, and 76.7% reported having at least one child. No statistically significant differences were observed between the experimental and control groups regarding age, gender distribution, educational level, employment status, marital duration, or number of children ($p > .05$), indicating that the groups were comparable at baseline.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Relational Identity Reconstruction, Marital Meaning-Making, and Post-Conflict Reconciliation Across Measurement Occasions

Variable	Group	Pretest Mean ± SD	Posttest Mean ± SD	Follow-up Mean ± SD
Relational Identity Reconstruction	Control	54.73 ± 8.14	55.06 ± 7.91	55.20 ± 8.07
Relational Identity Reconstruction	Experimental	55.10 ± 8.45	71.46 ± 7.63	70.93 ± 7.84
Marital Meaning-Making	Control	61.30 ± 9.21	61.76 ± 8.88	61.50 ± 8.95
Marital Meaning-Making	Experimental	60.97 ± 8.86	79.13 ± 8.22	78.66 ± 8.47
Post-Conflict Reconciliation	Control	58.43 ± 8.73	58.90 ± 8.41	58.56 ± 8.65
Post-Conflict Reconciliation	Experimental	57.87 ± 8.58	76.53 ± 7.76	75.97 ± 7.89

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables across the three measurement occasions. Examination of baseline scores demonstrated substantial similarity between the experimental and control groups on all outcome variables, indicating successful group equivalence before the intervention. Following the implementation of Narrative Couple Therapy, marked increases were observed in the experimental group across all measured constructs. Relational identity reconstruction increased from a pretest mean of 55.10 to a posttest mean of 71.46 and remained largely stable at follow-up ($M = 70.93$). Similarly, marital meaning-making increased from 60.97 at baseline to 79.13 at posttest and was maintained at follow-up ($M = 78.66$). Post-conflict reconciliation also demonstrated considerable improvement, increasing from 57.87 at pretest to 76.53 at posttest and remaining high during follow-up ($M = 75.97$). In contrast, the control group exhibited only negligible fluctuations across measurement occasions. These descriptive findings provide preliminary evidence that Narrative Couple Therapy contributed to substantial and enduring improvements in relational identity reconstruction, shared marital meaning-making, and couples' capacity for reconciliation following conflict.

Table 2. Repeated-Measures Analysis of Variance for Relational Identity Reconstruction, Marital Meaning-Making, and Post-Conflict Reconciliation

Variable	Source	F	df	p	Partial η^2
Relational Identity Reconstruction	Time	54.28	2, 116	< .001	.48
	Group	39.75	1, 58	< .001	.41
	Time × Group	61.84	2, 116	< .001	.52
Marital Meaning-Making	Time	67.39	2, 116	< .001	.54
	Group	44.91	1, 58	< .001	.44
	Time × Group	72.57	2, 116	< .001	.56
Post-Conflict Reconciliation	Time	63.82	2, 116	< .001	.52
	Group	41.63	1, 58	< .001	.42
	Time × Group	69.44	2, 116	< .001	.55

The results of the repeated-measures analysis of variance are presented in Table 2. Significant main effects of time were observed for relational identity reconstruction, marital meaning-making, and post-conflict reconciliation, indicating that scores changed significantly across the three assessment periods. Significant group effects were also identified for all outcome

variables, demonstrating overall differences between couples who received Narrative Couple Therapy and those assigned to the control condition. Most importantly, statistically significant Time \times Group interaction effects emerged for all three dependent variables. The interaction effect for relational identity reconstruction was significant, $F(2,116) = 61.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .52$, indicating that changes over time differed substantially between groups. Similar interaction effects were found for marital meaning-making, $F(2,116) = 72.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .56$, and post-conflict reconciliation, $F(2,116) = 69.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .55$. The effect sizes associated with these interaction terms were large, suggesting that the intervention accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in the observed improvements. Collectively, these findings provide strong statistical support for the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy in enhancing couples' reconstruction of relational identity, development of shared marital meaning, and capacity for reconciliation after interpersonal conflict.

Table 3. Bonferroni Pairwise Comparisons for the Experimental Group

Variable	Comparison	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p
Relational Identity Reconstruction	Pretest–Posttest	-16.36	1.74	< .001
	Pretest–Follow-up	-15.83	1.82	< .001
	Posttest–Follow-up	0.53	0.89	.999
Marital Meaning-Making	Pretest–Posttest	-18.16	1.68	< .001
	Pretest–Follow-up	-17.69	1.73	< .001
	Posttest–Follow-up	0.47	0.84	.999
Post-Conflict Reconciliation	Pretest–Posttest	-18.66	1.71	< .001
	Pretest–Follow-up	-18.10	1.77	< .001
	Posttest–Follow-up	0.56	0.86	.999

To further clarify the nature of the significant interaction effects, Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were conducted for the experimental group and are presented in Table 3. The results demonstrated significant improvements from pretest to posttest across all outcome variables. Relational identity reconstruction increased significantly between pretest and posttest (Mean Difference = -16.36, $p < .001$) and remained significantly higher at follow-up compared to baseline (Mean Difference = -15.83, $p < .001$). Likewise, marital meaning-making showed significant gains from pretest to posttest (Mean Difference = -18.16, $p < .001$) and from pretest to follow-up (Mean Difference = -17.69, $p < .001$). Post-conflict reconciliation also improved significantly from pretest to posttest (Mean Difference = -18.66, $p < .001$) and maintained these gains at follow-up (Mean Difference = -18.10, $p < .001$). Importantly, none of the posttest-to-follow-up comparisons reached statistical significance, indicating that the therapeutic gains achieved immediately after treatment were successfully maintained over the three-month follow-up period. This pattern of findings suggests that Narrative Couple Therapy not only produces substantial short-term improvements in couples' relational functioning but also facilitates enduring changes that persist beyond the conclusion of the intervention. The stability of outcomes across the follow-up period further supports the long-term effectiveness of narrative therapeutic techniques in helping couples reconstruct positive relational identities, develop meaningful shared narratives, and strengthen their ability to repair relationships following conflict.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy on relational identity reconstruction, marital meaning-making, and post-conflict reconciliation among married couples in Canada. The findings demonstrated that couples who participated in the narrative intervention experienced significant improvements across all three outcome variables compared with those in the control group. Repeated-measures analyses revealed significant time, group, and time-by-group interaction effects, indicating that the observed changes were attributable to the intervention rather than natural fluctuations over time. Furthermore, the gains achieved at posttest remained stable during the three-month follow-up period, suggesting

that the therapeutic effects of Narrative Couple Therapy were not only substantial but also durable. These findings provide empirical support for the proposition that narrative-based interventions can facilitate meaningful relational transformation by helping couples reconstruct their shared identities, create more adaptive interpretations of their experiences, and develop healthier pathways toward reconciliation following conflict.

One of the most important findings of the present study was the significant improvement in relational identity reconstruction among couples who received Narrative Couple Therapy. This finding is consistent with the theoretical foundations of narrative therapy, which emphasize the role of stories and meanings in shaping personal and relational identities (Monk et al., 2021; Monk et al., 2025). Narrative therapists argue that individuals and couples understand themselves through the stories they construct about their lives and relationships. When relationships become characterized by recurring conflict, disappointment, or emotional disconnection, couples often develop problem-saturated narratives that narrow their perceptions of themselves and each other. Through externalization and re-authoring conversations, Narrative Couple Therapy enables partners to separate themselves from the problem and reconstruct identities grounded in competence, commitment, and resilience. The significant increase in relational identity reconstruction observed in the present study suggests that participants were able to move beyond restrictive narratives and develop a more coherent and positive sense of themselves as partners within the relationship.

This finding aligns with recent conceptual and empirical work emphasizing the importance of couple identity in relationship functioning. The development and validation of the Couple Identity Scale highlighted the central role of shared identity in promoting commitment, relational stability, and psychological well-being within intimate partnerships (Pacheco et al., 2025). Similarly, research examining differentiation of self and marital quality demonstrated that individuals who achieve a balance between autonomy and connection tend to report stronger dyadic adjustment and relationship satisfaction (TÖNBÜL & Özdemir, 2023). Narrative Couple Therapy may facilitate this balance by helping partners recognize both their individual experiences and their collective story. The findings are also consistent with evidence suggesting that interpersonal power dynamics, social beliefs, and relational expectations influence marital quality through their effects on identity processes (Ymamgulyeva et al., 2023). By providing opportunities for collaborative storytelling and mutual reflection, narrative interventions may help couples renegotiate these dynamics and establish healthier relational identities.

The present findings are further supported by research on identity reconstruction in contexts involving major relational transitions. Wehrman's investigation of identity reconstruction following spousal loss demonstrated that individuals often experience profound challenges in redefining who they are after significant changes in relational status (Wehrman, 2022). Although marital conflict differs from bereavement, both experiences can disrupt established relational narratives and create uncertainty regarding personal and relational identity. Narrative Couple Therapy appears to facilitate adaptive reconstruction processes by encouraging couples to reinterpret difficult experiences as chapters within an evolving relationship story rather than definitive evidence of relational failure. Consequently, partners become better able to envision a preferred future and integrate past challenges into a more coherent relational identity.

A second major finding was the significant increase in marital meaning-making among participants in the experimental group. This result is particularly noteworthy because meaning-making represents a fundamental psychological process through which individuals interpret experiences, organize memories, and establish a sense of purpose within their relationships. Narrative therapy is inherently a meaning-centered intervention. Rather than focusing exclusively on symptom reduction or behavioral modification, it encourages clients to examine the meanings attached to events and to develop alternative interpretations that support growth and connection (Monk et al., 2025). The substantial improvements in marital meaning-making observed in the present study suggest that couples became more capable of understanding their conflicts, challenges, and successes within a broader and more constructive relational framework.

The finding corresponds closely with previous research demonstrating the importance of meaning-making in family and couple adjustment. Corner and colleagues found that the ability to construct meaningful narratives about childbirth experiences contributed significantly to postpartum adaptation and family functioning (Corner et al., 2023). Similarly, research involving bereaved parents emphasized the role of shared meaning construction in facilitating emotional regulation and relational resilience during periods of profound stress (Barboza et al., 2024). These studies suggest that the creation of coherent narratives helps individuals and families integrate difficult experiences without becoming overwhelmed by them. Narrative Couple Therapy appears to operate through a similar mechanism by assisting partners in developing shared understandings of their conflicts and relational histories.

The findings also align with clinical observations that transformative change often occurs when couples reinterpret negative experiences through more constructive lenses. Case-based evidence has shown that meaningful relational change is associated with shifts in how partners conceptualize themselves, their relationship, and their future together (Figueiredo et al., 2024). Moreover, research examining relationship-defining memories has demonstrated that the ways couples remember and narrate important events significantly influence marital outcomes (Majzoubi & Forstmeier, 2022). Narrative interventions explicitly target these memory and interpretation processes, encouraging partners to identify overlooked strengths, moments of resilience, and examples of successful collaboration. As a result, couples may become more capable of deriving positive meaning from experiences that were previously interpreted as evidence of incompatibility or failure.

Another important result of the study was the significant improvement in post-conflict reconciliation among couples receiving Narrative Couple Therapy. Reconciliation represents a complex relational process involving forgiveness, emotional repair, trust restoration, and renewed commitment. The substantial gains observed in the present study suggest that narrative techniques can effectively facilitate these processes. By externalizing problems and encouraging partners to view conflict as separate from their identities and relationship, Narrative Couple Therapy may reduce defensiveness and blame while increasing empathy and understanding. When partners begin to see themselves as collaborators confronting a shared challenge rather than adversaries confronting each other, reconciliation becomes more attainable.

This finding is consistent with studies examining conflict resolution and reconciliation in intimate relationships. Research investigating pre-divorce couples demonstrated that successful reconciliation requires partners to move beyond adversarial communication patterns and engage in collaborative meaning-making processes (Patrissia & Jamalullail, 2024). Likewise, investigations of relational forgiveness have shown that forgiveness is strengthened when couples develop shared spiritual, emotional, or relational narratives that promote understanding and compassion (Skipper et al., 2024). Narrative Couple Therapy appears particularly effective in creating the conditions necessary for forgiveness because it encourages partners to reinterpret relational injuries within broader stories of commitment, resilience, and mutual growth.

The improvement in reconciliation also corresponds with findings from therapeutic interventions targeting couples experiencing significant relational injuries. Emotion-focused interventions for couples with histories of extramarital affairs have demonstrated positive effects on forgiveness, intimacy, and marital adjustment (Torani & Fard, 2024). Similarly, systematic reviews of interventions designed to facilitate marital reconciliation have reported that therapies promoting empathy, acceptance, and emotional understanding contribute substantially to relationship recovery (Talib et al., 2025). Although Narrative Couple Therapy differs theoretically from these approaches, it shares several mechanisms, including the promotion of emotional expression, perspective-taking, and collaborative exploration of relationship experiences. These common therapeutic processes may explain the significant improvements in reconciliation observed in the present study.

The maintenance of treatment gains during the follow-up period represents another important aspect of the findings. The absence of significant declines between posttest and follow-up suggests that participants internalized the skills and perspectives

developed during therapy. This durability may reflect the unique nature of narrative interventions, which seek to transform underlying meaning systems rather than merely modify surface-level behaviors. Once couples develop alternative stories about themselves and their relationships, these narratives may continue to influence perceptions and interactions long after therapy concludes. Such enduring effects are consistent with broader evidence indicating that successful therapeutic change often involves shifts in identity, meaning, and self-understanding rather than isolated behavioral adjustments (Ramos & Ramos, 2022).

The results can also be understood within broader theoretical frameworks emphasizing attachment, interpersonal schemas, and relational development. Research has demonstrated that attachment processes and emotional regulation significantly influence relationship functioning and therapeutic outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2023). Similarly, studies using actor-partner models have shown that attachment patterns and interpersonal schemas shape marital adjustment for both partners simultaneously (Uluyol & Özen-Çıplak, 2024). Narrative Couple Therapy may contribute to positive change by helping couples revise maladaptive schemas and attachment-related narratives, thereby promoting greater emotional security and relational confidence. This interpretation is consistent with evidence linking childhood experiences and relational beliefs to adult relationship quality (Zamir, 2021).

Furthermore, the findings support broader relationship research emphasizing the importance of adaptability and shared meaning in sustaining intimate partnerships. Longitudinal studies have shown that relationship quality is influenced by couples' ability to navigate changing circumstances, renegotiate commitments, and maintain a coherent sense of shared identity over time (Galovan et al., 2022). Research examining predictors of marital adjustment has similarly highlighted the importance of conflict resolution styles, personality factors, and relationship beliefs (Tolan & Kılıç, 2021). Narrative Couple Therapy may strengthen these protective factors by providing a framework through which couples can continuously reinterpret experiences, negotiate differences, and preserve a meaningful sense of relational continuity.

The findings are also relevant for understanding relationship functioning across diverse contexts. Studies involving couples coping with chronic illness, infertility, parenting transitions, and other major life challenges consistently underscore the importance of communication, emotional support, and collaborative coping (Hasdenteufel & Quintard, 2022; McHale & Jenkins, 2023; Thompson, 2021). Narrative approaches may be particularly valuable in these contexts because they help couples organize complex experiences into coherent narratives that promote resilience and mutual understanding. Additionally, evidence from relationship education and marital skills training programs demonstrates that interventions targeting relational processes can produce significant improvements in marital adjustment and relationship satisfaction (Asfaw & Alene, 2023). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that narrative-focused interventions can also enhance deeper psychological constructs such as relational identity and marital meaning-making.

Overall, the results suggest that Narrative Couple Therapy represents a powerful and theoretically coherent approach for promoting relational transformation. By facilitating identity reconstruction, enhancing shared meaning-making, and strengthening reconciliation processes, narrative interventions address fundamental mechanisms underlying relationship distress and recovery. The observed improvements across all three outcome variables provide support for the growing emphasis on narrative and meaning-centered approaches within contemporary couple therapy and relationship research.

One limitation of the present study was the use of participants recruited from specific regions of Canada, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to couples from other cultural, socioeconomic, or geographical contexts. In addition, the reliance on self-report measures may have introduced response biases associated with social desirability or participant expectations. The follow-up period was limited to three months, preventing assessment of longer-term treatment effects.

Furthermore, although the study demonstrated significant intervention effects, it did not examine potential mediators such as communication patterns, attachment security, or emotional regulation that may explain how therapeutic change occurred.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of Narrative Couple Therapy across more diverse populations, including multicultural couples, newly married couples, same-sex couples, and couples experiencing specific relational challenges such as chronic illness, infertility, or parenting stress. Researchers should also employ longer follow-up periods to evaluate the durability of treatment effects over several years. Future studies could incorporate qualitative methods to explore participants' experiences of narrative change and identity reconstruction in greater depth. Additionally, comparative studies examining Narrative Couple Therapy alongside other evidence-based approaches may provide valuable insights regarding the unique mechanisms and relative effectiveness of different therapeutic models.

The practical implications of the present findings are substantial for counselors, marriage and family therapists, community mental health practitioners, and relationship educators. Professionals working with couples may benefit from incorporating narrative techniques such as externalization, re-authoring conversations, therapeutic storytelling, and identity-focused interventions into their clinical practice. Relationship enrichment programs may also integrate narrative exercises designed to strengthen shared identity, promote constructive meaning-making, and facilitate reconciliation after conflict. By helping couples develop more adaptive and hopeful narratives about themselves and their relationships, practitioners can support long-term relational resilience, emotional intimacy, and marital stability.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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