Prototypical Scenarios: Key Theoretical Nodes in Psychobiography Therapy Practice

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Abstract

Psychobiography focuses on the study of extraordinary individuals, and its shift toward the life courses of ordinary individuals depends on the creation and practice of psychobiographical therapy. The theoretical core of psychobiographical therapy is based on the concept of "prototype scenario" proposed by Schultz, which posits that key scenarios and conflicts in an individual' s life story can explain their current psychological problems and serve as a crucial entry point for therapy. However, the concept of "prototype scenario" remains theoretically ambiguous, with issues such as its connotation, characteristics, and identification requiring further clarification. This study proposes that "prototype scenario," as the theoretical nexus between psychobiography and psychobiographical therapy, undergoes three stages—generation, activation, and effect—and possesses the characteristics of non-uniqueness, repetitiveness and symbolism, emotional condensation, iterability, and constructability. The study further proposes an onion model for prototype scenario extraction, elucidating the application of "prototype scenario" in understanding and intervening in individuals' psychological problems.

Full Text

Preamble

Prototypical Scene: Key Theoretical Nodes in Psychobiographical Therapeutic Praxis

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Abstract: Psychobiography has traditionally focused on the study of extraordinary individuals, but its shift toward the life trajectories of ordinary people has been facilitated by the development and practice of psychobiographical therapy. The theoretical core of psychobiographical therapy is based on Schultz' s concept of the "prototypical scene," which suggests that key situations and conflicts within an individual' s life narrative can explain their current psychological problems and serve as critical entry points for therapeutic intervention. However, the concept of "prototypical scene" remains theoretically ambiguous, with issues such as its connotation, characteristics, and identification requiring further clarification. This study proposes that the "prototypical scene" serves as a theoretical bridge between psychobiography and psychobiographical therapy, progressing through three stages—generation, activation, and function. It is characterized by non-uniqueness, repetitiveness and symbolism, emotional cohesion, iterability, and constructibility. The study further proposes an onion model for prototypical scene extraction and elaborates on the application of "prototypical scene" in understanding and intervening in individual psychological problems.

Keywords: prototypical scene, psychobiographical therapy, psychobiography, mental health, counseling techniques

Since Freud pioneered psychobiography in 1910, the efforts of scholars such as Allport, Elms, Runyan, and Schultz have gradually evolved it into a relatively mature research paradigm. This paradigm takes "suspicious questions" as its starting point and integrates Alexander' s "salience indicators," Schultz' s "prototypical scene" (also translated as prototype scenario), and Zheng Jianhong' s emphasis on "growth-critical factors" to form an analytical framework for dissecting individual psychological histories (He Wuming & Zheng Jianhong, 2019; Shu Yueyu et al., 2021). Psychobiography has traditionally focused on extraordinary individuals, excluding ordinary people from its research scope (Zheng Jianhong, 2012), prompting calls to shift research focus from extraordinary figures to the exploration of ordinary individuals (Allen et al., 2021; Mullen, 2021).

A key aspect of future psychobiography will be its applicability in psychological practice and usefulness for general individuals (Mayer et al., 2021a). Psychobiography can support personal and social change and play a supportive role in applied fields such as psychotherapy and counseling (Ponterotto, 2014). Psychobiography provides a positive, holistic research perspective for understanding individual lives, distinct from traditional pathological analytical approaches (Burnell, 2013). Its common elements include mindfulness, gratitude, kindness, and the pursuit of hope and meaning (Chakhssi et al., 2018). Based on this foundation, domestic scholars applied psychobiographical research findings to the field of psychological counseling in 2015 and proposed psychobiographical therapy (PBT) (Zheng Jianhong & He Chenglin, 2015). Psychobiographical therapy expands the scope of traditional psychobiography, shifting focus from the life experiences of eminent figures to the life trajectories of ordinary people.

Schultz introduced the concept of prototypical scene and its identification from a psychobiographical methodology perspective (Schultz, 2005/2011). Psychobiographical therapy further posits that each person' s identity and meaning are defined by the conflicts and dilemmas of prototypical scenes within their life story, and that the connection between prototypical scenes and the client' s current problems is key to resolving their psychological issues. The prototypical scene thus becomes the theoretical core linking psychobiography and psychobiographical therapy. However, Schultz did not propose applying this concept to psychological counseling practice when introducing prototypical scene, nor did he further address critical issues such as its characteristics and conceptual distinctions. As psychobiographical therapy encounters practical challenges, there is an urgent need to clarify and answer three questions: As the core theory of psychobiographical therapy, how does the prototypical scene relate conceptually to the concepts of archetype and complex, and what are its inherent characteristics? How is the prototypical scene generated and activated within the life story, and what functions does it serve? In practice, how does the prototypical scene emerge, get deconstructed, and become reconstructed in psychobiographical therapy?

2 Theoretical Origins and Essential Differences Between Archetype and Prototypical Scene

The concept of "archetype"holds significant importance in psychological and psychobiographical research. Jung' s theoretical framework of "archetype" provides a unique perspective for understanding human psychology, while "prototypical scene" constitutes one of the core theories in psychobiographical research. The two share an inherited and developmental relationship theoretically. In the field of psychology, the term "archetype" carries multiple meanings: first, it refers to "archetype" in culture and collective unconsciousness; second, it refers to "prototype" in cognitive and creative psychological processes (Shen Heyong, 2001); third, following the narrative turn in psychology, it concerns prototypical scenes in life stories, which holds that the essence of psychology can only be understood through conscious content. Therefore, in narrative, the unconscious that can be discussed is limited to what can be revealed. This represents the essential difference between prototypical scene and archetype/complex.

2.1 From Archetype to Prototypical Scene: The Theoretical Boundary Between Collective Imagery and Individual Narrative

Jung first introduced the concept of "archetype" in his 1919 essay "Instinct and the Unconscious" (Hoerni & Fischer, 2018). According to Jung' s (2014b) analytical psychology, the human psyche comprises two key layers: the personal unconscious, primarily composed of emotionally charged complexes that form the uniqueness and privacy of individual psychological experience; and the collective unconscious, which contains universal archetypes that constitute the common psychological foundation of humanity. Jung defined archetypes

as universal, easily inheritable patterns of thought, ideas, or images within the collective unconscious. These archetypes, as core components of the collective unconscious, manifest through the carrier of primordial imagery. Consequently, archetypes serve as core elements of the collective unconscious while simultaneously providing observable forms of expression. The existence of archetypes is evident in various cultural manifestations, including stories, art, myths, religion, and dreams (Han Zhuo, 2021).

Archetypes play a crucial role in analytical psychology therapy, first studied by Jung in schizophrenia patients (Greco & Deutsch, 2017). Jung believed that psychological problems typically arise when the development of an archetype or complex is blocked, causing the psychic system to attempt self-adjustment through neurosis or other issues. Therefore, the goal of psychotherapy is to promote the healthy development of these blocked archetypes or complexes, thereby facilitating individual self-realization and individuation.

Schultz introduced the concept of "prototypical scene" into psychobiographical research, arguing that prototypical scenes are precisely those scenes with the highest salience in an individual' s psychobiography, capable of representing the core elements and key turning points of their life. Life consists of events with significant explanatory meaning, most of which are trivial and barely affect life' s trajectory. However, certain crucial events profoundly shape individuals, touching and defining the core of their personality. There even exists a core scene called the prototypical scene that encompasses all important indicators of a lifetime story, through which illuminating life contours and patterns can be discovered, providing a blueprint for exploring personality (Schultz, 2005/2011). As an important concept in postmodern narrative psychology, prototypical scene focuses on typical situational patterns within an individual' s life course that are repetitive, symbolic, and possess deep psychological meaning. This fundamentally differs from the concept of archetype—as a carrier of symbols and images without specific content. Critics of Jung' s archetype concept argue that archetype may represent a Eurocentric and colonialist universalization mechanism that attempts to dissolve the uniqueness of different cultures and their stories to support grand, abstract concepts (Frank, 2009). In psychobiographical therapy, prototypical scenes are used to reconstruct the detailed plot of an individual' s life story. Schultz' s prototypical scene theory was clearly influenced by Jung' s archetype concept. Both archetype and prototypical scene hold important theoretical and practical value in psychology, as they both serve to understand and analyze individual psychology and behavior. Both possess high symbolism. Archetypes are symbolic patterns in the collective unconscious that reflect common psychological structures of humanity, while prototypical scenes are concrete and highly symbolic scenes in an individual' s life that represent key elements of personal life. Both involve profound emotional experiences. Archetypes are often related to human basic emotions and instincts, typically those emotionally intense life fragments that have far-reaching impacts on individual psychological development. However, there are essential differences: archetypes are universal symbols and patterns in the collective unconscious with

broad cultural and historical significance, whereas prototypical scenes are concrete scenes in individual life with profound psychological meaning, focusing on personal experience and psychological development. Jung proposed that "as many archetypes as there are typical life situations" (Burger, 2011/2020). However, the number of prototypical scenes is relatively limited. In psychobiography, prototypical scene is both a method for processing materials and a theory for interpreting the subject' s life story (Zheng Jianhong & Huang Xiting, 2013). The generation of prototypical scenes is acquired postnatally, similar to the concept of complex.

2.2 Prototypical Scene: The Concrete Manifestation of Complex

When the concept of "prototypical scene" is introduced into the field of psychotherapy, the trajectory of complex functioning can be identified in its operational mechanism. The origin of complex can be traced back to Freud, who first introduced the concept of the "Oedipus complex" and firmly believed it profoundly influenced everyone' s psyche in early childhood. Complex is also one of the core concepts in analytical psychology. Through word association studies, Jung discovered that complex indicators in word association tests not only provide direct evidence of the unconscious mind but also reveal information about the unconscious' s latent content and its emotional energy. Before formally naming his "analytical psychology," Jung used "complex psychology" to designate his theoretical system and distinguish it from Freudian psychoanalysis (Shen Heyong, 2004). Jung believed that complexes are unconscious psychological structures formed from psychological trauma or maladaptive tendencies. Its empirical foundation comes from association experiment research, which shows that complexes interfere with volitional activity and conscious processes, affect memory and association functions, may temporarily dominate consciousness, or influence speech and behavioral expression through unconscious channels (Jung, 2014a). In analytical psychology, complexes are products of the personal unconscious that often affect individual psychology in life through trauma (Yang Lijuan, 2020).

Prototypical scene can be regarded as the concrete manifestation of complex, concretizing an individual' s deep emotions and conflicts into a specific situation with intense emotional experience. These situations not only hold significant turning points in an individual' s life course but also often constitute the root of complex formation. In psychobiography, prototypical scene refers to the deep description of key events in an individual' s life story to reveal the intentions and meanings behind behavior. This concept possesses historicity, situationality, biographicality, and relationality. The "scene" in situational context denotes temporal and spatial boundaries that specify the exact time and place of event occurrence. Temporally, prototypical scenes always encompass historical background, understanding their context through clear time points of occurrence, emphasizing chronological order including beginning, development, and ending. Spatially, each story occurs in a specific space, meticulously depicting environ-

mental facilities, spatial positions, and characters (including absent important figures) within the situation, while considering unique perspectives of different roles. Situations do not exist independently in the external world but are superimpositions of history and reality, containing individually projected emotions. Prototypical scenes encompass stories, characters, events, and emotions, and are deeply rooted in individual experience. As Bruner described his earliest story that could be considered a prototypical scene:

"Though I cannot tell you (or myself) the 'first, true story'of my hopeless summer after my father' s death, when I was plunged into loneliness and helplessness, yet I will tell you (or myself) a new story: a story that happened when I was twelve, a 'long, long ago' story. I can tell it in many ways, all shaped by my subsequent life and the circumstances of that distant summer."

Prototypical scene addresses a key methodological issue in psychobiography: how to select psychologically meaningful content from numerous materials about the subject (Shu Yueyu & Yang Ling, 2008), and has become the theoretical core linking psychobiography and psychobiographical therapy. However, Schultz' s explanation of the "prototypical scene" concept is relatively abstract. Using its five identification indicators (1) clarity, specificity, and emotional intensity; 2) penetration; 3) developmental crisis; 4) family conflict; 5) refusal to accept the status quo) (Schultz, 2005/2011) to screen materials for determining prototypical scenes involves considerable subjectivity and difficulty. Schultz also failed to provide clear explanations on how to use prototypical scenes to interpret subjects' life stories (Zheng Jianhong & Huang Xiting, 2013). Consequently, conceptual questions emerged: Is prototypical scene a real memory? Is it truly so unique? Why is there only one prototypical scene rather than multiple? Does the scene remain unchanged, or is it malleable? Can one prototypical scene gradually give way to another? Do positive prototypical scenes exist? What role does prototypical scene play in psychobiographical therapy?

3 Multidimensional Feature Analysis of Prototypical Scenes in Psychobiographical Therapy

In psychobiographical therapy, the "prototypical scene" is a symbolic psychological construct that presents important life narratives of individuals within specific historical, cultural, and emotional contexts. Through the reproduction of symbolic situations, prototypical scenes activate individuals' internal emotional and cognitive responses and influence the formation of psychological self-construction and psychological problems. Within this framework, the "prototypical scene" is the most superordinate prototype in an individual' s life story and a key structural element of personality development. It can activate deep emotional processing through typical situations, transform cognitive schemas, and dynamically reconstruct self-concept. At the emotional level, prototypical scenes possess the characteristic of emotional cohesion. As Tomkins' s (2008) life story script theory emphasizes, affect plays a central driving role in human behavior. This theory views "scene" as the basic unit of life, with each scene

containing at least one emotion and its corresponding target object, which can be either a person or another emotion. The earliest memories in an individual' s life story are more likely to be emotional memories (Cohen-Mansfield et al., 2010). Emotion has a significant enhancing effect on memory processes; compared to neutral events, emotional events are more easily remembered and preserved in more vivid forms. In clients' prototypical scenes, the contained emotions are mostly negative, and negative memories demonstrate stronger sensory re-experiencing (Kensinger & Ford, 2020). The negative emotions in certain scenes may be so intense that they lead to intrusive thoughts, flashbacks of traumatic events, and memory disorders (Samuelson et al., 2022).

At the cognitive level, prototypical scenes involve autobiographical memory, which refers to memory of experiences and events that occur in life (Conway, 2005). Prototypical scenes are episodic memories in long-term memory that allow people to mentally travel through time. They are concrete episodic scenes retrieved from the most specific level of an individual' s rich life story memories, including various details related to sounds, smells, thoughts, feelings, and visual details (Conway et al., 2004). Prototypical scenes also contain specific cognitive patterns or thinking frameworks, as cognition of prototypical scenes often involves rigid interpretations. Clients present early prototypical scenes in different forms at different stages (Zheng Jianhong, 2023). If individuals lack openness when interpreting prototypical scenes, they may fall into rigid cognitive frameworks. Good life stories require characteristics such as openness and coordination, while rigid interpretations violate these features, leading to persistent psychological problems.

At the behavioral level, prototypical scenes have a guiding function that can prompt individuals to exhibit specific types of repetitive behavioral patterns. Tomkins noted that so-called scenes are basic experiential units containing affect and objects, with affect directly triggering corresponding behaviors in scenes (Frank & Wilson, 2020). Prototypical scenes occur within the context of individual growth life stories. When individuals experience similar situations and produce similar emotional responses, the associations between these scenes and emotions are strengthened, further consolidating specific prototypical scenes. The symbolization of prototypical scenes amplifies their influence and continuously reinforces individuals' response patterns to specific scenes and emotions. Once formed, prototypical scenes possess certain stability, causing individuals to tend to repeat previous behaviors when facing similar situations. This is also why clients struggle to break free from life stories with certain negative prototypical scenes. The difference between "prototypical scene" and "core belief" lies in that the former emphasizes the concreteness of scenes (such as a specific family conflict) and the condensation of symbolic signs (such as a body part as metaphor), while the latter leans toward abstract cognitive patterns. Based on this understanding of prototypical scenes, analysis of clients' life stories in practice reveals that prototypical scenes possess characteristics of non-uniqueness, repetitiveness and symbolism, emotional cohesion, iterability, and constructibility.

3.1 Non-Uniqueness

Traditional theory holds that prototypical scenes often manifest in singular form, revealing core themes and meanings of individual life through integrated dispersed information (Schultz, 2005/2011). The principle of theoretical parsimony is an important feature of the prototypical scene model, as focusing on one prototypical scene can reduce confusion and misunderstanding caused by information overload. Stories may change, but prototypical scenes remain unchanged (Shu Yueyu & Yang Ling, 2008). However, this "uniqueness" assumption has been questioned in psychobiographical therapy practice. From a personality trait perspective, everyone possesses a diversified combination of traits, while a single trait can only reflect one aspect of their personality. Meanwhile, individuals face complex and diverse problems in the mental health domain, and attempting to simplify all problems into a single scene for interpretation undoubtedly represents a partial generalization. From a narrative dimension, life encompasses multiple forms or themes including main narrative, sub-narrative, career narrative, love narrative, and life narrative. These diverse narrative forms profoundly demonstrate the complexity of prototypical scenes, whose connotations are far richer than surface appearances.

An individual's life and growth are actually intertwined under the joint influence of both positive and negative prototypical scenes. Just as unfortunate stories may take long years to heal, happy stories possess the power to heal a lifetime. In psychobiography, there can be multiple suspenseful questions (Zheng Jianhong, 2012), and correspondingly, there can be multiple prototypical scenes addressing different suspenseful questions. Furthermore, an individual' s specific psychological distress can often be traced back to a deep prototypical scene. Each scene presents the individual' s core psychological conflicts in different ways, reflecting diverse psychological experiences during their growth process and jointly shaping the individual' s psychological structure and behavioral patterns.

3.2 Repetitiveness and Symbolism

The powerful psychological dynamics of prototypical scenes stem from their "repetitiveness"and "symbolism."Repetitiveness manifests as prototypical scenes recurring in diverse forms and continuously shaping individuals' emotional responses and behavioral patterns. Prototypical scenes are often recurring, seemingly familiar events in clients' experiences. These scenes are not merely simple memories but are filled with symbolic meaning, transcending specific events and memories to reflect individuals' deep emotional and psychological conflicts. The symbolic psychological construction of prototypical scenes is embodied in two stages: "primary symbolization" and "secondary symbolization." Primary symbolization involves non-verbal experiences, transforming prototypical scenes into internal subjective experiences through memory traces and perceptual experiences. Secondary symbolization further transforms these experiences into secondary linguistic and symbolic forms (Rabeyron & Loose, 2015; You Na & Yang Guangxue, 2006). The symbolism of prototypical scenes allows stories to

detach from specific situations and events, manifesting instead as certain stubborn ideas, emotions, behavioral patterns, or even certain parts of the client' s body (He Chenglin & Zheng Jianhong, 2022). For example, experiencing others' suicide may symbolize "anxiety, loss of security," while having an extra finger on the left hand may symbolize "denial of self-worth." In psychobiographical therapy, counselors help clients become aware of the deep psychological conflicts behind prototypical scenes by revealing these symbolic meanings and reassign them new symbolic significance.

3.3 Emotional Cohesion

Prototypical scenes typically condense strong, inadequately expressed emotions and feelings. When clients recall these scenes, they can often re-experience the emotional and affective states of that time. Research by Ergen and Gülgöz (2023) reveals that unfinished open autobiographical memories demonstrate significant emotional intensity and negative bias, accompanied by frequent involuntary recall phenomena. The study indicates that high emotional cohesion and overgeneralized memory may be key characteristics of prototypical scenes, a phenomenon particularly pronounced in individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Prototypical scenes often carry negative emotions and feelings, frequently related to trauma, loss, or unresolved conflicts, which over time precipitate and accumulate within the individual' s inner world. Unprocessed grief may transform into anxiety or depression, affecting overall mental health. The spiritual predicament of Xianglin' s Wife in Lu Xun' s writing, who fell into the 困境 of repeatedly narrating her story, essentially stems from blocked emotional expression—the permanent absence of her expression object (her son A Mao, devoured by beasts) caused the traumatic memory to become fixated as an indigestible psychological wound, eventually evolving into a symptomatic compulsion of repetitive narration. This emotional aggregation gives prototypical scenes particular power within life stories. While the dead cannot return to life, stories can return to the past. Counselors guide clients to revisit these story scenes, using situational dialogue techniques to help clients face unprocessed emotions. Through emotional release and cognitive reconstruction, clients can liberate themselves from emotional bondage and gain new psychological energy.

3.4 Iterability

In psychoanalysis, Freud discovered that symptoms removed through cathartic methods would often reappear. Further exploration revealed that behind symptom roots lay even earlier unpleasant memories. If symptoms were not traced back to their origins in early experiences, the likelihood of symptom recurrence would significantly increase. Therefore, phenomenological deconstruction must be applied to each emerging memory to identify whether it contains more primitive experiential templates, revealing that all symptoms can be traced back to traumatic events in early childhood (before age 6) (Mitchell & Black, 1995/2007). When exploring clients' prototypical scenes in life stories, adopting a life course

perspective is crucial. A study examining the relationship between age and perceived event characteristics among 1,044 Germans (aged 18-95) found that people of different age groups reported different types of life events, with perception of life events changing with age (Haehner et al., 2024). This emphasizes the necessity of adopting a life course perspective when studying individuals' key life events. In psychobiographical therapy, counselors often wonder whether the "prototypical scene" found in clients' life stories is truly the prototypical scene, and what time period this prototypical scene should be traced back to. Psychobiographical therapy collects clients' complete life stories, and determining the prototypical scene of a client' s life story is a gradual iterative process. Through iterative analysis, counselors can help clients gradually reveal these deep, often repressed or forgotten experiences. This gradual iterative process helps clients more comprehensively understand the deep logic of their life stories and achieve deep psychological exploration and healing by gradually revealing hidden scenes and emotional content. The ultimate goal of psychobiographical therapy is not only to reveal "what happened in the past" but more importantly, to help clients form more flexible coping styles through multiple revisits and reconstructions of prototypical scenes.

3.5 Constructibility

Memory is considered a reconstructive process, not simply storing and retrieving information. Each recall may recompile information in the current context, affecting the content and structure of memory (Pasupathi & Billitteri, 2015; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2010). This reconstructive nature makes prototypical scene memory not merely an archive of past events but a dynamic representation of how individuals understand and interpret these events. Over time, these memories may change due to new experiences and current psychological states.

Prototypical scene memory includes a mixture of accurate details and reconstruction errors, yet it remains an important pathway for understanding how individuals process and interpret life experiences (Fivush, 2019). The dynamic and complex nature of memory is key to understanding how human psychology develops over time and forms the foundation for deconstructing prototypical scenes and processing negative emotional experiences in psychotherapy. In psychotherapy, constructing reality is more meaningful than actual events themselves, and the constructibility of prototypical scene memory makes its deconstruction and reconstruction possible.

4 Generation, Activation, and Functional Mechanisms of Prototypical Scenes

Sarbin' s (1985/2020) root metaphor theory posits that narrative, as a fundamental paradigm of human cognition, provides a meta-level prototypical framework for organizing experience. Within this theoretical perspective, prototypical scenes constitute the most overarching meaning units in individual narratives—

they are both highly symbolic core fragments in life stories and condensations of key emotional experiences, behavioral schemas, and psychodynamic conflicts. Recurring scenes symbolize deep psychological conflicts or developmental crises, typically manifesting as memories of specific situations that profoundly influence individuals' identity, emotion, and behavior. Prototypical scenes can become either catalysts for psychological development or triggers for psychological disorders. Negative prototypical scenes may solidify into pathological patterns due to unresolved conflicts, while positive prototypical scenes may transform into elements with positive significance through integration processes. Prototypical scenes undergo three stages in individual life stories: generation, activation, and function. The generation stage condenses profound psychological content involving the construction and memory storage processes of prototypical scenes. The activation stage covers the initiation and reproduction mechanisms of prototypical scenes, influencing individuals' emotions and behaviors through internal and external triggering mechanisms. The function stage exerts lasting positive or negative effects on individuals' mental health and personal growth. The model architecture is shown in Figure 1

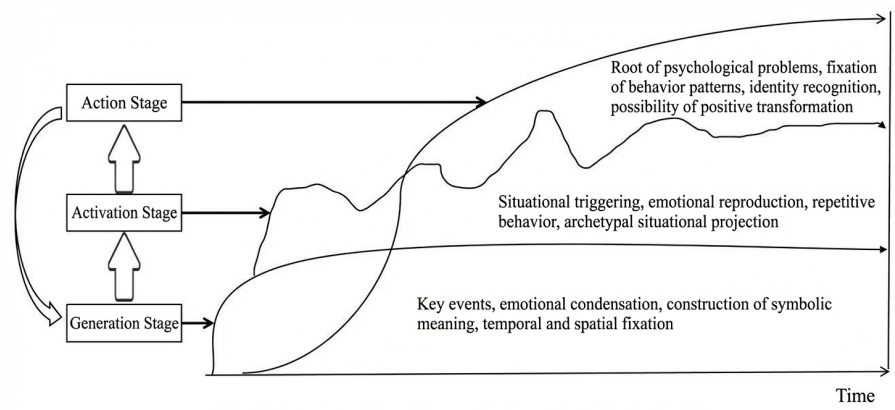

Fig. 1 Three-stage formation mechanism of archetype situation

Figure 1: Figure 1

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4.1 Generation Mechanism: The Formation of Prototypical Scenes

In this stage, prototypical scenes are internalized as deep psychological structures, often originating from intense emotional experiences, typically generated when individuals undergo important critical events such as traumatic, turning point, or peak experiences. Critical events are narrative turning points in individual life stories that carry emotion and meaning, profoundly influencing individuals' understanding of self and relationships with others and the critical events themselves. These critical events can be defined through four dimensions:

the event is situated in time and place; the event is described in logical and chronological order; the narrative combines factual information with emotional details and ends with problem resolution; and it contains explicit references to how the event shaped the individual' s life or sense of identity (Vanderveren et al., 2021).

Critical events in individual growth are not only repeatedly mentioned by individuals but also become reference points for understanding other events. The significance of critical events far exceeds the events themselves, as individuals endow these events with symbolic meaning through narration, making them representatives of universal psychological conflicts and frameworks for understanding self and the world. Critical events often mark important narrative turning points that prompt individuals to reinterpret the past and adjust future goals. Critical events are closely related to self-identity and serve as important cornerstones for personal values, life creeds, and interpersonal relationship outlooks, enabling individuals to more clearly understand "who I am"(Habermas & Köber, 2015). Critical events trigger the reorganization of self-narrative, as individuals reconstruct meaning systems after experiencing trauma, with this meaning being primarily endogenous (Liu Qing, 2021). Of course, narratives have confabulatory characteristics (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005/2020), and inevitable fictional and fabricated memories exist in individuals'narratives of critical events, but the fabrication itself is part of individual authentic life. Paul Ricoeur (1983/2023) attempted to resolve the opposition between historical and fictional narrative, arguing that narrative can unify seemingly uncoordinated temporal elements through plot weaving, endowing them with meaning and intelligibility. This unification eliminates temporal incoordination, constructs individual narrative identity, and enables multiple events to be connected and given meaning.

When individuals experience events with high emotional salience, their intense emotional experiences promote the formation of more stable psychological representations of these memories and produce deep encoding in cognitive structures. Brown (1977) first proposed the concept of "flashbulb memory," exploring how intense emotional events form clear and lasting memories. Research shows that the salience of emotional events enhances memory vividness and detail memory. Emotions in events (such as fear, sadness, shame) are highly intensified, forming strong psychological memories. Jung' s depth psychology theory points out that high-intensity emotional experiences prompt individuals to internalize specific situations into archetypal structures in the unconscious, a process that constitutes the core mechanism of complex formation (Jacobi, 2020). Emotional memories are not only stored but also repeatedly strengthened during narration, becoming important components of individual narrative. Events with high emotional cohesion, such as traumatic fear, pathological shame, or peak experiential happiness, often demonstrate extremely significant emotional valence. These emotions highlight events from ordinary life experiences, forming core memories. Emotion is the adhesive for memory and meaning, and emotional intensity "tags" events in individual memory, making them easier to retrieve and narrate (Kensinger & Ford, 2020). Intense emotional experiences prompt individuals

to construct meaning for events, making them important parts of self-narrative. Peak experiences and traumatic events with emotional cohesion are often narrated as key plots in life narratives and construct individuals' psychological patterns through symbolization.

Prototypical scenes gradually abstract from critical events into symbols with universal meaning. The construction of symbolic meaning is essentially a metaphorical processing process, where individuals establish connections between discrete experiences and deep psychological archetypal themes through narrative behavior, thereby completing the symbolic transformation of experiences. Symbolic meaning transcends the specific temporal and spatial limitations of events, becoming universally applicable psychological patterns. Symbolic meaning construction helps individuals integrate seemingly isolated events into coherent life stories, as individuals assign common themes to different events through symbolic meaning construction. For example, multiple encounters with setbacks may be integrated into a "redemption" narrative. Symbolic meaning makes prototypical scenes pillars of self-narrative, helping individuals maintain psychological stability and clarify "who I am" amidst complex life events.

Time and space provide scenes for identity construction (Veglia & Di Fini, 1897/2017). Self-narrative requires temporal and spatial frameworks to enhance coherence and sense of meaning. Time and space provide narrative structure for prototypical scenes, making them easier to integrate into life stories (McAdams, 2001). The emotions, meanings, and specific time points (such as a day in childhood) or spatial scenes (such as by a pond) of prototypical scenes are closely connected, strengthening the contextual features of memory. Specific times and spaces serve as "anchors" for memory, making prototypical scenes more vivid and easier to retrieve. Time and space act as "triggers" for emotion, evoking similar emotional experiences during recall. For example, a client' s interaction with their grandmother on the day of her death becomes a typical expression of the "fear of death" prototypical scene due to the temporal 特殊性 (grandmother' s death) and spatial symbolism (grandmother' s death room). The fixed nature of time and space gives prototypical scenes "cross-situational activation" characteristics, meaning that when individuals face similar temporal or spatial backgrounds, the emotions and meanings of prototypical scenes are re-evoked.

4.2 Activation Mechanism: The Reproduction of Prototypical Scenes

The activation of prototypical scenes is a transformation process of psychological energy from unconscious to consciousness, achieved through situational triggering. Situational triggering refers to certain stimuli in the current environment (such as environment, language, events, or relationship patterns) activating prototypical scenes stored in the unconscious, thereby affecting individuals' emotions, cognition, and behavior. The situational triggering mechanism includes three key characteristics: situational similarity, emotional reproduction, and unconsciousness (Sheldon et al., 2020).

Individual memories are often triggered by situations similar to current and past experiences. For example, PTSD clients often suddenly recall traumatic events due to environmental cues or situations. These situations may be sounds, smells, or specific behaviors that trigger individuals to re-experience past emotions and sensory memories (Brewin, 2011). Triggering events can evoke emotional responses similar to prototypical scenes, typically manifested as anxiety, anger, or helplessness. Emotional reproduction not only helps individuals understand current situations but also drives individuals' narrative reconstruction of self and world by influencing their emotional and behavioral responses (Holland & Kensinger, 2010). In psychobiographical therapy, the deconstruction and reconstruction of prototypical scenes depend on the awareness and regulation of emotional reproduction. Situational triggering usually occurs at the unconscious level, where individuals are unaware that their emotional responses originate from past experiences but attribute them to current situations, thereby influencing their behavior. Individuals often compulsively reenact behavioral patterns from prototypical scenes in unconscious states, with repetitive behavior serving as a potential cue in situations that can evoke emotions and memories related to the past.

The projection of prototypical scenes can be seen as a process through which individuals construct and reconstruct their relationship with themselves and the world via narrative and symbolic systems. From this perspective, projection is no longer merely an unconscious psychological mechanism but rather a way for individuals to reweave personal stories and emotions in specific situations, particularly when these stories are closely connected to past experiences, emotions, and symbolic meanings. Projection not only evokes memories and emotions related to prototypical scenes but also reshapes individuals' life narratives and self-cognition to a certain extent. Individuals connect past emotions and symbolic meanings with current situations and deepen their understanding and reaction to current situations through the reconstruction of personal narratives.

4.3 Functional Mechanism: The Psychological Functions of Prototypical Scenes

Prototypical scenes serve multiple psychological functions in individuals' life stories, involving the roots of psychological problems, the solidification of behavioral patterns, the formation of identity, and the positive transformation potential of negative prototypical scenes in psychological growth. Through deconstructing and reconstructing prototypical scenes, individuals can achieve psychological growth, break solidified behavioral patterns, and learn more flexible coping styles.

Negative prototypical scenes often become sources of psychological problems, affecting individuals' emotional responses and behavioral patterns. Early experiences of major trauma, family conflict, or neglect profoundly affect individuals' emotions, cognition, and behavioral patterns, especially when unintegrated trau-

matic experiences may trigger anxiety, depression, and other psychological problems in adulthood through projection or situational triggering mechanisms (Seok et al., 2020). Individuals who experienced humiliating experiences in childhood often develop deep-seated inferiority and social avoidance tendencies (Widom et al., 2018). These emotional and behavioral patterns become manifestations of prototypical scenes, profoundly affecting emotional states and social interaction patterns in adulthood (Lahousen et al., 2019). Unprocessed scenes may be repeatedly activated in other life situations, forming strong negative emotional and cognitive reactions that eventually transform into sources of psychological disorders.

Prototypical scenes solidify individuals'behavioral patterns through the strengthening of emotional memory and the internalization of symbolic meaning. Emotional memory strengthens individuals' tendency to repeat reactions in similar situations. These solidified behavioral patterns are usually driven by emotional experiences and symbolic meanings in prototypical scenes, making individuals more likely to repeat established behaviors when facing similar environments. Additionally, internalized symbolic meanings constitute stable cognitive frameworks that guide individuals' behavioral choices in future situations, limiting their flexibility in responding to new situations. For example, individuals may repeatedly fall into behavioral patterns of "must please others" or "obey authority," making it difficult to choose coping strategies more adapted to current environments.

Prototypical scenes profoundly influence the formation of individual identity and constitute core components of life narratives. Individuals' prototypical scenes formed in early experiences shape self-identity. Counselors are committed to helping clients deeply explore the origins of prototypical scenes and how they shape self-cognition, guiding clients to re-examine and reconstruct these core self-narratives to regain self-worth and positive interpersonal relationships. People tend to frame their self-identity within specific prototypical scenes, but the core of psychobiographical therapy lies in guiding clients to break free from narrow self-narratives and explore more possible self-landscapes (Beaudoin, 2022).

Although prototypical scenes usually carry negative emotions and behavioral patterns, they also possess positive transformation potential. By re-examining and interpreting prototypical scenes, individuals can change their views of themselves and the world, thereby transforming negative scenes into positive psychological resources.

4.4 Dynamic Relationship Among the Three Stages

The three stages of generation, activation, and function constitute a dynamic cyclic system that interacts continuously and evolves over time, jointly shaping individuals' psychological and behavioral patterns. The generation stage typically occurs early in the life story, where individuals condense emotional energy in critical events, forming prototypical scenes fixed in time and space. Through

selective encoding and meaning attribution by the narrative self (McAdams & Manczak, 2015), prototypical scenes with symbolic meaning are gradually constructed. In Singer et al.' s (2013) study, a male client recalled during couples therapy his father' s accidental injury in early years and his mother' s wrongful blame toward him. The mother never apologized for wrongly blaming the client, and this memory had important implications for the client' s self-cognition and intimate relationship understanding because the event condensed unexpressed emotions and feelings. These scenes are stored in the memory system and possess relative stability once formed, such as emotions repeatedly experienced in family conflicts that may be integrated into symbolic fragments and become potential psychological prototypes. Individuals further incorporate and integrate prototypical scenes into personality narratives through narrative reasoning (Bouizegarene et al., 2024).

As time progresses, when individuals face situations similar to prototypical scenes, they enter the activation stage. Prototypical scene activation can be triggered by internal and external factors, with internal triggers including emotional flashbacks from unresolved trauma and external triggers involving specific situational cues that awaken prototypical narratives. Research on context-dependent memory shows that consistency in environment, state, or emotion significantly enhances memory retrieval (Lohnas & Healey, 2021), and situational cues activate corresponding prototypical narratives. During this process, the narrative self plays a regulatory role, as individuals can adjust the emotional tone of prototypical scenes by reconstructing the meaning of events. According to memory consolidation theory, emotional intensity in situations such as "intense emotional narration"strengthens prototypical scene memory traces, forming self-verification cycles that consolidate psychological patterns. Meanwhile, memory reconsolidation theory indicates that once previously consolidated memories are reactivated, they enter a temporary unstable state and must undergo a restabilization process (Chen Wei et al., 2020). During this unstable phase of memory, memory traces are highly susceptible to modification, providing possibilities for subsequent deconstruction of prototypical scenes.

Entering the function stage, prototypical scenes exert profound influences on individuals' mental health and behavior, forming positive or negative adaptive pathways. In negative pathways, prototypical scenes may solidify into pathological behavioral patterns due to emotional suppression, limiting individuals' psychological adaptation capabilities. In positive pathways, individuals can transform prototypical scenes into psychological resources through integration and transformation, promoting adaptive reconstruction of identity. Additionally, psychological adaptation capabilities in the function stage may enhance individuals' cognitive regulation of activation cues, such as adjusting prototypical effects through metacognitive strategies to effectively inhibit reactivation of negative prototypical scenes.

The mental health impact produced in the function stage is not an endpoint but rather feeds back to the generation stage through the reconstruction of pro-

totypical scenes, updating the memory content and structure of prototypical scenes to form a dynamic cycle. For example, redemption sequences in life stories transform negative prototypical scenes into positive psychological resources, while contamination sequences may activate and reinforce negative prototypical scenes (He Chenglin & Zheng Jianhong, 2016). It is this cyclical, mutually influential mechanism that drives the continuous development and change of individual psychological and behavioral patterns throughout the life course.

5 Identification, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction Pathways of Prototypical Scenes in Psychobiographical Therapy

Prototypical scenes occupy a central position in psychobiographical therapy, representing a key to understanding individual life stories in postmodern narrative concepts and serving as core elements that drive the therapeutic process and promote client psychological transformation. During psychotherapy, counselors use clients' troubling psychological problems as anchors, guiding them to recall and narrate complete life stories to identify and determine prototypical scenes, helping clients explore deep emotions and beliefs and clarifying the roots of current problems. By re-examining, interpreting, and reconstructing these prototypical scenes, clients can gain new experiences and understanding, thereby promoting self-integration and self-development.

5.1 Identification Indicators and Extraction of Prototypical Scenes

Psychobiographical therapy holds that prototypical scenes are the source of clients' psychological problems. Everyone' s life story contains prototypical scenes, which may occur in childhood, adolescence, or even adulthood, though more often in childhood. Clients present earlier prototypical scenes in different forms and states at different life stages. One goal of psychobiographical therapy is to find clients' prototypical scenes (He Chenglin & Zheng Jianhong, 2023).

Psychobiographical therapy follows this main thread: starting from surface-level problem narratives, gradually delving into individuals' life stories, identifying emotional intensity, discovering recurring patterns, and ultimately reaching the core prototypical scene. Accordingly, an onion model for prototypical scene extraction can be constructed (Figure 2

). Problem narrative, as the outermost layer, serves as the anchor for prototypical scenes, focusing on specific psychological distress or symptom descriptions currently presented by clients, corresponding to Schultz' s indicator of "refusal to accept the status quo." Life story is the second layer, delving into clients' overall life course and focusing on panoramic narratives of their life experiences. This layer emphasizes the completeness, coherence, and internal logic of the story, requiring integration of event contexts across time and situations, corresponding to Schultz' s indicator of "penetration." The third layer is emotional intensity, identifying key situational events in life stories with strong emotional imprints. These events are often accompanied by clear somatic sensations (such

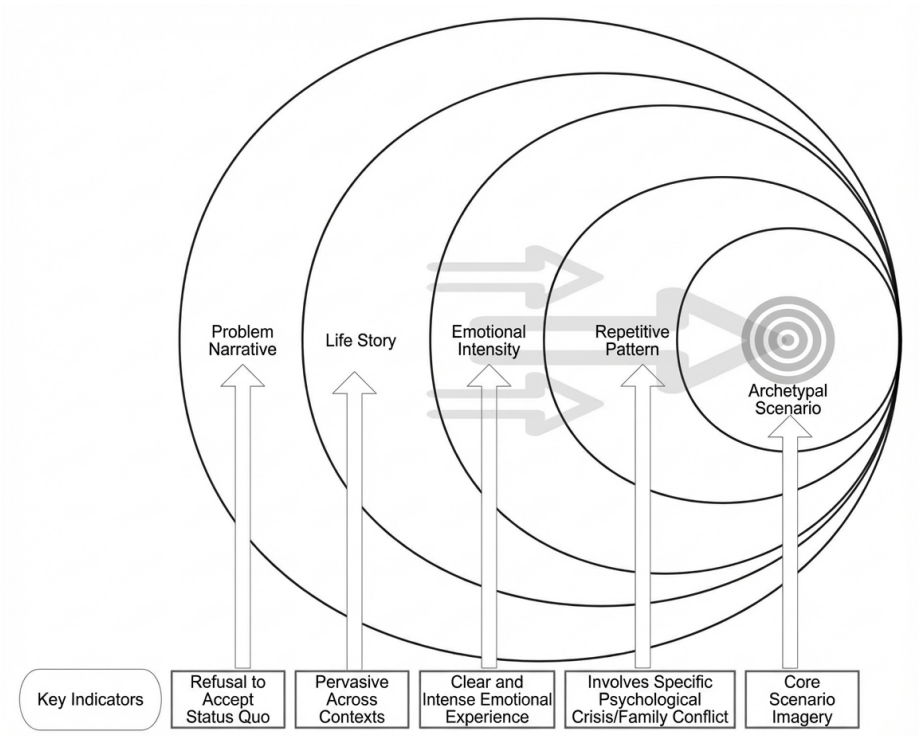

Figure 2: Figure 2

as palpitations, trembling) and persistent emotional memories (sadness, depression, anger, regret), meeting Schultz' s identification criterion of "clear and strong emotional experience." The fourth layer is repetitive patterns, analyzing repeatedly occurring behavioral-cognitive-emotional response patterns that mainly originate from family conflicts and developmental psychological crises. The fifth layer is the prototypical scene, which is both a clear and concrete situational image and the deep core of psychological structure. Prototypical scenes are condensations at the symbolic level of core conflicts running through the life course, integrating emotions, conflicts, and repetitive patterns to become symbolic expressions of psychological problems.

Figure 2. Onion Model of Key Indicators for Prototypical Scene and Its Extraction

In psychobiographical therapy, extracting prototypical scenes from clients' life stories can be standardized using the onion model structure. First, counselors guide clients to narrate their life stories through interviews, primarily involving the first and second layers of the onion model. In surface-level problem narrative, the focus is on clients' current "problem narrative" such as preliminary descriptions of symptoms or distress. Next, through open-ended questions, counselors guide clients to narrate complete life stories, paying attention to completeness, continuity, and emotional details of the stories, especially repeatedly occurring themes, conflicts, and key turning points. Subsequently, counselors enter the stage of identifying emotional intensity and repetitive patterns (corresponding to the third and fourth layers of the onion model). At this point, counselors need to screen for situations with significant emotional intensity, such as traumatic events or unresolved conflicts, which are usually accompanied by strong emotional experiences (third layer). Simultaneously, counselors identify interaction patterns or coping strategies that repeatedly occur across time and situations in clients' life stories, which may frequently appear in clients' life narratives (fourth layer). Finally, counselors preliminarily determine the embryonic form of prototypical scenes through analyzing clients' narratives and screening situations, then identify the evolutionary forms of these prototypes at different life stages based on the iterability characteristic of prototypical scenes, ultimately specifying concrete prototypical scenes (fifth layer).

5.2 Deconstruction of Prototypical Scenes: Story Expression, Emotional Catharsis, and Scene Interpretation

Psychobiographical therapy allows clients to examine the impact of life stories on the self from a distance, which is the process of "deconstruction." Derrida (1972/2006) proposed deconstruction theory, which originally derived from Heidegger and Husserl' s concept of "destruction," used by Heidegger to critique traditional metaphysics and endowed with meanings such as "revelation" and "breakthrough." Psychobiographical therapy deconstructs clients' prototypical scenes by dismantling their rigid relationship patterns, breaking closed and rigid states, releasing repressed implicit factors in the unconscious, and continuously

generating new cognition and positive meaning through perspective transformation. Therefore, deconstruction is a strategy aimed at achieving reconciliation, with its goal being to promote new construction through the reconciliation process.

Neural network research on narrative has found that the amygdala-hippocampus system, frontal lobes, bilateral ventromedial frontal lobes, bilateral dorsolateral frontal lobes, and medial frontal lobes are closely related to narrative. Damage to these regions leads to narrative disorders such as stagnant narrative, low narrative, or non-narrative (Young & Saver, 2010), indicating that narrative is a fundamental way of organizing human experience, and losing narrative ability means losing the self. Story expression helps clients understand and reconstruct the meaning of their experiences, particularly those prototypical scenes that profoundly impact self-image and psychological state, by narrating their life experiences (McAdams, 2008). The more concrete and clear the expression of prototypical scenes, the more helpful it is for their deconstruction. Negative prototypical scenes themselves are inadequately expressed, repressed stories. When clients are willing to narrate deep inner stories, they have already opened the door to deconstruction. Spinoza stated in *On Ethics*: "An emotion which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it" (Frankl, 1984/2003).

Better story narration ability is a protective factor for mental health. Previous research shows that individuals with mental disorders such as depression and those with general psychological problems exhibit high levels of overgeneralization in life story memory (Gong Huoliang et al., 2019; Hallford et al., 2021). Studies have confirmed that depressed patients have less specific and less detailed autobiographical memory (Raes et al., 2023; Fang & Dong, 2022; Biedermann et al., 2017). Functional magnetic resonance imaging research also supports this view, as depressed patients show no amygdala activation when recalling positive memories and have fewer memory details (Young et al., 2016). Meta-analysis research on narrative scene exposure therapy (Wei & Chen, 2021) shows that this method effectively alleviates PTSD symptoms and has lasting effects by guiding clients to systematically reproduce traumatic prototypical scenes and reconstruct narratives. The study shows the therapy has moderate between-group effect size and large within-group effect size, confirming the key role of emotional reconnection mechanisms in trauma treatment—when clients concretize traumatic scenes through structured narration, it can promote the release and integration of repressed emotions. Prototypical scenes unfold through narrative concretization, providing opportunities for clients and counselors to jointly explore multiple interpretations of stories and construct more positive meaning cognition. Clients integrate these understandings into their self and life concepts to improve mental state and quality of life (White & Epston, 1990).

Since Breuer and Freud published their paper on treating hysteria in 1895, emotional catharsis has become the foundation for many treatment methods attempting to help clients release repressed emotions (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020/2022).

Comparative analysis of mainstream psychotherapy theories shows that most therapeutic paradigms consider emotional understanding and regulation as core healing mechanisms, with treatment processes essentially representing the reinterpretation and adaptive coping of emotional experiences. Current research shows that various psychotherapy techniques (such as emotion-focused therapy, experiential therapy, etc.) promote symptom improvement by actively guiding clients to contact and process high emotional arousal content (Hillman, 2004). This therapeutic orientation is based on affective processing theory, emphasizing that deep processing of core affective experiences is the key mechanism of psychological change. Clients enter therapeutic relationships with emotional experiences, and counselors develop therapeutic understanding by analyzing these emotions, with therapeutically valuable negative emotional experiences becoming entry points for psychological intervention. A recent meta-analysis shows that regardless of psychotherapy approach, there is a significant moderate-to-large effect size correlation between patients' emotional expression and positive psychotherapy outcomes (Peluso & Freund, 2018). Prototypical scenes condense enormous negative emotional energy, with clients often unable to resolve their sorrow, unable to dispel their melancholy, and unable to calm their unresolved feelings. Psychobiographical therapy encourages clients to fully express these repressed or neglected emotions and feelings. Storytelling itself is the best operational tool for emotional catharsis (Ahlquist & Yarns, 2022). However, pure emotional catharsis may fall into the 困境 of repetitive narration like Xianglin' s Wife. More importantly, understanding the deep meaning of prototypical scenes and their impact on personal behavioral patterns is essential. Therefore, interpretation of prototypical scenes is indispensable.

Prototypical scenes are not interpreted solely by counselors; often, clients' own reflection and interpretation are more important. Counselors may only need to point out prototypical scenes to help clients deconstruct them. Yu Hua' s early short stories were filled with blood and violence. According to Professor Hong Zhigang' s 2017 publication *A Critical Biography of Yu Hua*, statistics from eight short stories between 1986-1989 show 28 unnatural deaths (Hong Zhigang, 2017). Later, this trend decreased. How did Yu Hua, a writer whose works were filled with blood and violence, transform into one who was warm and loving? Yu Hua was long troubled by a dream in which he returned to the scene of watching criminals being tried and executed in his childhood. But one day, Yu Hua dreamed he was the one being tried and executed. Yu Hua' s long-term dream trouble corresponded precisely to the "death scene" prototypical scene. Yu Hua' s own interpretation was: "I ask myself, why do I always dream of being chased and killed at night? I began to realize it was because I wrote too much blood and violence during the day. I believe this is karmic retribution. So in that late night, or maybe early morning, I seriously warned myself in the sweat-filled blanket: 'I can no longer write bloody and violent stories in the future.' " What is the significance of this interpretation for Yu Hua? For him, it was a previously indelible memory (prototypical scene) that could now be released. Consequently, the trend of blood and violence in Yu Hua' s later

works decreased.

Additionally, clients can help deconstruct prototypical scenes by naming and externalizing them, exploring the historical background and context of prototypical scenes, and analyzing the influence of sociocultural environment and family background on individuals at that time.

5.3 Key Strategies for Reconstructing Prototypical Scenes

Psychoanalysis and behaviorism have been criticized for their determinism (Shu Yueyu et al., 2022). Existentialism, however, believes that if possible, people can change the world, and if necessary, people can change themselves (Frankl, 1984/2003). Psychobiographical research (Mayer et al., 2021b) reveals that the meaning construction and identity development processes of extraordinary individuals have important exemplary value, with their life narratives providing paradigmatic cases for understanding individual psychological development trajectories. These psychological adaptation patterns across life courses can serve as reference frameworks for ordinary people' s psychological growth. Psychobiographical therapy further integrates these views, emphasizing that individuals can achieve self-change and psychological growth by deeply exploring and reconstructing their own life stories and drawing inspiration from exemplary cases of meaning construction and identity development.

Psychological research shows that sense of meaning is not merely an accessory to life but constitutes a fundamental dimension of mental health and overall well-being. Meaning construction is a key strategy for reconstructing prototypical scenes, as individuals reflect upon and reinterpret their experiences, relationships, and self-cognition to 赋予 appropriate meaning to life. People with clear life meaning are more likely to demonstrate resilience when facing major health problems, tragedies, or significant life changes (Schnell & Krampe, 2020). The pursuit of meaning is one of the basic driving forces of human existence, and meaning construction not only helps individuals understand and accept life experiences but also has important impacts on their mental health. Researchers collected life stories and health indicator assessments from 61 middle-aged individuals and found that individuals who reported contamination sequences (positive experiences developing into negative stories) without redemption sequences in their life stories showed poorer performance in metabolic syndrome risk components and inflammatory indicators, while individuals who reported redemption sequences (negative experiences developing into positive meaning) had better subjectively reported health status. Individuals who reported contamination sequences without simultaneously reporting redemption sequences performed worse on various outcomes than those who reported both contamination and redemption sequences (Murphy, 2016). Contamination sequences in life stories may be buffered by redemption sequences, thereby reducing negative health impacts.

Meaning construction is a dynamic process through which individuals actively

explore, interpret, and assign value to life experiences via cognitive-affective integration. Prototypical scenes are often the core of meaning construction because they occupy central positions in individuals' life narratives. Narrative identity theory posits that individuals integrate meaning systems across the life cycle through continuous construction of life stories (Singer, 2004). Research shows that this meaning generation process is particularly manifested through narrative retelling of prototypical scenes and key life events, through which individuals continuously discover, revise, and deepen their understanding of life meaning (McAdams, 1988; Pillemer, 2009). Client Y was confused about the value of her existence, with her life story beginning with the experience of being abandoned by her biological parents and placed in an apple box on the street, then adopted by foster parents. The client described this scene in relatively detailed terms: "I lay in the box, perhaps with wide-open eyes, not knowing if there was a smile on my face, but I was full of curiosity about the world. People came to see me, tease me, pinch my little face, and I probably smiled at them. I lay inside, sometimes watching passersby, watching the blue sky before me. Poor me didn' t know where I was headed, but the gears of destiny began to turn from this moment···" This prototypical scene was not only the beginning of her identity formation but also the cornerstone of her emotional world. Y repeatedly mentioned experiences of loneliness in academics and growth, such as studying alone from junior college to undergraduate to graduate school, and superficial communication with foster parents and friends. She said: "From junior college until now, I' ve always been alone." In her narrative, she mentioned: "I feel so pitiful, I wonder if I' m a child favored by heaven, feeling whether I' m very lucky." This contradictory emotion—being both a victim and a rescued person—became the foundation for her understanding of self and interpersonal relationships. By retelling this event, she reflected on her existential value and used it as a motivation for survival when facing life' s low points (such as graduate school pressure or suicidal thoughts), believing she "was saved by God once." In Y' s life story, meaning is not a static result but a process she gradually seeks and assigns when facing existential meaning, life challenges, emotional ups and downs, and self-reflection. From being abandoned by biological parents in an apple box to being adopted by foster parents, to experiencing ups and downs in academics and life alone, Y continuously examines her experiences, trying to understand their value and impact on her. For example, she repeatedly mentions the abandonment scene, feeling both "pitiful" and "lucky," and through effort in studying and independent living, she assigns positive meaning to this experience during growth. This search for meaning runs through her entire life cycle, from childhood ignorance to adult self-reflection, demonstrating continuous exploration of self-worth.

How is the meaning of prototypical scenes constructed? Meaning construction is the process by which individuals assign meaning to their life events, relationships, and self-identity (Attig, 2011). Both constructivist therapeutic paradigms and narrative therapeutic paradigms affirm to some extent the subjectivity and individualization of meaning construction (Ma Yibo & Zhong Hua, 2006). Psy-

chobiographical therapy emphasizes the subjectivity and individuality of prototypical scene meaning. Meaning is significantly influenced by socioculture but also possesses uniqueness beyond sociocultural constraints, just as Weber said, "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" (Liu Qing, 2021). Research has found that self-disgust levels are related to motivations for avoiding body-related memories, and body-related autobiographical memories can trigger disgust and avoidance motivations, potentially perpetuating body image problems (Von Spreckelsen et al., 2022). Body self is one source of prototypical scenes. A client sought help due to extreme inferiority about having an extra thumb on the left hand. From a sociocultural perspective, having an extra thumb is difficult to construct social meaning and may instead be considered inauspicious, ghostly, or monstrous. The client' s subjective meaning construction was: Some people are born disabled without hands, but I not only have hands but also one more finger than ordinary people. This is a gift from heaven, and I am heaven' s favorite. Such subjective meaning is often dismissed as idealism or Ah Q spirit. In Lu You' s poem "I know after death all things become empty, but I grieve that Jiu Zhou remains ununified. When the royal army stabilizes the Central Plains, do not forget to tell your father during family sacrifices," the poet holds a materialistic view, frankly admitting he knows everything becomes empty after death. But why does he still hope future generations will tell him about the pacification of the Central Plains during sacrifices? One reason is that the poet still maintains belief in subjective (consciousness, soul) existence, a subjective belief that has important existential significance for the poet.

Although clients' prototypical scenes often carry negative emotional tones, presenting traumatic and repressive characteristics, individuals who can reconstruct experiences through redemptive narratives—actively constructing positive meaning from suffering—demonstrate significantly higher levels of mental health, subjective well-being, and psychological maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Meaning can exist even in suffering, and for mental health, meaning derived from negative events is more important than meaning derived from positive events (Lin Jiabin & Li Lihong, 2015). Counselors should engage in dialogue with clients about prototypical scenes to construct or understand their personal meaning. In practice, counselors can frequently ask: "What meaning does this have for you?" to promote client reflection and construction. The counselor' s role is to adopt a humanistic attitude, unconditionally support clients' meaning construction, and assistively help clients become aware of the potential meaning of prototypical scenes.

Many methods and techniques for reconstructing prototypical scenes await further organization and practical testing. For instance, humor has long been regarded as a core element of mental health. If clients can confront the unbearable aspects of prototypical scenes and laugh away grievances, they complete self-reconciliation (McWilliams, 2011/2015). Systematically guiding individuals to discover and strengthen positive events in life narratives can promote integrative reconstruction of negative experiences. This strength-based narra-

tive intervention can help individuals establish more psychologically resilient life storylines, thereby achieving post-traumatic growth (Su Ruirui & Fan Fumin, 2021). Additionally, psychobiographical therapy emphasizes future orientation (Cheng Suping & Chen Yuqiu, 2020), which can guide individuals to consider the impact of prototypical scenes on current and future life and how to use past experiences to shape future stories.

6 Summary and Outlook

This study deeply explores the theoretical integration and practical application of psychobiography and psychobiographical therapy, revealing the unique value of this research direction in understanding and addressing individual psychological problems. Through systematic analysis and application of prototypical scenes, the study not only expands the research field of psychobiography but also provides new perspectives and tools for psychotherapy practice.

The development of psychobiographical therapy reflects the close integration of psychological theory and practice in enhancing treatment effectiveness. Although psychobiographical therapy currently faces challenges in application such as the accuracy of prototypical scene identification and personalization of treatment processes, it also promotes continuous reflection and innovation on treatment models and methodologies within indigenous psychology circles. Further deepening of psychobiographical theory will be key to future research, particularly in understanding the continuity and discontinuity of individual psychological development. Theoretical deepening will help more accurately grasp individual psychological dynamics and thereby design more effective treatment strategies. Additionally, the updating of indigenous Chinese psychotherapy theories needs to keep pace with contemporary sociocultural changes, adapting to new characteristics of individual psychology under diverse and globalized backgrounds.

With society' s increasing emphasis on mental health, the application scope of psychobiographical therapy urgently needs expansion. In multiple key fields such as education, career planning, social work, and elderly care, adopting in-depth analytical methods of prototypical scenes is expected to open new solution pathways, helping individuals more profoundly understand their own life trajectories and thereby promoting dual enhancement of personal growth and social adaptation capabilities. With technological advancements, artificial intelligence and machine learning demonstrate good performance in text processing, empathy, and emotional prediction (Amin et al., 2023; Hou Hanchao et al., 2024). The application of large language models in life story text analysis is expected to improve the efficiency and accuracy of prototypical scene analysis while optimizing personalized treatment plan design and implementation under privacy protection. Prototypical scenes are ways to help individuals re-experience and understand their past experiences, especially those with profound emotional impact. This technique allows individuals to deeply explore their inner world and gain deeper self-understanding and emotional release by "reproducing" spe-

cific situations. Prototypical scenes can combine concepts from psychodrama and Satir family sculpture to effectively reproduce and reconstruct prototypical scenes in group counseling, where each member can participate as an "actor" in others' scenes or as an observer to gain self-reflection from others' scenes.

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