Narrative Works

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Relations to Identity Development in Emerging Adults

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Introduction

Families share stories about personal and family history across generations which serve to bind individuals together in shared experience (Assman, 1995; Svob & Brown, 2012; Fivush, Bohanek, & Duke, 2008). In particular, the stories that parents tell their children about the parents' childhood, one type of intergenerational narrative, may serve multiple social and personal functions (Bohanek et al; 2009; Merrill & Fivush, 2016). Previous research has provided evidence that the way these stories are told is related to young people's well-being (Fivush & Zaman, 2011; Merrill, Srinivas, & Fivush, 2017) and that these stories may be important for understanding the self as well (Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015). Yet, little empirical research has examined the characteristics of these narratives in relation to identity development and whether there is something unique about family narratives compared to other types of "vicarious memory" narratives. The purpose of the current study is to compare emerging adults' narratives of personal, intergenerational, and friends' memories, first in terms of narrative meaning-making characteristics and second in relation to self-reported identity development.

Narratives as Expressions of Identity

Narratives are linguistic structures that humans use to create a coherent understanding of past experiences (Bruner, 1990). By narrating a personal autobiographical memory, individuals convey thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and evaluations about the events that have occurred and their own behavior within those events. In this way, people come to understand the experience beyond the series of actions or facts; they bring to bear their own interpretations in order to better understand the self (Fivush, 2011; McLean 2008; McAdams, 2001). Although the life story in its entirety represents an individual's sense of identity as a continuous person over time, single events in the life story, and how individuals talk about them, reveal the incremental process by which this understanding of self begins to take shape (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007). Narrative researchers may glimpse evidence of the changes in self-understanding individuals express when individuals verbalize connections between the experiences that they have had and their traits, beliefs, values, and world outlook. Such statements have previously been called "self-event connections" (Banks & Salmon, 2013) and when examined from a developmentally-based theoretical framework, these connections illuminate the way in which developing individuals are learning from their experiences in order to better understand their own sense of identity.

Previous research has demonstrated that the way emerging adults create connections to the self in narratives is related to identity development and well-being (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; McLean & Pratt, 2006, Banks & Salmon, 2013, Merrill, Waters, & Fivush, 2015). By reflecting on life experiences, young people can form insights about their behavior, how they may have changed as a result of an event, and how an event has shaped their world outlook, which may inform their sense of identity. For example, McLean and Pratt (2006) found that in emerging adults describing their personal "turning point" narratives, less sophisticated meaning about the self was related to less advanced identity statuses whereas more sophisticated reasoning about the self was associated with overall identity maturity. The content of narratives, particularly content that explores thoughts, motivations, and implications for self, may influence self-concept.

Narratives Develop in a Social, Cultural Environment

Importantly, the ability to tell elaborated personal narratives develops within socially and culturally guided storytelling environments. These narrative ecologies provide examples of stories which serve self and social functions (Svob & Brown, 2012; Fivush, Habermas, Waters, Zaman, 2011; Fivush & Merrill, 2017;

McLean, 2015). Intergenerational narratives, stories from parents' experiences in youth, are a commonly shared type of narrative within the family environment (Bohanek et al 2009). It is theorized that intergenerational narratives from parents, arguably the most important relationships in a young person's life, may hold a special place in the narrative ecology surrounding a developing person (McLean, 2015; Merrill & Fivush, 2016). Although some previous research has examined relations between family storytelling, intergenerational narratives, and well-being (e.g. Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008; Fivush & Zaman, 2011; Merrill, Srinivas, & Fivush, 2017), little research has directly examined relations between intergenerational narratives and self-reported identity development.

As argued by Merrill and Fivush (2016), intergenerational narratives may facilitate narrative identity development in adolescence and emerging adulthood by serving as models from older generations to younger of how to make meaning from previous experiences. The kinds of experiences that family members discuss and share with youth range from lighthearted, funny stories that bolster positive affect and affection in families, to stories of moral lessons meant to serve as opportunities for teaching family values and regulating behavior (Merrill, Booker, & Fivush, 2018).

It is critical from an empirical perspective, however, before making claims about the special role of intergenerational narratives in the formation of identity understanding, that we must consider whether it is the case that simply knowing any coherent narratives from close social others and being able to relay them in ways that demonstrate meaning-making is on its own indicative of the narrative abilities of the narrator, rather than the stories themselves being particularly meaningful. One way to approach this, therefore, is to directly compare individuals' retellings of stories of significant social others, such as stories about friends, against intergenerational narratives. A few relevant studies focusing on human cognition have examined "vicarious memories," theorized to be mental representations of past events that individuals hold based upon experiences that social others have recounted for them (Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015; Thomsen & Pillemer 2017). Pillemer et al. investigated vicarious memories through self-report questionnaire ratings of memory qualities and centrality of the event to self. They compared personal memories, memories of a parent, and memories of a friend, and found that in general the phenomenological qualities of the memory representations (e.g. emotional intensity, vividness, physical reactions) were rated more strongly for personal memories than vicarious memories, with no difference between parent and friend memories. For ratings of centrality to self, personal memories were generally rated more highly central to

self than ratings of memories for parents or friends. However, an interaction was observed such that ratings for parent memories were more similar to personal memories than were friend memories, specifically in the extent to which participants rated the memories as a reference for understanding the self and in the extent to which it was rated as forming a part of their own personal life story. This suggests that, in the development of narrative identity and the life story, intergenerational narratives might be more important to narrative identity formation than narratives about friends. Although these findings were an important first step for memory research, in measuring subjective ratings of vicarious memories, these studies did not focus on the narrative identity processes revealed through narrative expression. In order to do this, an examination of meaning-making is warranted. Thus, the current study is designed to compare the meaning making content of narratives about self, parent, and friends' experiences, particularly focusing on self-related meaning-making in narratives. As articulated by Grysman & Hudson (2013), narrating memories may provide a more implicit measurement of what the narrator recalls as the most important features of the event representation. Thus, by examining the narratives, researchers may capture the subjective perspective of the narrator (Fivush, 2011). Furthermore, whereas Pillemer et al. (2015) examined parent and friend memories as a between-subjects variable, the current study employed a within-subjects design in order to assess individual differences further.

Self-event Connections in Development

As alluded to earlier, individuals may use intergenerational narratives for self and social functions through "self-event connections." Such statements may illustrate how individuals come to an understanding of self in narrative (McLean & Fournier, 2008; Banks & Salmon, 2013; Merrill, Waters, & Fivush, 2016). For example, an individual may describe a difficult time in life when they overcame an obstacle and learned, "I'm capable of handling more than I thought." Specific to intergenerational narratives, individuals may use memories of their parents' experiences to understand the parent or the self by drawing connections to the identity of the parent (e.g. "my mom has always loved to dance") or linking aspects of the self to the parent (e.g. "I got my rhythm gene from her") (Fivush & Zaman, 2011; Reese, Fivush, Merrill, Wang, McAnally, 2017). Previous research has shown that in personal narratives, emerging adults' connections to self are related to identity development and well-being (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; McLean & Pratt, 2006, Banks & Salmon, 2013, Merrill, Waters, & Fivush, 2016; Fivush & Zaman, 2011).

Yet, the process by which this may occur is still theoretically less understood. Erikson's theory of identity development emphasized the exploration of possible selves, goals, values, and beliefs in order to form a coherent, stable sense of who one is as a person (1968). Although a Western, individualistic perspective, later researchers emphasized that young people maintain relationships with family members, and this connection to the family remains a key component of how they understand their identity in the process of individuation (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Thus, as young people integrate various important components of their social lives and sense of autonomy, the family, particularly parents, remain important in identity formation, and may help them create narrative identities through conversation and story modeling.

Granted, there may be caveats to this process. The process of individuation, a delicate balance, may be helped by parental influence in some ways but not in others. Marcia, building upon Ericson's ideas, operationalized the two processes characteristic of identity formation: exploration and commitment (Kroger & Marcia, 2011). Ideally, young people explore potential roles, values, etc. and commit to those which best fit themselves in order to find a sense of identity "achievement." The extent to which parents may encourage identity exploration or commitment is a matter of individual differences that are of empirical interest. Through intergenerational narratives, parents may be providing vicarious experiences for exploration; on the other hand, they may possibly only modeling "one way" to approach and interpret a life event, encouraging commitment but not exploration. Therefore, the question is, to what extent do emerging adults create personal meaning in these stories? It remains to be seen to what extent meaning-making characteristics in intergenerational narratives may be related to these identity development processes. And again, if they are related, are such effects specific to intergenerational narratives or do they extend to the narratives of close others?

The Current Study

To investigate these ideas, I present an analysis of narratives of personal memories, intergenerational stories, and vicarious memories about friends to compare the spontaneous meaning-making that emerging adults construct. I examined to what extent emerging adults make explicit connections to identity in intergenerational narratives (and friend narratives) that specifically prompt for information about the identity of the parent. The narrative prompts were adapted for this data collection based on Singer and Salovey's self-defining memory construct (1993; Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004; Singer & Blagov, 2002), in an

adaptation designed to capture stories that were recalled second-hand but chosen as stories which demonstrated the identity of the original storyteller. Participants narrated stories which they nominated as exemplifying who the parent (or friend) is as a person.

We coded self-event connections to examine explicit instances in which the narrator links the events of the story to the parent or friends' development of self. Within these self-event connections, we further examined whether the narrator took the statement further with respect to the story's implication for self, by explicitly stating a link between their own identities and that of their parent or friend. This would allow a test of whether stories of parents and/or stories of friends might inform one's own identity, in addition to informing one's understanding of the main characters' identity. It was hypothesized that personal and intergenerational narratives would have more self-event content than narratives about friends, in line with the theory that intergenerational narratives promote narrative identity development over and above any general narrative meaning-making style that might carry across all story retellings by an individual.

Finally, relations between narrative content and self-reported identity development were tested utilizing both a global, overall identity achievement scale, as well as another scale differentiating exploration and commitment based upon the identity status model (Luycx et al., 2008). Here it was hypothesized that individuals who created more meaning in their personal and intergenerational narratives would show higher scores in self-reported identity. It was expected that the same would not be observed for stories about friends.

Method

Participants

One hundred university students (59 female, Mean age = 18.94) were recruited using flyers placed on campus and the psychology student course sign-up. Students who were recruited via flyers were compensated $15 and students who were recruited through courses received course credit. There were no differences in the data between participants by method of recruitment. Ninety-seven participants self-reported ethnicity and race with 13 identifying as Hispanic and 84 as Non-Hispanic; 47 identified as Asian or Asian-American, 33 as White or Caucasian, nine as Black or African American, six as multiracial, and two selected "other" for race.

Materials

An online survey was administered to participants in an on-campus computer lab. The survey was created using Qualtrics online survey platform and contained narrative prompts and questionnaires.

Narrative Prompts

Participants were asked to report five narratives: one each for their mother, father, same-gender-friend, opposite-gender-friend and self.

The prompt for the mother intergenerational narrative was as follows:

> I would like for you to think about times when your mother (or relative)[1] may have told you a story about a time when your mother was about your age or younger. In the space below, write one of these stories you think best illustrates who she is as a person. Although you were not present at the time of this experience, do your best to describe the event in as much detail as possible. Try to include what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what your mother did, and what she was thinking and feeling during the event.

The prompt for the father narrative was identical, substituting the term "father" and gender pronouns as necessary.

The prompt for the friend narratives differed only slightly:

> I would like for you to think about a time when your closest female (male) friend may have told you a story from an experience that you were NOT there to observe. In the space below, write one of these stories you think best illustrates who she (he) is as a person. Although you were not present at the time of this experience, do your best to describe the event in as much detail as possible. Try to include what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what your friend did, and what she was thinking and feeling during the event.

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[1] It was anticipated that the story might have been originally told to them by another relative.

The prompt for the personal story were based upon Singer and Salovey's (1993) definition of self-defining memories:

> I would like for you to think about an experience you have had that best illustrates who you are as a person. Try to select a specific event in your life that is: at least one year old, has helped you to understand who you are as a person, is associated with strong feelings, and is something that you have thought about many times.

As with the other narrative prompts, participants were asked to describe the event in as much detail as possible.

Identity Questionnaires

EPSI. The 12-item Identity subscale of the Eriksonian Psychosocial Inventory Scale (EPSI) was used to measure overall sense of identity achievement (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981). Participants responded on a likert scale to items such as "I know what kind of person I am" and "I change my opinion of myself a lot" (reverse scored).

DIDS. The Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS) has expanded the measurement of identity development by assessing five identity dimensions: Commitment Making, Identification with Commitment, Exploration in Depth, Exploration in Breadth, and Ruminative Exploration (Luyckx et al., 2008). Luyckx et al. identified exploration in breadth as exploring possible identity alternatives, goals, beliefs, and values; Commitment making involved committing to particular identity alternatives; Exploration in depth occurs after commitments have been made, in order to evaluate and further explore those commitments; Identification with commitment involves the process of integrating these commitments into how one views the self. Finally, ruminative exploration questions sought to capture psychological quagmire, whereby an individual hesitates or does not move forward in identity development for a variety of potential reasons. Participants responded to 25 likert-scale items equally divided among the different identity dimensions. Totals were calculated for each dimension separately.

Narrative Coding

Two coders independently scored 15% of the data in order to establish reliability (k= .71) and then divided the task of remaining coding equally.

Self-event connections. Self-event connections were coded according to an adaptation of McLean & Fournier (2008), following Banks and Salmon (2013). Self-event connections were identified as statements describing how the events within the narrative are related to the current sense of self. These statements included Dispositions (e.g. "…because I'm a really introverted person…"), Values (e.g. "I always try to help those in need"), Outlook, (e.g. "You never know what's going to happen, so enjoy life today."), and Personal Growth (e.g. "It definitely made me a stronger person."), and were subcoded according to valence as positive, negative, or neutral/mixed.

Narrator links to main characters. For the stories told in the third person only (e.g. narratives about friends and parents but not personal narratives), we further identified whether connections were about the main character of the story (e.g. writing a story about a friend, "My friend is a really moral person.") or a "link" drawn between the narrator and the protagonist in the story (e.g. within a story about a parent, "I get my rhythm gene from my mom").[2] These links to main characters illustrated instances in which the narrators were explicitly identifying with characteristics or values of the person whose story they were telling.

Connections to other characters in the stories besides the main protagonists were not included in the coding.

Results

Means and standard deviations for the narrative variables are displayed in Table 1. Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were performed to test for differences by narrative type on all the narrative characteristics, as described in what follows.

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[2] Fivush and Zaman (2011) referred to these statements as "intergenerational connections," but because we analyzed friend narratives as well, we refer to them as "self-main-character links."

Only significant main effects and interactions are reported. All follow-up comparisons included family-wise Bonferroni corrections to control for multiple tests. Greenhouse-Geisser corrections for degrees of freedom were also employed when necessary.

Preliminary analyses examine differences in narrative word count, indicating that personal narratives were significantly longer than all other narratives but that there were no differences in the parents' and friends' narratives with respect to length. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that individuals may more vividly recall their own personal memories and thus have access to greater detail than those memories recounted to them.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Questionnaire Responses and Self-event Connections

Measure		Mean	Standard Deviation
Eriksonian Psychosocial Inventory Scale	Overall	3.57	0.62
Dimensions of Identity Development	Commitment Making	3.74	0.84
	Identification with Commitment	3.61	0.75
	Exploration in Breadth	4.09	0.63
	Exploration in Depth	3.86	0.47
	Ruminative Exploration	3.37	0.86
Self-Event Connections			
	Personal Narrative	2.47	1.85
	Father Narrative	.68	1.08
	Mother Narrative	.93	1.39
	Male Friend Narrative	.93	1.25
	Female Friend Narrative	.98	1.54

Self-event Connections

Valence. Table 2 illustrates the overall valence of the self-event connections identified in the narratives. As can be seen, for narratives about parents as well as personal narratives, the connections were overwhelmingly positive or neutral, with very few negative connections made. For friends, however, there was slightly more balance in the number of positive, negative, and neutral connections identified in the story about the main characters. Yet, it is notable that although more balanced for friends, negative connections tended to have the lowest numbers. This generally indicates that the self-defining memory prompts tended to garner

more positivity in selection of events relevant for illustrations of individuals with close relationships to the participant.

Table 2. Valence of self-event connections

	Total Father	Total Mother	Total Male Friend	Total Female Friend	Personal
Positive	24	31	24	24	55
Neutral	16	18	25	20	53
Negative	3	5	14	17	9

Total number of participants who included at least one self-event connection in the narratives, separated by connection valence and narrative type.

Comparing self-event connections between personal, parental, and friend narratives. A repeated-measures ANOVA afforded comparison between narrative types for levels of self-event connections. Again, self-event connections were spontaneous instances in which the participant narrator recounted ways in which the events of the story exemplified the identity, characteristics, values, outlook, or personal growth of the main story character. The ANOVA results showed a difference in the amount of self-event connections based on narrative type, $F(3.39, 308.15) = 27.73$, $p < .001$, $\hat{h}2 = .23$. Personal narratives (EMM = 2.42, SE = .19) contained more self-event connections than all other narratives (with EMM's ranging from .70 to 1.02, SE's from .11 to .16). Amounts of self-event connections between narratives of parents and friends did not differ from one another, indicating that participants were just as likely to draw conclusions about the identity of the story characters when recounting their narratives, regardless of whether they were narrating about a friend or a parent.

Comparing narrator links to main characters. In order to compare the number of statements linking the storyteller participant to the identity characteristics of their parents and friends in the recounted stories, an ANOVA was employed to compare the four third-person recounted narratives. Differences by narrative type were again observed, $F(2.33, 216.76) = 10.51$, $p < .001$, $\hat{h}2 = .10$, as illustrated in Figure 1. In stories about fathers (EMM = .55, SE = .10), participants drew significantly more links to their own sense of self than they did in stories about both male and female friends (EMM = .16 and .05, SE = .07 and .02, respectively). Interestingly, the difference between stories about fathers and stories about mothers

(EMM = .34, SE = .06) was not significant; however, stories about mothers had significantly more links than stories about female friends but not male friends.
Relations between narrative variables and self-reported identity development

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed between the narrative identity content and participants' scores on self-reported identity measures, as presented in Table 3. For this analysis, a total narrative identity content score was first computed by combining the self-event connections and narrator links to main characters, separately for each story type. The correlations were run for the overall EPSI identity score as well as the subscales from the DIDS.

Relations to overall self-reported identity achievement. The narrative content in the fathers' story alone was positively correlated with overall sense of identity achievement. Surprisingly, self-event connections in personal narratives was not related to EPSI scores. These findings suggest a potential disconnect between narrative identity and identity scale measures, an idea further elaborated in the discussion. Still, the findings indicate that participants who made more references to their fathers' identities and drew links between themselves in their fathers' stories had higher scores on overall identity achievement.

Relations between Dimensions of Identity Development and narrative content. Correlations between the different dimensions of identity development and the narrative content again revealed relations between the content of stories for fathers but few other patterns. Notably, to control for the number of statistical tests, the alpha level used to interpret these correlations was reduced family-wise to .002 and only those correlations with p-values below this threshold are treated as interpretable. Despite the correction, findings for narratives about fathers remain significant: participants who had higher identity content in narratives about fathers had higher scores in identification with commitment, and exploration in depth.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore emerging adults' meaning-making in intergenerational narratives, and directly compare it to that of friends – both in terms of quality and in terms of possible relations to self-reported identity development. Meaning-making was operationalized as "self-event connections," or spontaneous verbalizations of ways in which one's personal past experiences shape who one is as a person. Not surprisingly, personal narratives contained more self-event connections than intergenerational narratives or narratives about friends. This finding is consistent with Pillemer et al. (2015), and is not surprising, given that the memories which were personally experienced likely have more information

stored to access upon recall, relative to those memories which were only experienced vicariously, and also given that narratives which are personally experienced are likely to be more personally meaningful in constructing narrative identity.

Importantly, participants made more links to the self when describing their parents' experiences than when describing their friends' experiences. This suggests that emerging adults are using their parents' narratives more to understand their own current dispositions, values, outlook, and sense of personal growth. This evidence converges with findings from Pillemer et al. (2015) that vicarious memories can contribute to understanding of self, but that parents' stories may do so even more than friends' stories. This is one of the first studies to make this specific comparison in narrative, and supports the theory that parents' narratives may be particularly important among the many stories that surround developing individuals in their environment (Fivush & Merrill, 2016). Specifically, it suggests that intergenerational narratives, over and above narratives about others, may contribute to narrative identity development.

With respect to self-reported identity achievement, participants who make more self-event connections in the intergenerational narratives about their fathers were more likely to report higher identity achievement, particularly for commitment. However, no there were no relations observed between the characteristics of stories about mothers and self-reported identity achievement. This finding was quite surprising given previous work suggesting that mothers play a special role in daily family reminiscing (Merrill, Gallo, & Fivush, 2014; Rosenthal 1985; Taylor, Fisackerly, Mauren, & Taylor, 2013). One possible explanation for this finding may be based on previous work observing that stories told by adolescents about their fathers were more achievement-oriented (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Likewise, Fiese and Skillman (2000) found that in childhood, fathers tend to tell more stories about autonomy, relative to mothers. In emerging adulthood, individuals are concerned with taking on adult roles and responsibilities, forming independence from the family, although family relationships remain important (Arnett, 2000). Thus, the new roles and responsibilities in emerging adulthood may benefit more from drawing identity information from fathers' stories, making stories about fathers more relevant in this development timeframe.

For the observation that higher self-event connections in fathers' stories was related to higher identity achievement, it is notable that these correlations were observed particularly for commitment aspects of identity development. In identity commitment, some individuals commit to identities by exploring potential alternatives before committing (what Marcia called "achievement"), whereas

others commit to identities without exploring (what Marcia called "foreclosure"). It is possible that knowledge of family histories and the family practices for which they are a proxy in some ways encourage commitment to particular identities by guiding the young person into certain paths. This may mean that less exploration occurs as a result. However, there was not a negative relation between self-event connections and exploration, which is to say it was not the case that participants who connected more to their parents in the story reported lower levels of identity exploration. This suggests that connecting to intergenerational narratives does not necessarily mean that exploration has been discouraged. Rather, one interesting possibility is that identification with fathers in the stories facilitates exploration by providing a means of engagement in vicarious exploring: by hearing the stories of fathers along with accompanying lessons and insights about the world, young people may vicariously experience these memories, which they then incorporate into their own knowledge base of lessons and insights. In this way, emerging adults who know more about their family histories may explore less: they may feel more confident about their goals, values, beliefs, and overall sense of self. Granted, this process is likely highly filtered through the values and expectations of parents and grandparents, which could have potential implications for both good (for example, teaching about survival) and ill (for example, reinforcing prejudice).

A final note regarding the correlation results is that surprisingly, narrative identity content in the personal narratives was unrelated to self-reported identity achievement. There is partly a statistical explanation for this, in that identification with commitment was trending in the expected correction but an uninterpretable finding after corrections for multiple tests. Thus it could be that the effect exists, but is smaller than expected, requiring a larger study sample size to observe. Regardless, this result suggests that narrative identity and self-reported identity achievement are measuring different, albeit related, constructs. Whereas self-report scales attempt to capture standard, unbiased measurements, narrative recordings preserve the record of the individualized thoughts, feelings, actions, and interpretations that encapsulate the processing of individuals' meaningful experiences. Both can be used by researchers to shed light on the psychological characteristics of a young person as they develop their identity, but these methods do so through very different approaches.

Limitations

It is important to note limitations for this study. This method involved a single time point and concurrent relations do not provide enough information to assess cause and effect. Undoubtedly, intergenerational narratives are learned over

the course of multiple family conversations distributed across development. As expressed by Duke, Lazarus, and Fivush, (2008), it is likely not the case that by merely teaching a child a story about their parents that well-being would be enhanced; rather, the ability to tell these stories reflects ongoing dynamic family processes that may independently contribute to healthy identity development and psychological well-being as well.   Future research should examine what intergenerational narratives mean to individuals over time and with respect to individuals' family relationships, communication patterns, and individual differences such as cognitive abilities.

Furthermore, although the prompts were designed to pull for similar identity themes throughout, we do not know whether the events chosen by the narrators are those events which the main characters of the story would have chosen as self-defining. In terms of the shared history of storytelling, it is likely that there has simply been more time to pass in conversation between parents and children than between children and friends, and thus the stories chosen for parents may be more informed, more reflective of their identities and personal histories than stories about friends. This would support the theory for why intergenerational narratives are especially personally meaningful for young people, in that they reflect deeper understanding of the person and are shared across a larger developmental window of time in which autobiographical memory skills are developing. Still, it may be helpful to control for age of the participant when they first heard the memory, number of times they have heard the story, and perceived importance in order to more fully investigate potential mechanisms in action behind these stories.

Future Research

Many questions remain. The current research utilized intergenerational narrative prompts designed as with the assumption that parents were part of two-parent, heterosexual, binary-gender parental structures and it remains to be seen how family identity processes may be shaped differently or similarly in more diverse family structures. As parents model identity through narratives for their children, so too concepts about gender identity are likely modeled by intergenerational narratives.

Relatedly, it is critically important to expand these ideas to focus on communities of marginalized individuals. Previous research has explored the effects of collective memory and intergenerational trauma from victims of war (Baker & Gippenreiter, 1998; Wertsch, 2009; Wiseman, Metzl, & Barber, 2006); however, there is a great deal more to learn with regard to how individual trauma is passed down through memories shared across generations. Whether through

stories of suffering, resiliency, or hope, intergenerational narratives imbue personal narrative identity with background knowledge that help shape an understanding of self.

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