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Narratives of Personal and Parental Transgressions

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Abstract

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Transgressions are particularly difficult events for individuals to process and reconcile with their identities, as they can challenge positive self-perception. Research has identified narrative as the channel for meaning-making in efforts to resolve this inner tension. Parental narratives of transgression help provide adolescents with ways of understanding their personal transgressions as well as the moral code and values of their families. Thus, narratives of both personal and parental transgressions contribute to moral identity development in adolescents. Eighty-three (mean age= 18.97; 41 females and 42 males) college-enrolled, racially diverse adolescents were asked to write 3 narratives of transgression (1 personal, 1 mother's, and 1 father's experience). Narratives were coded for internal state content (emotions and cognitions) and for moral evaluations. Females used more emotion and moral evaluations across all narrative types than did males. Further, they used more cognitions than did males in telling their personal narratives but did not differ from males in frequency of cognition used to tell both parents' stories. We analyzed moral evaluation for agency of the evaluations and found that evaluations being made by the self are predominantly by females and that those made by parents are overwhelmingly being made by mothers. Our results suggest that both personal and intergenerational narratives of transgression facilitate moral reasoning and are both gendered.

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Narratives of Personal and Parental Transgressions

Narratives told about personal experiences are critical in understanding how individuals develop and maintain self-identity. They provide us with an understanding of the way an individual perceives oneself within the context of the larger world, as well as the emotions and thoughts an individual has when processing personal experiences. Adolescence is a critical period for the development of this type of narrative identity. Deeper reflection that begins in adolescence scaffolds the development of a strong sense of self, which has been shown to positively impact well-being. Recent research has explored not only interpersonal narratives, but also intergenerational narratives. Stories relayed from parents and grandparents to children convey important lessons about the world, often helping to support children's identity development. Intergenerational narratives may be especially important for conveying a sense of resilience and growth in the face of negative experiences. One form of negative experience— transgressions— are particularly difficult to process as they challenge one's sense of self and help create a moral identity. Thus, the major objective of this study is to examine how adolescents and emerging adults narrate transgression experiences, including both their own transgressions as well as parents' transgressions they have come to know while growing up. To place this study in context, I will discuss the following sections in this paper: narrative identity development, the emergence of self-concept through narratives in adolescence, the importance of emotional events and specifically transgressions, the role of intergenerational narratives in scaffolding moral identity development, the ability of adolescents to convey stories about their parents, and how the process of telling these stories is gendered.

Narratives & Identity

Telling others about an event that one recently experienced is a behavior so common that it has become a pervasive practice of human beings. When something even moderately interesting happens in people's lives, they find themselves jumping to relay that information to someone in their lives. Why is it that this behavior has become a pillar of human conduct (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007)? Narrative storytelling offers an exploration of events such that a person becomes aware of the emotions and thoughts linked to the event as well as of social norms and broad truths about the world (McLean et al., 2007). Narratives extend beyond simply conveying what happened during an event to include introspection that contributes to deriving purpose and meaning from the event in question (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). Creating meaning supports the integration of events into one's life story, and consequently, one's sense of self.

As a highly frequent behavior in which people engage, narrative storytelling is deliberate and purposeful (McLean et al., 2007). Further, the behavior is common across the life span, demonstrating its utility in preserving and transforming self-identity over time (McLean et al., 2007). Verbalizing and writing about experiences is a learning process that helps people confront their cognitions, emotions, and overall evaluation of the specific event that is being processed, as well as realize the emotions of other people involved in the occurrence (Fivush & Zaman, 2013; Tappan, 1991). The process also allows for grasping constructs that are socially and culturally important to an individual and, more broadly, to the world (Fivush, Merrill, & Marin, 2012). The insight that a person gains through reflection shapes the way in which these events will be remembered (Fivush, Bohanek, & Duke, 2008; Fivush & Zaman, 2013). Through breaking down and gaining a deeper understanding of the impact of these events, a person is able to integrate these experiences into their self-identity, which is related to well-being (Zaman &

Fivush, 2011). These events become the examples that people rely on to demonstrate both stable and changing characteristics of their self-identity. This process helps establish a consistent sense of self over time, where events are essential to one's life story. Thus, it is the act of narrating these events that scaffolds the creation of a sense of self and helps us understand who we are. This process is particularly important in adolescence, a critical developmental period during which an individual matures cognitively to the extent that their decisions are no longer dictated by external forces such as reward and punishment. Rather, adolescents' cognitive processes enable them to think more analytically about events to consider the tension between moral dimensions and personal desires, societal norms, personal feelings, and others' feelings that help to shape their personal identities. Adolescence is also the last major developmental period in which individuals will face major changes in self-concept, as self is relatively stable in adulthood (McLean et al., 2007).

Emergence of narrative identity in adolescence

A two-fold process that consists of higher cognitive capabilities paired with a societal demand to apply these abilities by mastering a coherent autobiography is what supports the emergence of a coherent life story in adolescence. As discussed by Habermas and Bluck (2000), by the time individuals reach adolescence they have had countless experiences of telling their life story. However, society dictates that adolescents be able to provide a more complex life story that incorporates their belief system and specific examples of self-defining characteristics. Society's emphasis on this ability is demonstrated by the constant demand to provide these life stories as evidenced by mandatory journal writing in classes, questions on college applications, and interview questions. These experiences force individuals to confront any discordant self-

characteristics while realizing and recognizing who they are—a process that involves considering aspects of self-identity such as sexual orientation, educational and extra-curricular values, and overarching values that guide daily action. The capacity to consider these aspects of self-identity demonstrates an increased development of cognitive abilities such as causal and thematic coherence, which are essential to the development of narrative identity in adolescence (Fivush & Habermas et al., 2011).

One study in particular, conducted by McLean, Pasupathi, and Pals (2007), was one of the first to document the emergence of a life story in adolescence. In their study, adolescents were asked to talk about self-defining events they had recently experienced. The study showed that talking about personal experiences enables introspection that helps in gaining insight. Adolescents gain interpretive abilities that enable them to consider both personal and others' struggles, psychological states, and cognitions that guide behaviors (Randy & McKeough, 2007). This deep level of processing catalyzes the creation of a continuous life story through which adolescents are able to reconcile their past with their current sense of self. Further, events begin to comprise one's self-identity as events become self-relevant examples of one's characteristics. Therefore, it is the storying of these events that supports the internalization of specific characteristics as being part of oneself and contributes to the creation of a coherent and continuous life narrative. Such findings emphasize the importance of narratives in establishing our self-concept.

Emotional events

Research has found that, across gender and culture, emotional events are conveyed more frequently than less emotional and mundane occurrences (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010).

Emotional events can be separated into two categories: 1) positive emotional events and 2) negative emotional events. While narrating positive events serve the purpose of understanding relational domains such as connectedness with others or making others feel better, the storying of negative events has a very deliberate function of gaining insight and reaching an internal resolution in thinking about challenging events. In a study conducted by Mansfield, McLean, and Lilgendahl (2010), adults were asked to report experiences of traumas and the extent to which they were able to gain understanding of the negative event as well as their well-being at the time of the study. Data showed that the more insight language (instances of emotions and cognitions) there was, the higher one's well-being, even if distress associated with the event had not completely disappeared. Thus, it is the actual process of storying a negative event that increases insight and complexity in understanding an event, consequently enabling a smoother integration into one's life story and increased well-being. Importantly, creating a coherent narrative of positive events is not related to increased well-being, whereas the storying of negative events is related to increased well-being (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). Simply thinking about negative events without creating a coherent narrative is related to decreased well-being, thus underscoring the critical nature of the actual process of storying emotionally negative events.

One critical aspect of creating a narrative about emotional events focuses on internal reflection about that event, as indicated through the use of language about thoughts and emotions. Thoughts and emotions move a narrative from a report of what occurred to a story about what it means. Interestingly, there are gender differences in the use of this kind of language. Overall, females are more emotionally expressive in their narratives than are males (Bauer, Stennes, & Haight, 2003; Fivush, Bohanek, Zaman, & Grapin, 2011), and there is some

suggestion that they use more language reflective of cognitive processing, such as "understand" and "realize."

One aspect of narrating negative events that is related to well-being is the decrease in negative emotion with each retelling of the negative event (McLean et al, 2007). This suggests that the insight derived from narrating stories promotes a more positive sense of self through the integration of the event with one's life story. Achieving resolution through reflection contributes to emotional maturity, which scaffolds the processing of future negative emotions. Being able to find the 'silver lining' in situations that elicit negative emotions enables a person to understand another's motives and promotes forgiveness of others (Mansfield et al., 2010). Of course, there are different kinds of negative events. An especially interesting negative experience is an experience of transgression, in which an individual has agency and, consequently, accountability for his or her actions

Transgressions

Transgressions are experiences in which one has done something that one believes is wrong, such as lying, cheating, stealing, hurting another, etc. Transgressions are particularly interesting, because an individual has acted in a manner that is inconsistent with his or her self-identity. Thus, an individual's self-identity is directly challenged, and an inner dilemma must be resolved (Merrill, 2012). There is also the potential for judgment from others if one acts in a way that opposes social norms. Therefore, while experiences of transgression often remain veiled, refusal to address transgressions can negatively impact an individual. In confronting transgressions, an individual must explore the emotions and cognitions that explain their motives for acting in an immoral way. Understanding these motives sheds light on the tension that people face between

their desires and moral identity (McLean et al., 2007). There has been very limited research on transgressions and the use of narratives as a means of processing these uncharacteristic behaviors. Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) were among the first to investigate transgressions from both the perpetrator and victim's points of view. They found that perpetrators seek to minimize the guilt and shame associated with committing a transgression. Participants often achieved this by processing the incident in an intelligible manner that enabled them to think of the transgression as a momentary lapse in judgment and uncharacteristic of who they are. Since unprocessed transgressions may cause one to view oneself as a "bad" human being, the process of narrating a transgression to help resolve the event may be essential to one's well-being. It is particularly relevant to adolescents as they begin to struggle to create a coherent identity that will be accepted by society (Krettenauer & Mosleh, 2013). Further, adolescents, unlike children, have the ability to recognize that actions have consequences beyond reward and punishment, such as impacting people emotionally (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). Understanding a transgression can make individuals aware of not only their own state of mind, but also that of another person. In addition to social norms conveyed through observing interactions and hearing stories from parents and friends, personal transgressions can help in developing one's morality. They serve as learning experiences such that an individual must ponder what kind of person he or she wants to be, encouraging one to refrain from similar behaviors in the future (McLean et al., 2007). In this way, processing transgressions can help individuals define their moral identity while also creating enough distance from the transgression that their sense of self is preserved. This process of resolving inner turmoil serves as a protective mechanism such that people can move past their transgressions instead of believing that they are fundamentally "bad" human

beings (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). Resolution scaffolds not only forgiveness of oneself, but also understanding and forgiveness of others who make mistakes (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010).

Research has shown that this deep reflection of events is specific to developmental stage, as the driving force of moral behaviors transitions from being based solely on reward and punishment in childhood to revolving around social norms and the consideration of others' feelings in adolescence (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). As the identity of adolescents expands to incorporate values and goals, society and families promote adolescents' development through giving them more agency. Therefore, adolescence is a developmental milestone in which individuals undergo monumental changes in self- identity and morality development (Fivush & Zaman, 2013). Further, adolescents will carry forward into the future the advancements they make in their identity (McLean et al., 2007). Earlier development contributes to a healthy sense of self as it is correlated with a consistent and stable sense of self, which enables an individual to integrate new events more successfully. Parents are essential in molding ideals of morality that children possess. One of the methods they use to influence morality development in their children is reminiscence. This purposeful telling of stories is called intergenerational narratives, which I now will discuss.

Intergenerational Narratives

Parents provide essential support in helping adolescents navigate experiences and endorse social norms during a period in which adolescents are very impressionable (McLean et al., 2007). By relaying their own childhood and adolescent experiences, parents are able to provide examples that parallel their children's experiences. Children use these stories not only to understand their own experiences, but also to gain a sense of belonging through positioning themselves within the

family context (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). For example, demonstrating similar experiences or shared characteristics with one's family provides a feeling of connectedness (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). This feeling of connectedness is also achieved through family members holding similar value and belief systems (Fivush et al., 2008). Through relaying personal experiences to children, parents are able to convey their own emotions and cognitions in response to situations (Fivush & Zaman, 2013). Such family reminiscing provides a foundation from which children can establish moral attitudes. Furthermore, it enables children to adopt values similar to their parents so that they feel a greater sense of belonging within the family unit as well as in the world (Fivush & Zaman, 2013; Pratt, Norris, Arnold, & Filyer, 1999). Research has shown that explaining situations that engage morality predicts the moral development of adolescents (Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010). Through explaining situations of morality, parents are able to control what values are emphasized and what behaviors are frowned upon, thereby introducing their own moral values (Hardy & Carlo, 2011).

Interestingly, research has shown that this process is gendered. In general, fathers tend to tell stories with themes of autonomy, success, and work, while mothers tell stories with themes of interpersonal relationships, roles, and routines (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Parents also alter the content of their stories depending on the gender of the listener. Both parents use themes of autonomy when telling stories to sons, whereas stories for daughters tend to use more emotional language and focus on social events and relationships (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Children internalize these gendered stories. For example, boys tell stories of their values and beliefs, whereas girls tell stories demonstrating their compassion and connectedness with others through the use of higher levels of internal state language, including emotion and cognitive processing words (Zaman & Fivush, 2011).

Adolescents' abilities to tell intergenerational narratives

Very little research has been conducted on the abilities of children to retell intergenerational narratives. Zaman and Fivush (2011) examined 65 middle class families with adolescent children aged 14-16 years old and asked these adolescents to narrate two stories about each parent's childhood and two positive experiences from their own lives. The purpose was to explore whether adolescents know stories about their parents' childhoods that the parents have told their children and whether adolescents tell stories in a gendered manner such that girls use more emotional expression and elaboration than do boys. Narratives were evaluated on 3 dimensions: 1) narrative structure, 2) narrative theme, and 3) internal state content. Two critical findings emerged. Both males and female adolescents told stories about their mothers that were more emotionally expressive and focused more on social relationships than the stories they told about their fathers, indicating that adolescents are telling intergenerational narratives through the lens of their parents' gender. Second, when telling their own personal narratives, female adolescents tell narratives that are more emotionally expressive than males, suggesting that their personal narratives are told through the lens of their own gender. These findings indicate both that adolescents know these stories and that they are internalizing these stories as gendered frames for understanding experience.

Understanding gender differences and implications of gender differences

Because narratives are couched in social norms, they serve as a mechanism for disseminating gender roles. As discussed by Fivush & Zaman (2013), narratives relayed to females focus on relationships with others and care, whereas narratives relayed to males emphasize independence. Because the prioritization of relationships by females is highly valued by society, females often

adopt and practice the value of care. This could contribute to girls being more elaborative and emotionally expressive than boys. Parents having the ability to emphasize and silence behaviors could account for the lesser focus that boys place on internal state language in telling their own narratives. An interesting point to note, however, is that boys are capable of telling more elaborative and expressive narratives, as demonstrated by their use of more internal state language in retelling their mothers' stories. However, in storying their personal experiences, boys use less internal state language. Narrative storytelling is therefore a gendered process in which social constructs are applied. Further, the impact that intergenerational narratives have is substantial as girls model their narrative styles off their mothers'.

Purpose of study and predictions

As adolescence is a period in which individuals undergo advancement in their cognitive abilities and face pressure from society to narrate coherent life stories, it serves as a critical developmental period for self-concept and moral identity. These cognitive abilities and societal expectations foster a curiosity in adolescents that may compel them to question their values and beliefs in a struggle to define themselves (Pratt, Arnold, & Lawford, 2009; Thorne, McLean, & Dasbach, 2004). Transgressions are particularly important to explore in an adolescent population, as they challenge self-perceptions that demand a resolution. Interestingly, previous research suggests that this process of narrative identity formation and morality development is gendered, as evidenced by females using more internal state content (emotions and cognitions) than males do. This higher level of processing by females indicates their desire to create a framework that will serve as a foundation for making future judgments and decisions. In this study, we examine both adolescents' personal narratives of transgression as well as stories they

know about their parents' transgressions. We hypothesize that both females and males are scaffolded by parents relaying their experiences of transgressions through intergenerational narratives. Parent stories of transgression provide a framework for adolescents to understand their personal transgressions and serve as a way of imparting familial values such as the importance of forgiveness and the idea that everyone makes mistakes. This may be especially important in helping adolescents forgive themselves and achieve internal resolution from committing a transgression. Therefore, in this study, we examined meaning-making as illustrated by internal state content (emotions and cognitions), moral evaluations and perspective-taking. Based on previous research showing gender differences in autobiographical narratives, we predicted that females would use more internal state content than males in their personal narratives. However, given that this is the first study to examine parental narratives of transgression, we made no specific predictions. Based on Zaman and Fivush (2013), we thought that narratives about mothers might contain more internal state content than narratives about fathers, but it was unclear whether these would differ by gender of adolescent.

Method

The data reported in this paper are part of a larger study that explores perspective-taking and meaning-making in adolescents using both pride narratives and narratives of transgressions. Participants and procedures specific to the exploration of narratives of transgression will be addressed in this paper.

Participants

There were a total of 94 private college students who were recruited through their Introductory Psychology classes. 11 of these participants failed to provide any narratives. Consequently, they

were eliminated from the sample, yielding a final sample of 83 participants (mean age= 18.97; 41 females and 42 males). Of the remaining participants, 1 participant only provided a personal transgression, 4 did not know of a time their mothers had transgressed and 5 did not know of a time their fathers had transgressed. 43 self-reported as freshman, 25 as sophomores, 12 as juniors, 2 as seniors, and 1 did not provide any demographic information. From these 83 participants, 37 participants self-identified as white/Caucasian, 23 as Asian/Chinese/Korean, 11 as Black/African-American, 3 as Hispanic, 2 as Mixed Race, 6 as another category, and 1 participant's form was missing. The overwhelming majority of these participants have parents who are college-educated or higher. All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board, and all students received class credit for participating.

Procedure

Participants were recruited using the Introductory to Psychology classes at Emory University. They were asked to come to the lab for one and a half hours of time, during which participants were seated away from each other. After signing informed consent, participants were provided with a workbook that they followed to provide a series of written narratives and to complete a series of questionnaires. In total, participants were asked for 6 narratives, 3 of transgression and 3 of pride; only the transgression narratives were used here. They were asked to write one personal experience of a transgression, one time their mother (biological or step parent) and one time their father (biological or step parent) had transgressed and told the participant about it. They were given two pages of paper for each narrative and were allowed to turn onto the back to write. Further, the order of the prompts was randomly mixed and assigned to participants.

The specific prompt for the intergenerational transgression narratives about each parent was as follows:

> "I would like for you to write a story about your mother (your father) when she (he) was young. This story should be about a specific time your mother (your father) felt that she (he) had done something wrong. Though this narrative is not based on your own experiences please describe the event in as much detail as possible. Do your best to include, what happened, where it happened, who was involved, what your mother did, what she was thinking and feeling during and after the event, and why she views this event as a transgression. Try to be specific and provide as much detail as you can."

For the personal narrative of transgression, the prompt was:

> "I would like for you to write a story about your own personal experience. This story should be about a specific time when you felt that you did something wrong. Please do your best to describe the event in as much detail as possible. As you write about your own personal experience please describe, in detail, what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling during and after the event, and why you view this event as a transgression."

Participants were also asked to provide their age at the time of the transgression.

Coding

The handwritten narratives were typed into word files by research assistants and double-checked. Words that were illegible were replaced by a series of 'x's . Narratives were coded for instances

of specific internal state content. The three main categories used to classify utterances were emotions, cognitions, and moral evaluations.

1. Emotion. Emotion was defined as a direct expression of a feeling (e.g. "I saw my mom crying"). Emotions were sub-coded for whether the emotions were positive or negative, and whether or not they included a moral dimension. Whether or not an utterance had moral dimensions was defined as words that refer to morals, societal values, or norms. If words implied one of the following, they were regarded as having a moral dimension: responsible, honest, fair, generous, kind, respectful, considerate, and compassionate.
2. Cognition. Cognitions included thoughts, beliefs, and desires, and were further sub-coded for whether or not they included a moral dimension (e.g. I cannot understand how I did all the work).
3. Moral Evaluation. Moral evaluations referred to evaluations of a person, their behavior, or the situation (e.g. My mother was extremely rude). Moral evaluations were sub-coded for whether or not the evaluations implied morality or immorality. Further, each utterance was sub-coded for the person making the evaluation: self, parent, and other. Appendices A, B, C and D illustrate how narratives were coded.

Reliability

Reliability was established by two researchers who coded 20% of the narratives independently. The overall Cohen's kappa was .87, indicating high reliability. After establishing reliability, the narratives were distributed equally between the two researchers and independently coded. Those narratives that had been used in developing the coding scheme were divided equally between the researchers and coded at the end.

Results

Results are presented in three main sections, each focused on a main coding category: emotions, cognitions and moral evaluations.

Emotion

We conducted 2 (gender) x3 (narrative type) analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with gender of the participant as a between subject variable and narrative type as a within subject variable. Because we violated sphericity, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser correction for all of our analyses. As displayed in Figure 1, there were main effects of both narrative type $F(2,146)= 7.67$, $p= .002$ and gender $F(73)= 5.54$, $p= .021$, but there was no interaction. To follow up the main effect of narrative type, 3 paired sample t-tests were conducted and revealed that there is no significant difference in the number of emotion words that adolescents use to tell their mothers' and fathers' stories. However, adolescents use more emotion words to tell their own stories than they do to tell both their mothers' ($M= -1.37$, $se= .41$), $t(78)= -3.34$, $p= .001$ and fathers' stories ($M= -1.46$, $se= .45$), $t(77)= -3.26$, $p= .002$. The main effect of gender indicates that females ($M= 2.97$, $se= .25$) use more emotion words than males ($M= 2.14$, $se= .25$).

We wanted to explore whether or not these results hold true for moral emotions specifically. We conducted 2 (gender) x3 (narrative type) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) only using moral emotions, with gender of the participant as a between subject variable and narrative type as a within subject variable. The effects were the same (see Figure 2). There were main effects of both narrative type $F(2,146)= 6.83$, $p= .003$ and gender $F(73)= 3.83$, $p= .054$ with no interaction. The main effect of gender indicates that females ($M=2.56$, $se= .24$) use more moral emotions than males do ($M= 1.90$, $se= .24$). We followed up the main effect of narrative type

with paired t-tests to determine where there were significant differences in use of moral emotions. Adolescents used more moral emotions in their own personal narratives than in retelling both their mothers' (M= -1.14, se= .36), $t(78)$= -3.15, p= .002 and fathers' stories (M= -1.38, se= .42), $t(77)$= -3.27, p= .002.

Cognition

We conducted 2 (gender) x3 (narrative type) analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with gender of the participant as a between subject variable and narrative type as a within subject variable. Because we violated sphericity, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser correction for all of our analyses. As displayed in Figure 3, there were main effects for both narrative type $F(2,146)$= 3.39, p= .04 and gender $F(73)$= 5.06, p= .027, which must be interpreted within the significant interaction between those two variables $F(2,146)$= 5.16, p= .008. To follow-up on this interaction, three independent sample t-tests between males and females were conducted on each narrative type. Females talked more about internal cognitive states (M= 2.56, se= .33) than males did when talking about their mothers' transgressions (M=1.73, se= .23), $t(77)$= -2.09, p= .040. There was no significant difference between females and males in telling their fathers' transgressions. In telling their personal transgressions, females used more instances of cognition (M=3.80, se= .44) than did males (M=2.00, se= .24), $t(81)$= -3.61, p= .001.

When we used only moral cognitions, the results paralleled our findings for overall cognitions (see Figure 4). There were main effects for both narrative type $F(2,146)$= 4.56, p= .015 and gender approaching significance $F(73)$= 3.05, p= .085, that must be interpreted within the significant interaction between those two variables $F(2,146)$= 3.47, p= .039. To follow-up on this interaction, three independent sample t-tests between males and females were conducted on

each narrative type. There were no significant differences between females and males in telling their mothers' and fathers' transgressions. In telling their personal transgressions, females used more instances of moral cognitions (*M*= 3.07, *se*= .40) than did males (*M*= 1.69, *se*=.21), t(81)= -3.066, *p*= .003.

Moral Evaluation

We conducted 2 (gender) x3 (narrative type) analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with gender of the participant as a between subject variable and narrative type as a within subject variable. As displayed in Figure 5, there were main effects of both narrative type $F(2,146)= 5.44$, $p= .005$ and gender $F(73)= 5.26$, $p= .025$, and no significant interaction. To follow-up the main effect of narrative type, 3 paired sample t-tests were conducted and revealed that adolescents use significantly more moral evaluations in telling their mothers' transgressions (*M*= .97, *se*= .30), $t(74)= 3.21$, $p= .002$ and personal transgressions (*M*= -.85, *se*= .30), $t(77)= -2.86$, $p= .005$ than they do to tell their fathers' transgressions. There is no significant difference in the number of moral evaluations adolescents use in telling their mothers' transgressions and their own. The main effect of gender indicates that females (*M*= 2.28, *se*= .20) use more moral evaluations than males (*M*= 1.63, *se*= .20).

We wanted to explore whether or not these results hold true when we specify the person making the moral evaluations (self, parent, other). We conducted 2 (gender) x3 (narrative type) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) for all 3 analyses, with gender of the participant as a between subject variable and narrative type as a within subject variable. In analyzing moral evaluations made by the self, there were main effects of both narrative type $F(2,146)= 6.50$, $p= .002$ and gender $F(73)= 4.75$, $p= .032$, but there was no interaction (see Figure 6). To follow-up the main

effect of narrative type, 3 paired sample t-tests were conducted. Participants used more moral evaluations to tell their mothers' (M= .53, se= .24), $t(74)$= 2.25, p= .027 and personal transgressions (M= .97, se= .27), $t(77)$= -3.61, p= .001 than they did to tell their fathers' transgressions. There were no significant differences in number of moral evaluations made by participants to tell their personal and mothers' transgressions. The main effect of gender indicates that females (M= 1.56, se= .18) use more moral evaluations made by the self than do males (M= 1.01, se= .18).

Because we violated sphericity, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser correction for analyzing moral evaluations made by the parent. As displayed in Figure 7, there was a main effect of narrative type $F(2,146)$= 5.85, p= .005, but there was no main effect of gender. To follow-up the main effect of narrative type, 3 paired t-tests were conducted. There were more moral evaluations made by parents in participants telling their mothers' transgressions than there were in the telling of personal (M= .37, se= .12), $t(78)$= 3.14, p= .002 and fathers' transgressions (M= .29, se= .11), $t(74)$= 2.66, p= .010.

Because we violated sphericity, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser correction for analyzing moral evaluations made by others. As seen in Figure 8, there were no main effects of narrative type or gender.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which adolescents know and are able to narrate their parents' narratives of transgression, how they narrate their own transgressions, and whether these processes are gendered. Narrative literature has established the importance of narratives in shaping individuals' identities and has widely recognized that this process of narrative identity development is gendered. Researchers have also acknowledged the purpose of

intergenerational narratives in situating children within their families by imparting moral codes and societal values. However, limited research to date has explored the role of narratives, both personal and intergenerational, in helping individuals to process transgressions, which are particularly challenging to one's sense of self. Overall, females were more elaborative about their own and others' internal state content than males were, but this depended on the narrative in question. I discuss emotions, moral evaluations, and cognitive processes, and then provide a more integrated summary.

Looking first at emotions, females were more emotionally expressive than males overall. This is consistent with previous findings that show that females are more emotionally elaborative in their narratives than are males (Bauer et al., 2003; Fivush et al., 2011; McLean et al., 2007; Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Our study extends upon this by confirming that females remain more emotionally expressive than do males even when narrating events that are particularly challenging to the self. Despite the tension that transgressions pose between a positive and negative self-perception and the need to internally resolve the tension, females remain more emotionally expressive than do males. Moreover, females were more emotionally expressive across all three narrative types than were males. Using more emotions is indicative of individuals interpreting events through their own perspectives, which also shows a higher level of emotional understanding (Fivush et al., 2012). This deeper emotional understanding is essential to forming evaluations of one's own and others' behaviors and learning about social etiquette and acceptable ways of acting, all of which contribute to meaning-making (Wainryb & Recchia, 2012). In turn, individuals are better able to integrate these events in creating a continuous life story. Additionally, the finding that females are more emotionally expressive in taking the

perspective of their parents when narrating their parents' transgressions reinforces the idea that females are cognizant of other peoples' emotions and understand how events impact them.

These differences between females and males may be attributed to early social interactions. This is not surprising, as previous literature has determined that both parents are more elaborative with daughters than with sons and that mothers are more elaborative than fathers in telling their narratives (Bauer et al., 2003; Fivush & Zaman, 2013). Consequently, daughters are learning a gendered narrative style that persists into adulthood, as evidenced by mothers being more elaborative than fathers. (McLean et al., 2007; Zaman & Fivush, 2011).

Finally, adolescents overall were more emotionally expressive in telling their own transgressions than they were in telling their parents' transgressions. This is to be expected, as adolescents personally experience and, consequently, are more aware of their emotions regarding their personal transgressions than they would be of their parents' emotions about their transgressions. Importantly, when we examined moral emotions specifically, females remained more emotionally expressive than males overall and across all narratives. This indicates that females are internalizing these experiences to determine their personal moral codes and ideas of what is right and wrong. As a result, females establish and develop an archive of experiences, which they can draw upon in the future in anticipating emotions that will be elicited by similar situations (Wainryb & Recchia, 2012).

Moral evaluations followed a similar pattern to emotional expressions. Overall, females made more moral evaluations than did males. Moreover, females across all three narrative types made more moral evaluations than did males, indicating that females are assuming a general evaluative stance. This suggests that females are processing their personal transgressions and others' experiences to a greater extent and are making more judgments than are males. This

practice of evaluating situations directly engages and applies individuals' moral reasoning capacities and moral identities, consequently strengthening their moral codes. This finding is an important addition to the literature on narrative identity development in adolescents, because it adds the additional category of evaluative comments as an indication of internal state content. Furthermore, this was the first time that evaluative comments by adolescents were explored.

Adolescents used the same frequency of moral evaluations in the telling of their mothers' and their own narratives than their fathers' narratives. This could be attributed to adolescents feeling emotionally closer to their mothers than to their fathers (Pratt et al., 1999). This closeness explains the reliance on mothers over fathers for emotional support and the feeling that mothers are more available than are fathers (Fivush & Zaman, 2011). Turning to mothers for advice during times of uncertainty provides the ideal situation for mothers to relay stories to their children about their own similar experiences. Relatedly, the ability to provide more evaluations in mothers' stories could also be attributed to adolescents paying less attention to their fathers' evaluations because they regard their mothers' evaluations more highly. Another possibility is that fathers are making fewer evaluations than mothers in telling their experiences of transgressions, which is related to literature that claims that fathers are less elaborative than are mothers (McLean et al., 2007; Zaman & Fivush, 2011).

When we separated moral evaluations based on agency (self, parent, other), those evaluations made by participants themselves mirrored the pattern of moral evaluations overall with females making more judgments than do males. Females across all narrative types made more moral evaluations than males, but they did not differ in reporting evaluations made by their parents. This reinforces the idea that females are engaging in more moral reasoning and confronting the internal turmoil in efforts to develop and shape their moral perspectives. In turn,

this perspective serves as an evaluative framework from which they will make their judgments of similar situations they encounter in the future. This suggests that females are not simply repeating the stories in the manner that they were told, as females would repeat these judgments from their parents' point of view rather than their own. Further, an additional dimension is added to internal state content, which females historically engage in more than males do (McLean et al., 2007; Zaman & Fivush, 2011).

In analyzing parents as agents, we found that there were more moral evaluations made in mothers' transgressions than in both personal and fathers' transgressions. It is likely that mothers are making more judgments than fathers, and from this we can infer that judgments by parents overwhelmingly occur in mothers' transgressions. Therefore, the evaluations being made in personal narratives are by adolescents themselves rather than by their parents. Given these results and the fact that evaluations made by the self are overwhelmingly made by females, we can infer that female adolescents are judging themselves more than they are judging their parents.

Both moral evaluations and emotions are important constituents of developing moral identity. That females make more evaluations and use more emotional language suggests that females are experiencing more reflection. More reflection suggests that females are using these experiences to develop their identities and moral compasses (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). This higher level of processing indicates that females are more emotionally mature as they recognize and accept others' values and beliefs. They are using their experiences and intergenerational stories to create an evaluative framework with which they can make sense of current and future situations.

Unlike emotions and evaluations, females are not using more cognitive processing overall than are males in their narratives. However, females used more cognitive states in telling their personal and mothers' stories than did males, but there were no differences between females and males in telling their fathers' stories. Using more cognition in personal transgressions suggests that failure to act in accordance with individuals' moral codes causes moral reasoning to occur in efforts to understand others' feelings and cognitions (Carlo, McGinley, Davis, & Streit, 2012). This deeper processing enables a higher level of integration of these stories into females' identities that males are unable to achieve because of their lesser processing. Additionally, females convey cognitions regarding their mothers' transgressions to the same extent as their personal stories, which are both with more frequency than males. As literature suggests, mothers could be telling stories in a gendered manner such that they use less internal state content with sons than they use with daughters (Fivush & Zaman, 2013). Another possibility is that females could be identifying with mothers more than they do with fathers, while males don't with either parent. This suggests that there is another variable determining why males don't identify with either parent, but future research is required to investigate and determine what those influences are. When we conducted the analyses for moral cognitions, the same patterns emerged with the exception that females used more moral cognitions in personal transgressions than they did in telling both their parents' stories. Importantly, this illustrates that females are creating moral self-agency through these narratives and that they perceive these events through a moral lens.

Overall, the finding that females use more emotions, including moral emotions, more evaluations and more cognitions, especially moral cognitions, in narrating their transgressions than do males suggests that females are using these experiences to develop their moral identities. They are thinking about these experiences from a moral standpoint and are developing an

evaluative framework of what is right and wrong that they will bring forth with them into adulthood.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions

It must be acknowledged that our sample group consisted of college-educated students whose parents are overwhelmingly college-educated or higher. This could have positively influenced parents' abilities to tell more elaborate stories. Thus, it would be interesting to have a more diversely educated group of participants and parents in order to explore whether identity development follows the same patterns if, for example, parents are providing shorter and less elaborate narratives of transgression. We did not specify whether parents were biological or step-parents, which is important to look at as this factor may make a difference in the design and results of our study. However, it is currently being looked at to see if its inclusion would change the way we interpret our results. Another limitation is that we were unable to control for how recently parents had told these stories. This could have impacted adolescents' abilities to remember details and their thought processes at the time, therefore bringing into question whether these events were helping to scaffold identity development or whether adolescents were imposing already established moral identities on evaluating these experiences. A third limitation is that we do not know how these intergenerational narratives were told. It would be interesting to record parents telling their transgressions to their children so that we could quantify the extent to which adolescents are perspective-taking. It would be interesting to use the current data and run correlations to explore whether females are identifying with mothers, as they are the same gendered parent. It would also be interesting to analyze the content of these transgressions for

theme such as achievement-related transgressions or relational transgressions. This would add to the literature by establishing whether these gendered themes are steadfast for transgressions.

Despite these limitations, our study is the first to explore identity development in adolescents through a gendered lens using transgressions. Because adolescents are confronted with creating a coherent self-narrative and moral identity that is socially acceptable, the processing of transgressions provides us with a particularly unique lens in understanding this development in adolescents. Not only did our study reinforce that narrative identity is gendered, but it also extended these findings by demonstrating that the process remains gendered even when dealing with experiences of transgression. It also extended previous research by exploring the extent of elaboration and internal state content in regards to perspective-taking. Our study suggests that perspective-taking is also gendered. Most importantly, gender is essential to understanding identity development and perspective-taking in adolescents.

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Figure 1. Mean emotion language by gender of adolescent and narrative type

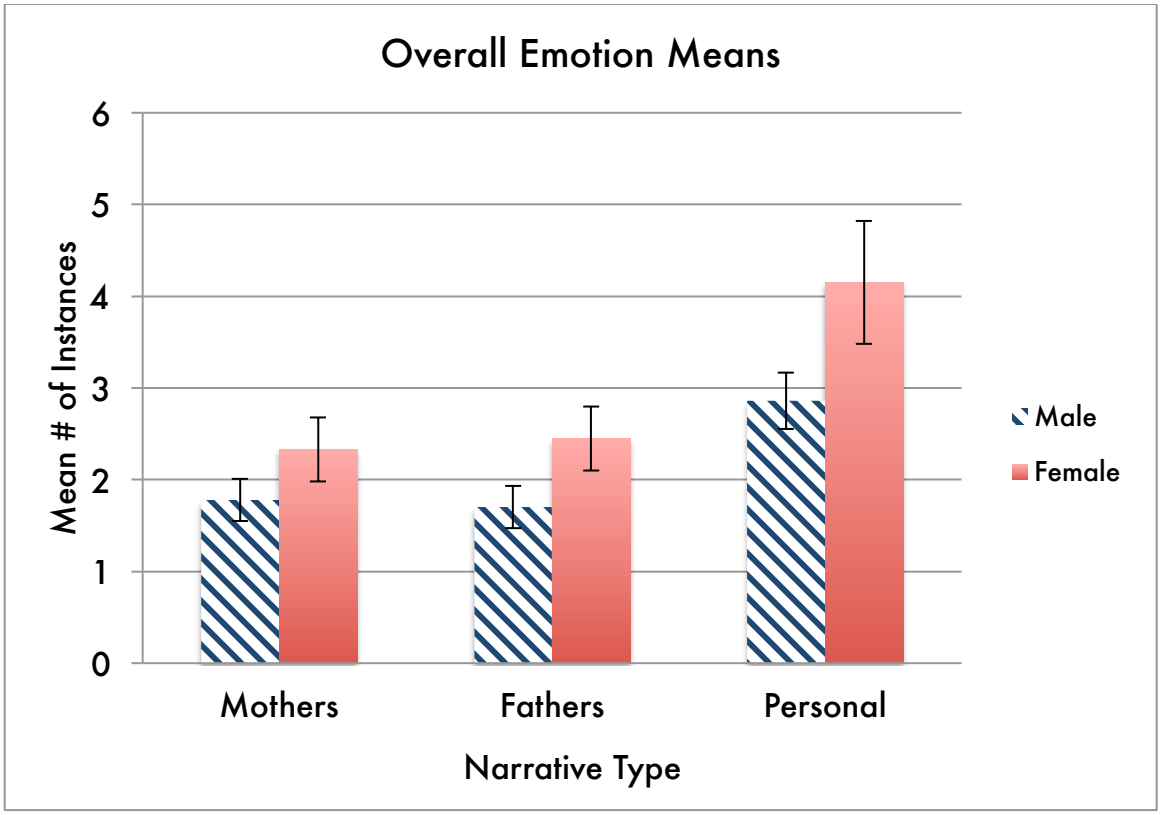


Figure 2. Mean moral emotion language by gender of adolescent and narrative type

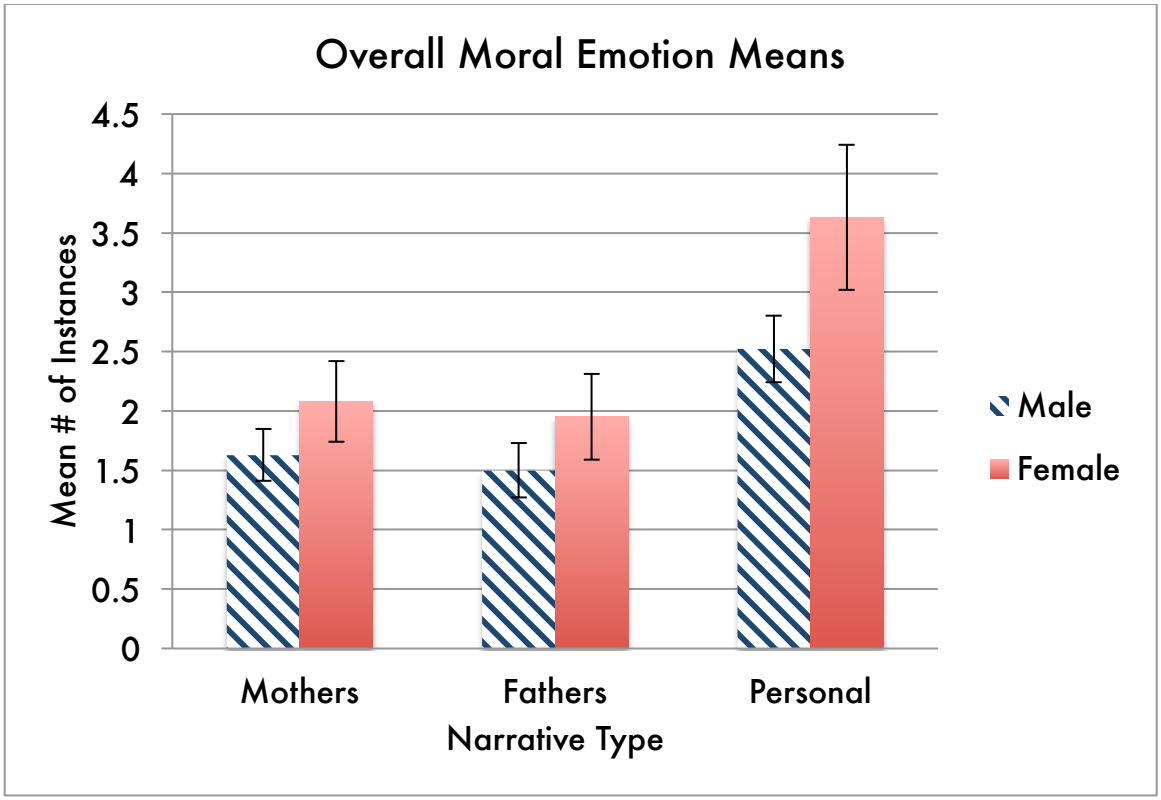


Figure 3. Mean cognitive language by gender of adolescent and narrative type

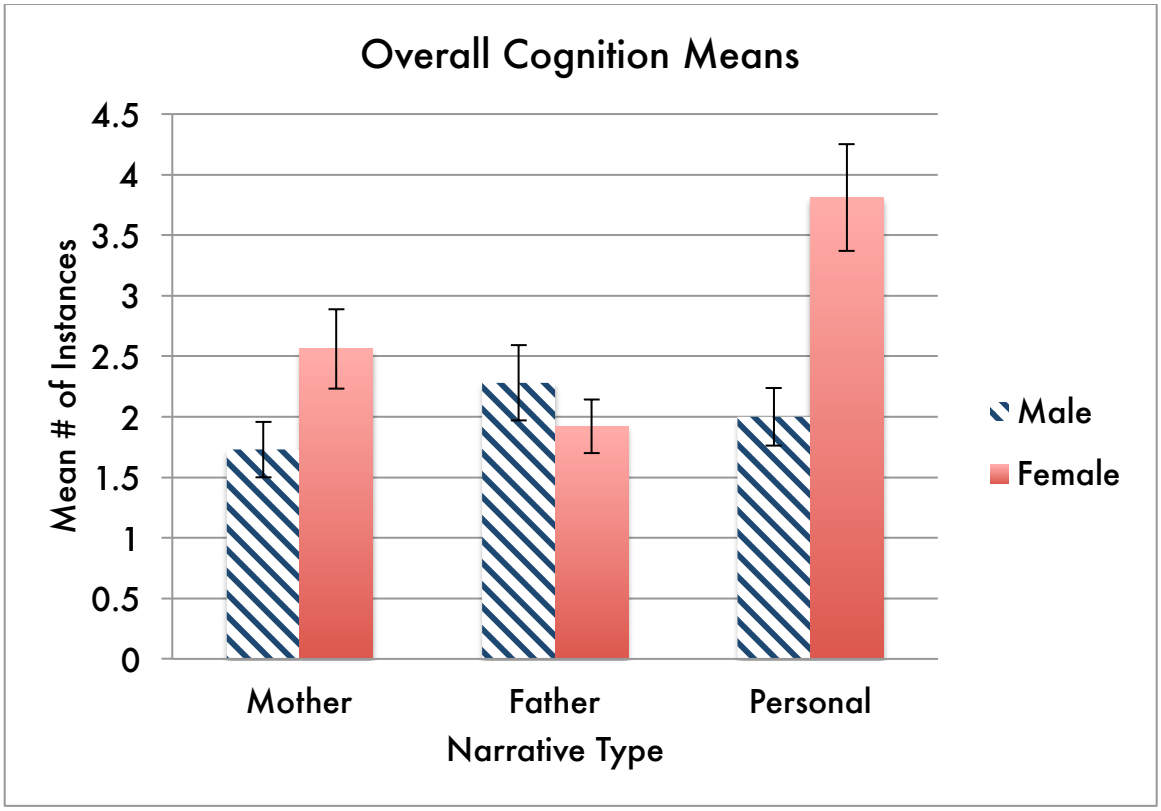


Figure 4. Mean moral cognitive language by gender of adolescent and narrative type

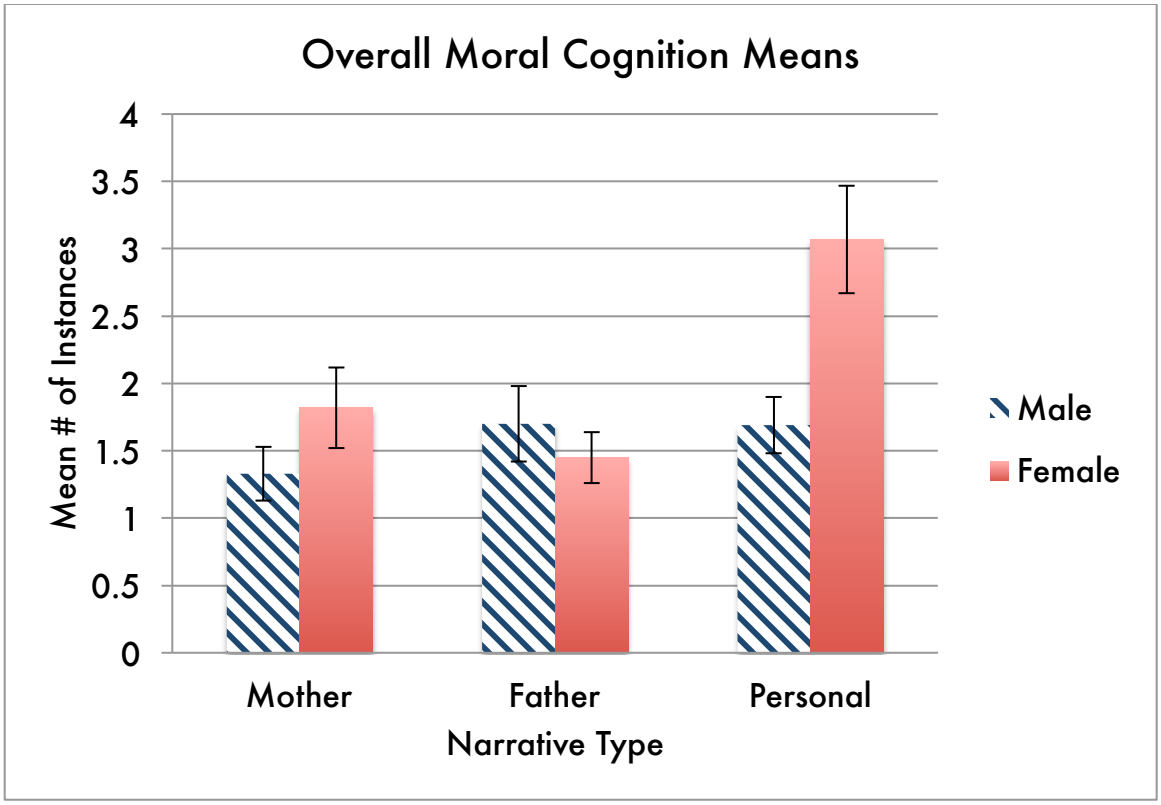


Figure 5. Mean moral evaluative language by gender of adolescent and narrative type

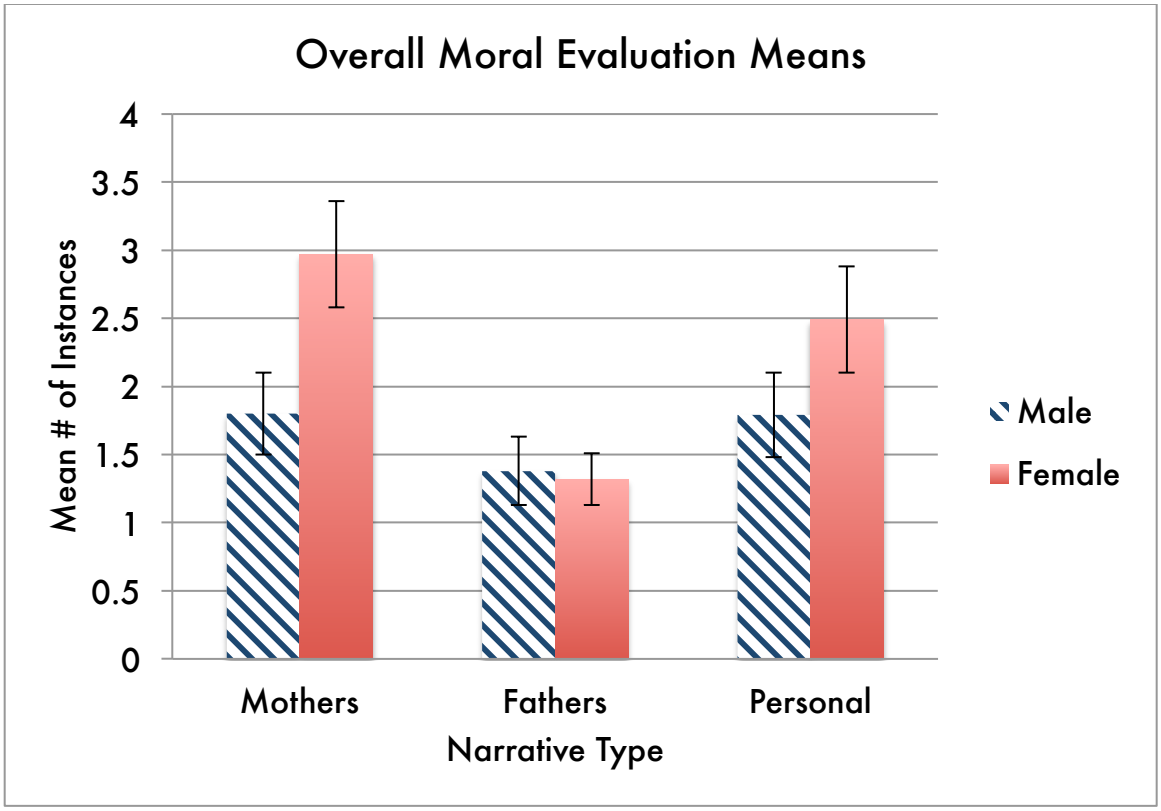


Figure 6. Mean moral evaluative language by 'self' by gender of adolescent and narrative type

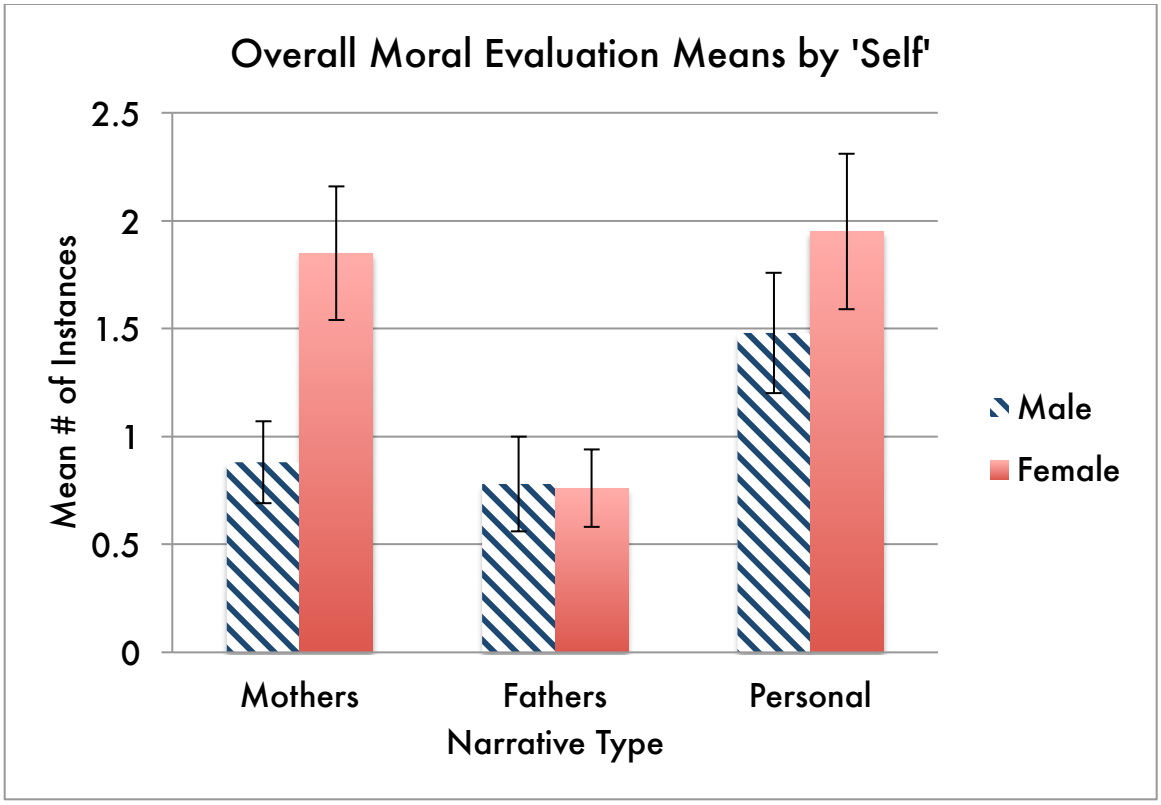


Figure 7. Mean moral evaluative language by 'parent' by gender of adolescent and narrative type

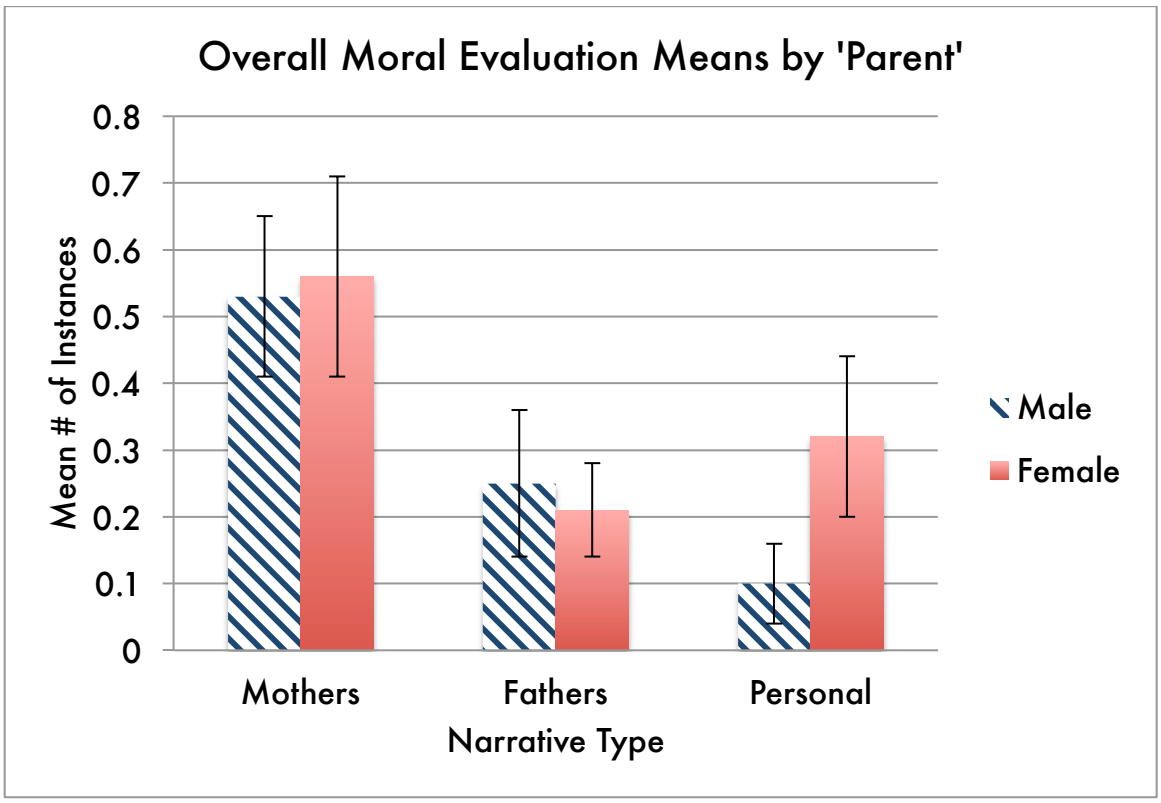
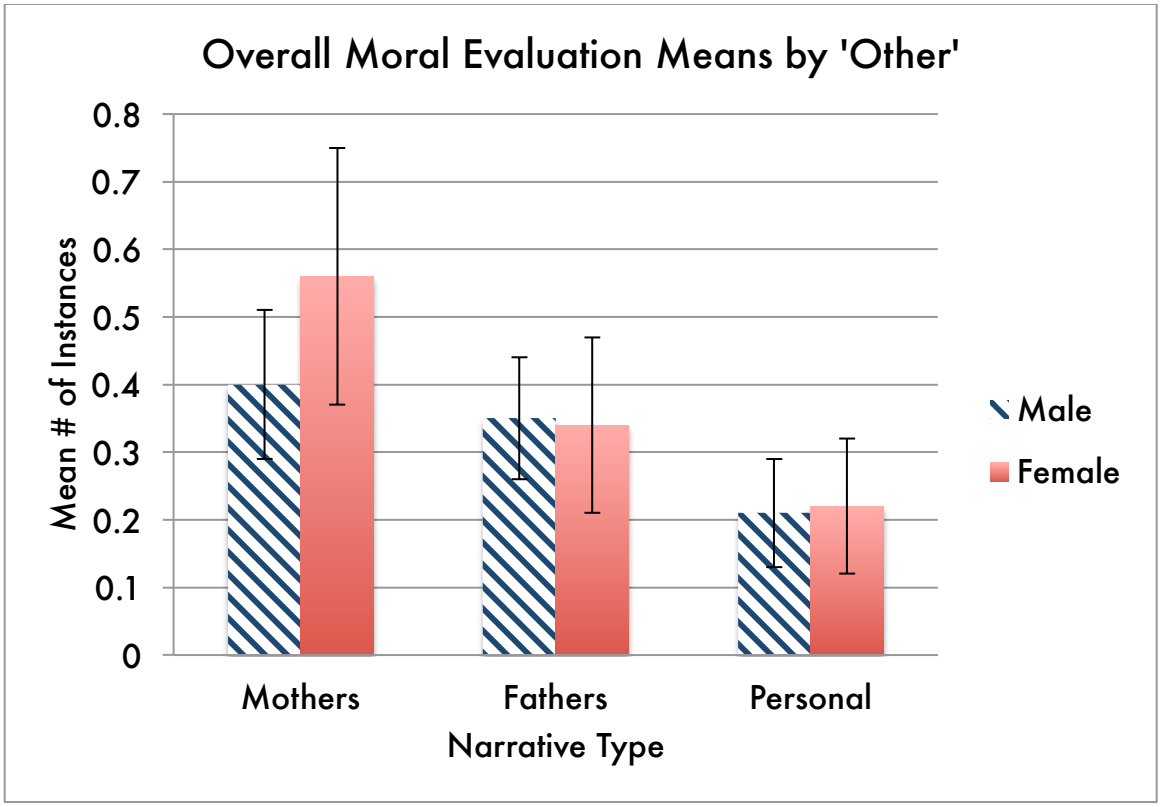


Figure 8. Mean moral evaluative language by 'other' by gender of adolescent and narrative type



Appendix A

Personal Narrative by Female

By the age of 9, it was evident that *I had an unmatched talent*[1] in playing soccer. I was on numerous traveling teams, participated in countless tournaments, and by age 13, had even *won*[2] several w/the company of my teammates. Though, at this age of transitions, from adolescent to teen, I made a *decision*[3], that to this day, I will *consider*[4] to be "wrong." I stopped playing. I *wanted*[5] my weekends to be open to friends, parties, & experiences *I could have gone without experiencing*[6]. By this time, *my advancing talents*[7] were *recognized*[8] by AUSA (Atlanta United Soccer Association) & demanded 3 (2hr Sessions) of training a week & traveling Saturday & Sunday for games & tournaments. I made a sacrifice to change my environment & *re-level*[9] my values. Though, what ended up happening was a *hindsight view*[10] that my life experiences would *only be improved*[11] by the presence of soccer in life.

Ultimately, I had my free time & was able to *enjoy*[12] friends & events. I made all A's in high school & *thought*[13] my decision had worked in my favor, though, what I came *to find*[14] was that it had not.

College applications began asking about extracurricular activities I participated in during high school. I had none. Instead of filling my applications w/tournament achievements & HS soccer team accomplishments, my adolescent success would not be reflective of my activities in his school. Where it would've counted most, *I made a wrong decision*[15]. The colleges w/emphasis on extracurricular activities, *I didn't get in to*[16]. My grades meant nothing & *my decision*[17] to quit playing soccer split a *well-rounded student into just a good student*[18]. For that, I will always *regret*[19] that *decision*[20].

[1]Moral Evaluation. Self. Positive

[2] Moral Evaluation. Other. Positive

[3] Cognition. Self. Moral

[4] Cognition. Self. Moral

[5] Cognition. Self. Nonmoral

[6] Moral Evaluation. Self. Negative

[7] Moral Evaluation. Other. Positive

[8] Cognition. Other. Nonmoral

[9] Cognition. Self. Moral

[10] Cognition. Self. Moral

[11] Moral Evaluation. Self. Positive

[12] Emotion. Self. Positive. Nonmoral

[13] Cognition. Self. Moral

[14] Cognition. Self. Moral

[15] Moral Evaluation. Self. Negative

[16] Moral Evaluation. Other. Negative

[17] Cognition. Self. Moral

[18] Moral Evaluation. Self. Negative

[19] Emotion. Self. Negative. Moral

[20] Cognition. Self. Negative. Moral

Appendix B

Personal Narrative by Male

At fifteen I was invited to a party for my Highschool homecoming. There were going to be girls, and alcohol. I told my parent that weekend that I would be spending the nights at my xxxx friends house, and I assured them I would net get involved in highschool Shannanagans. *I obviously lied or I would not be writing this in my transgression page*[1]. On Friday night was the big game. We won against Xxxxx Xxxxx that night and it *felt great*[2]. That night I was out till 3 am chilling with friends. The next day was the big party.

That night my parents called me to see what I was doing. I told them I was playing call of Duty with my friends and that was the reason it was so loud. *I feel*[3] like this was a transgression because I lied to *the people who love me the most*[4].

[1]Emotion. Parent. Positive. Moral.

[2]Emotion. Self. Positive. Nonmoral

[3]Cognition. Self. Moral

[4]Moral Evaluation. Self. Positive.

[5]Moral Evaluation. Self. Negative

Appendix C

Narrative of Mother's Transgression

My mother's parent got divorced when she was a teenager. Even though she personally *didn't do anything to cause the divorce*[1], she *felt that it her fault*[2]. She *decided*[3] to move out of the house with the rest of her siblings and live with her dad in a neighboring town. My mom *decided*[4] to leave the rest of her three sisters, brother, and mom because she was so *upset*[5] with her mom for divorcing her dad. In a way she *wanted*[6] to punish her because she *thought her mom was in a sense punishing her*[7] (my mom) with the divorce.

When my mom moved out of her mother's house, the rest of the family was *devastated*[8] because their big and older sister had left them to *take care of*[9] their mentally unstable mother. After much *guilt*[10] from her siblings and mom, she *felt horrible*[11] that she abandoned her family and finally *realized that the divorce was not her fault*[12] ~~I~~ – it was because her father was *unbearable*[13] to live with (she finally *discovered*[14] when she moved in with him). My mom *felt so much guil*[15]*t* after *realizing*[16] she ~~had~~ left her younger siblings and fragile mother by themselves and had not only lost their dad or husband, but their *leader of a sister*[17]. My mom moved back into my grandmother (her moms) house (Capetown, South Africa) and had to live with xx some *guilt*[18] for leaving her family in the first place.

[1] Moral Evaluation. Self. Positive

[2] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[3] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[4] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[5] Emotion. Parent. Negative. Moral

[6] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[7] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[8] Emotion. Other. Negative. Moral

[9] Emotion. Other. Negative. Moral

[10] Emotion. Parent. Negative. Moral

[11] Emotion. Parent. Negative. Moral

[12] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[13] Moral Evaluation. Parent. Negative

[14] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[15] Emotion. Parent. Negative. Moral

[16] Cognition. Parent. Moral

[17] Moral Evaluation. Self. Positive.

[18] Emotion. Parent. Negative. Moral

Appendix D

Narrative of Father's Transgression

When my father was young, he was involved in a car accident. However *he was at fault*[1] because he was driving drunk. He did not hit another person, rather a pole. *Thankfully*[2] no one was hurt. My dad *received a DUI*[3], and also had to go to an AA meeting weekly. He made the *very stupid decision*[4] to drive that night and he *realizes*[5] how lucky he was the he not only didn't hurt someone, but did not kill himself.

However in a related not, I have never seen my dad drink an alcoholic beverage, and he hasn't had one in 25 years.

[1] Moral Evaluation. Self. Negative

[2] Moral Evaluation. Self. Positive

[3] Moral Evaluation. Self. Negative

[4] Cognition. Parent. Moral