

Processes and Content of Narrative Identity Development in Adolescence: Gender and Well-Being

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The present study examined narrative identity in adolescence (14–18 years) in terms of narrative content and processes of identity development. Age- and gender-related differences in narrative patterns in turning point memories and gender differences in the content and functions for sharing those memories were examined, as was the relationship between narrative patterns and self-esteem. The narrative patterns focused on were meaning-making (learning from past events) and emotionality of the narratives, specified as overall positive emotional tone and redemptive sequencing. Results showed an age-related increase in meaning-making but no gender differences in the degree of meaning-making. Results further showed that gender predicted self-esteem and that boys evidenced higher self-esteem. Emotionality also predicted self-esteem; this was especially true for redemption and for boys. In terms of telling functions, girls endorsed more relational reasons for telling memories than did boys. Results are discussed in terms of potential gendered and nongendered pathways for identity development in adolescence.

Keywords: narrative identity, adolescence, self-esteem, autobiographical memory

The development of identity is the central task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968), and narrative meaning-making has been proposed as one of the major processes by which identity is constructed (e.g., Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007). Engaging in narrative practices, such as reflecting on past events or talking about them with others, is an important way in which people develop life stories or a narrative identity (e.g., Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean et al., 2007; Thorne, 2000) and is related to positive well-being in research with adults (e.g., King, 2001; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001; Pals, 2006). However, gender differences in childhood socialization practices and in relations between narrative patterns and well-being in childhood (e.g., Fivush, Bohanek, Marin, & Duke, in press; Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007) raise the questions of whether or not boys and girls will construct narrative identity in different ways in adolescence and whether or not gender moderates relations between narrative patterns and well-being. Our aim in the present study was to examine gender differences in potential mechanisms of narrative identity develop-

ment and in the content of narratives, as well as narrative predictors of self-esteem, as potentially moderated by gender.

Narrative Meaning-Making in the Construction of Identity

A constructed narrative is a representation of past event details, but, perhaps more important, it provides a venue for the evaluation and interpretation of the past (e.g., Fivush, 2001). Our work is driven by the assumption that narrative meaning-making processes are the mechanisms through which identity is constructed. Researchers have taken a variety of approaches to exploring the narrative processes by which individuals construct meaning, such as focusing on the use of internal state language (e.g., Fivush & Baker-Ward, 2005; Pennebaker & Francis, 1996) and using socio-linguistic strategies (e.g., Labov, 2006; Tannen, 1987). We define meaning-making as the degree to which one learns something about oneself from reflecting on past events (e.g., McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean & Thorne, 2003). In this study, we examined meaning-making within turning point memory narratives, which focus specifically on how one has changed over time. Such narratives provide a clear context in which to examine how individuals make explicit meaning of the past in relation to the current self.

Gender and Meaning-Making

Previous findings have been somewhat contradictory with regard to gender differences in meaning-making. Research that has shown some of the clearest gender differences has focused on the development of narrative skills in childhood. For example, in conversations about the past, parents are more likely to discuss and elaborate emotional states, in particular sadness, with daughters than with sons (see Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Fivush & Buckner, 2000). Further, over time girls become more focused on orientation and evaluative components of narrative

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than do boys, particularly as they narrate the psychological and emotional aspects of events (Haden, Haine, & Fivush, 1997). Thus, Fivush (1991) suggested that parents may work harder to help resolve negative affect with their daughters than with their sons. This may put daughters on a path toward developing a more elaborated self-concept, particularly in terms of emotional experiences (see also Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003).

These differences in parent-child conversations map onto some data on adult gender differences in autobiographical memory. For example, women report their memories to be more personally revealing than do men and their narratives tend to be longer than men's narratives (Thompson, Skowronski, Larsen, & Betz, 1996). These findings perhaps reflect the socialization toward more elaborated memories in childhood.

Moreover, research has consistently demonstrated gender differences in the content of narratives. Fivush and colleagues have shown that parents socialize more relational themes in their daughter's narratives and that girls' narratives contain more relational content, such as relationship references and social events (Fivush et al., 2000; Fivush & Buckner, 2000, 2003). Similarly, research with adults shows that women report more communal and intimacy-oriented narratives than do men (e.g., McAdams et al., 2004, 2006). Together, these findings suggest that there may be gender differences in narrative processes and content in childhood and in adulthood.

However, gender differences in explicit references to how one has changed or what one has learned about the self—the kind of meaning we examined in this study—have been found to be consistently lacking in prior research studies. These studies have found no gender differences in meaning-making as we have defined it here (McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean & Thorne, 2003), growth themes or integrative memories (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005), or the report of self-event connections (Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006). However, previous research has focused on older adolescents and adults, and, as such, it is not yet known whether gender differences in explicit meaning-making exist earlier in adolescence, when the capacity for this kind of meaning-making is likely to emerge (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, in press).

The apparent contradictions in previous findings relating to gender differences may be due to differences in the measurement of meaning (e.g., elaborative narrative devices in childhood vs. explicit lessons and insights) or possibly to differences relating to the social versus individual focus of the research. Studies with young children have explored narrative development within the context of conversations. In contrast, studies with late adolescents and adults have generally examined representations of past experience that are usually written. Fivush and Buckner (2003) have argued that gender may be “foregrounded” or “backgrounded” depending on the particular situation and context. In this view, it is possible that conversational (i.e., relational) contexts are particularly likely to bring gender differences to the foreground and that these differences are backgrounded in tasks involving the representation of experience.

Further, Fivush and Buckner (2003) suggest that, although gender never ceases to be important, particular stages of development may bring gender further into the foreground. It is possible that childhood gender differences may be more prominent in narratives

because gender is highly relevant to the child's self-concept at this stage, with gender differentiation and segregation being most prominent in middle childhood (Maccoby, 1988; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1989). Although there are few data on gender differences in adolescent narratives, it is possible, given the prominent task of identity development, that gender differences in meaning-making will be backgrounded to other aspects of identity, such as establishing social commitments (Erikson, 1968) or understanding one's self as coherent across time (e.g., Habermas & Bluck, 2000). That is, boys and girls may focus on identity development in similar ways as self-definition is given more prominence during adolescence.

Given the contradictions in previous research on gender differences as well as potential contextual and developmental influences on the relative salience of gender differences, we did not have hypotheses about gender differences in adolescents' meaning-making processes. Nevertheless, we did expect to find gender differences in thematic content of narratives, given that gender differences have been found in the thematic content of both children's and adult's narratives (e.g., Fivush et al., 2000; Fivush & Buckner, 2000, 2003; McAdams et al., 2004). Thus, we examined the thematic content of the narratives with the expectation that girls would report more relational turning point narratives than would boys.

Finally, we also expected that gender would be foregrounded in more relational aspects of narrative development, in particular in the reasons that the turning point memories were told to others. Recently, McLean et al. (2007) proposed that personal storytelling is a mechanism by which narrative identity develops (see also Fivush et al., in press; Pasupathi, 2001; Thorne, 2000). That is, telling stories to others helps people to make connections between their experiences and their selves or to make meaning of their experiences. One important aspect of storytelling where gender differences exist is the reason one has for telling the story (e.g., Alea & Bluck, 2003; McLean, 2005; Pasupathi, 2006). Late adolescent and emerging adult males report higher frequencies of telling memories for entertainment (McLean, 2005), and women report reminiscing for more relational reasons, such as to increase intimacy in relationships, and for the sake of conversation (Bischoping, 1993; see also Pillemer, Wink, DiDonato, & Sanborn, 2003; Webster & McCall, 1999). Therefore, we expected that adolescent girls would report telling their memories more for relational reasons (e.g., to get closer to others) than would boys and that boys would report telling their memories more for entertainment functions than would girls. One reason that we were particularly interested in this topic is that storytelling is viewed as a potential mechanism for narrative identity development (e.g., McLean et al., 2007), and we propose that this social process may be one place in which gender is foregrounded in adolescents' narrative practices.

Age and Meaning-Making

It has been hypothesized that adolescence is a special time for the development of meaning-making for two reasons: the newly prominent developmental task of identity construction and the new cognitive skills that emerge to facilitate that task (see Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Indeed, identity development is the prominent developmental task adolescents face as they are pushed by both

psychological and social factors to define the self (Erikson, 1968). Further, Harter and her colleagues (Harter, 2003, 2006; Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, 1997; Harter & Monsour, 1992) have found that cognitive developments in adolescence lead to an increasing capacity to consider and ultimately reconcile multiple abstractions relating to the self (e.g., self as happy and depressed may become unified in an abstraction of “moody”). We view the task of reconciling multiple aspects of the current self as a process analogous to reconciling aspects of the self across time, which is at the center of narrative identity development. Thus, due to adolescents’ increasing capacity for and interest in engaging in complex thought about the self, we predicted that meaning-making would show age-related increases across adolescence, replicating prior research (McLean et al., *in press*).

Self-Esteem and Narrative Patterns

We wanted to examine the relation between narrative patterns and self-esteem in addition to associations between age and gender. A survey of previous research reveals interesting trends, such that gender appears to moderate how narrative practices relate to well-being in childhood and early adolescence (Bohanek, Marin, & Fivush, 2008; Fivush et al., *in press*; for a review, see Fivush et al., 2006). In contrast, research with midlife adults has seldom found gender differences in how narrative patterns predict well-being (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Bauer et al., 2005). We situated our study in adolescence, as this period not only has been relatively neglected in studies of narrative development (for exceptions, see Bohanek, 2006; Bohanek, Marin, Fivush, & Duke, 2006; Fivush et al., *in press*; Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, *in press*; McLean et al., *in press*) but is when identity development is particularly critical.

Adolescent self-esteem has received a great deal of attention because, on average, it declines in adolescence, in particular for girls (e.g., Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005). However, results from a longitudinal study show that some adolescents increase in self-esteem over the course of adolescence, particularly those who conform to normative gender roles (Block & Robins, 1993). For example, girls who showed an increase in self-esteem across adolescence were rated as more protective and sympathetic at age 14, and boys whose self-esteem increased were rated as more self-satisfied at age 14 (see also Thorne & Michaelieu, 1996). Though these results are correlational, one interpretation of them is that conforming to the gendered expectations of one’s culture is a way to maintain or increase positive views of one’s self.

In one of the only studies of which we are aware that has examined meaning-making and well-being with a sample of early-to-late adolescents (though the sample included only boys), meaning-making was related to low well-being in early adolescent boys (11–13 years), though this trend disappeared by late adolescence (17–18 years; McLean et al., *in press*). One possible explanation for these findings is that meaning-making can be construed as a more “feminine” practice, as it involves thinking and disclosing about the self and is a practice in which girls receive more scaffolding than do boys in childhood (e.g., Reese & Fivush, 1993). Thus, those boys who are engaged in meaning-making in early adolescence may be breaking gender norms. Further, given increasing pressure to fit into peer groups, early adolescence may be a particularly difficult time to be engaged in nonnormative

gender practices (e.g., Gavin & Furman, 1989). Though we did not have an early adolescent sample in this study, we investigated the possibility that gender moderated the relationship between meaning-making and well-being.

We also examined the emotionality of narratives as a predictor of self-esteem. Meaning-making involves the interpretation of past events, but the emotionality of reconstructed past events may also be a predictor of healthy functioning. Self-esteem often is measured in terms of how positively one views the self (e.g., Rosenberg, 1965); thus, it is reasonable to expect that more positive narratives about the self would predict higher self-esteem. Indeed, constructing positive narratives about the self may be one way to maintain high self-esteem across adolescence (e.g., McLean et al., 2007). In support of this, Reese et al. (2007) found that mothers who emphasized positive aspects of events (regardless of the valence of the actual event) had children with higher self-esteem.

Another way to examine the emotionality of narratives is to examine the emotional sequencing of the narrative. McAdams has written robustly about the importance of the redemptive sequence (when bad turns to good) in predicting psychosocial adaptation, such as well-being and generativity in adults. For example, McAdams et al. (2001) found that redemptive sequencing in narratives was a better predictor of well-being than was the overall affective tone of narratives. This finding suggests that redemptive restructuring is a powerful narrative tool for managing difficult events in midlife. In a longitudinal investigation, Reese, Yan, Jack, and Hayne (*in press*) found that references to positive emotions in adolescence were predicted by parent–child conversations in early childhood in which mothers emphasized negative emotions. They interpreted this finding in terms of redemption and suggested that conversations about negative events in early childhood may help children find the silver lining of subsequent events in adolescence. Thus, we expected that redemption in episodes of self-change would predict high self-esteem both for boys and for girls. Further, in light of findings in the adult literature (McAdams et al., 2001), we expected that redemption would be a better predictor of self-esteem than would overall positive tone.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

1. Meaning-making in relation to gender and age: Analyses of gender differences in the degree of meaning-making were exploratory, but we expected that meaning-making would be positively correlated with age.
2. Narrative content and functions for telling: Girls will report more relational narratives and more relational functions for telling than will boys.
3. Meaning-making and self-esteem: Relations between meaning-making and self-esteem were exploratory, with gender included as a potential moderator. We also examined age as a moderator between meaning and self-esteem.
4. Narrative emotionality and self-esteem: Positive tone and redemption will predict self-esteem in both boys and girls; however, redemption will have greater predictive validity than will positivity.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 171 adolescents ($n = 77$ boys) at a private school in an urban area of Northern California. Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations of the narrative and well-being variables by gender. Age ranged from 14 to 18 years ($M = 15.68$ years, $SD = 1.48$); of the participants, 52 were age 14, 34 were age 15, 18 were age 16, 39 were age 17, and 28 were age 18. Self-reported ethnicities included White ($n = 84$), Black ($n = 9$), Asian ($n = 28$), Latino/Hispanic ($n = 2$), and Mixed ($n = 39$). Nine participants did not report ethnicity. Though this was a private school, 40% of the students received financial aid.

Procedure

Students were recruited from science courses. Letters explaining the nature of the study were sent to parents and students. Eighty-two percent of the eligible students and their parents agreed to participate. Students were tested in one 45-min session during class.

Tasks and Measures

Self-esteem. Adolescents' level of self-esteem was assessed through the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This scale asks participants to indicate the extent to which they agree with statements evaluating the self as positive or negative on a 4-point scale ($\alpha = .86$).

Narrative task. Participants were asked to write about a turning point memory (i.e., an episode in the life story during which the individual experiences a significant change). The instructions for this task were modified from McAdams' guided autobiography instructions to be made suitable for a younger group (McAdams, 2006; available at <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/guided/>). After the memory had been written, participants were asked questions about the reasons the memory was told; rating scales were 1–5 for each function. Functions included to get advice, entertain others, better understand the memory, explain the self, feel closer to someone, make someone feel better, share the self, and teach others (the last four were deemed the more relational functions). These functions were derived from past stud-

ies that have identified common functions for telling memories (e.g., McLean, 2005; Webster & McCall, 1999). Participants were asked to indicate how often they had told the memory using the same scale as for the functions questions. Several other surveys and open-ended questions were given, but they are not relevant to the present study.

Narrative Coding

All written responses were transcribed and all participant responses were scored by the authors, who reached consensus on each case. Reliability was conducted on 20% of the cases with a reliability coder who was blind to the age and gender (where possible) of the participants. Intraclass correlations for reliability are reported below.

Meaning-making. Each narrative was coded for sophistication of meaning, on the basis of McLean and Pratt's (2006) recent adaptation of the system developed by McLean and Thorne (2003). Memories were coded according to a 4-point scale that captures the degree of meaning-making ($r = .89$). A score of zero was assigned to narratives that contained no explanation of the meaning of the event to the self. Narratives were scored as 1 if there was mention of a specific lesson that the reporter learned from the event. A score of 2 was assigned to narratives that contained "vague meaning"; narratives of this sort describe some growth or change in the self, but the specifics of the change are not clear. Narratives were scored as 3 if there was evidence that the reporter had gleaned specific emotional, psychological, or relational insight from the event that applied to broader areas of the reporter's life.

Emotion. Narratives were coded for overall positive emotion on a 3-point scale ($r = .98$).¹ A score of 1 represented no positive emotion in evidence. Narratives were scored as 2 if there was evidence of some positive emotion and as 3 if they were strongly positive. To capture redemption, we coded the narratives for both beginning emotional tone ($r = .90$) and end emotional tone ($r = .89$). Both the beginning and the end of each narrative were assigned a code of negative (1), neutral (2), or positive (3). Redemption was identified if the beginning story tone was negative (1) and the end story tone was positive (3).

Content. We used an inductive approach to coding event types and arrived at 12 topics ($\kappa = .83$). Four of these topics concerned relationships: family, friends, romance, and peers (general acquaintances or groups, as opposed to specific friends). Self-discovery involved learning about aspects of one's character or personality, whereas beliefs and values centered on learning about political beliefs, morals, and the like. Career and interests narratives concerned changing one's directions or discovering a new talent or idea for one's future. Mortality narratives focused on life-and-death issues. External transitions concerned changes due to things outside of the person, the most common of which was changing schools. Mental health concerned issues with psychological functioning. Achievement concerned successes at school, sports, or extracurricular activities. Finally, autonomy concerned narratives about independence.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Narrative and Self-Esteem Variables by Gender

Variable	Boys	Girls
Meaning ^a (M, SD)	1.53, 1.09	1.50, 1.17
Positive tone (M, SD)	2.24, 0.80	2.29, 0.81
Redemption (% present)	13%	17%
Well-being		
Self-esteem (M, SD)	3.25, 0.44	2.97, 0.45

Note. Meaning, positive tone, and self-esteem are scored from 0 to 3, 1 to 3, and 1 to 4, respectively.

^a The scale is meant to be linear, and the meaning scores were evenly distributed across each anchor point (i.e., 0 = 25%, 1 = 24%, 2 = 22%, 3 = 29%).

¹ We also coded overall negative emotional tone, but negativity and positivity resulted in the same predictive validity, just in opposite directions. Thus, for the sake of simplicity we include only results with positivity here.

Results

Descriptives

To determine if ethnic differences were present, we ran analyses of variance using ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, and Mixed for sample size considerations) and gender as the between-subjects factors and the meaning-making, emotionality, memory functions questions, and self-esteem variables as the dependent measures. A more stringent alpha level ($p < .01$) was used because of the possibility for Type 1 errors in these exploratory analyses. These analyses revealed no significant main effects of ethnicity or interactions between ethnicity and gender; thus, ethnicity is not considered further.

Main Analyses

Meaning-making: Gender and age. There were no gender differences in the degree of meaning-making, $t(162) = .47, ns$. Controlling for word count, as expected, age was positively correlated with meaning-making, partial $r(161) = .20, p < .01$. Figure 1 shows that the major jump in meaning-making appears to be in mid-to-late adolescence. This finding is similar to that of our recent investigation with another sample (McLean et al., in press).

Event types: Gender. Overall, the most common event types were narratives about peers (17%), values and beliefs (13%), and autonomy (11%). When the groups were split by gender (see Table 2), the most common events for boys were values and beliefs (20%), followed by peers (16%) and autonomy and self-discovery (both at 9%). For girls, the most common was peers (18%), followed by autonomy (12%) and self-discovery and external

Table 2
Percentage of Event Types by Gender

	Boys	Girls
Event type		
Romance	33	67
Peers	41	59
Friends	39	61
Self-discovery	40	60
Career/interests	50	50
Family	44	56
Values and beliefs	67	33
Mortality	50	50
External transitions	36	64
Mental health	46	54
Achievement	43	57
Autonomy	35	65

transitions (both at 10%). Inspection of these percentages suggests that girls report more narratives about relationships concerning peers, friends, and romance, as well as self-discovery, external transitions, and autonomy. Boys reported more narratives about beliefs and values. Boys and girls were equal or nearer to equal on career/interests, family, mortality, mental health, and achievement. To test our hypothesis about gender differences in relational content, we grouped the narratives as relational (peers, family, friends, romance) and nonrelational. Although the percentages were in the predicted direction (60% of relational narratives were from girls), unexpectedly, there were no significant gender differences in relational content, $\chi^2(1) = .73, ns$.

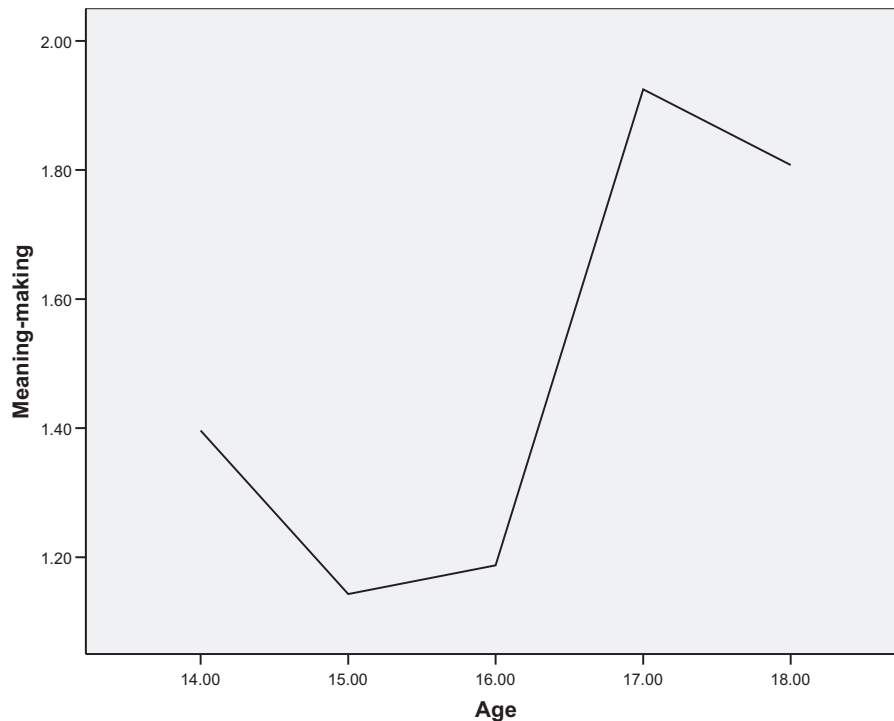


Figure 1. Age and meaning-making.

Telling functions: Gender. As expected, girls reported higher mean levels of relational functions: sharing the self, $t(154) = -2.33, p < .05$; telling to make others feel better, $t(154) = -2.53, p < .05$; and telling to get closer to others, $t(154) = -2.66, p < .01$. Unexpectedly, there were no gender effects on entertainment, nor were there gender differences for to get advice, to explain the self, or to teach others. Finally, girls reported telling their memories more often than did boys, $t(154) = -2.74, p < .01$.

Self-esteem. Regression analyses were conducted to test the unique and combined effects (i.e., main effects, interaction effects) of meaning-making, emotion, gender (dummy coded), and age on self-esteem. We conducted four regressions, each predicting self-esteem. All results for the following regressions are shown in Table 3.

The first regression included main effects of age and gender in Step 1, meaning in Step 2, and Age \times Meaning and Gender \times Meaning in Step 3. In this model there was a main effect for gender, such that girls had lower self-esteem than did boys. There was no main effect of age, no main effect of meaning, and no interaction effects.

The second regression included main effects of age and gender in Step 1, overall positive emotion in Step 2, and Age \times Emotion and Gender \times Emotion in Step 3. There was the same main effect of gender at Step 1. There was also a main effect of gender and positive emotion at Step 2, such that boys and those with more positive emotional tone had higher self-esteem. There were no significant interactions or changes in R^2 at Step 3.

The third regression included main effects of age and gender in Step 1, redemptive imagery in Step 2 (dummy coded as redemption present or absent), and Age \times Redemption and Gender \times Redemption in Step 3. In this model, there was the same main effect of gender at Step 1. At Step 2, there was no significant change in R^2 for effects of redemption. However, there was a main effect of redemptive imagery at Step 3, such that those with greater redemptive imagery had higher self-esteem. There was also an interaction with gender and redemption at Step 3. As can be seen in Figure 2, redemption did not distinguish self-esteem for girls, but for boys, greater redemptive imagery predicted higher self-esteem.

Our fourth regression pitted positive emotion and redemption against each other. We included gender at Step 1, positivity and redemption at Step 2, and Gender \times Positivity and Gender \times Redemption at Step 3. There was a main effect of gender at Step 1. At Step 2, gender and positivity predicted self-esteem but not redemption. At Step 3, gender, redemption, and Gender \times Redemption predicted self-esteem. Thus, for prediction of self-esteem, boys and those with redemptive narratives had higher self-esteem. Therefore, redemption was more important in predicting self-esteem for boys than for girls (see Figure 2). Overall these results suggest that, in relation to the development of the narrative self in adolescence, self-esteem is predicted by gender and emotional imagery, particularly redemption, but is not predicted by meaning.

Table 3
Predicting Self-Esteem

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	β	p	B	β	p	B	β	p
Age	0.06	.06	ns	0.05	.05	ns	0.06	.06	ns
Gender	-0.53	-.26	.001	-0.54	-.26	.001	-0.54	-.26	.001
Meaning				0.02	.02	ns	0.02	.02	ns
Meaning \times Age							0.06	.06	ns
Meaning \times Gender							0.01	.01	ns
R^2		.07			.07			.00	
F for change in R^2		5.93 ($p < .01$)			.05 ($p = ns$)			.29 ($p = ns$)	
Age	0.06	.06	ns	0.05	.05	ns	0.06	.06	ns
Gender	-0.51	-.25	.01	-0.53	-.26	.001	-0.52	-.26	.001
Positive tone				0.20	.19	.05	0.09	.09	ns
Tone \times Age							0.03	.03	ns
Tone \times Gender							0.18	.13	ns
R^2		.07			.10			.11	
F for change in R^2		5.48 ($p < .01$)			6.16 ($p < .05$)			0.64 ($p = ns$)	
Age	0.05	.05	ns	0.04	.04	ns	0.07	.07	ns
Gender	-0.54	-.27	.001	-0.55	-.27	.001	-0.40	-.20	.01
Redemption				0.17	.06	ns	0.83	.29	.05
Redemption \times Age							-0.09	-.04	ns
Redemption \times Gender							-1.04	-.30	.05
R^2		.07			.08			.11	
F for change in R^2		6.36 ($p < .01$)			.61 ($p = ns$)			3.02 ($p = .05$)	
Gender	-0.52	-.25	.05	-0.54	-.26	.001	-0.34	-.18	.05
Positive tone				0.19	.19	.05	0.02	.02	ns
Redemption				0.11	.04	ns	0.85	.30	.05
Tone \times Gender							0.26	.19	ns
Redemption \times Gender							-1.13	-.33	.05
R^2		.06			.10			.15	
F for change in R^2		10.41 ($p < .01$)			3.32 ($p < .05$)			3.78 ($p < .05$)	

Note. ns = nonsignificant.

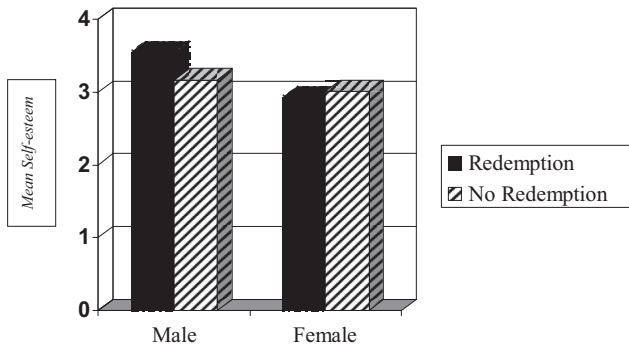


Figure 2. Redemption and gender predicting self-esteem.

Discussion

This study centered on gender and age differences in the development of narrative identity in adolescence. Although there were no mean-level gender differences in the process of meaning-making or in narrative content, there do appear to be gender differences in the processes of telling memories. We also found that positivity of narratives and redemption predicted self-esteem, with redemption appearing particularly important to boys' self-esteem. Finally, we replicated previous work that has found an age-related increase in meaning-making.

Gender and Narrative Identity

There were no gender differences in the degree to which adolescents reported meaning in their turning point narratives, and this suggests that gender differences in the degree of elaboration that are socialized in childhood may not be apparent in the kind of meaning that we examined here (i.e., explicit references to what one has learned about the self). We also found no gender differences in the relational content of narratives. Although we note that this finding could be due to error and should be replicated, it is possible that gender differences fade in adolescence as aspects of self-identity that are not gendered gain prominence. Perhaps they reemerge in adulthood as the nongendered aspects of self-identity become relatively less pressing. It is also possible that relational concerns are similarly prominent for boys and girls in adolescence. Indeed, though there is some debate in the literature about gender differences in the development of intimacy (Camarena, Sarigiana, & Petersen, 1990; Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981), most studies find a significant relation between age and increasing intimacy for boys and for girls (e.g., Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Thus, perhaps it is appropriate that relationship issues are salient both for boys and for girls, as adolescence is a period of important transition in most of one's relationships (i.e., parents, friends, peers, romantic partners).

One area in which we predicted and found gender differences was in the social process of memory telling. We examined telling functions as one potential mechanism for meaning-making and found that girls and boys engaged in this process with different self-reported motivations. As predicted, girls were more likely to report telling their memories for relational reasons. Overall, these results also suggest that though one of the products of story construction (what one has learned about the self) is not gendered,

the social pathways through which adolescents construct that meaning may be gendered.

Narrative Patterns and Well-Being

In terms of well-being, we found no relation between meaning-making and self-esteem, contrary to our previous investigation of boys (McLean et al., in press). One important difference from our previous study is that we did not have an early adolescent sample (in the previous study, this was where we saw the strongest relation between meaning-making and well-being). These sampling differences suggest that we cannot rule out the possibility that meaning-making is related to lower self-esteem at earlier stages of adolescence, but we did find that emotionality in narrative patterns predicted self-esteem. This is consistent with adult research. Positive emotional tone predicted self-esteem both for boys and for girls, though redemptive sequencing was a better predictor of self-esteem, particularly for boys.

Redemption involves reconstructing past negative experiences into more positive experiences, often through processes of self-transformation or learning about the self. Indeed, redemption can be thought of as one manner of meaning-making, in which the individual reconstructs a past event as one in which the tides turned for the better. Indeed, redemption and meaning-making were positively correlated ($r = .36, p < .001$). Thus, it appears that simply learning about the self does not predict self-esteem in middle and late adolescence but constructing experiences as moving from negative to positive does. This process of redemptive narration may be particularly important for adolescents, who face the daunting task of trying to construct self-identity while in the throes of biological, cognitive, and social changes. Finding redemption may be a strategy that allows one to see the positive parts of life and the self. An example of a particularly potent redemptive narrative comes from a report by one of our participants, Pete (all names are pseudonyms), a 17-year-old boy:

I was in the third grade and it was recess. Some kids in my class were being bullied and not being allowed to play kick ball. The bullies were taking up this whole court just for their use. I felt bad for the kids, and thought I should do something. So, I organized a group of kids to help me take back the court. It was our whole class against the bullies. We successfully pushed the bullies off the court, and I felt very proud of myself. It was one of the first times I can remember standing up to people and being a leader. I often still find myself standing up to people, and emphasizing my leadership qualities in many ways. The moment was most significant to me because the bullies were the kids who thought they were the coolest kids in the class and could do whatever they wanted; however, since I led the whole class to turn against them, I felt like some sort of justice has been served.

In this recollection, Pete acts to change a negative situation, turning it positive for himself and for those he was helping.

Redemption appeared to be more important in predicting self-esteem for boys than for girls. Although our sample of redemptive narratives was quite small ($n = 26$), content analysis of these narratives suggests that differences in the themes of girls' and boys' narratives may help to explain gender differences in predicting self-esteem. We examined the redemptive narratives of boys and girls with high self-esteem and found that the boys' narratives were much like Pete's, in that they were quite agentic and focused on personal action or independence. In contrast, almost all of the

girls' redemptive narratives centered on relationships. The following narrative comes from Margaret, a 14-year-old girl:

My turning point was when I went to middle school. In elementary school I wasn't very popular and didn't have a lot of friends, and I didn't exactly know "who I was." Then, when I arrived in middle school, I suddenly had a lot of friends. I even was on Student Body in 8th grade (representing a school of around 1,400 kids). I ran against 5 other kids, and when I won and realized that people actually liked me, that raised my confidence a lot. I think all through those 3 years, I was able to find myself through real friends, and I found confidence.

Here, Margaret finds redemption, and though there is agency in the narrative (running in an election), her emphasis is less on her own agency and more on the realization that people liked her. One possibility is that, for girls, redemption may predict a more relational aspect of well-being than self-esteem. Indeed, in a sample of midlife adults, Lilgendahl and McAdams (2008) found that positive meaning in life story narratives was connected to aspects of well-being that focused on agency for men and to relational aspects of well-being for women.

Limitations and Conclusions

One of the major limitations of our study was the lack of an early adolescent population. Such a sample is important for full replication of past studies (McLean et al., in press) and for understanding how narrative practices are related to well-being for early adolescent girls. We also note that our sample came from a private high school with a strong academic emphasis. This fact may limit generalizability, as these students may have been particularly skilled in their verbal abilities. Nevertheless, given our high participation rates, we suggest that we were likely able to sample a range of backgrounds and abilities. Further, we note that a large proportion of students received financial aid and that our sample was ethnically diverse, thus increasing the generalizability from our previous sample (McLean et al., in press). We also note the limitations of the self-report and cross-sectional nature of our data. Studies that examine development over time, as well as actual conversations, are necessary for fuller understanding of individual trajectories of development and relational processes in the construction of narrative identity.

Overall, our results show that there are age-related differences in the frequency of meaning; these differences most likely reflect cognitive and social developments that allow for meaning-making and motivate an interest in creating a self-story at this stage. We have further shown that there are some gender differences in narrative practices, particularly in terms of the social uses of turning point memories. Further, the emotionality of adolescent narratives appears to be an important predictor of self-esteem, in particular, the restructuring of events from negative to positive. Overall, both boys and girls are actively engaged in constructing a self-story over the course of adolescence, which suggests that this stage is critical for laying the groundwork for continued identity development in adulthood.

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