Family Narrative Interaction and Children's Sense of Self

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Family narratives about the shared past may be a particularly significant site for preadolescents' emerging sense of self both as an individual and as a member of a unified family. We examined the relations between family narrative interaction style when reminiscing and preadolescents' sense of self. Results indicated three narrative interaction styles that describe the extent to which families discuss or fail to discuss their past in integrated and validating ways. Specifically, conversations with a coordinated perspective incorporated information from all members and were related to higher self-esteem, especially in girls. Conversations with an individual perspective, in which family members took turns telling their thoughts and feelings about the event without integration among the perspectives, were associated with a more external locus of control, especially in boys. Conversations with an imposed perspective, in which one family member was in charge of the conversation or in which unpleasant exchanges between members occurred, were not associated with either self-esteem or locus of control. Implications of these narrative interaction styles for children's developing sense of self are discussed.

Keywords: Narrative, Family Interaction, Self, Adolescence

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We experience many important and emotional events with our families, and reminiscing about these shared experiences defines who we are both within the family and as individuals. The process by which families narrate their shared history together provides a framework for each individual family member to understand and integrate shared events into their own individual life stories. For adolescents, who are just developing the abilities to create coherent life narratives (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; McAdams, 1985), differences in the ways in which families narrate their shared

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experiences together may play a critical role in children's developing sense of self (Fivush, 2001; Fivush & Buckner, 2003).

More specifically, narratives are socially and culturally conventionalized forms for organizing and representing our past experiences (Bruner, 1987; McAdams, 1985). Because personal narratives move beyond simple memory of what happened, to include evaluations and perspectives on self and others, narratives are the way through which we create meaning of our personal and shared past and are linked to understanding of self as an individual and in relation to others (Bruner, Fivush & Haden, 1997; Labov, 1982). In this study, we are particularly interested in the process of family narrative interaction—that is, the ways in which families construct narratives of the past together. We hypothesize that families who are able to help their children to create mutually negotiated meaning and a validated shared perspective on past experiences might also be helping their children to develop a sense of self-worth and self-efficacy. Before fleshing out this argument in more detail, we briefly review research on family patterns of communications more generally.

Family Communication

Whereas little research has focused on family narrative interactions, there is a large body of research on family patterns of communication more broadly conceived, and specific parental patterns of communication have been linked to children's developing sense of self. For example, parents who help their children to identify and cope with their emotions have children with fewer negative peer interactions and behavioral problems and who are better able to regulate their emotions (Gottman, 2001; Hooven, Gottman, & Katz, 1995). Further, open and supportive communication styles, as opposed to more controlling and unsupportive communication, foster rich affective relationships between parents and children that contribute to more positive views of the self (Openshaw, Thomas, & Rollins, 1984; Ryan, 1993), higher self-esteem, (Blake & Slate, 1993; Enger, Howerton, & Cobbs, 1994; Kernis, Brown, & Brody, 2000), and a higher sense of self-efficacy in children (see Carton & Nowicki, 1994, for a review). In addition, family interactions that facilitate autonomy while not sacrificing relatedness facilitate positive and healthy self-esteem development in preadolescents (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994). Even for at-risk children, families who engage in more confirmatory communication patterns have children with higher social competence and fewer psychiatric symptoms (Wichstrom, Holte, Husby, & Wynne, 1993; Wynne, 1983).

Thus, it seems as though more controlling patterns of parental communication do not allow for children's opinions and perceptions to be acknowledged, thus causing children to question their value and worth as people and their abilities to be effective agents in the world. Parental communication that is clearly validating and that acknowledges children's perceptions and feelings allows for a sense of value and worth of the individual self, and feelings of autonomy and self-efficacy.

Family Narrative Interaction

Talking about past events together may be a particularly important form of family communication. Through participating in family reminiscing, children learn not only how to become storytellers but also theory builders (Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph, & Smith,

1992). For a family to construct a coherent narrative together, each part of the story must be explained. The members of the family may challenge what was told, add in different pieces, or critique and rework the current ''theory'' of what happened.

Fiese and her colleagues (Fiese & Marjinsky, 1999; Fiese & Sameroff, 1999) have further posited relations between family narratives and children's well-being. Fiese and Marjinsky found that although the overall coherence of narrative interactions during mealtimes had little relation to children's well-being, parents' appropriate modulation of affect was linked to fewer child behavior problems. Related to this, Sales and Fivush (2005) found that when mothers and preadolescent children used more explanations and more emotion talk when narrating a stressful experience together, children had fewer internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

Thus, there is emerging evidence that the ways in which parents discuss the past with their children is related to children's understanding and evaluation of their personal and shared family past. However, whereas some research has shown a relation between family narrative interaction and children's well-being, to date, no study has examined relations between family narrative practices and children's sense of self. This is particularly important because during adolescence, narratives take on new meaning for the individual (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1993, 2001). With the cognitive and social advances of adolescence, individuals are able to organize and integrate memories of their past experiences into a life narrative, allowing for self-continuity and a more complex sense of self (Pillemer, 1998). Thus, for adolescents, who are just beginning to construct a coherent life narrative (Bluck & Habermas; McAdams, 1985), the ways in which families guide them to create more collaborative and integrated narratives may be an important factor in their developing sense of self.

Gender

Provocatively, gender differences have also been found in family narrative interaction. Specifically, parents with daughters engage in more detailed and more relationship-oriented reminiscing than do parents with sons (Buckner & Fivush, 2000; Reese & Fivush, 1993). The different family narrative interactions in which girls and boys engage allow for the direct socialization of gendered modes of self (Fivush & Buckner, 2003). By adolescence, girls report a more relationally oriented sense of self, whereas boys report a more individuated sense of self (Gilligan, 1982; Harter, 1999). Moreover, Block and Robbins (1993) found that the ability to communicate and relate to others promotes positive self-esteem in females, whereas the lack of personal involvement and emotion was linked to higher self-esteem in males. Therefore, it seems likely that different patterns of family narrative interaction, emphasizing and integrating family members' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives, could relate to sense of self differently for boys and girls.

Objectives of the Present Study

In summary, narratives create meaning and provide perspective on our past and on our lives and thus are clearly related to sense of self. Family narrative interaction may be an important site for children's developing sense of self, both as individuals and as members of the family. Moreover, these processes may be particularly critical in early adolescence, when children are just beginning to construct coherent life narratives

(Bluck & Habermas, 2000; McAdams, 1985) and are forming more mature and enduring concepts of self (Harter, 1999). Yet, to date there is no research examining family narrative interaction and children's sense of self. Thus, the two major objectives of this research are, first, to explore and describe patterns of family narrative interaction and, second, to relate these patterns to children's sense of self as measured by self-esteem and locus of control.

Our focus is on the extent to which families negotiate meaning, validate each other's perspectives, and create a shared perspective and evaluation of the past, versus the extent to which family members tell their own independent stories without listening to and validating other family members, or dismissing outright the viewpoints of others. We predict that families who narrate past events in a collaborative, validating, and supportive manner will have children who show higher self-esteem and higher self-efficacy than families who discuss the past in more independent, unsupportive, and disharmonious ways. Finally, we expect gender to play a role in these relations, such that family narrative interactions that emphasize relatedness may be especially important for girls' developing self-worth, whereas family interactions that emphasize independence may be more important for boys' developing sense of self-worth.

METHOD

Participants

The present study is part of a larger, longitudinal project on family narratives, family functioning, and child well-being. Forty middle-class two-parent families were recruited through advertisements and summer sports camps (e.g., tennis, baseball), and approximately 80% of families contacted agreed to participate. Of the 40 families, 33 were identified as dual-earner and 7 as single-earner. All the families had a child between the ages of 9 and 12, 20 with sons and 20 with daughters. Most families had additional children; the majority of families had a total of two children, with a range of one to six children. A total of 29 of the families self-identified as Caucasian, 6 as African or African American, and 5 as mixed race. Thirty of the families in the sample were traditional nuclear families (although we do not have data on whether they were all first marriages), 8 were blended families, and 2 were extended families (traditional nuclear families with at least one additional adult living with them). The family was compensated for their time with $25, and the child was given two movie ticket vouchers. All families signed fully informed consent. Only the procedures and measures relevant to this particular study will be discussed.

Procedures

One of four researchers (three female and one male) visited each family in their home and asked them to discuss a positive and negative event that they had experienced together as a family. After the narratives were completed, the preadolescent target child also filled out questionnaires regarding sense of self.

The families were asked to select one specific positive event and one specific negative event that had taken place in the past 2 to 3 years that everyone had experienced together. Once the families chose the events, they were asked to discuss the event in as natural a manner as possible, as though it had come up in conversation. The researcher then either left the room or moved to an inconspicuous corner of the room to

minimize his or her influence on the conversation. The families were not given any time limits for the event conversations and were asked to move to the next event when they had finished the first (event order was counterbalanced across families). Most families engaged in this reminiscing task for approximately 20 minutes, ranging from about 10 to 30 minutes. Conversations were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Measures

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965) was designed to measure feelings of self-worth. Items are answered on a 4-point scale (*strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree*, *strongly disagree*), with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Sample items include, ''On the whole, I am satisfied with myself'' and ''I feel I do not have much to be proud of.'' The scale generally has high reliability: Test-retest correlations are typically in the range of .82 to .88, and Cronbach's alpha for various samples are in the range of .77 to .88 (Blaskovich & Tomaka, 1993). Furthermore, convergent validity has also been demonstrated for the RSE (Demo, 1985).

Children's Nowicki Strickland Internal-External scale. The Children's Nowicki Strickland Internal-External (CNSIE) scale for ages 9–18 (Nowicki & Duke, 1974) is a 40-item scale designed to assess a child's locus of control, or self-efficacy. Children with higher scores, indicative of an external locus of control, tend to believe that what happens to them is the result of luck, fate, or forces beyond their control. Conversely, those with lower scores (internal locus of control) tend to believe that they have some degree of control over what happens to them. Items from the CNSIE include, ''Are some kids just born lucky?'' and ''Do you often feel that whether you do your homework has much to do with the kind of grades you get?'' Extensive research has demonstrated high reliability and validity for the CNSIE (see Duke & Nowicki, 1973; Nowicki & Duke; Nowicki & Strickland, 1973).

Coding Family Narratives

We were particularly interested in the family style of interaction while narrating shared past events. Based on our predictions, previous research (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999), and inspection of the narratives, we developed five global dimensions along which the narrative interactions varied: collaborative, child centered, parallel, facilitated-moderated, and disharmonious. These dimensions are defined in detail in Table 1. Each narrative was coded on each of these dimensions on a 0–3 scale (0 = *style was not present at all in the conversation*, 3 = *the interaction style was dominant in the story*). Note that each dimension focuses on the process of interaction rather than the content of the narratives.

Two coders independently listened to each audiotaped conversation while simultaneously reading through the transcription and scored each narrative on each dimension. Thus, each narrative received a score of 0–3 on each of these five dimensions. Across the five dimensions, raters agreed 93% of the time for both positive and negative events (range from 88% to 98%). Disagreements within 1 point occurred an additional 6% of the time, and disagreements of 2 points or more occurred only 1% of the time. All disagreements were then resolved through discussion.

TABLE 1

Family Narrative Interaction Styles

Interaction Style	Collaborative	Child Centered	Parallel	Facilitated-Moderated	Disharmonious
Description	The narrative unfolds as the family members each add small bits of information; the narrative is being told by all the participants simultaneously, as if they are all of one mind.	Parents try to elicit information from the children by asking leading questions, prompting them, and giving them cues.	Family members take turns telling the story, each telling his or her own point of view.	The conversation is moderated and facilitated primarily by one parent.	Family members appear to be disconnected, are not like minded, or don't have a shared understanding of events.
Indicators	Family members finish each other's sentences, say the same thing simultaneously, or interrupt without changing the topic.	The conversation is dominated by questions from parents and responses by the children.	Family members listen to each other and are allowed to finish their own thoughts without interruption.	A single moderator initiates topics, chooses speakers, gives extended monologues, or ignores other family member's input.	Mild disagreements, denial of feelings, little shared affect, put-downs, complaining, and parental lecturing.
Combined Styles	**Coordinated Perspective**	**Individual Perspective**		**Imposed Perspective**	

TABLE 2
Description of Events

	Number of Families	Percentage of Families
Positive Events		
Family vacations	31	78%
Sibling birth	3	8%
Sports/tournaments	3	8%
Visits to/from relatives	2	5%
Ceremony	1	1%
Negative Events		
Death of friend/family	12	30%
Death of pet	8	20%
Child's illness/injury	5	13%
Accident/disaster	5	13%
Family conflict	3	8%
Move to new city	3	8%
Mishap during vacation	3	8%
Parent's illness	1	1%

RESULTS

Events Narrated

Table 2 describes the types of positive and negative events that the families chose to discuss. As can be seen, the overwhelming majority of positive events discussed were family vacations. Negative events were more variable, with most families discussing deaths or illnesses, but many families selected conflicts or family moves.

Narrative Interaction Style

Table 3 displays the means and standard deviations for each interaction style for positive and negative event conversations. The *t* tests between the positive and negative events on each style indicated that families were significantly more collaborative in the positive event narratives and significantly more disharmonious in the negative event narratives (see Table 3). However, individual families were consistent in their

TABLE 3
Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) for Each Family Interaction Style Within Positive and Negative Event Narratives, and Correlations and T Tests Between Event Type

	Positive Event Score	Negative Event Score	Correlation Between Pos and Neg Scores	*t*	*P*
Interaction Style					
Collaborative	1.35 (.89)	.73 (.82)	.56**	4.9	**
Child Centered	2.17 (.55)	2.07 (.62)	.49**	1.07	ns
Parallel	2.05 (.50)	2.13 (.56)	.52**	– .90	ns
Facilitated-Moderated	.13 (.52)	.20 (.65)	.54**	– .83	ns
Disharmonious	.10 (.38)	.30 (.61)	.43**	– 2.24	*

ns = nonsignificant.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

TABLE 4

Spearman Correlations Among Interaction Styles: Correlations Among Positive Event Interaction Styles Above Diagonal, Correlations Among Negative Event Interaction Styles Below Diagonal

	Collaborative	**Child Centered**	**Parallel**	**Facilitated-Moderated**	**Dishar-monious**
Collaborative	____	−.37*	−.09	−.33*	−.02
Child Centered	−.30+	____	−.33*	.08	.09
Parallel	.08	−.46**	____	−.03	.16
Facilitated-Moderated	−.21	−.07	−.22	____	−.08
Disharmonious	.02	−.32*	.11	−.01	____

+$p<.10$. *$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

narrative interaction styles across the positive and negative events, as can be seen by the pattern of significant correlations displayed in Table 3. Moreover, correlations among the narrative dimensions, shown in Table 4 for positive and negative events separately, indicated that some of the interaction dimensions were negatively related, such that families engaging in high levels of specific interaction styles engaged in low levels of other interaction styles. To examine these relations in more detail, we conducted a cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is a statistical technique that allows for the detection of higher order levels of relationships among variables. More specifically, cluster analysis examines whether variability along one dimension is related to variability along other dimensions, and then it combines these dimensions into a higher level cluster. Thus, it is similar to factor analysis except that it makes no assumptions about number of cases or distribution of variability. Cluster analyses were initially computed for positive and negative events separately, but because the resulting clusters were identical, a final cluster analysis was conducted across positive and negative event discussions.

This analysis revealed three higher order clusters (see Table 1). First, the parallel and child-centered styles clustered to form an individual perspective style. In the parallel exchanges, family members each take their turn expressing their views and emotions surrounding the events, but there is no integration of thoughts and feelings across family members. Similarly, in the child-centered conversations, parents ask the children for their thoughts and feelings surrounding the events, but there is very little discussion of how the parents felt about the events, and there is also very little integration of facts and emotions across all members of the family. Thus, this cluster seems to describe families who focus on creating individual perspectives on the past event.

Second, the facilitated-moderated and disharmonious styles clustered to form an imposed perspective style. Clearly, in conversations exhibiting the facilitated-moderated style, one parent is imposing his or her perspective of the event onto the other members of the family by directing who should talk and what they should talk about. Similarly, in the disharmonious exchanges, name-calling, negation of emotions, and lecturing serve to discount the perspective of one person and to impose the perspective of another.

The collaborative dimension did not cluster with other dimensions and was renamed *coordinated perspective*. These narratives integrate the emotions, thoughts,

TABLE 5
Means (Standard Deviations) for Self-Esteem (RSE) and Self-Efficacy (CNSIE)

	Total	Boys	Girls
RSE scale range 10–40	32.31 (3.92)	32.58 (3.85)	32.05 (4.07)
CNSIE scale range 0–40	13.5 (5.31)	13.2 (5.65)	13.8 (5.06)

and feelings of all the family members present, and all the family members add to the story, making the story more complete and complex than if told by any one member alone. Families who engaged in this type of narrative interaction accepted the co-constructions of past events as a shared perspective of what actually took place.

Narrative Interaction Style and Children's Sense of Self

Means and standard deviations on children's self-esteem (RSE) and self-efficacy (CNSIE) are shown in Table 5 by gender. Overall, children showed high levels of self-esteem and relatively external locus of control. However, these locus of control scores are in line with population norms on this scale for children this age (Nowicki & Duke, 1974). Independent *t* tests confirmed no differences between boys and girls in either self-esteem or locus of control.

Correlations between the narrative dimensions and children's self-esteem and self-efficacy suggested that more coordinated perspective narrative interactions were associated with higher levels of child self-esteem, and more individual perspective narrative interactions were significantly associated with a more external locus of control in children (see Table 6).

Because previous research suggests gender differences in sense of self, we computed correlations between narrative interaction and sense of self for boys and girls separately (see Table 6). Coordinated perspective narrative interactions were significantly related to higher self-esteem in girls but not boys. In contrast, individual perspective narrative interactions were significantly associated with a more external locus of control in boys but not girls.

DISCUSSION

Narratives are the way in which we make sense of ourselves and our experiences, and the ways in which families guide children through this process may be a critical

TABLE 6
Correlations Between Clustered Interaction Styles and Self-Esteem (RSE) and Self-Efficacy (CNSIE)

	RSE			CNSIE		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
Coordinated Perspective	.27^{+}	.10	.45*	−.14	−.19	−.07
Individual Perspective	−.12	−.28	.11	.34*	.51*	.06
Imposed Perspective	.03	.10	−.08	−.12	−.25	.09

$^{+}p<.10$. $^{*}p<.05$. $^{**}p<.01$.

site for socialization of self. Our results suggest that there are individual differences in how families narrate their shared past, and these differences are related to adolescents' developing sense of self. Specifically, our results yielded three types of family narrative interaction style—a coordinated perspective, an individual perspective, and an imposed perspective—and these styles were consistent across family reminiscing about both highly positive and negative experiences. To illustrate these differences, excerpts of these differing styles are presented in the appendix. Moreover, families who engaged in a coordinated perspective style tended to have children, especially girls, who had higher self-esteem, and families who engaged in an individual perspective style had children, especially boys, with a more external locus of control.

Turning first to the narrative interaction styles, some families engaged in creating a coordinated perspective on the past event. During these conversations, several perspectives are taken and, most important, parents structure and integrate these different perspectives for a more complex understanding of one's own perspective, the perspective of others, and the integration of the self with others. Families using a coordinated narrative interaction style teach their children that they are part of a unified, cohesive family whose members understand and work through positive and negative experiences together. This narrative interaction style is closely tied to the notion of story-telling as theory building, as described by Ochs and her colleagues (1992). Specifically, children's opinions are acknowledged by other family members, and children's perspectives are integrated into the evolving theory of what occurred, which is recognized by the family as the shared family story. Through the process of integrating children's perspectives, families using a coordinated perspective style provide a safe and comfortable environment for children to tell their perspectives, thus creating interconnectedness as a whole family and recognizing the individual value of the child. Because children's perspectives are validated and integrated, their self-esteem is high.

Provocatively, coordinated perspective taking during family reminiscing is significantly related to self-esteem for girls but not boys. Previous literature has suggested that there are gender differences in what contributes to girls' and boys' sense of self (Openshaw et al., 1984; Ryan, 1993). Specific to identity, girls value relatedness and connectedness, whereas boys value autonomy and independence (Gilligan, 1982; Harter, 1999), and these differences may be particularly pronounced in early adolescence as children first begin to form a more enduring sense of self (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; McAdams, 1985). Families who emphasize relatedness through the construction of a shared perspective on the past seem to facilitate higher self-esteem in daughters to a greater extent than in sons. It is possible that self-esteem in preadolescent boys is tied more to domains outside of the family, such as academics and athletics (e.g., Harter), and that relations between self-esteem and relatedness emerge later in adolescence and young adulthood.

The second narrative interaction style we identified is an individual perspective style. Families who predominantly use this narrative interaction style attempt to elicit information from their children by the use of questions; most often, each family member takes a turn telling his or her own individual story and point of view. However, unlike the coordinated interaction style, these families do not integrate the individual perspectives into a unified theory of what occurred, or a shared family story. Children of these families are not exposed to a cohesive, unitary collaborative narrative, but individual turn taking. In the absence of integration and shared meaning

making, these children may come to understand their perspective as one among many possible perspectives. Because there is no consensus on what happened or on how the family should think, feel, or act in these situations, in the future, these children may not clearly understand how they can effectively manage and control the events that constitute their lives. Thus, we see relations between the individual perspective narrative interaction style and children's external locus of control. Again, this was related to gender, such that the individual perspective style was significantly related to boys' external locus of control but not girls'. It is not clear why this relation held for boys only, although it is possible that these types of interactions might affect girls later in development.

Finally, the third narrative interaction style identified was an imposed perspective style. Families who use an imposed perspective typically contain one parent who dominates the family conversation, often to the point that the parent ignores other family members' opinions. These parents are not simply providing more structure for their children during these narrative interactions; in many cases, these narratives resemble a parental lecture with complaints and put-downs offered by multiple family members, none of which is likely welcomed by other members of the family. Families using this style appear to be both controlling and unsupportive; they do not acknowledge children's individual viewpoints, and they certainly do not strive to create shared meaning through a coordinated perspective. Interestingly, this style is unrelated to both self-esteem and locus of control. Previous literature on parental communication would suggest that this type of controlling and unsupportive family interaction would relate to low self-esteem and high external locus of control (Carton & Nowicki, 1994; Openshaw et al., 1993). However, it should be noted that the imposed perspective was relatively rare in these families, and the lack of relations to children's sense of self may be due to the low occurrence and little variability in this interaction style in our sample.

Of course, family narrative interaction style may be reflective of broader overall family communication patterns. It is likely that families who discuss emotional events in more open and collaborative ways also respond to their children in similar ways in other contexts (during conflicts, helping children with homework, and so on). From a clinical or interventional perspective, these implications of our data bear further comment. It appears that there are several inherent ''curative'' or ameliorative processes present in the everyday functioning of families that may serve as sources of resilience. In that adverse circumstances and stresses are part and parcel of modern life, the family who possesses narrative styles (e.g., coordinated perspective or individual perspective) that are salutary may be expected to be able to absorb these conditions better than those with the less effective, imposed perspective style. This suggests a refocus in clinical intervention from problems and challenges per se to the processes whereby families deal with them. Thus, rather than assessing the nature of family situations, a broader clinical perspective would focus on a determination of family narrative style. In that this narrative style affects multiple areas of family and family member functioning, it would seem that the correction or development of more adaptive narrative processes would have a much broader impact than the more traditional focus on specific problems and their solution. Although further research is necessary, it may be that the classification system of narrative style used here may be applicable as a diagnostic tool in family assessment and treatment. If this was realized, the clinician would have a powerful new way of thinking about and rendering aid to families in need.

Narratives provide understanding, evaluation, and perspective on the events of our lives. Through narrative interactions about the shared past, parents help shape children's understanding of who they were, who they are now, and presumably who they will be in the future, both as individuals and as members of the family. Thus, although family communication and interaction in other contexts and settings is clearly important, the role of family narratives may be particularly critical for children's developing sense of self.

Finally, we acknowledge that this study was limited by a small sample size and high homogeneity among the families. Our families were all middle class and well adjusted, and variability was generally low across all measures. Future studies should examine a larger and more varied group of families. Specifically, it would be extremely interesting to examine family narrative interaction styles among families with at-risk adolescents, and narrative interaction styles among families with children of different ages. It is possible that at this developmental level, 9–12-year-old children benefit in specific ways from particular types of family interaction, whereas the different interaction styles may provide younger and older children with different benefits. Moreover, our focus was on the dialogic process by which families narrate their shared past. Past research has elucidated the importance of both the content and process of family narratives (see Walsh, 1996), and future research should address other aspects of narrative interaction in more depth, such as the emotional tone and content of family narrative interaction. Research currently under way in our research group suggests that families who discuss emotions, specifically negative emotions, in more open, expressive, and explanatory ways have adolescents with higher self-esteem and social competency (Marin, 2004).

Nonetheless, we found distinct patterns of family narrative interactions; some families engaged in more collaborative and coordinated perspective taking during reminiscing, and other families engaged in more individuated or even imposed perspective taking during reminiscing. Further, these styles were related to adolescents' sense of self. Our results point to the importance of family narrative interaction as a critical site for meaning making and sense of self in adolescence.

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APPENDIX

Sample excerpts of family narrative interactions styles

Excerpt 1: Coordinated perspective

In this excerpt, the mother and the adolescent child (AC) are discussing the time that the younger sister burned her hands on some grits that were sitting on the table (< > indicates overlapping talk). Both mother and child interweave their contributions to the emerging story, creating a coordinated perspective of what happened:

AC: And um so there w- were these gr-grits (younger sibling) was gonna eat for breakfast and so and, and um < so

Mom: They > were sitting on the table.

AC: So, they were very hot and then,

Mom: I guess, well Auntie had (cousin's name) put them in the microwave. < They were those instant (unintelligible) microwaves.

AC: And > sh-she, I think she overcooked them.

AC: So they were very < hot,

Mom: She > was letting them cool off.

AC: And then and she was letting them cool off, and I had a um, magnifying glass and I um there was, they had the light and so it was under the light and I put the magnifying glass, um right on the um, on the < um

Mom: over > the bowl, the grits,

AC: over the bowl and for um, a couple of seconds and then (another sibling) called me downstairs and, and um,

Mom: And then she

AC: and then she accidentally

Mom: and then she<um

AC: touched it>

Excerpt 2: Individual perspective

In this excerpt, the father, the adolescent child (AC), and a sibling (Sib) are discussing a family vacation. The father questions both the target child and the younger sibling, who responded to his questions, but no integration of either of their perspectives is provided, nor does either parent provide his or her own perspective on the event.

Dad: Was it a vacation or was it something you had to do?

AC: Vacation.

Dad: So what do you remember about the trip out there?

AC:<Uh . . .

Sib: That we would have to run around and eat some french fries.

Dad: That's all you remember that you ate some french fries<and. . .

Sib: We went scuba diving.

Dad: You went scuba diving.

AC: And then we got to get really close to fish and we got to um, we went down water slides on tubes.

Excerpt 3: Imposed perspective

In this excerpt, the father imposes his version of the story of the adolescent child's success at baseball. Although he questions the son and the son responds, the father restates and reinterprets the son's contributions to fit his own perspective of the event.

Dad: And what was remarkable about the experience for us is that (adolescent child) was unknown, untested and new at this. And what position did you start off uh batting order?

AC: Uh, second?

Mom:<No, no, no.

Dad: No, no, no.>At the beginning of the year, what..?

AC: Eighth.

Dad: Eighth. You were eighth batting order, which means you were one of the worst hitters there. And then how did you move up during the year?

Mom: By hitting. (Laughs)<By hitting the ball.

AC: Uh, the best>, then to second.

Dad: Second.

AC: Then back to second.

Dad: Then back to second. And, in the beginning of the year, you started off playing what position?

AC: Left field.

Dad: And then what position did you finish at the end of the year?

AC: First base.

Dad: First base! From the outfield to the infield and from eighth in the batting order to second.