The Co-Construction of Adolescent Narrative Identity: Narrative Processing as a Function of Adolescent Age, Gender, and Maternal Scaffolding

Kate C. McLean
Western Washington University

Cade D. Mansfield
University of Utah

The current study aimed to situate the development of adolescent narrative identity in the context of past-event conversations between adolescents and their mothers, extending work on conversational contexts in early childhood to adolescence. We examined a cross-section of 63 adolescents with 2 goals: (1) to examine how adolescent age and gender interacted with mothers' scaffolding behaviors and how those interactions were associated with adolescents' narrative processes of meaning-making, vulnerability, and resolution; (2) to examine mothers' behaviors in conversation and how the interactions between those behaviors and event type (important, sad, and happy themes) were associated with those narrative processes. We found that maternal behavior in the conversation was related to adolescent narrative processes, yet this link varied as a function of characteristics of the adolescent and type of event discussed. Overall results suggest that those with potentially less practice at narrating the self in elaborative ways—younger adolescents and boys—receive more supportive scaffolding, and that for those with likely more practice with elaborative narration—girls and older adolescents—mothers engage in more negation behavior. The role of these scaffolding behaviors in adolescent narrative identity development is discussed.

Keywords: narrative, autobiographical memories, adolescence, identity, conversations

Research has clearly shown that narrative identity, a coherent and meaning-filled life story, is a critical component to a happy and healthy life (e.g., Bauer, McAdams, & Sakeda, 2005; King, 2001; King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000; Pals, 2006). But how does this story develop? We know that children begin to tell stories very early in development and that parents actively participate in this development by scaffolding their children's emerging narrative skills and temporal sense of self (for a review, see Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006). We also know that the kind of story associated with a happy and healthy life begins to emerge across adolescence (e.g., Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010) and is rooted in those earlier developmental practices with parents (Reese, Yan, Jack, & Hayne, 2010). Yet, there is a missing link in the literature, as research on adolescents is currently lacking relative to the other

two ends of the lifespan (cf. McLean & Pasupathi, 2010). The relatively few studies on adolescent narrative development have focused on two areas: first, on the specific elements of narrative coherence and meaning-making that develop in cross-sections of adolescents (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008), and these studies have been primarily done in the context of decontextualized written narratives (McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean et al., 2010; Zaman & Fivush, 2010); and second, on how family conversations about shared past events in middle childhood are associated with early adolescent well-being (Bohanek, Marin, & Fivush, 2008). The present study examined narrative identity development in a cross-section of adolescents in the context of conversations about the past with their mothers. The primary aim of this study was to assess the extent to which adolescent age and gender moderated relationships between maternal scaffolding and adolescent narrative processes of meaning-making, vulnerability, and resolution in conversations about sad, happy, and important events. Our second aim was to assess the extent to which mother behavior interacted with event type being discussed in relation to adolescent narrative processes.

Narrative Identity Development: Childhood and Adolescence

In thinking about how one learns to tell the story of the relation between one's past and oneself, researchers have focused on the importance of conversations about past events (Fivush et al., 2006; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Pasupathi, 2001; Thorne, 2000). The social practice of sharing stories provides opportunities to articulate one's own feelings and thoughts about events, as well as opportunities for another person

to validate, challenge, or help to construct that story. A robust area of research has shown that parents scaffold their children's early narrative development by helping children to organize and interpret past events by elaborating on those events with their children and by supporting the child's point of view via confirming the child's contributions to the conversation (e.g., Bird & Reese, 2006; Fivush, Marin, McWilliams, & Bohanek, 2009; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1993). Research has shown that mothers who engage in elaborative narration in talking about past events encourage their children to produce novel information about those events and provide a richer and more detailed reminiscing context in which children can begin to locate their selves in the context of an extended autobiographical history (e.g., Bird & Reese, 2006; Fivush, 1991; Haden, Haine, & Fivush, 1997; Reese et al., 1993). In contrast, mothers who are less elaborative in reminiscing contexts tend to ask more specific and close-ended questions, creating a reminiscence context that is less detailed, less tailored to the child's developing self and point of view, and more focused on accuracy than evaluation. Over time, children of more elaborative mothers display more engagement in conversations about autobiographical events, more elaborated event narratives, more nuanced and richer understanding of emotion, and a more consistent self-concept, to name a just few outcomes examined (see Fivush et al., 2006, for a review).

Our study focused on adolescence when identity becomes the dominant task (Erikson, 1968), and when the skills developed in childhood can presumably be used to construct a narrative identity. This construction is broadly defined as connecting past events to the current understanding of oneself, facilitated by new cognitive skills that become increasingly available in adolescence (e.g., Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McLean et al., 2010). There are also developmental shifts in relationships during adolescence. Parent–adolescent relationships shift to accommodate adolescent's growing efforts toward autonomy, as well as the growing intimacy and importance of peer relationships (e.g., Youniss & Smollar, 1985). However, a series of studies have shown that autonomy developed within the context of warm and connected relationships with parents predicts increasing self-esteem, ego development, and identity achievement (e.g., Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Thus, we expected that mothers would have an important and active role in scaffolding narrative identity, just as they have an important and active role in scaffolding the development of self-concept in early childhood. Although new potential audiences come on board in adolescence, namely peers (e.g., McLean, 2005), peers may still be struggling with their own narrative identities and not have the same expertise as mothers to scaffold narrative identity. Indeed, in a recent investigation, we found that mothers engage in more traditional scaffolding behavior compared to friends in conversations about past events (McLean & Jennings, 2010).

Narrative Processes: Meaning-Making, Vulnerability, and Resolution

The focus of the current study was on different aspects of narrative processing that are theoretically related to developing a healthy life story: (1) the ability to reflect on and learn from past events to better understand the current self—termed meaning-making; and (2) the ability to express, as well as manage, negative emotion—termed vulnerability and resolution. Meaning-making facilitates the development of a life story in at least two ways. First, it is via meaning-making that individuals can selectively appropriate events to be integrated into a larger life story (Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007), though the events selected may change over time with the fluidity of contexts as well as with new experiences. Second, this process can be thought of as practice to forming a life story even if the events upon which one is reflecting are not eventually integrated into that life story (e.g., McLean & Pasupathi, 2011). For example, a break-up may provide an opportunity to reflect on one's relationship behaviors and why the relationship ended—thus, learning something important about the self in reflecting on a past event—but this break-up story may not become a part of the life story. This reflective process may be particularly important for adolescents who are newly able to engage in such processes and who are only slowly moving toward the accomplishment of having a life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean et al., 2010; McLean & Mansfield, 2010).

Interestingly, this reflective process of meaning-making is not something that helps one to understand all kinds of events but instead is more likely to facilitate understanding of negative events (e.g., McLean & Thorne, 2003). Indeed, when the canonical story is broken, often by a negative disruption, narrative is the means by which the break can be mended (Bruner, 1990). In the current study, we addressed this phenomenon in two ways. First, we solicited different types of events in the conversation (important, sad, and happy). Past research with adults has shown that meaning-making is more likely to occur in the context of emotionally negative events (e.g., Pals, 2006). In childhood, mothers are generally more elaborative when discussing negative events than positive events (e.g., Ackil, Van Abbema, & Bauer, 2003; Sales, Fivush, & Peterson, 2003), and they discuss the causes of emotion more when discussing negative than positive events (e.g., Sales et al., 2003). Fivush et al. (2006) suggested that the discussion of positive emotion may be important to family bonding and self-esteem, whereas the discussion of negative emotion may serve to create coherence and understanding about an event, which in adolescence may manifest as meaning-making. Further, based on research that has shown that maternal scaffolding is important to emotion regulation and coping, as well as self-concept consistency, particularly in the context of talking about negative emotions (e.g., Bird & Reese, 2006; Laible & Panfile, 2009), we expected that elaborative scaffolding in sad events might be especially important for meaning-making. Thus, we expected more meaning to emerge in important events as a way of explaining their importance, but we also expected more meaning in sad events, due to their emotionally negative nature, perhaps especially in comparison to happy events. We also examined gender as a moderator of the relation between maternal scaffolding and narrative processes. Previous research in early childhood has found that mothers are more elaborative about sad events with their daughters than with their sons in early childhood (e.g., Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000), so we expected mothers to continue to elaborate more on sadness with girls than with boys.

Along with soliciting an emotionally negative event, we also coded the degree to which the adolescent expressed emotional vulnerability in talking about all of the events and the degree to which that vulnerability was resolved. We defined vulnerability as being overpowered by negative emotions with an inability to

manage them, portraying the self as lacking agency, passive, helpless, or alone. At first glance it would seem that expressing vulnerability is unpleasant for speaker and listener (e.g., Thorne & McLean, 2003) and may even be associated with risk factors such as low self-esteem or depression. On the other hand, previous theorizing and research points to the importance of crisis and conflict in the process of identity development (e.g., Erikson, 1968; Harter & Monsour, 1992; King et al., 2000; McLean, 2008; Pals, 2006). Indeed, in a previous investigation, we found that expressing vulnerability was associated with a greater likelihood of meaning-making (McLean & Mansfield, 2010). Thus, vulnerability may be a developmentally normative phenomenon in talking about past negative events. We also examined the resolution of vulnerability, defined as reducing the vulnerability by introducing positivity or finding a way to reduce the vulnerability in telling the story. As with meaning-making, we examined how the mother's scaffolding behavior was associated with displays of vulnerability and resolution in the context of different events.

Meaning-Making: Elaborations, Age, and Gender

We expected that, as seen across the early childhood years (e.g., Cleveland & Reese, 2005), younger adolescents would need more assistance than older adolescents in making meaning of past events, such that a mother's elaborative reminiscing would be associated with more meaning-making for younger adolescents compared to older adolescents. There are several reasons for this hypothesis. First, early adolescents report less meaning in their written (individually produced) narratives compared to late adolescents (McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean et al., 2010), suggesting that either they do not have the capacity to make meaning, or interest in it, or perhaps they do not yet have the skills to independently make meaning but may be able to do so with expert guidance (see also Fivush, Marin, Crawford, Reynolds, & Brewin, 2007). Early adolescents are also cognitively less sophisticated, such that they are able to abstract concepts, but have difficulty integrating concepts, particularly contradictory concepts, such as self-perceptions across time and situation (e.g., Harter & Mansour, 1992).

In examining the research on the development of narrative skills in early and middle childhood, it is also possible that gender plays a role in narrative processes in adolescence. In early childhood, parents are generally more elaborative in talking about the past with daughters than with sons (Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996). This has led some theorists to posit that girls may get more practice with narrative skills, setting them up for more elaborative meaning-making in adolescence (e.g., McLean, 2008). In the current study, we did not have set a priori hypotheses concerning gender, but we raise four possibilities here. First, we may see that mothers continue to engage in more elaborative reminiscing with daughters than with sons, reflecting continuity in reminiscing practices. Second, it may be that mothers engage in more elaborative reminiscing with sons than with daughters because (a) mothers turn their attention to sons who may be at a slight disadvantage upon entering adolescence as they may have engaged in less elaboration or (b) mothers may work harder to draw elaborations out of sons who are less likely to self-disclose (e.g., Dindia & Allen, 1992; Hyde, 2007). Third, we may see no gender differences in elaboration. Indeed, recent research has not found mean level gender

differences in the degree to which adolescents elaborate on, or make meaning of, the past (e.g., Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McLean & Breen, 2009; cf. Zaman & Fivush, 2010). Finally, we may see that gender interacts with aspects of the mother's conversational style depending on the event under discussion to determine the association with narrative processing. For example, in early childhood, parents are especially likely to elaborate with girls in sad events, suggesting that main effects of gender may be less important than moderating effects of gender.

Meaning-Making: Negations and Age

Based on the research showing that mothers of pre-school age children shift the form of scaffolding from close-ended questions to open-ended questions as their children become more capable of participating in the conversation (e.g., Farrant & Reese, 2000), we also raised the possibility that whereas elaboration may be more strongly associated with meaning-making in early than late adolescence, other forms of scaffolding become more important for meaning-making in late adolescence. One type of scaffolding that is less well examined in early childhood conversations is *negation*, defined as instances in which the mother disagrees with the child's recall or interpretation of events. On the surface, negations may seem like a harsh tactic, but negations may actually serve an important role in helping an adolescent to develop his or her own meaning of a story. For example, parents who both negated and confirmed their adolescent's points of view in family dinner time conversations had adolescents with lower internalizing behavior (Bohanek et al., 2009). This may be a reflection of the individuation process in which challenges from parents in the context of warm and supportive relationships predict healthier self-development over time (Allen et al., 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). In the current study, we suspected that age might interact with the impact of negations, in that negations in early adolescence might be associated with less meaning-making. However, in late adolescence, we suspected that negations would be associated with greater degrees of meaning-making in representing a part of the process of developing and maintaining an autonomous point of view.

Vulnerability and Resolution: Elaborations and Confirmations

Because we entertained the possibility that vulnerability could be developmentally normative, we expected more elaborative questioning to be associated with expressions of vulnerability; yet, we also expected elaborative questioning to be associated with resolution of vulnerability. That is, mothers may scaffold a process in which adolescents experience opportunities to explore negative emotions and then resolve them.

Although encouraging new ways of thinking via elaborative reminiscence practices is critically important in the development of identity, mothers can also contribute to children's sense of self via the practice of confirmation, in which the child is validated in his or her point of view. Confirmations involve comments of agreement with the child's statements, which serves to reinforce what the child is saying and to help to solidify a story told from the child's point of view (Fivush et al., 2006). As adolescents begin to voice their own personal and more extended stories, these confirmatory comments might be particularly important in expressing

vulnerability, such that confirmations signal support and validation for the adolescent. We were not sure whether mothers' elaborations in the context of vulnerability and resolution would have less of an impact on older than younger adolescents' narrative processes, as we suspected with meaning-making. Indeed, vulnerability and resolution may be more complex and emotionally laden narrative processes, which require more collaborative work between mother and adolescent.

Present Study

In the present study, we aimed to situate the study of adolescent narrative development in the social context of conversations about past events. Our first aim was to assess the extent to which adolescent age and gender moderated relations between mother scaffolding behavior and the adolescent narrative processes of meaning-making, vulnerability, and resolution. Our second aim was to assess the extent to which mother behavior interacted with event type being discussed in relation to the adolescent narrative processes of meaning-making, vulnerability, and resolution. Our hypotheses follow:

Predicting Meaning-Making

Hypothesis 1: We expected more meaning to emerge in sad and important events in comparison to happy events.

Hypothesis 2: We expected elaborative scaffolding in sad events to be especially important for meaning-making.

Hypothesis 3: We expected that mothers' elaborative reminiscing would be associated with more meaning-making for early adolescents compared to older adolescents.

Hypothesis 4: We expected that negations would be associated with less meaning-making for early adolescents compared to late adolescents.

Predicting Vulnerability and Resolution

Hypothesis 5: We expected more elaborative scaffolding to be associated with expressions of vulnerability as well as the resolution of vulnerability.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 63 adolescents ($n = 32$ boys) and their mothers from Northwest Washington State. Age ranged from 11 to 18 years ($M = 13.71$, $SD = 1.95$). Adolescents' self-reported ethnicities included White ($n = 53$), Asian ($n = 2$), Latino/Hispanic ($n = 4$), and other ($n = 4$), which is representative of the community from which they were drawn. Family income was reported in checklist form by mothers (range = less than $20,000–more than $100,000, $Mdn = $70,000–$80,000$). In terms of highest level of education, two mothers reported high school, 10 reported some college, 28 reported college degree, and 23 reported

graduate degrees. We did not collect data on the language spoken at home.

Procedure

Families were recruited via postings around town (ice cream shops, restaurants, fitness centers, libraries, book stores, farmer's markets, grocery stores, YMCA, etc.), on Craigslist, and snowball sampling techniques. Eighty mothers responded to these various announcements, and 63 families participated, with lack of participation primarily due to scheduling difficulties. Once families were recruited, two undergraduate research assistants visited the family home to conduct the study. Questions about the study were answered, if necessary, and mother and adolescent signed consent forms, after which the pair had an audio-recorded conversation in a private and comfortable location without the researchers present. When the conversation was over, dyads notified the research assistants, who gave mother and adolescent surveys to fill out in separate locations. Participants were thanked, debriefed, and paid $15 each. A separate component of the study, not relevant to the present analyses, included a similar procedure with the adolescent and a friend at a later time point (McLean & Jennings, 2010).

Tasks and Measures

Conversation task. Mother and adolescent were each asked to share three event-type memories, which had the following definitions on a laminated page that they could hold during the conversation. The first was described as "an important, distinctive, specific personal memory that says something about you as a person." The second was described as "an important, specific, and extremely sad memory." The third was described as "an important, specific, and extremely happy memory." Dyads were left alone for the conversation and were told that they could proceed in any order that they wanted and to have as normal a conversation as possible. There were no specifications in the instructions about the age of the memory, whether or not the memories were shared experiences, whether or not they had been discussed previously, or the order in which they were shared.

We did not code how the memories to be talked about were decided upon, but conversation transcripts reveal that the great majority were chosen by the adolescent. Our focus was on the stories that the adolescent shared in relation to the mother's scaffolding behavior; thus, we coded aspects of the adolescent's stories and the kinds of scaffolding behavior in which the mother engaged while the adolescent was telling those stories. This is analogous to coding procedures in early childhood conversations in which child and mother contributions are coded from the same data source and examined in a correlational fashion in relation to each other (e.g., Bird & Reese, 2006; Reese & Fivush, 1993). We also note that our terminology and analytic strategy clearly separates "adolescent narrative processes" from "maternal scaffolding behavior." Theoretically, we view these as related processes of co-construction, but we retain the terminology for clarity in our description of coding and in analyses.

Narrative Coding: Adolescents' Memory Narratives

All conversations were transcribed and checked, and participants' responses were scored by the first author and three research

assistants who were all blind to the age and gender of the adolescent. Coders independently scored each case and then met to resolve disagreements. Reliability was conducted using the consensus of the first four coders on 20% of the cases with a separate reliability coder who was blind to the age and gender of the participants as well as the hypotheses of the study. Intraclass correlations and kappas for reliability are reported below. Coding manuals are available from the first author.

Meaning-making. Each of the adolescent's three memory narratives were coded for sophistication of meaning, based on McLean and Pratt's (2006) adaptation of the system developed by McLean and Thorne (2003). Narratives were coded according to a 4-point scale that captures the degree of meaning-making (range per memory, intraclass $r = .79–.92$). 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 one if there was mention of a specific lesson that the reporter learned from the event. A score of two 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 three if there was evidence that the reporter gleaned specific emotional, psychological, or relational insight from the event that applies to broader areas of the reporter's life.

Vulnerability. Vulnerability was coded on a scale ranging from 1 to 5 (range per memory, intraclass $r = .64–.95$) by assessing the emotional expression of the adolescent's narrative in conversation. Markers of vulnerability included being overpowered by negative emotions, feeling weak, passive, helpless, or alone. Any one of these characteristics could be present and capture complete vulnerability. That is, multiple markers were not needed to receive a score of five. A one represented lack of vulnerability in the story. A two represented a small amount of vulnerability that did not overwhelm the story, such that the vulnerability was more of a minor detail in the story. A three represented a moderate level of vulnerability. A four represented high vulnerability, but the reporter, or the story, was not completely overwhelmed by it. A five represented a story and/or a reporter that/who is completely mired in the vulnerability of the experience.

Resolution. This code was meant to capture whether or not the vulnerability expressed in the adolescent's narrative was at all resolved; thus, resolution was only coded if vulnerability was expressed. Resolution was defined as reducing the experience of negative emotion, either by attempting to reduce the negative strength of the negative emotion (e.g., "it wasn't that bad or it was a long time ago") or by introducing a positive emotion or a positive meaning (e.g., "and it all turned out okay; I learned a lot from that"). Resolution was coded on a 3-point scale, with 1 indicating no resolution, 2 representing an attempt at resolution or partial resolution, and 3 representing fully resolved vulnerability (intraclass $r = .75–.85$).

Maternal Scaffolding Behavior

Coding for maternal scaffolding behavior was adapted from Haden et al. (1997) and Bird and Reese (2006), as the coding scheme was originally designed for pre-schoolers. Each of the mother's turns in the conversations was coded for mutually exclusive types of responses by two research assistants who were blind to gender, age, and hypotheses of the study and who did not code the adolescent's narratives. Once trained, reliability was conducted on 10 conversations. After reliability was reached, the same two research assistants proceeded to code the rest of the conversations, consulting with each other and the first author when there were disagreements. The codes used in the current study are described below.

Elaborative questions ($\kappa = .88$) were those in which the mother asked the adolescent to provide new information about the event under discussion, which could be new factual information or the adolescent's evaluation or point of view on the event (e.g., "How did you feel about that?"). Reiteration[1] questions ($\kappa = .88$) were questions that required only a yes or no answer or repeated what someone had just said in question form ("So you went to the store yesterday?"). Confirmations ($\kappa = .96$) were statements that indicate agreement or confirmation of what the adolescent is saying (e.g., "uh-huh," "yeah") or statements of confirmation or support ("You're right."). Negations ($\kappa = .84$) were statements of disagreement with the adolescent ("No, that is not what happened.").

Results

Descriptives

Conversations varied a good deal in length[2] (range $= 4–41$ min, $M = 17.54$, $SD = 9.14$) and also varied in event types (see Table 1). In terms of event types, achievement events were most often about winning at sports or doing well in school. Common mortality events were death of pets or grandparents. Common relationship memories were conflicts with friends or siblings, or losing or developing new friendships. Common recreation memories were vacations and fun activities. We examined the prevalence of narrative processing variables in each event type (see Table 1). Partly consistent with Hypothesis 1, adolescents made more meaning, and mothers asked a greater number of elaborative questions in important events but, unexpectedly, not in sad events. Relative to

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[1] We note that we first developed the reiteration code based on the repetition codes from the early childhood literature. However, we changed the name, as the use of reiteration seemed different in these more complex adolescent conversations than in the childhood conversations, and perhaps less reflective of confirmation that is associated with repetition in early childhood (e.g., Fivush et al., 2006).

[2] Conversation length was significantly correlated with adolescent meaning-making in the important (.27) and sad (.30) memory narratives but not within the happy narratives. It was also significantly correlated with vulnerability in the sad memory narratives (.31) but not within the important or happy memory narratives. Length was also significantly correlated with resolution within the sad memory narratives (.32) but not within the important or happy memory narratives. Of the four scaffolding behaviors we examined, conversation length was significantly correlated with confirmations within all three memory narratives (rs range $= .39–.42$) and with negations within the happy memory narratives (.34), but not with elaborations or reiterations in any of the memory narratives. Conversation length was also significantly correlated with age (.34) but was not associated with gender. Following previous research, we did not control for conversation length in the analyses we present. Researchers in this area have argued that conversation length can be viewed as an assessment of the amount of time discussing a particular event, emotion, or meaning, and is, thus, a meaningful variable (e.g., Fivush et al., 2003; Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007). We follow this tradition to be consistent with previous research and for these theoretical reasons.

Table 1
Narrative and Mother Response Variables by Event

Event type	Important		Sad		Happy	
	M (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range
Meaning-making	0.47 (0.96)	0–3	0.20 (0.66)	0–3	0.03 (0.26)	0–2
Vulnerability	1.32 (0.75)	1–5	2.17 (1.17)	1–5	1.07 (0.25)	1–2
Resolution	2.55 (0.82)	1–3	2.11 (0.79)	1–3	3.0 (0.00)	3
Mother elaborative questions	1.12 (1.59)	0–10	0.65 (1.07)	0–6	0.72 (1.44)	0–9
Mother reiterative questions	0.13 (0.39)	0–2	0.12 (0.37)	0–2	0.20 (.51)	0–2
Mother confirming evaluations	2.38 (2.44)	0–9	2.90 (2.80)	0–11	2.80 (2.70)	0–11
Mother negating evaluations	0.13 (0.54)	0–3	0.27 (0.71)	0–4	0.18 (0.68)	0–4

happy and important events, adolescents displayed the greatest amount of vulnerability in sad events. Also, relative to happy and important events, mothers provided more confirming evaluations and fewer elaborative questions in sad events. Relative to important or sad events, adolescents had the least amount of vulnerability and the highest amount of resolution in happy events. Finally, mothers engaged in a greater number of reiterative questions in happy events than in important or sad events.

Next, we examined gender differences on the narrative processing variables and mother scaffolding behaviors. We found that mothers asked their sons more elaborative questions in important events ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 1.94$) than their daughters ($M = 0.77$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(58) = 2.00$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.51$; furthermore, there was a marginal difference in mothers asking sons more elaborative questions in sad events ($M = 0.90$, $SD = 1.32$) than daughters ($M = 0.40$, $SD = 0.68$), $t(58) = 1.85$, $p = .07$, $d = 0.47$. There were no gender differences on the adolescent narrative processing variables. We also examined correlations among the narrative processing variables across event types, which are displayed in Table 2. Meaning appears more event specific and is associated with vulnerability in sad events, and vulnerability appears more person-specific with positive correlations across events.

Primary Analyses

We used hierarchical linear modeling to examine how interactions between adolescent characteristics and mother scaffolding

behavior were associated with adolescent narrative processing in memories of important, sad, and happy events. Level 1 variables included those related to the characteristics of conversation, whereas Level 2 variables were adolescent specific characteristics; thus, conversational patterns were nested within adolescent characteristics. Level 1 variables included mothers' scaffolding behavior, which was captured by the extent to which she asked (a) elaborative and (b) reiterative questions, as well as the extent to which she used (c) confirming evaluations and (d) negating evaluations. None of these variables were group centered. For clarity, we separated our analyses to examine aspects of elaboration (elaboration/reiteration) and aspects of validation (confirmation/negation). In addition, at Level 1, we entered event types (dummy-coded as absent [0] or present [1]), which allowed us to compare narrative outcomes of mother–adolescent interactions in different events. Level 2 variables were the adolescent-specific characteristics of age and gender.

Each model was built sequentially. First, the intercept-only, or unconditional model, was created to determine how much variance in the outcome variable existed at Levels 1 and 2. Next, where appropriate, we tested models with all predictors, modeling the variability in the intercepts and coefficients at Level 1 (conversation level) across Level 2 units (adolescent-characteristic level) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In the current study, we focused on the effects of maternal scaffolding behavior on narrative processing. Thus, at Level 1, we had three outcome variables in our

Table 2
Correlations Among Adolescent Narrative Processes

Narrative processes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Meaning (Important)	—							
2. Vulnerability (Important)	.07	—						
3. Resolution (Important)	−.19	−.52	—					
4. Meaning (Sad)	.14	−.59**	−.51	—				
5. Vulnerability (Sad)	.21	.36**	−.30	.27*	—			
6. Resolution (Sad)	.18	.12	.48	.29	−.07	—		
7. Meaning (Happy)	−.07	−.06	NC	−.04	−.02	.19	—	
8. Vulnerability (Happy)	.01	.52**	−.17	.43**	.13	.06	−.03	—

Note. NC = correlation could not be computed because of limited variability. Note that vulnerability was not reported in all narratives, and resolution could only be coded if vulnerability was present. Thus, different *N*s for the above correlations result in some coefficients being non-significant even when larger than some significant correlations.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

models: meaning-making, vulnerability, and resolution. An example of a model predicting adolescent meaning-making in important events is as follows:

Level 1 Model

$$Y = P0 + P1 * (\text{important events})$$
$$+ P2 * (\text{maternal confirmations in important events})$$
$$+ P3 * (\text{maternal negations in important events}) + E.$$

Level 2 Model

$$P0 = B00 + B01 * (\text{age}) + B02 * (\text{gender}) + R0.$$
$$P1 = B10 + B11 * (\text{age}) + B12 * (\text{gender}).$$
$$P2 = B20 + B21 * (\text{age}) + B22 * (\text{gender}).$$
$$P3 = B30 + B31 * (\text{age}) + B32 * (\text{gender}).$$

For each model, we first tested elaborations and reiterations, and then we tested confirming and negating evaluations in each memory type. Each model, regardless of outcome variable, was run with the same predictors; however, we present only the significant or marginally significant findings from each model. The full list of coefficients and their statistical significance is displayed in Table 3.

Meaning-Making as Outcome

We calculated an intraclass correlation coefficient with meaning-making as the outcome variable of .02, indicating that 98% of the variance in meaning-making is associated with conversation characteristics, and 2% is associated with between-adolescent differences.

Elaborations and reiterations. For important events, we found no statistically significant relationships between mothers' questions (or evaluations) and adolescent characteristics. Likewise, for happy events, we found no statistically significant relationships between mothers' questions and adolescent characteristics. However, in sad events, we found significant relationships between mothers' questions and adolescent characteristics and their associations with meaning-making. Adolescent age was a marginally significant moderator of the relation between mothers' elaborative questions and adolescent meaning-making in sad events ($\beta = .05$, $p < .07$), and it was a significant moderator of the relation between mothers' reiterative questions and adolescent meaning-making in sad events ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .03$). Contrary to Hypothesis 2, elaborative questions during the telling of sad events were associated with decreased meaning-making; however, consistent with Hypothesis 3, this effect was marginally compounded for older adolescents. Further, reiterative questions were also associated with decreased meaning-making in memories of sad events, but that effect was lessened for older adolescents.

Confirmations and negations. We found that the extent to which maternal confirmations were related to meaning-making in sad events depended on gender ($\beta = -.08$, $p < .07$), such that mothers' confirmations in sad events were associated with more meaning-making for girls than for boys; however, this finding was marginally statistically significant, so it should be interpreted with care. We found that the extent to which maternal negations in sad events were related to adolescent meaning-making was dependent on gender ($\beta = -.45$, $p < .01$), and age was a significant and positive moderator of that relationship ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$). Thus, negations in sad events were associated with increased meaning-making for girls (but not for boys) and, consistent with Hypothesis 4, with increased meaning-making for older (but not younger) adolescents. Also consistent with Hypothesis 4, we found that age

Table 3

Primary HLM Findings in Sad and Happy Event Memories With Adolescent Age and Gender as Moderators

Model	Sad event memory		Happy event memory		Important event memory	
	Age coefficient	Gender coefficient	Age coefficient	Gender coefficient	Age coefficient	Gender coefficient
Adolescent meaning-making						
Maternal elaborations	.05†	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Maternal reiterations	−.16*	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Maternal confirmations	NS	−.08†	.13*	NS	NS	NS
Maternal negations	.18**	−.45**	NS	NS	NS	NS
Adolescent vulnerability						
Maternal elaborations	NS	.48*	NS	.30†	NS	NS
Maternal reiterations	NS	NS	.23**	.43*	NS	NS
Maternal confirmations	NS	NS	NS	−.09*	NS	NS
Maternal negations	−.14†	.87*	NS	NS	NS	NS
Adolescent resolution						
Maternal elaborations	NS	NS	NS	.27†	.04*	NS
Maternal reiterations	.12†	NS	.17**	NS	NS	NS
Maternal confirmations	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
Maternal negations	−.22*	1.20**	NS	NS	NS	NS

Note. The row titled maternal elaborations under adolescent meaning making that corresponds to the age column under sad event memory (coefficient = .05) can be read as follows. This cell indicates the degree to which adolescent age moderates the relationship between maternal elaborations and adolescent meaning making in conversation about sad event memories. HLM = hierarchical linear modeling; NS = non-significant coefficient.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

was a significant and positive moderator of the relationship between negations and meaning-making in happy events ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), indicating that the association between meaning-making and negations in happy events is stronger for older than younger adolescents.

Vulnerability as Outcome

We calculated an intraclass correlation coefficient with vulnerability as the outcome variable of .08, as 8% of the variance in vulnerability is associated with conversation characteristics, and 92% is associated with between-adolescent differences.

Elaborations and reiterations. For important events, we found no statistically significant relationships between mothers' questions and vulnerability or in the relationships between negations/confirmations and adolescents characteristics and vulnerability. However, in sad and happy events, we found significant relationships between both mothers' questions, mothers' confirmations/negations and adolescent characteristics, consistent with Hypothesis 5. Specifically, the extent to which maternal elaborations were related to adolescent vulnerability in sad events depended on adolescent gender ($\beta = .48$, $p < .05$). Thus, asking the same number of elaborative questions of boys and girls in memories of sad events was associated with boys displaying more vulnerability than girls. For happy events, we found that the extent to which maternal elaborations were related to adolescent vulnerability depended on adolescent gender ($\beta = .30$, $p = .059$). Thus, asking the same number of elaborative questions of boys and girls in memories of happy events was associated with boys displaying more vulnerability than girls; however, this finding was marginally statistically significant, so it should be interpreted with care. Finally, we found that age and gender were significant moderators of the relationship between reiterative questioning and vulnerability in happy events ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$; $\beta = .43$, $p < .05$), indicating that for older adolescents, and for boys, asking more reiterative questions was associated with increased displays of vulnerability.

Confirmations and negations. We found that age was a negative moderator of the relationship between negating confirmations and vulnerability in sad events ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .05$), indicating that with increasing age there is a diminished relationship between maternal negations and displays of vulnerability. However, this finding was marginally statistically significant, so it should be interpreted with care. In addition, in sad events, we found that the extent to which maternal negations were related to adolescent vulnerability depended on adolescent gender ($\beta = .87$, $p < .05$). This indicates a gender difference such that increased negations in sad events are associated with more displays of vulnerability for boys and fewer for girls. We also found that gender significantly moderated the relationship between confirmations and vulnerability in happy events ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .05$), indicating that increased confirmations in conversations about happy events were more associated with more vulnerability displays for girls than for boys.

Resolution as Outcome

We calculated an intraclass correlation coefficient with resolution as the outcome variable of .03, indicating that, similar to the meaning-making analyses, 97% of the variance in resolution was associated with conversation characteristics, and 3% was associated with between-adolescent differences. We note that our resolution findings may be somewhat compromised by the fact that we could only code resolution if there was vulnerability present, decreasing our sample size ($n = 40$ out of our original 63 participants) for analyses with resolution as an outcome variable.

Elaborations and reiterations. We found that adolescent age was a significant and positive moderator of the relationship between elaborations and resolution in important events ($\beta = .04$, $p < .05$). In partial support of Hypothesis 5, elaborative questioning by the mother was associated with a greater tendency to display resolution in conversations about important events, but more so for older adolescents. Adolescent age was a positive moderator of the relationship between reiterations and resolution in sad events ($\beta = .12$, $p = .07$). Adolescent age was a significant positive moderator of the relationship between reiterations and resolution in happy events ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that as adolescents age, increased reiterative questioning by the mother is associated with a greater tendency to display resolution in conversations about sad and happy events; however, the finding for sad events was marginally statistically significant. Finally, we found that the extent to which maternal elaborations were related to adolescent resolution in happy events depended on gender ($\beta = .27$, $p = .052$). These findings indicate that greater elaboration in happy events is associated with more resolution for boys than for girls. That is, when mothers ask boys and girls equal amounts of elaborative questions in conversations about happy events, those questions are associated with boys displaying marginally more resolution than girls, partially consistent with Hypothesis 5.

Confirmations and negations. We found that adolescent age was a significant and negative moderator of the relationship between mothers' negations and resolution in sad events ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$). These findings indicate that as adolescents age, there is a diminished relationship between maternal negations and resolution in sad events. In addition, we found that the relationship between maternal negations and adolescent resolution depended on gender in sad events ($\beta = 1.20$, $p < .01$). These findings indicate that boys whose mothers engage in negations in conversations about sad events tend to display more resolution than do girls whose mothers engage in negations in conversations about sad events.

Discussion

In this study, we examined processes of narrative identity development within conversations between adolescents and mothers about sad, happy, and important events. Age and gender moderated many of the relations between maternal behavior and adolescent narrative processes. Broadly, our results suggest that mothers continue to play a role in the processes of narrative development in adolescence, particularly for boys, in the discussion of personally important events, and in challenging their adolescent's points of view. Further, different narrative processes were more or less strongly associated with scaffolding behavior, showing that moth-

ers appear to hold a smaller role in co-constructing meaning but a larger role in discussing vulnerability, especially in late adolescence.

In terms of our descriptive results, the most meaning and elaborative questioning occurred in important event memories, followed by sad and happy event memories. We had expected to see more meaning in sad memories because of their negative emotional valence. However, sad memories were where the mothers engaged in more confirmations, suggesting that emotional support may be more important in talking about sad events than understanding their personal meaning. In contrast to findings in early childhood (Fivush et al., 2003; Reese et al., 1996), mothers engaged in more elaborative questioning in important and sad memories with boys than with girls. Perhaps mothers turn their attention to boys at this stage, as girls have greater practice with the necessary narrative skills, or perhaps mothers have to work harder to pull conversation out of boys, who are less likely to self-disclose (e.g., Dindia & Allen, 1992; Hyde, 2007). We turn now to interpreting our main analyses.

Meaning-Making

We predicted meaning based on the scaffolding behavior of the mother in different types of events and characteristics of the adolescent. Although more meaning was reported in important events overall, much of the interaction effects occurred in the context of sad events. Contrary to our expectations, more elaborative and reiterative questions were associated with less meaning in sad events. That is, in talking about sad events, the more mothers elaborated on an event, the less adolescents did. It may be that adolescents do not feel the need to elaborate when their mothers have already done some elaboration on the event. Thus, the mothers could be responding to the adolescent's lack of meaning by elaborating, or the adolescent could be responding to the mother's elaboration by not making meaning. Indeed, these are likely bidirectional processes. It is also possible that adolescents may be talking to other audiences, such as friends, about their most vulnerable moments. However, friends are less elaborative than mothers in these conversations (McLean & Jennings, 2010), suggesting that, as mentioned above, discussion of sad events may be more about emotional support than about finding personal meaning—a point to which we return in discussing the findings on resolution.

Similar to past research with adolescents (e.g., McLean & Breen, 2009), there were no mean level gender differences in meaning-making. Yet, there were different associations between scaffolding behavior and meaning-making for girls and boys, suggesting that girls may have a stronger foundation for their narrative identities in adolescence. For example, whereas boys who experienced negation from their mothers in talking about sad events were less likely to make meaning, this was not the case for girls. Further, confirmations from mothers were also associated with increased meaning-making, but only for girls. Thus, girls may be more comfortable with their narrative identities, or at least have a head start on the development of narrative identity. Though we cannot determine the causal direction of these results, we speculate that girls' early childhood experiences in conversations may set them up with a stronger foundation to explore their narrative selves

by both responding to challenge and validation with the explanation of personal meaning.

Vulnerability

Consistent with Hypothesis 5, elaborative questioning in the context of sad events was associated with more vulnerability, and this was especially the case for boys. Again, for those who may have had less practice with the elaborative narration necessary for constructing a narrative identity, these kinds of questions may stir up vulnerability. On the other hand, it is possible that vulnerability, which may be a marker of less well-formed stories, calls for more elaborative questioning.

Interestingly, confirmations were associated with more vulnerability for girls but not for boys, and negations were associated with more vulnerability for boys and with less vulnerability for girls. Research in early childhood and emerging adulthood has shown that girls are socialized to display vulnerability and sadness more than boys (Fivush, 1991, 1998; Fivush et al., 2000; Thorne & McLean, 2002). This may be a continuation of the pattern of mothers encouraging or supporting displays of emotional vulnerability in girls but not boys. One implication of this is that girls may then develop more emotionally saturated narrative identities compared to boys (see Fivush & Buckner, 2003).

Resolution

Interestingly, whereas meaning-making was less strongly related to the mother's behavior in older adolescents, the degree to which an adolescent resolved vulnerability was more strongly associated with the mother's behavior, particularly for older adolescents. That is, as adolescents get older and the more their mothers use elaborative questioning techniques, the more likely adolescents are to resolve vulnerability in talking about important events. It is possible that the kinds of vulnerability older adolescents are expressing are more serious and demand more involved scaffolding. It is also possible that as adolescents get older they are more collaborative with their mothers in resolving vulnerability, showing more openness to, or need for, her input.

In the context of important events, elaborative questioning was associated with resolution, and in the context of important and sad events, it was reiterating what the adolescent had said that was associated with resolution. This may reflect the emotional weight of these events—important events may be less emotionally seismic, emotionally, thus creating room for exploration with elaborative questions. In contrast, the emotional weight of sad events may be too much to deeply explore, and all one needs to resolve the event is validation of one's feelings. Indeed, many of the sad events were about death, and perhaps the confirmations allow the adolescent to realize that is acceptable to feel sad about loss, and gaining an explicit insight about the self is not the primary focus of these conversations.

Limitations and Conclusions

One of the larger limitations of this study is the lack of a longitudinal component to best capture the dynamic process of narrative identity *development*. In such a design, conversational processes can be used to predict an independent assessment of

adolescent narrative identity, such as aspects of the life story, for which there are now appropriate adolescent assessments (see Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; Reese et al., 2010). Further, though we adopted the general procedure for coding these conversations from the early childhood literature, alternative ways of coding the data may reveal a different picture of these processes, particularly relating to disentangling the order of conversational comments to tie the adolescent's production of meaning, for example, to a specific question from the mother. As is, we do not know if meaning-making is in response to the mother's questions or comments, or comes from the adolescent contributions, to which the mother is responding. Despite this limitation, we have shown that adolescent narrative processes and maternal scaffolding behavior are related in theoretically consistent ways, and that adolescent age and gender are important moderators of this relationship, which has bearing on aspects of the development of adolescent narrative identity.

Another potentially important limitation of our study concerns our sample. We recruited mothers and adolescents from the community who were motivated to participate in a psychological study together. In addition, our sample was almost exclusively composed of Caucasian dyads. Although representative of the region in which the study was conducted, this limits the generalizability of our findings. In addition, we note that this study looked exclusively at the mother's role in conversational processes, and we expect that fathers play a role in this process as well, though it may be different than mother's roles (e.g., Fivush et al., 2009). We also note that the nature of the task in our study was not completely naturalistic and that the somewhat contrived setting (providing a prompt to recall events) could potentially limit the extent to which narrative processes in the conversation emerged. The frequency of meaning-making was also quite low, though this is somewhat consistent with some other adolescent data (e.g., McLean & Breen, 2009), as well with as the mother's reports of meaning in her own memories from this data set (McLean & Morrison-Cohen, 2011), which suggests that the explicit kind of meaning we captured here may be less frequent in conversations as opposed to written reports (see McLean & Thorne, 2003, for a discussion). Further, it is clear in this study as well as others that the type of event matters for how much meaning is communicated (McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2006, unpublished raw data).

Although we have shown that event type and characteristics of the adolescent are important moderators of the relation between maternal scaffolding and adolescent narrative processing, there are likely many other specific features of the mother–adolescent dyad that impact scaffolding of a narrative identity. For example, the quality of the mother–adolescent relationship is likely critical to understanding vulnerability and resolution, in particular. The encouragement and validation of expressing vulnerability may be quite healthy if it leads to the scaffolding of resolution, for example. However, the process just described may be more likely to take place in the context of secure relationships, and the expression of vulnerability may be quite risky in other types of relationships.

In sum, as the aspects of narrative identity are varied—in this case, learning about the self and how to manage negative emotion—so too is the role of the mother. Overall, we suggest that mother and adolescent continue to co-construct personal narratives in adolescence, but with developmental shifts as the adolescent begins to take ownership of his or her own narrative

identity. Indeed, mothers appear to have a weaker role in predicting meaning-making in late adolescence, but a stronger role in predicting vulnerability and resolution. We expect that other relationships are beginning to participate in this co-construction process, especially by late adolescence, such as friends and romantic partners who may take on some of the mother's roles, or perhaps engage in different modes of scaffolding (McLean & Jennings, 2010). Learning to author one's story is a social project, and our results show that is a project with many facets from personal insights to the expression of deep emotions that eventually converge into a personal story of the self through time.

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Call for Papers: *Developmental Psychology*
Special Section on Moral Development

Editors: Daniel Lapsley & Gustavo Carlo

The field of moral development has undergone dramatic change over the past decade. Although the field was once dominated by stage theories in the cognitive developmental tradition, it is now clear that the study of moral functioning has been sparked a renascence of interest across a much broader spectrum of theoretical and empirical traditions; and across a spectrum of psychological disciplines, including the various neurosciences. It is now possible to talk about a new generation of moral development research that folds into its domain topics of long interest to developmental science even though these have not been traditionally conceptualized as moral development constructs. These include topics such as internal working models, event representations, theory of mind, autobiographical memory, self-regulation, genes, neurophysiology, temperament, emotions, socialization, culture, and self and personality development, among others. How these constructs are recruited for moral functioning is a pressing empirical question. In addition, we need better specification of developmental trajectories. Are there normative developmental achievements in the moral domain, and how do they intersect with changing contexts of socialization?

This special section will focus on the development of constructs of broad relevance to moral functioning and moral formation across the lifespan. We particularly welcome submissions with longitudinal designs, diverse methodologies and populations.

Authors must first submit a letter of inquiry (not to exceed two pages) to the special section editors that outlines the topic, sample, methodology and summary of findings, in order to determine its suitability for the intentions of the special section.

Letters of inquiry that outline the full manuscript are due April 15, 2012 and may be submitted directly to either Daniel Lapsley (Daniel.K.Lapsley.2@nd.edu) or Gustavo Carlo (carlog@missouri.edu). Initial decisions to invite full submissions will be completed by June 1, 2012. Full manuscript submissions will be due September 1, 2012.

All invited manuscripts will undergo the normal peer review process. Note that an initial invitation does not guarantee acceptance. Full manuscripts should be prepared in strict accordance with *APA* guidelines and eventually submitted through the *Developmental Psychology* manuscript submission portal (http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/dev/).