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Gaining from Loss: Meaning Making and Resolution in Emerging Adults' Low Point Narratives
as Predicted by Identity Development and Perceptions of Parenting in Adolescence

by

Tara M. Dumas

Honours Bachelor of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2005

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Arts

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Abstract

Past research suggests that difficult life events can disrupt the expected flow of life, often necessitating increased cognitive effort and reflection to assimilate into the greater life story. In the present longitudinal study, 104 emerging adults ($M=26$ years) narrated stories about their most difficult life experience. The relationship was examined between certain characteristics of participants' low point narratives (depth of learning and coherent positive resolution) at age 26 with their identity development, feelings of support, and parent-child relationships from late adolescence ($M=17$ years) to emerging adulthood. Depth of learning refers to the extent to which participants extract more sophisticated forms of meaning, such as gaining insight, from their life narratives as opposed to more simplistic forms of meaning, such as lesson learning, while coherent positive resolution refers to the ability to come to a clear and positive resolution to low point narratives. Narratives of more serious content and those with themes of mortality contained greater depth of learning than other narratives. Participants who were more diffused in their identity development (i.e., lacking identity exploration and commitment) demonstrated less depth of learning in their narratives while participants who had more advanced identity statuses or who showed an increase in identity development from age 17 to 26 demonstrated greater resolution in their narratives. Coherent positive resolution was a partial mediator in the relationship between perceptions of good parenting at age 17 and self-reported well-being at age 26. Narrative resolution was a partial mediator in the relationship between concurrent perceptions of family support and well-being at age 26. These results suggest the importance of identity development, healthy parenting and family support as unique contributors to personally meaningful and resolved low point narratives in emerging adulthood.

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Gaining from Loss: Meaning Making and Resolution in Emerging Adults' Low Point Narratives as Predicted by Identity Development and Perceptions of Parenting in Adolescence

“Troubles are a blessing that force you to change, to believe”. Dr. Maya Angelou

Late adolescence to early adulthood is a fascinating period of life characterized by personal discovery and growth. As older adolescents transition into their adult identities, the events that they are faced with, as well as the way in which they perceive these life events, further shape their beliefs, opinions and values about life. A unique type of life experience, the difficult life event, can encourage late adolescents and young adults to further reflect upon their already challenging lives during this period.

According to Marcia (1966), individuals with a more achieved identity status have engaged in exploration of the self and have committed to their own unique identity. Difficult life events are experiences that challenge our self-knowledge and promote the reflection and reevaluation of thoughts and beliefs. People who have not yet explored the self or who have not come to a clear conclusion about who they are as a person may find it challenging to explore and integrate these unexpected and often confusing life events into their ongoing life story. Young adults who are more developed in their identities, and who are more aware of who they are, may find it easier or may be more motivated to explore and integrate low points into their life stories by perceiving some sort of resolution or purpose, such as a lesson or an insight.

In addition to the promotion of reflection and re-evaluation of one's life, difficult life events can also affect emotional development. Perceiving difficult life events with positivity, coherence and resolution may have benefits for self-reported well-being (Pals,

2006-b) but may require a great deal of time, energy, and commitment, as well as a great deal of inner strength and optimism. Strong and supportive parent and social relationships may help to provide encouragement and guidance to adolescents, providing them with resources needed to optimally deal with difficult life events. Positive parenting and social support may help young individuals to understand and resolve difficult life events in a more positive way, leading to the maintenance or promotion of well-being.

The present study examined difficult life events by exploring the low point narratives of young adults. Narrative life stories are representations of a person's life seen through his or her own eyes (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The way in which people perceive their life events provides a glimpse into how they understand and give meaning and continuity to their lives (McAdams, 2001). By examining narratives of difficult life events, we can directly observe how participants perceive these experiences, what sort of meaning they have extracted from these experiences, and how well they have integrated the difficult events into their greater life story. In the current study, the relationship between certain narrative characteristics of difficult life events, identity development, and well-being will be assessed, as well as the possibility of beneficial effects of positive parenting and social support on well-being. The following literature review will further address important advances in narrative research, the experience of difficult life events and family and peer relationships in relation to cognitive and emotional development in late adolescence and emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

The Emergence of Identity and the Life Story

Erikson (1950, 1968) defined identity as an interconnected set of values and beliefs concerning social relationships, religion, career, and politics, which is initiated

during late adolescence. During this stage of life, important elements that contribute to the development of identity, such as advanced cognitive functioning, sexual and physical maturation, and the motivation to function as an adult begin to form together in the individual. Furthermore, because of the formal operational stage of cognitive development, which enables more complex and insightful thinking and meaning making, late adolescents are provided with the tools to explore the self and to reflect upon prior thoughts and beliefs (Erikson, 1968). Often, these prior thoughts and beliefs are modified or transformed to accommodate late adolescents' newfound insights and perspectives about themselves and the world around them.

As adolescents transition into their adult identities, and explore the kind of person that they want to become, feelings of vulnerability are common as their thoughts and feelings are very susceptible to change. Feelings of vulnerability paired with transformed thoughts and beliefs provide late adolescents with a foundation for identity exploration and development (Erikson, 1968).

In order to conceptualize identity development, Marcia's (1966) ego-identity status framework, derived from Erikson (1963), is often employed. Marcia's model identifies four distinct types of identity statuses characterized by varying levels of identity exploration and commitment. Specifically, individuals with a moratorium status have explored different identities but have yet to come to a commitment, whereas individuals with a foreclosure status have committed to an adult identity, but failed to explore different options before settling. Individuals who have a diffused status lack both identity exploration and commitment. According to Marcia et al. (1993), the least advanced identity statuses are foreclosure and diffusion, with both statuses lacking any

real sense of identity exploration. The most advanced form of identity development is identity achievement. Individuals with an achieved status have attained an adult identity through exploration and finally a commitment to their chosen identity. Identity achievement is related to stable self-esteem, and an ability to maintain intimate relationships (Marcia, 1987).

A more recent way of exploring identity is through the examination of narrative life stories. In narrative research, participants tell stories about momentous life experiences, often through interview. Bruner (1990) suggested that human beings commonly use a narrative mode of thought, which allows us to understand ourselves and the social world around us. Narrative accounts of momentous life events, such as high points, low points and turning points (life experiences that cause a person to change in some way) combine to create the personal life story (McAdams, 1993). Parallel with identity, the life story also emerges in adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1988). Adolescents begin to form a narrative understanding of where they are coming from, who they currently are and where they are going in the future. Similar precursors influence the emergence of the life story, such as advanced cognitive ability, physical and psychological maturity and the motivation to establish an adult identity (Grotevant, 1993; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Through the telling of high point, low point and turning point stories, researchers can examine the emergence of the life story in adolescence, as well as how people understand and integrate their important life experiences into the life story.

Singer and Blagov (2004) defined *Narrative Identity Processing* as the continuous process of incorporating past experiences into the life story and adjusting the event or the

life story to maintain continuity. *Narrative Identity Processing* allows for a coherent and flowing life story and is critical for further identity development, psychological functioning and well-being (McAdams, 2001; Singer, 2004; Singer & Blagov, 2004). Some life events, those that are unexpected or difficult to understand, are not easily incorporated into the life story and may produce a great deal of identity questioning. These types of life events usually include a degree of conflict, i.e., difficult or negative life events. According to McAdams (1985) they represent the category of *identity challenge*. However, the narrative reworking of difficult or negative life events may actually act as a coping mechanism, providing a sense of resolution, as well as promoting reflection and further identity exploration (Pals & McAdams, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Difficult Life Events

Previous research indicates that it is unlikely for people to explain or rationalize positive experiences in their lives as thoroughly as negative experiences (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finenauer, & Vohs, 2001). People often expect positive experiences to occur in their lives, and when they do, it is common for people to credit themselves as personally responsible instead of searching for a reason behind the positive occurrence. Because of this, positive life events can be accommodated relatively effortlessly into the life story, providing for *identity continuity* (McAdams, 1985). Positive events usually do not disrupt the expected flow of life. On the other hand, difficult life events are disruptive to the flow of life and require greater cognitive effort to understand (Piaget, 1965). Difficult life events encourage people to grapple with the meaning of the event and how it fits into one's life story. Loevinger (1976)

acknowledged that one's environment must first lack predictability, for example, through experiencing a disruptive negative event, before there is room for personal growth.

Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice (1985) found that individuals who had experienced an identity crisis were actually better off in terms of academic attainment, achievement motivation, and interpersonal intimacy than those who had experienced no crisis.

Difficult life circumstances may be seen as opportunities for growth. In addition, past research indicates that personal growth and development are likely to arise in people who have experienced a traumatic life event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Difficult life events provide people with a second chance to author their life stories in a more valuable way (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1998; Pals, 2006-a). Pals (2006-a) believes that by acknowledging and remaining connected to the negative feelings associated with a difficult life event, we can use the negative experience as encouragement to seek positive self-transformation and a healthier way of authoring our life stories.

In sum, difficult life events may be beneficial in the sense that they encourage personal growth and transformation. However, it is important to address the negative impact of difficult life events, especially in the adolescent and emerging adulthood age group. Since both difficult life events and the period of late adolescence and emerging adulthood are times which promote reflection and challenge past perceptions, difficult life events that are experienced by this population run the risk of being especially overwhelming. During difficult periods of life, people are required to cope with the resulting pain and disappointment, as well as the task of understanding the event in the context of their life story. If an adolescent or emerging adult is already questioning his or her past beliefs and perceptions, a difficult life event may serve to bring more

vulnerability to the way that he or she views the life story, encouraging a range of consequences from personal growth and reflection to confusion and a negative, bitter outlook on life. Satisfying parent-child relationships and a strong support unit may be especially important during difficult times in late adolescence and emerging adulthood by providing support, encouragement and a safe environment to explore one's emotions, subsequently influencing emotional development. The remaining sections of the literature review will examine first how perceptions of difficult life events are related to personal growth and identity development and second, how difficult life events may affect emotional development.

Identity Development

As previously discussed, the experience of negative life events and identity development may be related to each other, in that identity development may facilitate the exploration and assimilation of negative life events into the life story, while negative life events promote additional reflection and identity questioning. People are encouraged to reflect upon and make sense of difficult life events, subsequently providing an opportunity for changes in beliefs, thoughts and perceptions, as well as for possible reconstruction of the life story.

It has been suggested that all of our momentous life experiences involve conflict at some level, because momentous events are disruptive by nature (Rime, Mesquita, Phillipot, & Boca, 1991). Hardcastle (1985) argued that the life experiences judged to be the most meaningful were generally negative or difficult life events. For example, previous research indicates that mortality events are an especially important time for reflection and meaning making. Mortality events, especially in adolescence or young

adulthood, are usually about one's first serious experience with death and the vulnerability of the self and others. These events can encourage people to reflect upon their beliefs around death, values regarding life, and their life purpose, resulting in newfound beliefs, insights and life meaning (Thorne & McLean, 2002; 2003).

Even though some life experiences promote personal growth more than others, there are still important individual differences in the extent to which people explore the meaning of life events. This ability appears to be an important skill in people who are more advanced in their identity statuses (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Furthermore, this skill may allow certain individuals to extract more meaning or a more advanced kind of meaning from the same momentous life events than other people, further developing their personal identities.

McAdams (1988) suggests that the quality or sophistication of learning that accompanies life experiences advances over time with age and maturity. McLean and Thorne (2003) explored meaning making in participants' self-defining memories about various relationships, and identified two distinct types of learning. Meaning derived in narratives was characterized as either involving *lesson learning* or *gaining insight*. Lesson learning refers to a type of learning that is specific to a particular area of one's life and not applied widely to other situations. It is relatively simplistic and has been shown to be more frequent in younger adolescents as opposed to older adolescents or young adults (Dumas & Pratt, 2007; McLean, 2005). An example of lesson learning would be, "I learnt that I must put effort into my job in order to get a positive evaluation". Gaining insight is a more sophisticated and complex form of learning that can be applied more generally to one's life and usually transforms a person's beliefs, perceptions and

values about the self or others (McLean, 2005). An example of gaining insight would be, “I have grown to realize that I truly am a kind and caring person”. McLean and Thorne (2003) noted that both kinds of meaning were associated with greater conflict in participants’ stories, suggesting again that events that disrupt the flow of life promote exploration and meaning making.

McLean and Pratt (2006) examined the relationship between young adults’ identity statuses and meaning making in their turning point narratives. Similar to the coding scheme used by McLean and Thorne (2003), narratives fell into the categories of *no meaning*, *lesson learning* or *gaining insight*, with an increasing degree of sophistication. Additionally, a fourth, intermediate category, *vague insight*, was incorporated and served to capture meaning that was not developed enough to be classified as *gaining insight*, but not basic or situation-specific enough to be classified as *lesson learning*. An example of vague insight would include a broad statement of personal development, such as “I have grown as a person”, but would lack the specific explanation of how the person has grown. McLean and Pratt found that less sophisticated meaning making in participants’ turning point narratives (e.g., lesson learning) was associated with the less advanced identity statuses of foreclosure and diffusion. When participants’ questionnaire scores on the foreclosure, diffusion and moratorium scales were subtracted from their scores on the identity achievement scale, this “identity maturity index” at age 19 was positively related to more sophisticated meaning making in participants’ turning point narratives at age 23.

In regards to narrative topic or theme, narratives about autonomy, i.e., maturing or becoming independent, as well as mortality narratives, were positively related to more

sophisticated forms of meaning in participants' narratives, whereas achievement narratives were related to less sophisticated forms of meaning. This has been a common finding within the literature (Dumas & Pratt, 2006; Matsuba & Walker, 2004; McLean, 2005) and suggests that development of the life story relies on the growth of autonomy and the understanding of personal experience as well as others' limitations and vulnerabilities (McLean & Pratt, 2006; Matsuba & Walker, 2004). On the other hand, achievement narratives, whether positive or negative, may be more similar to high point narratives, in that they often do not require as extensive reflection. Standard cultural expectations about achievement may allow people to anticipate certain life events such as the lowering of grades in university, the experience of graduation, or finding a job, thus decreasing the disruptive impact that these events may have otherwise had. In addition, achievement narratives have been associated with more situation-specific and simplistic lesson learning, as opposed to events that requires more sophisticated meaning making and cognitive effort to accommodate into the life story (Dumas & Pratt, 2006; Matsuba & Walker, 2004; McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006).

In sum, McLean and Pratt conveyed that the status approach to identity development is somewhat associated with narrative accounts of life events, specifically indicating that a lack of identity exploration may be reflected in identity status as well as in the ability to form meaning in narrative life stories. Furthermore, the patterns of findings for story theme indicate the possibility that certain types of life events promote more sophisticated forms of meaning making, and this meaning making appears to be an essential part of identity development (McLean & Pratt, 2006).

One area of narrative research yet to be explored is the relationship between

identity development and the resolution of low point narratives. Similar to meaning making, the ability to resolve difficult life events may require extensive exploration, reflection and the assimilation of negative experiences into the life story in order to move beyond these life events. Individuals who have a better understanding of who they are as a person may be better able to understand how their low points fit within their life stories and thus this may allow them to resolve their difficult life experiences more effectively, as opposed to individuals who do not have a clear sense of who they are. Previous research suggests that the narrative resolution of difficult life events is related to subjective well-being (Pals, 2006-b); however, in the present study we also will examine the relationship between participants' identity development and their ability to resolve their low point narratives.

Life Stories and Emotional Adaptation

As we develop cognitively, it is common to recognize greater conflict within ourselves and the world, both acknowledging different ways of approaching situations, and answering questions (King, 2001). Without positive emotions, such as a sense of happiness or life satisfaction, it may be very difficult to cope with increased insight into the conflicts around us, which is associated with advanced cognitive development.

Previous research indicates that increases in positive narrative tone across time, regarding difficult or problematic life events, may predict subsequent improvement in certain areas of well-being, such as self-acceptance (Hemenover, 2003) and improvement or recovery from depression (Watt & Cappeliez, 2000). In addition, McAdams et al. (2001) indicated that redemptive themes in narrative life stories (i.e., stories that transition from negative to positive) were positively related to self-reported measures of

well-being among young and midlife adults. Thus, not only is it important for people to narrate their difficult life experiences with some evidence of exploration in order to achieve cognitive development, but it may also be important for people to resolve these difficult conflicts with a sense of positivity in their stories, which may promote emotional development in the future.

Past notions of development suggested that people who are more advanced in their identities or more psychologically mature are also happier in their lives. However, in more recent research, cognitive development (i.e., maturity and ego development) has been found to be largely unrelated to emotional development (i.e., happiness, satisfaction, and well-being; King, 2001; Noam, 1998; Vaillant & McCullough, 1987). Likewise, the ability to extract sophisticated levels of meaning from a life event does not necessarily indicate a more positive recollection of that event. This distinction between cognitive and emotional development in the literature has been beneficial, because it has allowed researchers to identify the unique pathways through which these outcomes occur, as well as how they are independently affected by challenging life events (King, 2001). King suggests that the ideal life goal is to be both mature and happy, both achieved in identity and satisfied with life. Several researchers have examined the distinction between emotional and cognitive development during momentous or challenging life events and the benefits that follow when one has reached a state of “mature happiness”.

King and colleagues have found that through two separate routes, people are able to find happiness as well as cognitive development from difficult or traumatic life experiences (e.g., King, 2001). These areas of personal growth have been examined in divorced women (King & Raspin, 2004), gay men and lesbians (King & Smith, 2004),

and parents of a child diagnosed with Down Syndrome (King et al., 2000). For example, parents who told positively ending narratives of their child's diagnosis with Down Syndrome had greater levels of subjective well-being two years later than participants who told stories that ended more negatively. As well, parents who were able to actively accommodate the diagnosis of their child into their life story had increased levels of ego development. These findings suggest that the positive perception of past events may be important for happiness and life satisfaction, while cognitive development may instead require an exploration of conflict and loss in order to understand and bring meaning to one's life events.

Similar to King and colleagues, Bauer and McAdams (2004) explored narrative themes of growth in transition narratives in relation to participants' concurrent cognitive development (i.e., the level of sophisticated or advanced thoughts about the self and others) and emotional well-being. Bauer and McAdams recruited participants who had recently experienced a life transition concerning either their career or their religion. Participants were asked to tell six different narratives concerning their occupational or religious change, for instance, describing a turning point or a conflict that occurred within their transition. Narratives were measured for *integration* themes, referring to the assimilation of new perspectives or ideas into one's sense of self or sense of others, and *intrinsic* themes, referring to the importance of topics such as happiness, the quality of personal relationships, and giving to society, expressed through one's transition narratives, among other measures. Each of the participants' six narratives was coded for the existence or lack of integration and intrinsic themes.

Bauer and McAdams noted that narrative themes of *integration* were significantly

related to participants' level of cognitive maturity. Parallel to meaning making (McLean & Thorne, 2005), narrative integration is characterized by the attempt to gain novel perspectives, and was noted in participants' narratives through, for example, the evidence of exploring new ideas or learning about oneself. Narrative integration is suggested to be a process involved in initiating identity development (e.g., Damon & Hart, 1988). On the other hand, participants' emotional well-being was positively related to narrative themes of *intrinsic* motivation, referring to themes of personal growth or relationships rather than material possessions or status (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For example, a narrative regarding the pursuit of a specific career path in order to express and share one's creative skill with others, as opposed to seeking financial gain, would be considered a theme of intrinsic motivation. Bauer and McAdams concluded, first, that people who placed a greater emphasis on meaningful relationships, which was reflected in their narrative stories, experienced greater well-being, while people who placed more emphasis and importance on individual growth, experienced a greater ability to evaluate life changes and derive meaning from them. Participants who were both happy and mature told stories that focused on what they had learned from intrinsic or personally meaningful events (especially meaningful relationships). Bauer and McAdams (2004) concluded that indeed, certain ways of perceiving one's significant life events corresponded to distinct types of personality development, namely cognitive and emotional development.

Along the same lines, using data from an extended longitudinal study, the Mills study, Pals (2006-b) examined the relationship between participants' cognitive and emotional development and the characteristics in participants' narrative low point stories. Mature women (age 52) were asked to tell a narrative about their most difficult life

experience since college. Narratives were examined for *exploratory narrative processing*, defined as evidence of exploration, complexity and depth of thinking about a life event. Similar to McLean and Thorne's (2003) *meaning making* and Bauer and McAdams' (2004) *narrative integration*, exploratory narrative processing addresses the person's ability to explore the meaning and purpose behind a life experience and to extract some sort of insight or wider perspective. It was found that participants who scored higher on a scale of self-reported coping openness, that is, who have engaged in a larger degree of open rather than defensive styles of coping at age 21, had greater levels of maturity at age 61 and this relationship was mediated by participants' level of exploratory narrative processing in their age 52 narrative low point stories. Thus, this finding further supports the notion that exploring and extracting insight or meaning from momentous life events may promote cognitive development. Furthermore, stories were also examined for *coherent positive resolution*, defined as the ability to conclude a life narrative with positive tone, and evidence of coherence and emotional resolution. The importance of transformative positive tone in narratives was noted by McAdams et al. (2001), who found that redemptive sequences in young and midlife adults' narrative life stories were more predictive of psychological well-being than the overall positivity of participants' stories. Likewise, Pals found that the level of coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives at age 52 was positively related to subsequent life satisfaction at age 61. The combination of both exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution in Pals' study was referred to as *positive self transformation* and was characterized by patterns of enduring and positive personal growth in participants' narratives. Pals suggests that positive self transformation may be the most mature and

healthy form of narrative identity processing, and may be an important skill in achieving King's (2001) notion of the good life: the experience of both happiness and maturity.

Interestingly enough, Pals (2006-b) noted that in her study, level of event severity was not related to coherent positive resolution or exploratory narrative processing. This is an unexpected finding, since one may assume that the more an event disrupts the life flow, the more people may feel the need to make sense of this disturbing event, thus promoting questioning, reflection, and meaning making. The participants in Pal's study told low point stories at the age of 52 and it is very likely that during these participants' lives so far, they have all been exposed to key difficult life events that are thought to promote reflection and perception change, such as the death or near-death of a friend or family member. Event severity or the amount of disruption caused by a life experience may be more important in the exploration and meaning making in late adolescents' or young adults' low point stories, since this population will have much greater variability in the experience of difficult life events than midlife adults. It is possible that those late adolescents and young adults who have experienced a severely negative life event will have a hard time making sense of the event in a positive way, and this also will be reflected in their ability to bring coherent positive resolution to their low point narratives. Consequently, the current study will take into account a measure of the magnitude of life disruption in young individuals' low point narratives, along with the examination of meaning making and coherent positive resolution, when examining factors related to cognitive and emotional development.

Parent Relationships, Social Support and Emotional Well-Being

In the previous section, it has been suggested that the way in which people choose

to perceive and make sense out of their difficult life events directly affects both their cognitive and emotional development. The interpretation of difficult life events in order to extract coherence and positivity is one way that people can consciously direct their development (Bauer et al., 2005), and may be crucial for a healthy narrative identity (Pals & McAdams, 2004). Furthermore, the ability to extract positivity from difficult life events may be especially important in the adolescent years, when impressionable youth are beginning to develop their identities (Erikson, 1968) and difficult events have a wider scope to have a lasting negative effect on personal outlook on life. Some adolescents are able to bring clarity, understanding and resolution to their narrative low point stories, concluding on a positive note. However, this ability takes a lot of cognitive and emotional effort and possibly outside encouragement. As was stated previously, the experience of a difficult life event during adolescence or early adulthood, periods of cognitive and emotional vulnerability, questioning, and transition, may be extremely difficult and overwhelming without an external support system.

Past research indicates that during adolescence, parents remain the main source of emotional support (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Intimate and satisfying parent-child relationships during difficult life events in adolescence may serve to promote emotional regulation, and the maintenance of well-being. Attentive parents may provide adolescents with guidance and encouragement to resolve issues and find some underlying positivity within difficult life events.

McLean (2005) found that participants between the ages of 16 and 27 were more likely to share a self-defining memory at an earlier time with family members (within one week prior to the event) than with peers or romantic partners (after one month following

the event). Furthermore, participants were more likely to share their self-defining memories with family for the purpose of emotional regulation, and with peers or romantic partners for the purpose of self-communication or to develop intimacy. These findings suggest that family members play an important role in providing immediate support, guidance and emotional regulation after a momentous life experience. Peers may also act as an important support system for adolescents, but may not be the immediate source of support.

In a longitudinal study, Bell and Bell (2005) investigated the relationship between certain family dynamics occurring during adolescence and subsequent midlife well-being. Family connection and individuation were examined, with family connection referring to how well adolescents' emotional needs are matched with the level of support and care giving from their parents, and family individuation referring to the extent to which parents encourage and accept their adolescent children's beliefs, opinions, and independent choices. Home interviews were conducted with 99 families containing at least one adolescent child. Through various group activities, family interaction was videotaped and measured. Approximately 25 years later, phone interviews were held with the previous adolescent participants, now in their late 30s or early 40s. The quality of family interaction and the family system atmosphere that participants experienced in adolescence was found to be directly related to well-being in mid-adulthood. Gender differences were noted, with family connection contributing more to the maintenance of women's well-being, and individuation contributing more to the maintenance of men's well-being. This study stresses the importance of a healthy family environment during adolescence and provides a strong example of the potential long term effects that family

interaction may have upon well-being.

The association between parent relationships and adolescent well-being has been further examined by Steinberg and colleagues in regards to authoritative parenting (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Steinberg et al. 1994). Authoritative parenting refers to a parenting style that is nurturing, accepting, and autonomy promoting, yet also firm and assertive (Baumrind, 1971). Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, and Mounts (1994) indicated that in contrast to adolescents who have been raised with authoritarian, indulgent or neglectful parenting styles, those adolescents raised by authoritative parents had higher adjustment levels, i.e., lower anxiety and depression scores, and higher self-esteem. Furthermore, adolescents are more likely to characterize authoritative parents as more responsive and involved in their lives, and this perception is important in predicting global well-being of adolescents (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Gray and Steinberg indicated that even though parents often exhibit flaws in their child-rearing, those that take a more active interest in their children's lives communicate to their children that they are loved and supported, and this is important for the child's subsequent well-being.

Purpose and Hypotheses

The present study examined the relationship between characteristics of young adults' narrative low point stories, and their identity development and well-being.

Participants with a mean age of 26, who had participated in Pratt, Pancer and Hunsberger's longitudinal *Futures Study* since age 17, were asked to share a number of narratives, including low point narratives, as well as complete several questionnaires regarding identity status, subjective well-being, perceived social and family support, and their perceptions and satisfaction with the quality of their parents' child-rearing and their

current family relationships. The purpose of the present study was to expand on previous narrative research, as well as to examine a possible pathway to the maintenance of well-being during difficult times in adolescence.

It was expected that participants' low point narratives at age 26 would vary in terms of story theme and severity, and that those characteristics of the actual narrative event would influence the amount of meaning making and coherent positive resolution found in participants' stories. Within narrative research, stories which contain conflict have been shown to be related to increased meaning making (McLean & Thorne, 2003). It is possible that experiences which cause greater conflict may require increased levels of exploration and reflection to assimilate into the life story, thus generating increased levels of meaning making within narrative stories. Additionally, it may be more difficult for young individuals faced with greater conflict to narrate negative events in a positive way, since especially conflicting or severe negative events may result in an increase in negative affect. Thus, it was first hypothesized that low point narratives regarding a more severe life experience also would contain greater depth of learning, and perhaps lower levels of coherent positive resolution.

Previous research using turning point narratives suggests that stories with mortality themes contain more sophisticated forms of meaning making, while stories with achievement themes contain less sophisticated forms of meaning making (e.g., Dumas & Pratt, 2006; McLean & Thorne, 2003). The relationship between narrative theme and coherent positive resolution, however, has not been examined within previous research. It is possible though, that some life experiences may be more difficult to understand in a positive way, as well as harder to resolve, than others. An exploratory approach will be

used in the present study concerning the possible relationship between themes of low point narratives and coherent positive resolution. Thus, it was hypothesized that low point narratives of different themes would also differ in terms of depth of learning and coherent positive resolution.

In terms of cognitive development, difficult life events have been suggested to disrupt the flow of life and promote individuals' efforts to make sense of the experience. In addition, people who have explored their identities and have a greater understanding of who they are as a person may be better able to understand and extract meaning from their low point narratives. Therefore it was expected that participants in the current study would show evidence of meaning making in their low point narratives, similar to the turning point narratives in McLean and Pratt's study (2006), indicating narrative accommodation and understanding. It was hypothesized that the depth of learning in participants' low point narratives would be positively related to an overall identity maturity index at age 17 and 26, as well as being related to an increase in measures of identity development from age 17 to 26.

Finally, expanding on the findings of Bell and Bell (2005), the present study examined a possible mediator of the relationship between parenting and adolescents' personal well-being: the interpretation of narrative life stories. It was proposed that healthy, interactive parenting in adolescence, and intimate and satisfying parent-child relationships in emerging adulthood, would provide participants with a safe and encouraging environment to make sense of their low point experiences in a positive way. In addition, it was hypothesized that participants' larger social networks may also contribute to this narrative ability. This pattern of interpreting low point narratives, which

Pals (2006-b) labeled as *coherent positive resolution*, was proposed in turn to mediate the relationship in the present study between participants' perception of good parenting at age 17 and subjective well-being at age 26, as well as the relationship between participants' level of perceived social support at age 17 and subjective well-being at age 26. Thus, good parenting and social support in late adolescence may encourage people to resolve their negative life events with positivity and clarity as emerging adults, in turn helping them to maintain or even increase a sense of well-being. It also was hypothesized in the present study that coherent positive resolution would mediate the relationship between participants' quality of relationship with their parents, assessed at age 26 and subjective well-being at age 26, as well as the relationship between family support at age 26 and subjective well-being at age 26. Thus, we proposed that the relationship between concurrent measures of family and parental support and subjective well-being would also be mediated by participants' ability to come to a coherent and positive resolution to their low point narratives.

Summary of Hypotheses

1. Low point narratives concerned with more severe life events will contain greater depth of learning, but may show less evidence of coherent positive resolution, than narratives regarding less severe events.
2. Low point narratives with dissimilar topics or themes will also differ in terms of depth of learning and coherent positive resolution.
3. Participants who are better able to come to a resolution and to extract greater depth of learning from their low point narratives at age 26 will have more advanced identity statuses at age 17 and 26, and will show increased identity

development from age 17 to 26.

4. Participants who report higher levels of good parenting and social support at age 17 will report higher rates of well-being at age 26. They will also show a greater capacity to narrate difficult life events at 26 with a sense of coherence and positive tone, and this ability will mediate the effects of early parenting and social support on well-being at age 26.
5. Participants with more satisfying parental relationships and more supportive family units at age 26 will have higher rates of well-being at age 26. They will also show the ability to narrate difficult life events at age 26 with a sense of coherence and positive tone, and this capacity will mediate the relationship between satisfaction with parental relationships and well-being at age 26, as well as the relationship between family support and well-being at age 26.

Method

Participants

Participants were 104 young adults (males $N = 32$, females $N = 72$) who had previously been involved with Pratt, Pancer and Hunsberger's *Futures Study*. Ages of participants ranged from 25 to 29, $M = 26.46$, $SD = .87$. At the time of data collection, 98% participants had completed high school, 74% had completed a college or university program and 19% were enrolled in or had completed graduate programs. Ninety-two percent of participants were employed and 27% were currently enrolled in an educational institution. Approximately 70% of participants reported being in a "committed relationship" at age 26 and nearly 20% were parents. Concerning participants' mothers' and fathers' education levels, 86% and 84% had completed high school, respectively,

44% and 48% had completed a college or university program, and 7% and 13% had completed graduate school. Sixty-seven percent of participants' parents were married.

At a mean age of 17, participants were originally recruited on a voluntary basis from 16 high schools in a region of central Ontario, Canada. The original *Futures Study* sample consisted of 896 predominantly white adolescents who were mostly born in Canada (88%). During the first data collection for the *Futures Study*, participants completed questionnaires in regards to cognitive and emotional development, as well as reported on satisfaction with family relationships.

For the 2006 follow-up of the *Futures Study*, participants were invited to take part in a 2 hour interview and questionnaire session at Wilfrid Laurier University, where they completed questionnaires, responded to interview questions, and told narrative stories. Participants were compensated for their participation with a cheque for \$50.00.

The present study's participants consisted of 12% of the original *Futures Study* sample. Comparisons of participants who remained in the *Futures Study* until age 26 versus those who did not participate at this testing period indicated no difference in age 17 measures of social support, perception of parenting or average high school grade. Participants who dropped out prior to the current testing period had higher foreclosure scores ($M=20.76$) on the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS; Adams, Bennion, and Huh, 1989) at age 17 than did participants who completed the age 26 measures ($M=18.65$), $F(1, 895) = 5.52$, $p < .05$. The percentage of males in the age 17 sample was 39%, whereas the proportion of males in the age 26 sample was 31%. However, this trend was not significant by $\chi^2(1) = 3.09$, $p > .05$.

Tasks and Measures

Relationship Measures

Good Parenting. At age 17, participants' standardized scores on the Family Assessment Device (FAD; Morris, 1990), on an authoritative parenting scale adapted from Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg and Dornbusch's (1991; see Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005) and on the Parent Interaction Inventory (PII; Hunsberger, Pratt & Pancer, 1997) were aggregated to produce an overall measure of good parenting developed for this study. Each of these components is discussed below. Cronbach alpha for this 3-item measure was .84.

Authoritative Parenting. At age 17, participants rated the level of authoritative parenting within their families (See Appendix A). Authoritative parenting is characterized by high levels of both strictness and responsiveness (Steinberg et al., 1991). Using questionnaire items, adolescents' perception of their parents' strictness and responsiveness on a 6-item and 10 item-scale, respectively, were summed together to create a "level of authoritative parenting" scale (Lawford et al., 2005). On a 9-point Likert scale from -4 (very strongly disagree) to +4 (very strongly agree) participants responded to statements such as "My parents spend time just talking with me" (responsiveness scale) and "My parents REALLY know what I do with my free time" (strictness scale). In the current study, Cronbach alpha was .80 for the strictness scale and .87 for the responsiveness scale.

Family Assessment Device (FAD). Participants completed the 12-item General Functioning scale of the McMaster Family Assessment Device at age 17 (See Appendix B). This scale provides a global assessment of family health in terms of issues such as

relationship functioning and emotional communication in the family. Participants' scores on each item of the FAD range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) on a 4-point Likert scale. An example item of the FAD is, "We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems". Higher scores on the FAD indicate healthier family functioning. Cronbach alpha for the FAD in the current study was .92.

Parent Interaction Inventory. At age 17, participants completed the 18-item Parent Interaction Inventory (See Appendix C). Participants indicated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 0 (none) to 4 (a great deal) how much they discussed certain areas of their lives (academics, family issues, future career plans, religion, moral values and politics) with their parents, how much they enjoyed discussing these 6 topics with their parents and how much influence they feel that their parents have on them regarding these areas of their lives. Cronbach alpha for the PII in the current study was .84.

Social Provisions Scale (SPS). At age 17, participants completed the Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Cutrona, 1984; See Appendix D), a self-reported questionnaire that assesses satisfaction with one's current level of social support. The SPS consists of 24 items measured on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from -4 (very strongly disagree) to +4 (very strongly agree). An example statement from the SPS is, "There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it". Higher scores on the SPS indicate greater perceived social support. Cronbach alpha for the SPS in the current study was .90.

Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire, Version C (PAFS-Q). At age 26, participants completed Bray's (2004) Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire Version C (PAFSQ; see Appendix E). This 22 item questionnaire assesses participants' level of satisfaction and intimacy regarding the relationship with both their

mothers and fathers. If one or both parents are deceased, then participants are instructed to reflect upon the quality of their previous relationship while the parent was still living. The PAFSQ is on a 5-point Likert scale which is separated into three different answering styles. Firstly, participants record on a scale from 1 (“Excellent”) to 5 (“Poor”) the quality of their relationship with both their mother and father. Secondly, participants further assess their parental relationships on a scale from 1 (“Very Satisfied”) to 5 (“Very Dissatisfied”) following statements such as, “Satisfaction of my relationship with my mother/father is:”. Lastly participants agree or disagree on a scale from 1 (“Strongly Agree”) to 5 (“Strongly Disagree”) with statements such as, “I usually help my parents understand me by telling them how I think, feel, and believe”. Higher scores on the PAFSQ indicate less satisfaction and intimacy within relationships with one’s mother and father. Cronbach alpha for the PAFSQ in the current study was .91.

Family Affective Solidarity (FAS). At age 26 participants completed a self-reported measure of family affective solidarity (Bengston, 1988; See Appendix F) consisting of 8 items on a 4-point Likert scale. An example of an item is, “How much do members of your family really care about you”. Items such as, “How often do they (your family) get on your nerves?” were reverse scored. Participants record the occurrence of certain events from 1 (never or not at all) to 4 (a lot or often). Higher scores on the FAS scale indicate feelings of closeness and emotional solidarity with the family of origin. Cronbach alpha for the FAS in the current study was .76.

Identity Development

The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS). At age 17 and 26, participants completed Adams, Bennion, and Huh’s (1989) Objective Measure of Ego

Identity Status (OM-EIS; see Appendix G). The OM-EIS is a self-report measure that targets how well people have explored and made a commitment in each of the following areas in life: religion, politics, and career. The 24 statements on the OM-EIS are separated into four 6-item categories and provide participants with a score on each of Marcia's 4 identity statuses: diffusion (e.g., "I haven't really thought about politics. It just doesn't excite me very much."), foreclosure (e.g., "I attend the same church as my family has always attended. I've never really questioned why."), moratorium (e.g., "I'm still trying to decide how capable I am as a person and what jobs will be right for me.") and identity achievement (e.g., "I've gone through a period of serious questioning about faith and can now say I understand what I believe in as an individual"). On a 9-point Likert scale, participants rated how well they agree with the statements, from -4 ("very strongly disagree") to +4("very strongly agree"). When participants completed the OM-EIS at age 17, Cronbach alphas for the subscales ranged from .41 to .66, and at age 26, Cronbach alphas ranges from .46 to .70. While rather low, these alphas are comparable to those reported in other samples (Adams et al., 1989).

To calculate a summary measure of identity development in the present study, participants' scores on the foreclosure, diffusion and moratorium categories of the OM-EIS were subtracted from their score on the identity achievement category to arrive at an "identity maturity index" at both age 17 and 26 (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Participants' age 26 identity maturity index was then subtracted from their age 17 identity maturity index to arrive at a measure of change in identity development from age 17 to age 26.

Marcia (1966) conceptualized identity development as not only the movement towards identity achievement, the most sophisticated identity status, but the movement

away from the less sophisticated identity statuses, foreclosure, diffusion and moratorium. By subtracting participants' identity achievement scores from their identity foreclosure, diffusion and moratorium scores on the OM-EIS, the identity maturity index provides an important composite measure of identity development: both the movement towards identity achievement and the movement away from less sophisticated identity statuses.

Emotional Development and Adjustment

Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP). Stones et al.'s (1996) Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP), which assesses subjective well-being, was completed by participants at age 26 (see Appendix H). The SHARP is a 12 item self-report measure on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants record how well statements such as "During the past month I have felt particularly content with my life" apply to them from -2 ("strongly disagree") to +2 ("strongly agree"). Negative statements such as "Life is hard for me most of the time" are reverse scored. Higher scores on the SHARP indicate greater self-reported subjective well-being. Cronbach alpha for the SHARP in the current study was .89. Because the SHARP was not included within the first few interviews of the current study, missing data were replaced by the overall mean of participants' SHARP scores for these participants (N=20).

Low Point Narratives

At age 26, participants were asked to describe a low point, a time or event in their life during which they experienced very negative emotions (See Appendix I). Low point stories were categorized by theme and topic severity, as well as examined for meaning making, and ending positivity, coherence and resolution.

Narrative Themes. Participants' low point stories were categorized by predominant theme, based on previous methodology (McLean & Pratt, 2006). The agreement between two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 20 low point stories (19% of the full sample) was 100%. A description of each general theme is included below.

Achievement: This theme included difficulties or conflicts concerning advancement in areas such as academics, work, or extra-curricular activities. Some examples of topics that this category encompassed are academic struggles, glass ceilings in the workforce or job loss and barriers in extra-curricular success.

Mortality: Stories coded under this theme were generally related to mortality, whether that was thoughts of death, near-death experiences of the self or others, or the actual experience of death in the participant's life.

Relationships: This theme encompassed difficult life stories about peer, family and intimate relationships, ranging from relationship conflicts to relationship loss.

Personal Conflict: Stories coded under this theme were related to conflict within self, such as psychological conflicts, religious or spiritual conflict, or problems with personal growth and independence.

Event Severity. The magnitude of life disruption was measured in participants' low point stories using Miller and Rahe's (1997) Recent Life Changes Questionnaire (RLCQ; See Appendix J). This research tool ranks 74 life changing episodes in terms of accompanying life stress and intensity of change. The overall themes of each participant's low point story were ranked using the RLCQ in order to assess objective event severity. The correlation between two independent raters, using a randomly chosen set of 20 low point stories was .99 (90% exact agreement rate).

Coherent Positive Resolution. The coding of coherent positive resolution followed Pals' (2006-b) methodology in order to maintain consistency when interpreting results. Coherent positive resolution consisted of four different characteristics of the ending of

participants' narratives: positive tone, negative tone, coherence and resolution. Positive and negative tone were rated separately to distinguish between stories consisting of both negative and positive affect and stories demonstrating a neutral affect. Negative and positive tone ranged from 1 ("not negative") to 3 ("very negative"), and 1 ("not positive") to 3 ("very positive") respectively, with 2 ("somewhat negative/positive") as the intermediate level for each variable. Ending coherence, defined as the clarity and distinct closure of a story was coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 ("very incoherent") to 4 ("very coherent"). Lastly, ending resolution, defined as the evidence of settled conflicts and emotions was coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 ("very unresolved") to 4 ("very resolved"). Using a random sample of 20 low point stories, two independent raters obtained a correlation of .96 (95% agreement rate) for positive tone, .72 (80% agreement rate) for negative tone, .81 (90% agreement rate) for ending coherence and .93 (90% agreement rate) for ending resolution. The coding of the author was used for analysis below.

Depth of Learning. Depth of learning was measured in participants' low point stories (following the work of McLean & Pratt, 2006), and stories were placed into the following categories

No Learning (Coded as 0): These stories contain no evidence of a lesson or insightful learning.

Lesson Learning (Coded as 1): These stories describe a positive or negative lesson learnt that is specific to the event experienced in the story.

Vague Insight (Coded as 2): These stories contain a form of learning that is more general than "Lesson Learning, but too brief and vague in regards to particular content to be coded as "Gaining Insight".

Gaining Insight (Coded as 3): These stories describe insight that is gained and applied broadly to various areas of one's life. This type of learning is abstract and transforms

one's views regarding the self, one's life, or relationships beyond the specific event experienced.

Each narrative was coded by two independent raters for depth of learning. Coding discrepancies were discussed between the two raters and resolved with no outstanding concerns. The two independent raters obtained a correlation of .74 (79% agreement rate) across all of the 104 narratives.

Coding Examples. The following low point narrative was categorized into an overall theme of mortality with a LCU score of 119 for "death of spouse". It was coded 3 for depth of learning (gaining insight), 3 for ending positivity ("very positive"), 3 for ending negativity ("very negative"), 4 for ending coherence ("very coherent"), and 2 for ending resolution ("somewhat unresolved").

"Well it was. This is the worst thing that's ever happened in my life. My boyfriend who I was living with at the time was diagnosed with cancer, and for a year afterwards went through radiation, surgery and whatnot, and he died four years ago. And it happened in London at the hospital, um so it was just him and I, his family was all involved as well. What did I do? Well we stayed together the whole year that he was sick and I just tried to be as supportive as possible and we went back and forth to London and driving and all the stuff you have to do. And obviously I was thinking and feeling very depressed, very lonely, very um, very lost. Um, the impact, it has made me appreciate life more, because it may not be there and the people that you're living and experiencing life with may not be there tomorrow. So if he leaves his socks on the floor it's not, you know, such a big deal because he may not be there tomorrow and you'd pray that his socks were still on the floor so. Um, and the experience say about who you are, who I was and who I am now. I guess that I'm a caring person and I still am."

The second low point narrative was categorized into an overall theme of relationships with a LCU score of 47 for "falling out of close personal relationship". It was coded 1 for depth of learning (lesson learning), 1 for ending positivity ("not

positive”), 3 for ending negativity (“very negative”), 1 for ending coherence (“very incoherent”), and 1 for ending resolution (“very unresolved”).

“Well it’s funny because you can always remember those 10 stories versus those happy ones, but, um. I would, I would have two. I don’t if that matters. Um, my parents divorced. I was about eight years old and I think even though, you know, it’s been so many years I think you never, you never sort of like, if I cry it’s just cause it’s (unclear). Um, yeah I know, it, it stays with you, it does. And, and ironically enough my fiancé comes from a divorced family too. So, it’s just uh, one of those things that we’ve had to sort of have each other to feel the support through. But just with the after effects, I mean you know, there’s statistics to say that we’re not going to make it, that that I think is the fuel for us, you know? (sure) So, I don’t know, um, my dad’s always been in the area so it’s not for lack that I have access to him if I choose to. It’s just, uh, the family divorce half basically (unclear), various issues with my parents, but um, I mean now looking back I can say that you know, um, obviously as a child you don’t know what’s going on and, and having taken so many counseling courses myself you kind of, you can separate, it’s not, you don’t personalize it, you know, or internalize it (right). I mean you kind of, you’ll always have traces of that but, and question, but um, you know, my dad struggled with alcoholism and to this day he does, and um, I just, the family violence would have got too out of, sort of that just kind of, um, I mean there was a time in my life where like a breaking point where I had to say I have to take care of me emotionally (um-hmm) because it’s really affecting me, um, to have to maybe screen your calls because you don’t want to hear, you know (right), your drunk dad, you know, on the phone. Just, it’s not something that um, I don’t know. That’s just how (yeah), how it is sometimes. And I mean you can’t really change it. You have to just sort of hope and make the best of it (yeah), but yeah. So, yeah, that would be sort of I wouldn’t say (unclear).”

Procedure

At age 17, participants were invited to participate in the *Futures Study*.

Researchers distributed questionnaire packages to classes of grade 12 students at 16 different high schools, which were then completed within the students’ high school classrooms. This initial questionnaire package consisted of measures of good parenting, social support, and the OM-EIS, as well as a number of other measures not related to this research.

For the most recent follow-up of the *Futures Study*, research assistants contacted participants by phone using a standard script. Phone numbers were obtained from the contact information received from the last *Futures Study* data collection (at a mean age of 23). Participants were invited to participate in a 2 hour research session at Wilfrid Laurier University. The session consisted of a verbal, audiotaped interview, followed by administration of a questionnaire package.

During the audiotaped, interview section of the current *Futures Study* follow-up, participants were asked to tell a low point story, as well as a turning point and high point story, and several other sections of an interview not related to this research. Afterwards, participants completed questionnaire packages containing the PAFSQ, the FAS, the SHARP, and the OM-EIS, among other measures.

Results

Using biserial correlations, it was revealed that males and females differed in the current study in terms of their average scores on the age 17 measures (social support, good parenting, and the identity maturity index), with females, on average, scoring significantly higher than males in each case, p 's < .01. At age 26, there were no significant differences between the average scores of males versus females in terms of either questionnaire or narrative measures. Furthermore, the patterns of relationships between narrative and questionnaire measures tested for the hypotheses appeared to be consistent across sex. Therefore, gender is not considered further as a variable in the analyses below.

The means and standard deviations for the questionnaire measures of parenting and support can be found in Table 1 (age 17 measures) and in Table 2 (age 26 measures).

Pearson correlation coefficients for the relations of family and support measures can be found in Table 3. As can be seen, the correlations were moderate in size at each age level. Correlations across ages 17 and 26 were positive, but somewhat more modest ($r_s \approx .30$).

The means and standard deviations for the narrative measures can be found in Table 4. Overall, there was a moderate amount of meaning making, ending positivity and ending negativity in participants' low point narratives. Ending coherence and resolution of participants' low point narratives were, on the whole, fairly strong. The amount of Life Change Units (LCU) allocated to narratives varied, with a fairly high overall mean (66.42; roughly equaling the LCU of a miscarriage or abortion) due to several narratives that were quite severe, involving several traumatic experiences such as death of a family member, divorce and serious illness. The theme most prevalent in participants' low point narratives was Relationship issues (50 stories), followed by Mortality (32 stories), Personal Conflict (14 stories), and Achievement (8 stories) themes.

Pearson correlation coefficients revealed that the subcategories of coherent positive resolution: ending positivity, coherence and resolution were all positively related with one another, and negatively related to ending negativity, $r_s = -.50$ to $.50$, $p_s < .001$ (see Table 5). Furthermore, depth of learning was significantly related to coherent positive resolution and its four subcategories, $r_s = -.27$ to $.45$, $p_s < .01$ (see Table 5). None of these variables accounted for more than 25% of the variance in another narrative index, however, and so it seemed reasonable to examine each of them in the tests below.

A measure of participants' high school grade point average was obtained at age 17, in order to examine whether participants who did better in school, or who are more cognitively advanced, exhibited increased levels of meaning making and coherent

positive resolution in their low point narratives at age 26. There was no significant relationship in the present study between average high school grade at age 17 and narrative meaning making at age 26, $p < .05$, *ns*, however, there was a significant relationship between average high school grade and narrative coherent positive resolution at age 26, $p < .05$.

A word count was completed for each low point narrative, in order to account for the possibility that people who tell longer stories and who are perhaps more articulate possess greater coherent positive resolution and depth of learning in their narratives. Pearson correlation coefficients revealed no significant relationship between word count and depth of learning, coherent positive resolution or the four subcategories of coherent positive resolution, $r_s = -.02$ to $.12$ (see Table 5). Furthermore, narrative word count was not related to any of the predictor variables in the study (identity development, good parenting, social support, family affectual solidarity and relationship satisfaction with parents) or self-reported well-being on the SHARP, and so it was not used in any analyses below.

Hypothesis 1

Pearson correlation coefficients were employed in order to determine whether the severity of low point content was related to both depth of learning and coherent positive resolution in participants' narratives at age 26. As was predicted, a positive, significant relationship between participants' LCU scores and depth of learning in participants' low point narratives was revealed, $r(102) = .32$, $p < .001$, one-tailed. Contrary to prediction, the relationship between participants' LCU scores and coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives, or with any of the subscales of coherent positive

resolution, was not significant, overall $r(103) = .03$, *ns* (see Table 5).

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2, which indicated that different narrative themes would differ in terms of depth of learning and coherent positive resolution, was partially supported. It is important to note however, that the distribution of participants across the four narrative themes was quite disproportionate; for example, 50 participants told relationship narratives and 8 participants told achievement narratives. Thus it is difficult to make strong conclusions regarding the findings of Hypothesis 2. A Tukey test revealed that mortality narratives had significantly higher LCU scores than the other types of narratives, $ps < .05$ (see Table 6). According to a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), using event severity as a covariate, narratives with dissimilar themes still differed in terms of depth of learning, $F(4, 99) = 3.77$, $p < .01$. A Tukey test revealed that mortality narratives contained significantly more meaning making did than relationship narratives, $p = .03$ (see Figure 1). However, five additional one-way ANOVAs indicated that narratives with different themes did not differ in terms of coherent positive resolution or any of the four subcategories of coherent positive resolution, Overall $F(3, 100) = .13$, $p = .94$, *ns*.

Hypothesis 3

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 3, that participants who had greater resolution and depth of learning in their low point narratives would have more achieved identity statuses at age 26, and increased identity development from age 17 to 26.

Analyses, using partial correlations controlling for event severity, revealed that participants' identity maturity index at age 17 and at age 26 were marginal predictors of

depth of learning in low point narratives at age 26, $r = .14$ and $r = .15$, respectively, $ps < .10$, one-tailed (see Tables 7 and 8). Furthermore, participants' identity development from age 17 to 26 was not a significant predictor of depth of learning in low point narratives at age 26, $r = .02$, ns (see Table 8). A negative relationship was found, however, between depth of learning in participants' low point narratives and the diffusion identity status subscale of the OM-IES at age 17, $r(102) = -.17$, $p = .10$, and at age 26, $r(102) = -.20$, $p = .05$, indicating that participants with higher diffusion scores at each age tended to extract less meaning from their low point narratives (see Tables 7 and 8).

Using partial correlation analysis, controlling for event severity, it was revealed that participants' identity maturity indexes at ages 17 and 26 were significant predictors of ending resolution in participants' low point narratives at age 26, $r(102) = .24$, $p < .01$, one-tailed, and $r(102) = .46$, $p < .001$, one-tailed, for age 17 and age 26, respectively. Additionally, participants' identity index increase from age 17 to 26 was positively related to ending resolution of low point narratives at age 26, $r(102) = .19$, $p < .05$, one-tailed. To interpret these patterns, see the partial correlations between each of the four identity status subscales of the OM-EIS at age 17 and 26, and ending resolution and meaning making in low point narratives at age 26 in Tables 7 and 8.

Hypothesis 4

Using the mediational analysis technique identified by Baron and Kenny (1986), a series of regressions was used in order to assess whether coherent positive resolution in participants' low point narratives mediates any of the relationships between the Good Parenting Scale (GPS) or the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) at age 17 and well-being on the Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP) at age 26. The first step in

this analysis is to conduct a regression with the independent variable (GPS or SPS) predicting the dependent variable (SHARP). Second, a regression is conducted with the independent variable (GPS or SPS) predicting the mediator (coherent positive resolution). A next step is to show that coherent positive resolution is a significant predictor of the SHARP. The last step is to conduct a regression with both the independent variable (GPS or SPS) and the mediator (coherent positive resolution) predicting the dependent variable (SHARP). For mediation to be present, the effect of the independent variable upon the dependent variable must be significantly less in the final regression than in the second one, and the mediator must remain a significant predictor. This would indicate that the mediator is indeed accounting for some of the predictive power that the independent variable has upon the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 4, that good parenting and social support at age 17 would predict positively to self-reported well-being at age 26, and that coherent positive resolution of low point narratives at age 26 would mediate these effects, was partially supported (see Figure 2). The mediational analysis technique identified by Baron and Kenny (1986) was utilized. Using regression analysis, it was revealed that good parenting at age 17 was a significant and positive predictor of SHARP scores and coherent positive resolution at age 26, $\beta = .28, p < .01$, one-tailed and $\beta = .27, p < .01$, one-tailed, respectively (see Tables 9 and 10). Additionally, coherent positive resolution at age 26 was a significant and positive predictor of SHARP scores at age 26, $\beta = .33, p < .001$, one-tailed (see Table 11). When participants' SHARP scores were regressed upon both good parenting and coherent positive resolution, the predictive power of good parenting dropped to $\beta = .20, p = .05$, one-tailed, while coherent positive resolution remained a significant predictor (see

Table 12). A Sobel test was conducted and revealed that the drop in the beta value of good parenting at age 17 (29%) was significant, $Z = 1.64$, $p = .05$, one-tailed.

Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediational analysis was repeated with social support as the independent variable (see Figure 3). Using regression analysis, it was revealed that social support at age 17 was a significant, positive predictor of SHARP scores and coherent positive resolution at age 26, $\beta = .30$, $p = .001$, one-tailed, and $\beta = .19$, $p < .05$, one-tailed, respectively (see Tables 13 and 14). As noted above, coherent positive resolution predicted the SHARP significantly. When participants' SHARP scores were regressed upon social support and coherent positive resolution, the predictive power of social support dropped to $\beta = .24$, $p = .01$, one-tailed, and coherent positive resolution remained significant (see Table 15). A Sobel test was conducted and revealed that the drop in the beta value of social support (20%) was marginally significant, $Z = 1.53$, $p < .10$, one-tailed.

Hypothesis 5

Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediational analysis technique, an initial regression revealed that participants scores on the PAFSQ, indicating intimacy and satisfaction with relationships with parents, at age 26 were a significant, negative predictor of SHARP scores, since higher PAFSQ scores indicate less satisfaction and intimacy in parent-child relationships, $\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$, one-tailed (see Table 16). Participants' PAFSQ scores were marginally related to coherent positive resolution at age 26, $\beta = -.14$, $p < .10$, one-tailed (see Table 17). When SHARP scores were regressed onto PAFSQ scores and coherent positive resolution, the predictive power of PAFSQ scores dropped slightly, $\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$, one-tailed, while coherent positive resolution

remained significant. Through the use of a Sobel test, it was revealed that the drop in the beta value of PAFSQ scores (11%) was not significant, $Z = -1.29$, *ns*.

Further analysis examining the subcategories of coherent positive resolution as possible dependent variables revealed that participants' PAFSQ scores were a significant predictor only of ending resolution, $\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$, one-tailed (see Table 18). A Sobel test, using ending resolution as a mediator, revealed that the drop in the beta value of participants' PAFSQ scores (11%) was marginally significant, $Z = -1.55$, $p < .10$, one-tailed (see Figure 4).

In a second mediational analysis (see Figure 5), two regressions revealed that family affectual solidarity at age 26 was a significant, positive predictor of SHARP scores and of coherent positive resolution at age 26, $\beta = .36$, $p < .001$, one-tailed, and $\beta = .23$, $p < .01$, one-tailed, respectively (see Tables 20 and 21). As noted for Hypothesis 4, coherent positive resolution was a significant predictor of the SHARP well-being scores. When SHARP scores were regressed onto both family affectual solidarity and coherent positive resolution, the predictive power of family affectual solidarity dropped moderately, $\beta = .30$, $p = .001$, one-tailed, while coherent positive resolution remained significant (see Table 22). Through the use of a Sobel test, it was revealed that the drop in the beta value of the FAS (17%) was significant, $Z = 1.91$, $p < .05$, one-tailed. This suggests that coherent positive resolution may be a partial mediator of the concurrent relationship between family affectual solidarity and self-reported well-being on the SHARP. To explore this further, four additional mediational models were completed, each using one of the four subcategories of coherent positive resolution as an independent variable. A Sobel test revealed that only ending resolution was a significant mediator in

the relationship between family affectual solidarity and self-reported well-being on the SHARP, with a Sobel test revealing a 19% drop in the beta value of the FAS, $Z = 2.00$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 6 and Table 23).

Discussion

The main goal of this research project was to investigate how both identity development and the quality and support of certain social relationships in adolescence affect the way in which people perceive their difficult life events as emerging adults, and how this perception is related to concurrent identity development and the quality and satisfaction with one's life. The present study, which contributes to the growing body of narrative life story research, produced several interesting findings which help to shed light upon predictors, narrative qualities and possible outcomes of a good life story.

Low Point Event Severity

Hypothesis 1 stated that narratives concerning more severe life events would contain increased meaning making and less coherent positive resolution than narratives concerning less severe life events. The overall theme of participants' low point narratives was ranked by the amount of stress and change that they are expected to provoke, using Miller and Rahe's (1997) Life Change Units scale (LCU). As was hypothesized, participants' LCU scores were positively related to increased meaning making in their low point narratives, suggesting that events which cause greater disruption and discomfort to life encourage a greater need to form meaning from the experience. This finding is consistent with past theories that view more negative and disruptive life events as requiring more cognitive effort to understand (McAdams, 1985; Piaget, 1965). As was previously stated, difficult life events fall into McAdam's (1985) category of *identity*

challenge, which implies that they encourage people to grapple more intensely with the meaning of the event and how it fits into one's identity and life story.

Striving to learn a lesson or gain insight from a negative life experience is one way of taking an event that, on the surface, may seem to have had a negative impact on one's life, or may seem to be in conflict with one's life flow, and reconstructing the outcome to include some sort of purpose and benefit, some sort of gain that the person receives from this event, thus making it easier to assimilate the event into one's life story (Pals & McAdams, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Perhaps the cognitive dissonance that people feel when faced with a life experience that doesn't fit with their expected flow of life is increased when they are faced with an event that is especially difficult to make sense of, such as an unexpected death, and thus encourages them to take greater strides at understanding the meaning that this event holds for them. In sum, the first finding of the current study suggests that more severe and conflicting negative experiences promote or encourage more reflection upon the meaning of the negative event and a more sophisticated form of meaning making, such as gaining insight. This is consistent, in a general way, with previous findings regarding conflict and higher levels of narrative meaning making (McLean & Thorne, 2003).

An additional finding of the current study in regards to event severity was that low point narratives with an overall theme of mortality possessed significantly higher LCU scores than narratives with an overall theme of relationships, personal conflict or achievement. This is a reasonable finding since the events on Miller and Rahe's (1997) scale with the three highest LCU scores are death of a sibling (102 LCUs), death of a spouse (119 LCUs) and death of a child (123 LCUs). It is possible also for participants to

receive high LCU scores with narratives of themes other than mortality, however. An event with an overall relationship theme, that of divorce, with 97 LCUs, was the fourth most severe life event according to Miller and Rahe (1997) and if more than one life changing event was described as contributing to a participant's low point narrative, the LCU scores of each event were aggregated together. Thus, there were low point narratives other than mortality stories that were quite severe. However, as life experience teaches us, mortality events can be the most painful, negative and disruptive events that we face as human beings.

The second part of Hypothesis 1, that stories concerning more severe life events would contain less coherent positive resolution than stories concerning less severe life events, was not confirmed. There was no relationship between participants' LCU scores and the coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives. Furthermore, participants' LCU scores were not related to any the subcategories of coherent positive resolution, ending positivity, negativity, coherence or resolution. This is an unexpected finding, since it was speculated that since negative life events would seem more challenging to understand within the context of one's life, it may be harder for young individuals to resolve more severely negative life events in a positive and coherent way. These results are, however, consistent with previous research by Pals (2006-b) who revealed that level of event severity was not related to coherent positive resolution in her study with participants who told a low point narrative at age 52.

Perhaps since difficult life experiences promote individuals to reflect upon and assimilate these events into their life stories, people who experience more severely negative events are that much more motivated to resolve them. The increased cognitive

dissonance and emotional turmoil that persons feel when faced with a life experience that is especially traumatic and difficult to make sense of may encourage them to make greater efforts at resolving their low points in positive ways, ultimately protecting their emotional health and well-being. Therefore, in the present study, participants' low point stories on average, whether they were regarding troubles with co-workers or a tragic death of a loved one, tended to end in a somewhat resolved and coherent manner.

Themes of Low Point Narratives

Hypothesis 2 posited that narratives with dissimilar topics or themes would also differ in terms of meaning making and coherent positive resolution. Results indicated that mortality narratives contained significantly more meaning making than relationship narratives, even when event severity was removed as a covariate (as noted, mortality narratives were higher than others in event severity). Thus, different types of low point events, in addition to the severity of these events, may encourage greater meaning making than others. Unfortunately due to the small number of participants who told narratives with an overall theme of achievement or of personal conflict, it is possible that our test did not have enough power to distinguish differences between these and other narrative theme types. Forty-six percent of participants in the current study told relationship narratives, and 31% of participants told mortality narratives, which are, in a sense, a type of relationship story often in which the narrator permanently loses a relationship with another person. Since humans are inherently social beings, it makes sense that when asked to talk about our most difficult life events, we may immediately recall conflicts with, or a loss of, another person. Because human interaction is so important to us, we may view the loss of another person, for example, as more traumatic

then a loss of a material possession or opportunity, such as a career. Thus, it is possible that the unequal distribution of narrative themes in the present study is not due to characteristics of the current sample of participants, but a reflection of the importance that people place on human contact. Only further investigation could address this issue.

Unlike the current study, past research has revealed that achievement narratives are often related to more situation-specific and less sophisticated forms of meaning, such as lesson learning (Dumas & Pratt, 2006; Matsuba & Walker, 2004; McLean, 2005; McLean & Pratt, 2006). Again, our failure to replicate this finding could be due to the small sample of participants who told achievement narratives in the current study or due to a possible content difference between achievement narratives told as turning points in previous work versus those told as low points in the present study. Turning point narratives about achievement often refer to the successful attainment of a goal, or a loss of achievement that generated a positive change in one's life, such as the loss of a job which allowed a person to take on a new profession. Low point narratives about achievement in the present study were stories about failure to attain a particular goal, a failure to succeed. It is possible that achievements which act as turning points in people's lives are less negative and less disruptive as compared with low point narratives about achievement, thus demanding less cognitive effort and reflection to understand, resulting in the production of less sophisticated forms of meaning making. Low point narratives about achievement, on the other hand, may demand more cognitive effort and reflection to understand, thus resulting in amounts of meaning making similar to low point narratives about relationships or personal conflict in the present data (see Figure 1). In the future, it would be valuable to examine the differences between common themes of

turning point and low point narratives, in order to clarify how the characteristics of certain themes, such as achievement, differ across these story types.

The finding that mortality narratives contained more sophisticated forms of meaning making than relationship stories is consistent with previous research, which found that, on the whole, mortality narratives reflect greater evidence of meaning making than narratives of other themes (Dumas & Pratt, 2006; McLean, 2005). In sum, the current study's findings support the idea that mortality experiences are unique events which contribute a great deal of stress and disruption to life but also encourage meaning making through the need to understand and integrate these events into the life story. The experience of mortality events can cause one to question and reflect upon the importance of relationships, the importance of living life to the fullest and the overall meaning or purpose of life. Deep reflection and insight can come from the death of others, often leading people themselves to realize how precious their own lives are and how they could be living their own lives in a more fulfilling way. These anecdotes provide vivid examples of why personal growth and development often arise in people after they have experienced a traumatic life event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

The second part of Hypothesis 2, that narratives with dissimilar themes would also differ in terms of coherent positive resolution, was not supported. There were no differences between narrative themes in terms of coherent positive resolution or any of coherent positive resolution's subcategories: ending positivity, negativity, coherence or resolution. Again, this finding was unexpected since certain themes of low point narratives, such as mortality, seem to bring more stress and disruption to life. It was expected that narratives of more severe themes would be more challenging to resolve in a

positive and coherent way. However, similar to results for event severity, it appears that individuals who narrate stories with more traumatic themes such as mortality feel especially encouraged to understand and resolve their low points in positive ways. Thus, it appears that on average, regardless of theme, participants' low point stories often ended somewhat resolved and coherent. In fact, as shown in Table 5, meaning-making, which was higher in mortality stories, was substantially predictive of all the components of positive resolution.

Identity Development and Low Point Narratives

Hypothesis 3 stated that participants who were better able to resolve and to extract more insightful forms of meaning from their low point stories at 26 would have more achieved identity statuses at ages 17 and 26, and would show increased identity development from age 17 to 26. In the analysis for Hypothesis 3, event severity (participants' LCU scores) was controlled for in order to account for the possibility that, for example, participants who told narratives about more severe life events would have a more difficult time articulating the meaning that they extracted from their low points. Concerning the relationship between meaning making and identity development, our hypothesis was not fully supported. There was a marginal relationship between meaning making in participants' low point narratives at age 26 and their age 17 and 26 identity maturity indices (their OM-EIS scores on the identity achievement subscale minus their OM-EIS scores on the three less advanced identity statuses). Participants' identity development from age 17 to 26 (their age 26 identity maturity index minus their age 17 identity maturity index) were not predictors of meaning making in participants' low point narratives at age 26 as was hypothesized.

The rationale behind section one of Hypothesis 3 was that people who are more identity achieved or who had more experience exploring, reflecting upon and making choices about who they are as a person would be better able to explore and reflect upon their low point narratives, subsequently extracting more sophisticated or more insightful forms of meaning from their low point narratives. This hypothesis was derived from previous work on turning point stories (McLean & Pratt, 2006).

The current study revealed a negative relationship between identity diffusion on the OMEIS at both 17 ($p < .10$) and 26 ($p < .05$) and meaning making in participants' low point narratives. This suggests that people who are more diffused, that is, those who have not engaged in identity exploration or identity commitment, have trouble extracting meaning from their low point narratives. This implies that rather than identity achievement acting as a facilitator, identity diffusion may hinder the ability to extract meaning from difficult life events. This pattern of findings is partially consistent with the work of McLean and Pratt (2006), whose analysis revealed that a relationship between identity status and meaning making within emerging adults' turning point narratives at age 23. This finding specifically involved negative correlations between identity diffusion and meaning making.

It is uncertain as to why there was no relationship between depth of learning and participants' identity achievement, moratorium and foreclosure scores on the OM-EIS. This finding is inconsistent with previous research, which indicated a negative relationship between moratorium and foreclosure identity statuses, with meaning making in emerging adults' turning point stories at age 23 (McLean & Pratt, 2006). One possibility, which was touched on above, is that all individuals may be encouraged to

explore and make sense of their low points, in order to relieve feelings of discomfort and confusion. However, people with a diffused identity status, the least advanced identity status, simply are unable to or unwilling to explore the meaning of these difficult life events. Perhaps even individuals higher on foreclosed or moratorium statuses are motivated to create meaning from the strong feelings of discomfort and confusion accompanying negative life experiences.

It is important to note that forming meaning from experiences is not the only way to understand disruptive life events. Some individuals may believe that their negative event is attributed to a higher being(s), a God(s) working in a manner that is unclear. Some Asian cultures, for example, believe that, like ying and yang, negative and positive things happen to everyone and that you need to accept the bad with the good, so to speak, because this is how the universe functions. It is quite plausible that some participants in the current study used other methods to understand and assimilate their low points into their life stories as opposed to extracting meaning from them. In future narrative research, it would be interesting to investigate different ways in which people strive to understand and bring clarity to their negative life events. Further probing in the narrative interviews might facilitate this. It is also important to further examine the relationship between identity development and depth of learning in people's low point narratives, in order to elucidate the rationale behind this relationship. It would be beneficial to continue to follow the current study's participants longitudinally to see if those individuals who told low point narratives with more sophisticated forms of meaning experienced a subsequent increase in identity development. This would further support the idea that the relationship between identity development and narrative meaning making is mutually influential.

Section two of Hypothesis 3 stated that participants who were better able to resolve their low point narratives at 26 would show more advanced identity statuses at ages 17 and 26, and would show increased identity development from age 17 to 26. Again, as with all of the Hypothesis 3 analysis, event severity was controlled. Participants' identity maturity index at age 17, and their identity development from age 17 to 26 were both positive predictors of clear resolution in participants low point narratives at age 26. Furthermore, participants' identity maturity index at age 26 was positively related to resolution of their low point narratives at age 26 (see Tables 7 and 8).

The pattern of results concerning the relationship between narrative resolution and participants' scores on the subscales of the OM-EIS suggests that those participants who are higher in identity achievement are better able to resolve their low point narratives, whereas participants who show higher levels of identity diffusion or moratorium have a more difficult time bringing resolution to their low point narratives. It appears that people who are more developed in their identities, and thus who have a clearer sense of who they are as a person even across a period from age 17 to young adulthood, may be better able to deal with and resolve difficult life experience more effectively than individuals who have a less developed identity. Perhaps people who have openly explored their life experiences and who they are as a person may feel more comfortable exploring negative events that occur in their lives. They may be less hesitant to explore and understand negative life events in general. This may lead achieved individuals to actively face their emotions about their low points head on and be more likely to overcome these negative feelings.

Identity achieved individuals have made a commitment regarding who they are as a person and thus may feel a sense of security with their chosen identities. Past research indicates that identity achievement is related to a stable sense of self-esteem (Marcia, 1987). This may help individuals faced with hardships to have the confidence to delve into their low point experiences and bring them to an emotional resolution. On the other hand, persons with a more diffused or moratorium identity status (see Table 8), who have yet to come to a clear conclusion as to who they are as a person, seem to have less confidence in themselves and thus may be less likely to actively cope with and move on from negative emotions that result from key difficult life experiences. If you do not have a clear idea of who you are as a person, it may be quite difficult to grasp why negative, possibly confusing events have occurred in your life and attempt to assimilate and move past them emotionally. For instance, individuals in a moratorium identity status, who have begun exploring their identities but have not yet committed to one, may have trouble moving past the low points in their lives because they are still trying to understand who they are and what their life experiences say about who they are as a person. The following example narrative comes from a participant with a high moratorium score on the OM-EIS at age 26, who has yet to resolve her low point experience.

I started in the workforce two years ago this summer. Two years ago I received my masters degree and started my first full time job. Um, you know, it was, you don't know what to expect, it's going to be different from being in school all the time, but I had done co-ops and thought oh, this isn't going to be too bad. And just uh, the pressure of you know, having so much work to do and not having enough time, and the demands... So, I ended up working late the first few months, I was working, I was going insane because I didn't know how to balance those two demands on my time. And not knowing what to do and having to jump in late, it was really a sink or swim atmosphere where you have to do

this and figure it out and if it takes you fifteen hours to do it and we were only budgeted for five, well, you're just going to have to figure it out, and so that, you know, it's really, it really was difficult because you think during school "I'm finally going to have weekends to myself", "I'm finally going to have evenings to myself". And yeah, it just didn't happen and, you know, you think you work towards something and then all of a sudden it's not, it doesn't turn out to be what you thought it was going to be, so, it was very difficult. Um, it impacted me and it makes me question what I want to do with the rest of my life. There are a lot of days where I think this isn't what I want to be doing and what else is out there for me? So, definitely you question why you worked so hard in school for, because you're like, if I wasn't working towards this, then why was I doing that?

It is clear that this person is still trying to discover what vocation is best for her, and this lack of certainty regarding the self may be restricting her from settling into a career path that might be more suitable to her personality and skill. Thus, the current narrative demonstrates the possibility that some individuals may have troubles resolving their low points because they have difficulties understanding who they are as a person and what they need in order to be able to resolve their low points, for example, what vocation would work best for them. Of course, this narrative also reflects the fact that this unresolved low point experience itself may also be a factor in the story-teller's moratorium status. More generally, further work is necessary to understand the possible causal orderings of these important links between identity and the life story.

In the current study, there was no relationship between low point resolution and the adherence to foreclosed identity status. Foreclosed individuals have committed to one identity, however they have failed to engage in a period of identity exploration before making this commitment (Marcia, 1966). Therefore, it is possible that they may show a somewhat similar pattern when interpreting certain life events. McLean and Pratt (2006) revealed a negative relationship between meaning making in emerging adults' turning point narratives and their scores on the foreclosure subscale of the OM-EIS, thus

suggesting that more foreclosed participants failed to explore the meaning behind their turning point events. It is also possible that foreclosed individuals are more likely to experience a life event without exploration of ensuing emotions. For example, some foreclosed individuals may narrate unresolved low points, indicating a lack of exploration, while others may demonstrate blind faith in others or in a higher being, which may allow their low point narratives to appear somewhat emotionally resolved with minimal exploration and effort to reach their conclusion. It would be interesting to further examine foreclosed individuals' patterns of resolving negative life events and their subsequent emotional and cognitive development following these life experiences in order to see how foreclosed patterns of narrative story telling affect future development.

In sum, the finding that identity maturity and identity development over the period of late adolescence (age 17) to early adulthood (age 26) are related to the ability to resolve low point experiences at age 26 seems reasonable. Individuals with more advanced identity statuses appear to be better able to resolve their negative life experiences. In turn, the process of exploring and coming to a clear resolution of negative life experiences may help people to understand and explore their lives on the whole, further increasing their identity development. Further longitudinal research, concurrently examining both participants' identity development and the use of resolution in narration of difficult life events over a period of time, from adolescence to adulthood could shed additional light on the possible causality relative to this important link between traditional measures of identity development and narrative low point resolution.

Relationship Characteristics as Predictors of Well-Being and Coherent Positive Resolution

Hypothesis 4 posited that participants who experienced higher levels of good parenting and social support at age 17 would have higher rates of well-being at age 26, higher narrative resolution of low points at age 26, and this ability to narrate difficult life events at 26 with a sense of coherence and positive tone would mediate the effect on well-being at age 26. The good parenting measure that was utilized in the current study at age 17 consisted of participants' ratings of the amount of contact and quality of contact with their parents, their parents' level of authoritative parenting, and the degree to which family of origin relationships functioned in an emotionally healthy way. Participants who experienced higher levels of good parenting at age 17 reported higher subjective well-being at age 26 (see Table 9), supporting the considerable body of literature suggesting that parents who are responsive and involved may promote the future well-being of their children (Bell & Bell, 2005; Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Additionally, participants who perceived themselves as having more social support at age 17 reported increased levels of well-being at age 26, as compared to participants who felt less social support at age 17 (see Table 13). This is a common finding (Ystgaard, Tambs, & Dalgard, 1999), that people who feel an overall sense of support and encouragement from others grow to feel more worthy and satisfied with themselves and their abilities to overcome life challenges.

Both good parenting and social support at age 17 were positive predictors of participants' tendencies to tell low point narratives with coherent positive resolution at age 26 (see Tables 10 and 14). This important finding, tested across the developmental period from age 17 to 26, suggests that both the guidance and encouragement that

adolescents receive from their parents, their main source of social support during this period in their lives, as well as the support that they perceived overall, from varying sources such as peers, family members and mentors, may help them in the future to resolve difficult experiences and find some sort of underlying positivity from negative life events. This result provides clear evidence for a linkage between earlier family social life and key elements of the adult life story (e.g., McAdams, 2006).

It was revealed in the current study that coherent positive resolution was a partial mediator of the relationship between good parenting at age 17 and self-reported well-being at age 26 (see Table 12). Coherent positive resolution was a marginal, partial mediator of the relationship between social support at age 17 and self-reported well-being at age 26, apparently because overall social support ($\beta = .19$) was not as strongly predictive of coherent positive resolution as was good parenting at age 17 ($\beta = .27$). Thus, it appears that one way in which attentive, authoritative parents promote well-being in their adolescent children may be through helping them to learn to narrate their low points with coherent positive resolution. Perhaps since late adolescents and young adults are more likely to initially share their self-defining memories with family for the purpose of emotional regulation (McLean, 2005), rather than for the purpose of developing self-communication or intimacy, as they do with peers, it may be that parents are more involved in the initial working through of difficult or disruptive life events. Fivush and colleagues (2004) have shown that parents scaffold their children's narratives about emotionally difficult experiences in the family. Perhaps, in addition to solely providing their children with a sense of positivity and support when dealing with difficult life events, as peers may do, parents also may be able to directly structure the ways that their

children think about low points, helping them to understand, reconstruct and resolve their difficult life experiences. Perhaps these skills that adolescents learn from encouraging and attentive parents are applied when they are faced with understanding their low point experiences as emerging adults. Indeed, a key feature of authoritative parenting is supporting the gradual autonomy of adolescents through scaffolding their independent decision-making and analytic processes (e.g., Dornbusch et al., 1985).

Relationship Satisfaction, Well-Being and Coherent Positive Resolution

Hypothesis 5 stated that participants with more satisfying parental relationships and more supportive family units at age 26 would have higher rates of well-being at age 26, as well as be more likely to narrate difficult life events with a sense of coherence and positive tone. This sense of narrative coherence would at least partly mediate these effects. With respect to participants' relationships with their parents, it was found that more satisfying and intimate relationships indeed were related to higher self reports of well-being (see Table 16). This finding is consistent with past research, suggesting that young individuals' perceptions of their parents as responsive and involved in their lives are important in predicting global, future well-being (Bell & Bell, 2005; Gray & Steinberg, 1999). In the current study, family support at age 26 was also concurrently related to higher self-reports of well-being. Although past research indicates that during adolescence, parents remain the main source of emotional support (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985), as adolescents emerge into adulthood they begin to seek support from other intimate relationships and their families often grow to include, for example, spouses, and even children, whose relationships contribute to the overall well-being of an individual. Indeed, many of the members of the young adult sample at

age 26 were in marriages or long-term romantic relationships (70%), and a number had children (20%).

Participants who reported that they had more satisfying and intimate relationships with their parents at age 26 had only moderately higher coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives. They did however have significantly higher ending resolution scores, a subcategory of coherent positive resolution, and ending resolution was a moderate, partial mediator in the relationship between relationship satisfaction and intimacy with parents and self-reported well-being at age 26. Perhaps the idea that emerging adults do not rely as heavily on their parents for support and encouragement as they do in adolescence explains why the relationship between coherent positive resolution and satisfying and intimate parent-child relationships was significant at age 17, and moderate by age 26. This hypothesis is further supported by the finding that participants who reported having greater family support at age 26 had increased levels of coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives (see Table 21). Emerging adults' families as a whole, which appeared to include parents, siblings, significant others, and possibly children may provide them with the encouragement, support and confidence that they need to bring closure to their negative life experiences and restore positivity in their lives.

Consistent with our hypothesis, coherent positive resolution was found to be a partial mediator of the relationship between family support and self-reported well-being at age 26. Further analysis of the subcategories of coherent positive resolution revealed that ending resolution was a significant ($p < .05$) mediator of the relationship between family support and self-reported well-being at age 26. Thus, it appears that one way in

which supportive families may influence emerging adults' well-being is by helping them to emotionally resolve their difficult life events. Given that these measures were all taken concurrently at age 26, these interpretations of possible mediation processes must remain speculative until further longitudinal research is completed, which is better designed to test these issues directly.

Participants' perception of family support was related to their satisfaction with their parent relationship at age 26. Additionally, the age 17 measures, good parenting and social support, were significantly related to one another (see Table 3). Naturally, the characteristics of parent-child relationships affect how supported one feels by their family units, and on the whole, it is plausible that feelings of greater support are reflected within the dynamics of people's relationships, perhaps with their parents. In the present study, the experience of good parenting at age 17 was related to feelings of greater family support and satisfaction with parent-child relationships at age 26. The wider measure of social support at age 17 was not related to family affectual solidarity at age 26, and only marginally related to satisfaction with parent-child relationships at age 26.

In sum, it appears from these analyses that good parenting and social support in late adolescence, and overall family support in emerging adulthood, may facilitate young adults' ability to resolve low point narratives with clarity and positivity. Furthermore, the ability to resolve low point narratives appears to be a partial mediator of the relation between good parenting in late adolescence and well-being in emerging adulthood and in the relation between overall family support and well-being in emerging adulthood. The finding that these relations with parenting extend over a nine year time period suggests considerable robustness in these effects.

Previous research suggests that concluding narratives of difficult life events with positivity or with coherent positive resolution is related to increased levels of subsequent well-being in midlife adults (King & Raspin, 2004, King et al., 2000; King & Smith, 2004; Pals, in press). It would be beneficial to further follow the current study's participants to examine whether individuals who demonstrated greater coherent positive resolution in their low point narratives continue to maintain increased levels of well-being over time and whether previous levels of support and good parenting continue to have an effect on the way that these participants deal with their low points into mid-adulthood. As was theorized previously, the lack of positive parenting and support for late adolescents and emerging adults who are trying to understand and resolve difficult life events, in addition to coping with a challenging transitional period of life, appears to negatively affect well-being, and this developmental pattern may be quite long-lasting.

Overall Limitations

One limitation of the current study is that the analysis used to examine the relationships between age 26 questionnaire data and narrative measures was correlational and therefore no cause and effect conclusions can be made. Thus, it is not certain that participants' age 26 identity statuses affected their ability to extract meaning from their low point narratives at age 26. It is also possible, even likely, that participants' exploration of meaning from their low point events have influenced their developing identity statuses. Because of the use of age 17 questionnaire data, which allowed us to longitudinally examine the relationship between identity development in adolescence and low point narratives in emerging adulthood, and because of previous research which suggests that narrative exploration and integration encourages subsequent identity

development (Pals & McAdams, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), we are able to suggest in the present study that narrative depth of learning and identity development seem likely to be mutually influential.

A second limitation of the current study is the amount of participant attrition from age 17 to 26, as people moved out of their parents' houses to begin post-secondary education and start their own adult lives. However, it is important to note that there was little evidence of selective attrition within the current study on age 17 variables, except for more loss of those who were originally foreclosed in terms of identity. It is possible that this pattern of drop out affected the analyses. Identity foreclosure was not related to narrative measures in the age 26 analysis, and it is possible that participant attrition attenuated the effects of identity foreclosure in the present study. Thus, it would be beneficial to conduct further research to examine the relationship between identity foreclosure and the narration of low point stories.

The sample of participants for the present study was recruited from predominately white high schools in a moderate-sized urban area of central Ontario, Canada. Most of the participants were Canadian born. Different cultural and ethnic backgrounds were not fully represented in the present study and thus it is possible that our findings cannot be generalized beyond North American culture. In the future, it would be beneficial to examine possible differences in the narrative life story and predictors of narrative characteristics across various cultures, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how different people perceive and understand their lives.

We cannot control when participants' will experience their low points throughout their lives. Thus, some participants in the current study narrated low points that occurred

to them while they were in elementary school, while others narrated low points that occurred to them in their early twenties. This is a limitation to the current study because it is possible that these events are somehow stored differently within our memories, depending on their durations. Perhaps certain characteristics of low point narratives, such as depth of learning, may differ between an event that occurred in emerging adulthood as opposed to one from earlier childhood (McLean & Thorne, 2003). However, since the life story is constantly changing and growing, and the way in which we interpret our life events are influenced by past memories as well as current perception, it is likely that the depth of learning in participants' low point narratives from childhood is largely a measure of their current reflection upon these events (McAdams, 2001). Since identity development is initiated in adolescence, it is plausible that the emerging adult participants in the current study would have recently had to reflect upon their earlier low point experiences in order to integrate them into their identities, and into their life stories. However, in the future, it would be beneficial to ask participants to tell life narratives from a specific time in their lives, or to control statistically for when the negative events happened in participants' lives. Although such a control was attempted in the current study, our data on time of occurrence were not sufficiently precise to permit this analysis.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the modest reliability of the identity status measure, the Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS), in the present study. Cronbach alphas for the subscales of the OM-EIS ranged from .41 to .66 when participants were 17 years of age, and from .46 to .70 when participants were 26 years of age. It is possible that these modest reliabilities may limit our ability to detect relationships between the OM-EIS and other measures in the present study. On the other

hand, the OM-EIS does have substantial validity (Marcia et al., 1993) and it is used quite frequently in the literature, for example, in past narrative research (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Thus, the final limitation in the present study is that although the OM-EIS is a commonly used and valid measure of identity status, it is possible that its moderate reliability contributed to attenuation of the relationships between the OM-EIS and other measures.

Overall Contributions and Applications

Despite limitations, the present study revealed several useful and interesting findings in regards to the predictors and beneficial qualities of a well-developed low point narrative. For instance, the current study further supports the notion that mortality narratives are unique in that they require extensive cognitive effort to assimilate into the life story and as a result, require greater meaning making (McLean & Thorne, 2003). The current study further suggests the role of initial mortality experiences in adolescence and emerging adulthood as important times of identity questioning and reflection upon life.

These periods of reflection may be essential to identity development, and the current study suggests the importance of giving adolescents and young adults room to fully explore their low points. However, it is also important for people to recognize that mortality experiences appear to be the most severe and life changing events that young adults experience. The current study also suggests that it is important for adolescents and emerging adults to have the support of their parents and families during times of distress.

Previous research with mature adults has suggested that identity development is facilitated through the exploration and understanding of momentous life events, such as low points, in an attempt to integrate them into the life story (Pals, 2006-a; 2006-b). The

present study examined previous identity development, as well as concurrent identity development, in relation to emerging adults' ability to extract meaning and resolution from their low point narratives. The results of the current study suggest that identity development and the understanding of low point experiences through meaning making and resolution are linked, and likely to be mutually influential. Persons with more advanced identity statuses seemed to narrate their low points with greater resolution. It is possible that in some cases positive meaning making may act as a type of low point resolution, allowing people to move past their difficult life experiences through the gain of a positive lesson or insight about the self. The following low point narrative is from a participant who scored high on the identity achievement subscale of the OM-EIS and who received a 3 (gaining insight) for depth of learning and a 4 (very resolved) for ending resolution.

I guess with the death of my grandma, that was pretty hard. It was, let's see, September 2001, and she was actually staying at our home because she had become sick. So, she was at our home and she actually died in my bedroom. I was so sad to see her go, but it was amazing to be there when she went and she was holding my hand and um, and we believe that we have hope and that we'll see her again and um, and I guess let's see, the rest of my family was there as well and um it was sad, um, to lose her. I was quite close to her, but I did have the hope that I would see her again, um, and, like being as, it was still sad, but it was still, it's weird to think of it as still a positive experience, you know, I guess just because she died peacefully. The impact that it's had upon me is that it, it really changed me. I think I always knew that family is very important but now I just believe that, like I see a lot of people my age that don't um, don't really appreciate their family and grandparents and they just kind of go about their own lives. They don't treasure that time or visit them or anything and that makes me sad to think about what they're missing because I know how much they can contribute to your life. Um, so I guess, it just shows, like I value my family and now I really appreciate, I really appreciate them, any time we have together. I have learnt not to take family for granted and I cherish the time that I have with people.

It is clear that this participant has reflected upon the meaning of her low point and

has been able to positively resolve (e.g., “she died peacefully”) and extract insight from this event regarding the value of certain relationships and who she is as a person, thus helping her to move on from this difficult experience. In sum, it may be important to encourage individuals at a young age to explore and try to begin to understand who they are as a person, because once difficult or confusing events occur in their lives, they may have less difficulty understanding, resolving and assimilating these events into their life stories if they have attained a clearer sense of identity. As was stated previously, it would be beneficial to follow a group of adolescents longitudinally to examine both their identity development and their ability to explore and understand their low point narratives over time, to help us to further understand this seemingly reciprocal relationship.

Another important finding of the present study is that good parenting and family support in late adolescence and young adulthood appeared to help emerging adults to resolve their low point narratives in a positive and coherent way. This capacity for resolution, in turn, promotes well-being. A common belief is that once one’s children are in adolescence, they no longer need or want to communicate with their parents and may have support systems outside the family with whom to share their life troubles. However, the current study suggests that involved and encouraging parents, who their adolescent children feel comfortable coming to with problems, may help their children to narrate their low points in healthier ways, hence emphasizing the importance of maintaining a trusting and open relationship with the child throughout the period of adolescence and into young adulthood. A future direction for this research would be to examine exactly how supportive parents and families help adolescents to reconstruct their life stories and the role that narratives play within supportive households over time. For instance, at what

point do supportive parents begin to help their children understand their difficult life experiences through narrative, and what sorts of interactions in the family might do this (Fivush et al., 2004)?

One important characteristic of low point narratives that produced some interesting patterns in the present study was ending emotional resolution. In contrast to previous research which distinguishes between exploration and cognitive development, and affect and emotional development within life narratives, emotional resolution appeared to be a characteristic of narratives that was influenced by and possibly predicts to greater support, satisfaction and cognitive and identity maturity. It may be important to have the cognitive development, encouragement and confidence to understand, explore and resolve low point narratives because unresolved emotional issues can negatively affect people's future quality of life. Ending resolution appears to be an important component in the low point narratives of emerging adults who are developed in their identities as well as more satisfied with their relationships and their lives on the whole.

The ways in which people bring meaning, positive affect and resolution to their low point narratives are important reflections of their coping with difficult life experiences (Pals, 2006-a; 2006-b). The results of the present study suggest that it is important for people to extract a sense of meaning or purpose and to come to a resolution to their low point narratives. Furthermore, more responsive and involved parenting, strong support systems and identity development in adolescence all appear to be significant contributors to a well narrated low point story in emerging adulthood. All in all, it is clear that the way in which we perceive and narrate our challenging life experiences provides a window into our cognitive and social development over time, and

our concurrent emotional well-being. These results add to an increasing body of evidence in developmental psychology that narratives can help to illuminate the processes and products of traditional research (e.g., McAdams, 2006; McLean & Pratt, 2006).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Age 17 Measures

| Measure | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| Social Provision Scale (SPS) | 183.38 | 22.91 |
| Good Parenting Scale (GPS) | .45 | 2.57 |
| Authoritative Parenting | .13 | .98 |
| Parent Contact | .21 | 1.02 |
| Family Assessment Device | .07 | .98 |
| The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS) | | |
| Achievement | 36.85 | 8.54 |
| Moratorium | 30.91 | 10.01 |
| Foreclosure | 18.85 | 8.07 |
| Diffusion | 29.90 | 9.31 |
| Identity Maturity Index | -42.80 | 22.87 |

Notes.

n=104

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Age 26 Measures

| Measure | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Family Affectual Solidarity (FAD) | 25.43 | 3.25 |
| Personal Authority in the Family Systems Questionnaire | 44.27 | 13.13 |
| Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP) | 35.49 | 7.98 |
| The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS) | | |
| Achievement | 37.91 | 6.51 |
| Moratorium | 23.61 | 9.11 |
| Foreclosure | 14.47 | 6.79 |
| Diffusion | 23.36 | 8.41 |
| Identity Maturity Index | -23.52 | 21.17 |
| Identity Development from 17 to 26 | 19.36 | 27.61 |
| Notes. | | |
| n=104 | | |

Table 3

Pearson Correlation between Parenting and Support Measures

| Measure | Social Provisions Scale (SPS) | Good Parenting Scale (GPS) | Family Affectual Solidarity (FAS) | Personal Authority on the Family Systems Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Social Provisions Scale (SPS) - Age 17 | 1.00 | .51*** | .10 | -.19* |
| Good Parenting Scale (GPS) - Age 17 | - | 1.00 | .32*** | -.28*** |
| Family Affectual Solidarity (FAS) - Age 26 | - | - | 1.00 | -.63*** |
| Personal Authority on the Family Systems Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) - Age 26 | - | - | - | 1.00 |

Notes.

n=104

*p < .10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Narrative Measures

| Measure | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Range |
|------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------|
| Depth of Learning | 1.50 | .56 | 0-3 |
| Coherent Positive Resolution | 5.25 | 2.48 | 0-10 |
| Ending Positivity | 2.07 | .71 | 1-3 |
| Ending Negativity | 2.17 | .66 | 1-3 |
| Ending Coherence | 2.87 | .86 | 1-4 |
| Ending Resolution | 2.49 | 1.05 | 1-4 |
| Life Change Units (LCUs) | 66.42 | 29.68 | 20- |

Notes.

n=104

Table 5

Pearson Correlation between Narrative Measures

| Measure | Coherent Positive Resolution | Ending Positivity | Ending Negativity | Ending Coherence | Ending Resolution | Depth of Learning | Life Change Units (LCUs) | Word Count |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Coherent Positive Resolution | 1.00 | .76*** | -.75*** | .70*** | .82*** | ..46*** | .03 | .00 |
| Ending Positivity | - | 1.00 | -.50*** | .35*** | .50*** | .45*** | .15 | .07 |
| Ending Negativity | - | - | 1.00 | -.36*** | -.50*** | -.28*** | -.08 | .06 |
| Ending Coherence | - | - | - | 1.00 | .39*** | .34*** | -.03 | -.02 |
| Ending Resolution | - | - | - | - | 1.00 | .34*** | -.06 | .01 |
| Depth of Learning | - | - | - | - | - | 1.00 | .32*** | .11 |
| Life Change Units (LCUs) | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1.00 | .03 |
| Word Count | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1.00 |

Notes.

n=104

*p < .10

**p < 0.05

***p < 0.01

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Life Change Unit Scores Across Narrative Themes

| Narrative Theme | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|
| Achievement | 50.88 | 18.98 |
| Mortality | 83.97 | 37.39 |
| Relationships | 61.74 | 21.89 |
| Personal Conflict | 51.93 | 20.69 |
| Notes. | | |
| n=104 | | |

Table 7

Partial Correlations between Age 17 Identity Status, Depth of Learning and Narrative Resolution, Controlling for Event Severity

| Narrative Measures | OMEIS Measures | | | | Identity Maturity Index |
|-----------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|-----------|----------------------------|
| | Achievement | Moratorium | Foreclosure | Diffusion | |
| Depth of | .09 | .00 | -.11 | -.17* | .14* |
| Learning | | | | | |
| Ending | .25** | -.15 | .06 | -.24** | .24** |
| Resolution | | | | | |

* $p < .10$, one-tailed

** $p < 0.05$, one-tailed

*** $p < 0.01$, one-tailed

Table 8

Partial Correlations between Age 26 Identity Status, Depth of Learning and Narrative Resolution, Controlling for Event Severity

| Narrative Measures | OMEIS Measures | | | | Identity Maturity Index | Identity Development from 17 to 26 |
|--------------------|----------------|------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Achievement | Moratorium | Foreclosure | Diffusion | | |
| Depth of Learning | .06 | -.05 | -.10 | -.20** | .15* | .02 |
| Ending Resolution | .32*** | -.34*** | -.16 | -.41*** | .46*** | .19** |

*p < .10, one-tailed

**p < 0.05, one-tailed

***p < 0.01, one-tailed

Table 9

Regression Analysis with Age 17 Perception of Good Parenting as a Predictor of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|----------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Good Parenting Scale (GPS) | .85 | .28 | 2.87 | .003 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.08

F(1, 103)=8.25, $p < .01$

Table 10

Regression Analysis with Age 17 Perception of Good Parenting as a Predictor of Coherent Positive Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|----------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Good Parenting Scale (GPS) | .26 | .27 | 2.81 | .003 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.07

F(1, 103)=7.90, $p < .01$

Table 11

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Coherent Positive Resolution as a Predictor of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|----------------------------|------|---------|------|--------------|
| Good Parenting Scale (GPS) | 1.06 | .33 | 3.45 | .00 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.11

F(1, 103)=11.87, $p = .001$

Table 12

Regression Analysis with Age 17 Perception of Good Parenting and Coherent Positive Resolution as Predictors of Narrative Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Coherent Positive Resolution | .87 | .28 | 2.81 | .003 |
| Good Parenting Scale (GPS) | .61 | .20 | 2.02 | .023 |

n = 104
R Squared=.14
F(1, 103)=7.96, p =.001

Table 13

Regression Analysis with Age 17 Social Support as a Predictor of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Social Provision Scale (SPS) | .11 | .30 | 3.19 | .001 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.09

F(1, 103)=10.14, $p < .01$

Table 14

Regression Analysis with Age 17 Social Support as a Predictor of Coherent Positive Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Social Provision Scale (SPS) | .02 | .19 | 1.98 | .03 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.04

F(1, 103)=3.92, p =.05

Table 15

Regression Analysis with Age 17 Social Support and Coherent Positive Resolution as Predictors of Narrative Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Coherent Positive Resolution | .94 | .30 | 3.12 | .001 |
| Social Provision Scale (SPS) | .09 | .24 | 2.58 | .006 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.14

F(1, 103)=7.96, $p = .001$

Table 16

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Relationship Satisfaction with Parents as a Predictor of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|---|------|---------|-------|--------------|
| Personal Authority in the Family Systems Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) | -.22 | -.37 | -3.98 | .00 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.14

F(1, 103)=15.81, $p < .001$

Table 17

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Relationship Satisfaction with Parents as a Predictor of Coherent Positive Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|---|------|---------|-------|--------------|
| Personal Authority in the Family Systems Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) | -.03 | -.14 | -1.39 | .09 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.02

F(1, 103)=1.92, $p = .17$

Table 18

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Relationship Satisfaction with Parents as a Predictor of Ending Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|---|------|---------|-------|--------------|
| Personal Authority in the Family Systems Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) | -.01 | -.18 | -1.80 | .038 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.03

F(1, 103)=3.22, $p < .10$

Table 19

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Relationship Satisfaction and Coherent Positive Resolution as Predictors of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|---|------|---------|-------|--------------|
| Coherent Positive Resolution | .90 | .28 | 3.05 | .002 |
| Personal Authority in the Family Systems Questionnaire (PAFS-Q) | -.21 | -.33 | -3.65 | .000 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.21

F(1, 103)=13.09, $p < .001$

Table 20

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Family Affectual Solidarity as a Predictor of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Family Affectual Solidarity (FAD) | .89 | .36 | 3.91 | .00 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.13

F(1, 103)=15.29, $p < .001$

Table 21

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Family Affectual Solidarity as a Predictor of Coherent Positive Resolution

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Family Affectual Solidarity (FAD) | .18 | .23 | 2.39 | .01 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.06

F(1, 103)=5.70, $p < .05$

Table 22

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Family Affectual Solidarity and Coherent Positive Resolution as Predictors of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|-----------------------------------|-----|---------|------|--------------|
| Coherent Positive Resolution | .87 | .27 | 2.92 | .002 |
| Family Affectual Solidarity (FAD) | .73 | .30 | 3.19 | .001 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.20

F(1, 103)=12.19, $p < .001$

Table 23

Regression Analysis with Age 26 Family Affectual Solidarity and Coherent Positive Resolution as Predictors of Well-Being (SHARP)

| Predictor | B | β | t | Significance |
|-----------------------------------|------|---------|------|--------------|
| Narrative Resolution | 2.26 | .29 | 3.08 | .002 |
| Family Affectual Solidarity (FAD) | .70 | .29 | 3.05 | .002 |

Notes.

n = 104

R Squared=.21

F(1, 103)=12.74, $p < .001$

Figure 1

Differences in Mean Depth of Learning and Narrative Themes

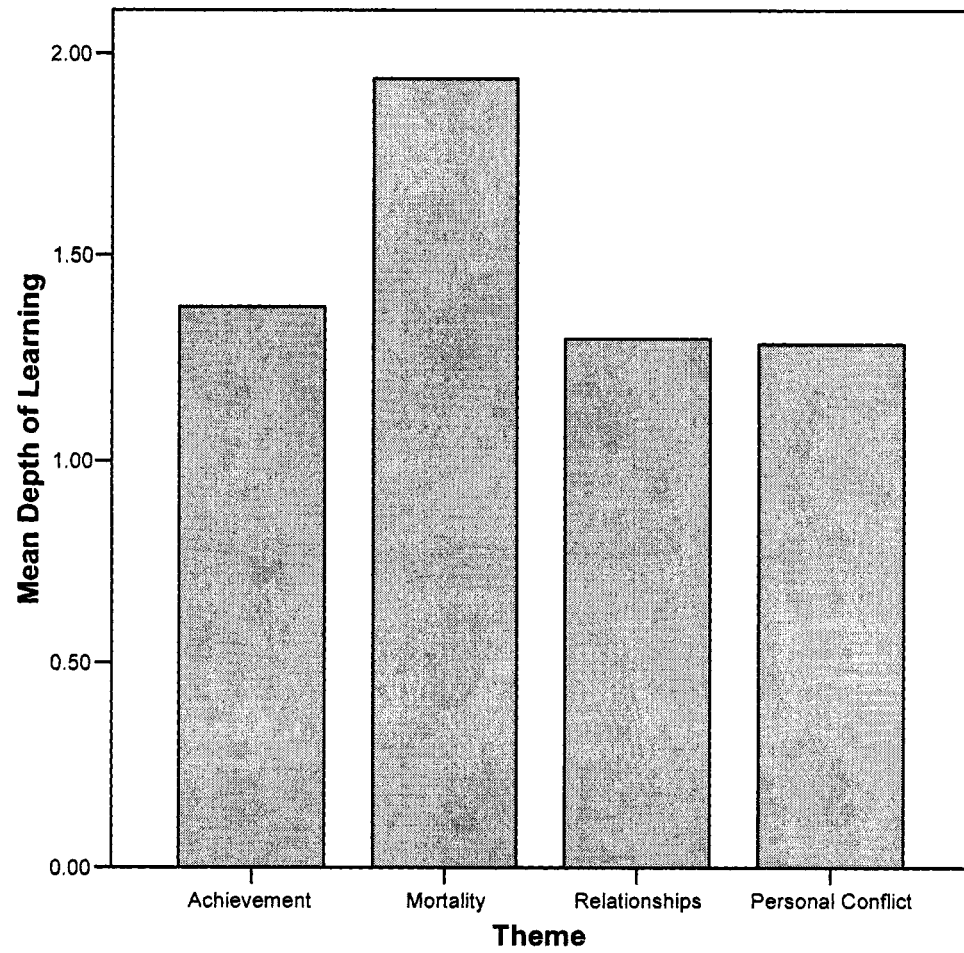
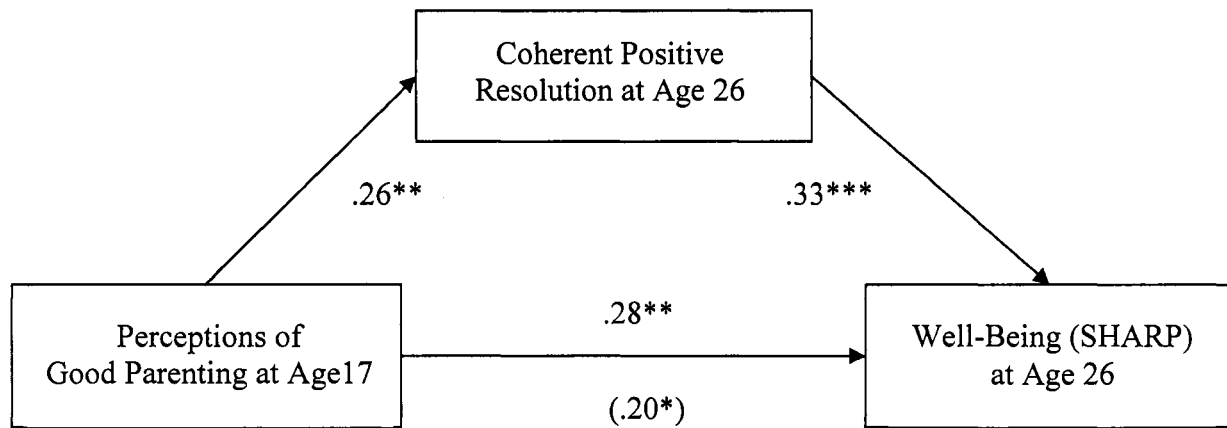


Figure 2

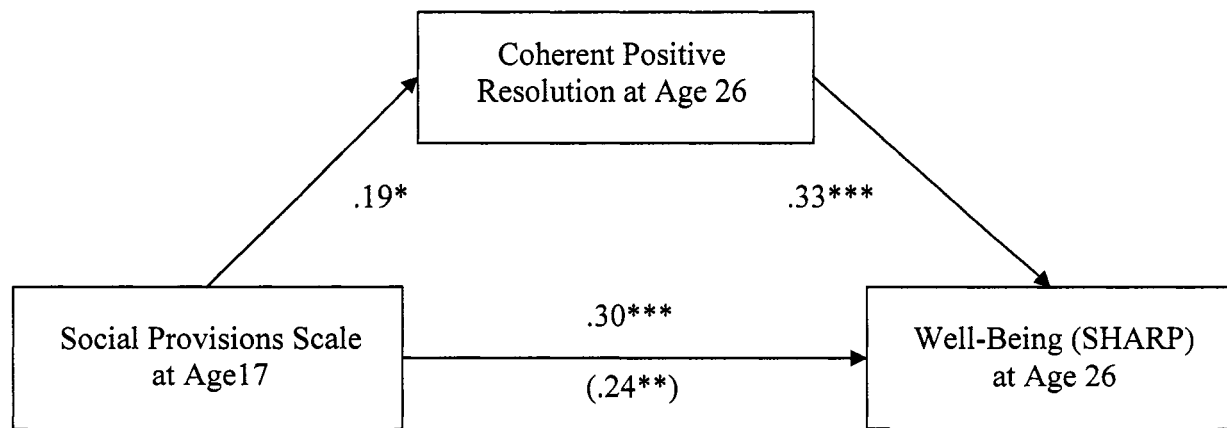
Beta Weights Illustrating Coherent Positive Resolution as a Mediator of the Relationship between Perceptions of Good Parenting at Age 17 and Well-Being at Age 26



* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Figure 3

Beta Weights Illustrating Coherent Positive Resolution as a Mediator of the Relationship between Social Support at Age 17 and Well-Being at Age 26



* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Figure 4

Beta Weights Illustrating Ending Resolution as a Mediator of the Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction with Parents and Well-Being at Age 26

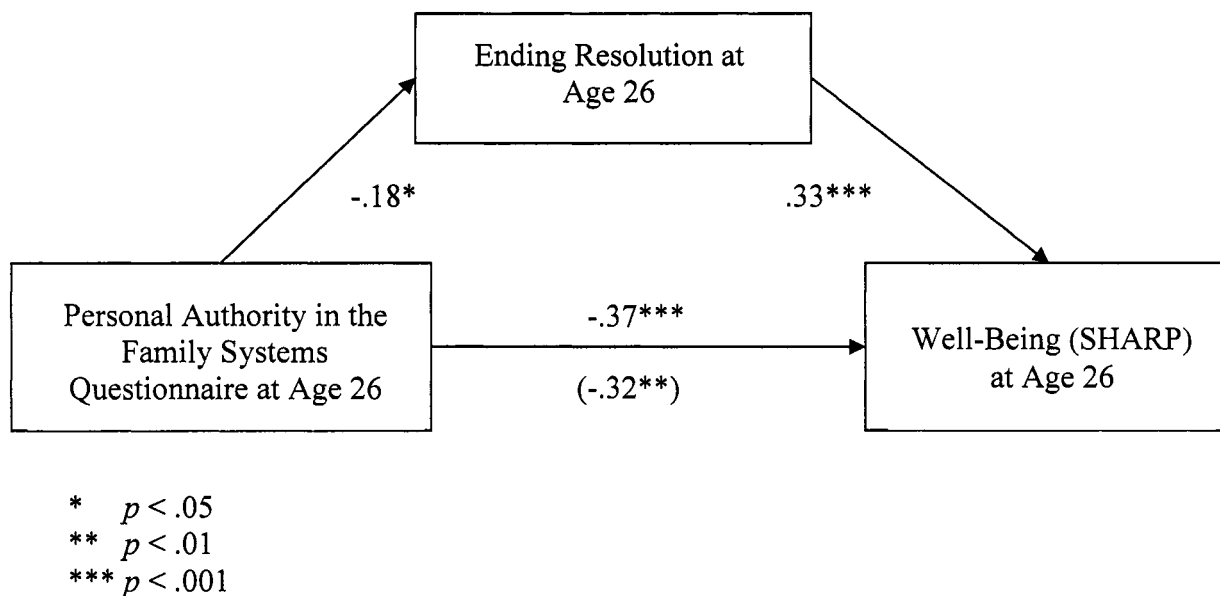
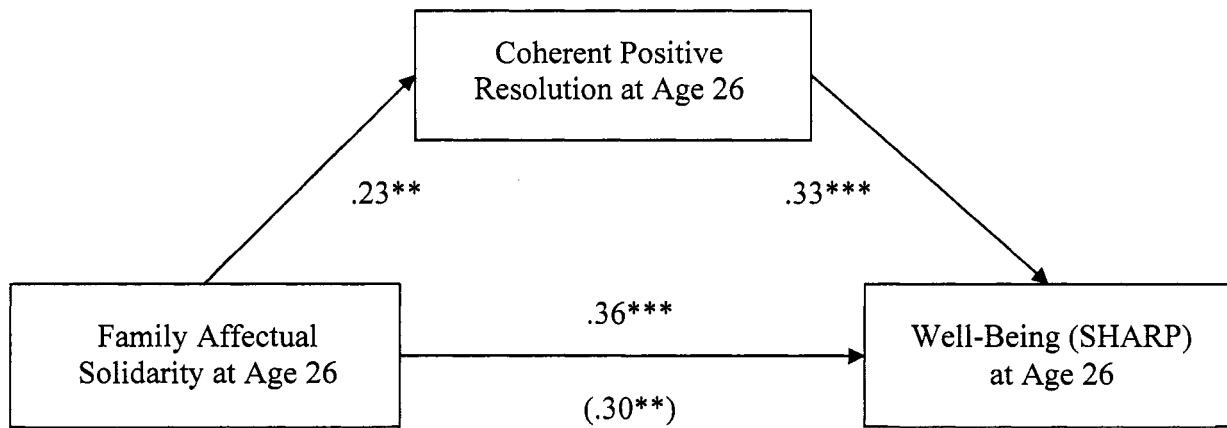


Figure 5

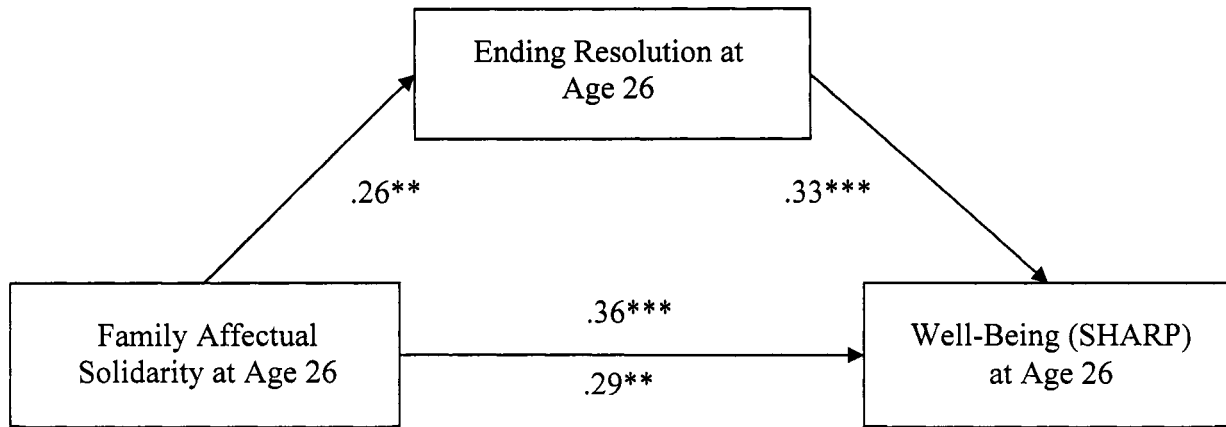
Beta Weights Illustrating Coherent Positive Resolution as a Mediator of the Relationship between Family Affectual Solidarity and Well-Being at Age 26



* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Figure 6

Beta Weights Illustrating Ending Resolution as a Mediator of the Relationship between Family Affectual Solidarity and Well-Being at Age 26



* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

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Appendix A

Authoritative Parenting Scale

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements as applied to your parent(s) (or the adult(s) you are living with)?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| -4 = very strongly disagree | +4 = very strongly agree |
| -3 = strongly disagree | +3 = strongly agree |
| -2 = moderately disagree | +2 = moderately agree |
| -1 = slightly disagree | +1 = slightly agree |
| 0 = neither agree nor disagree | |

1. _____ I can count on them to help me out, if I have some kind of problem.
2. _____ They keep pushing me to do my best in whatever I do.
3. _____ They keep pushing me to think independently.
4. _____ They help me with my school work if there is something I didn't understand.
5. _____ When they want me to do something, they explain why.
6. _____ When I get a poor grade in school, my parents encourage me to try harder.
7. _____ When I get a good grade in school, my parents praise me.
8. _____ My parents really know who my friends are.
9. _____ My parents spend time just talking with me.
10. _____ My family do fun active things together.
11. _____ *My parents TRY to know where I go at night.*
12. _____ *My parents REALLY know where I go at night.*
13. _____ *My parents TRY to know what I do with my free time.*
14. _____ *My parents REALLY know what I do with my free time.*
15. _____ *My parents TRY to know where I am most afternoons after school.*
16. _____ *My parents REALLY know where I am most afternoons after school.*

* The first 10 items measure perceived parent responsiveness, while the last 6 items in italics measure perceived parent strictness

Appendix B

Family Assessment Device (FAD)

The following section is made up of statements that apply to families. Please rate how these statements apply to your family.

-4 = very strongly disagree

-3 = strongly disagree

-2 = moderately disagree

-1 = slightly disagree

+4 = very strongly agree

+3 = strongly agree

+2 = moderately agree

+1 = slightly agree

0 = neither agree nor disagree

1. _____ Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other.
2. _____ In times of crisis, we can turn to each other for support.
3. _____ We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel.
4. _____ Individuals are accepted for what they are.
5. _____ We avoid discussing our fears and concerns.
6. _____ We can express feelings to each other.
7. _____ There are lots of bad feelings in the family.
8. _____ We feel accepted for what we are.
9. _____ Making decisions is a problem for our family.
10. _____ We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.
11. _____ We don't get along well together.
12. _____ We confide in each other.

Appendix C

Parent Interaction Inventory (PII)

For each topic listed across the top of the following table indicate your response to each of the four questions by writing in the rating from the scale below that best expresses your view.

When the table is complete, you should have a rating in each box.

0
none

1
a little

2
a moderate
amount

3
quite a bit

4
a great deal

| | Topics | | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|
| | Academics, Course Work | Family Issues | Future Career Plans | Religion | Moral Values | Politics |
| 1. How much do you <i>discuss</i> this topic with your <i>parent(s)</i> | | | | | | |
| 2. How much do you <i>enjoy</i> discussing this topic with your <i>parent(s)</i> ? | | | | | | |
| 3. How much <i>influence</i> do you feel your <i>parent(s)</i> have on you in this area? | | | | | | |

Appendix D

Social Provisions Scale (SPS)

Below you will find a number of statements about relationships with other people. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement using the following scale:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| -4 = very strongly disagree | +4 = very strongly agree |
| -3 = strongly disagree | +3 = strongly agree |
| -2 = moderately disagree | +2 = moderately agree |
| -1 = slightly disagree | +1 = slightly agree |
| 0 = neither agree nor disagree | |

1. _____ There are people I can depend on to help me if I really need it.
2. _____ I feel that I do not have any close personal relationships with other people.
3. _____ There is no one I can turn to for guidance in times of stress.
4. _____ There are people who depend on me for help.
5. _____ There are people who enjoy the same social activities I do.
6. _____ Other people do not view me as competent.
7. _____ I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person.
8. _____ I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs.
9. _____ I do not think other people respect my skills and abilities.
10. _____ If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance.
11. _____ I have close relationships that provide me with a sense of emotional security and well-being.
12. _____ There is someone I could talk to about important decisions in my life.
13. _____ I have relationships where my competence and skill are recognized.
14. _____ There is no one who shares my interests and concerns.
15. _____ There is no one who really relies on me for their well-being.
16. _____ There is a trustworthy person I could turn to for advice if I were having problems.
17. _____ I feel a strong emotional bond with at least one other person.
18. _____ There is no one I can depend on for aid if I really need it.
19. _____ There is no one I feel comfortable talking about problems with.
20. _____ There are people who admire my talents and abilities.
21. _____ I lack a feeling of intimacy with another person.
22. _____ There is no one who likes to do the things I do.
23. _____ There are people I can count on in an emergency.
24. _____ No one needs me to care for them any more.

Appendix E

Personal Authority in the Family System Questionnaire Version C (PAFSQ)

The following questions ask about your CURRENT relationships with your parents. Please select the answers that best reflect your current relationships with these people. There are no right or wrong answers. REMEMBER: GIVE THE ANSWER THAT BEST APPLIES TO YOU.

If one or both of your parents are deceased, then answer the questions about your deceased parent(s) in terms of how you remember or imagined your relationship(s) to be. Remember: Give the answer that best applies to you.

- 1) Quality of my relationship with my mother is:
1 = Excellent 2 = Good 3 = Fair 4 = Poor 5 = Very Poor
- 2) Quality of my relationship with my father is:
1 = Excellent 2 = Good 3 = Fair 4 = Poor 5 = Very Poor
- 3) Satisfaction of my relationship with my mother is:
1 = Very Satisfied 2 = Satisfied 3 = Neutral 4 = Dissatisfied 5 = Very Dissatisfied
- 4) Satisfaction of my relationship with my father is:
1 = Very Satisfied 2 = Satisfied 3 = Neutral 4 = Dissatisfied 5 = Very Dissatisfied
- 5) How satisfied are you with the frequency of contact (letter, phone, in person) that you have with your MOTHER.
1 = Very Satisfied 2 = Satisfied 3 = Neutral 4 = Dissatisfied 5 = Very Dissatisfied
- 6) How satisfied are you with the frequency of contact (letter, phone, in person) that you have with your FATHER.
1 = Very Satisfied 2 = Satisfied 3 = Neutral 4 = Dissatisfied 5 = Very Dissatisfied
- 7) I usually help my parents understand me by telling them how I think, feel, and believe.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 8) I get together with my mother from time to time for conversation and recreation.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 9) I get together with my father from time to time for conversation and recreation.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 10) I share my true feelings with my father about the significant events in my life.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 11) I can trust my mother with things we share.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 12) I can trust my father with things we share.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 13) I am fair in my relationships with my mother.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 14) I am fair in my relationships with my father.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 15) I openly show tenderness toward my mother.
1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 16) I openly show tenderness toward my father.

- 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 17) My mother and I have mutual respect for each other.
 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 18) My father and I have mutual respect for each other.
 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 19) I am fond of my mother.
 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 20) I am fond of my father.
 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 21) My father and I are important people in each other's lives.
 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree
- 22) My mother and I are important people in each other's lives.
 1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neutral 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

Appendix F

Family Affectual Solidarity (FAS)

Indicate the number that best applies to each statement.

1 = never or not at all 2 = a little or rarely 3 = some or sometimes 4 = a lot or often

- (a) How much do members of your family really care about you? _____
- (b) How much do they understand the way you feel about things? _____
- (c) How much can you rely on them for help if you have a serious problem? _____
- (d) How much can you open up to them if you need to talk about your worries? _____
- (e) How often do members of your family make too many demands on you? _____
- (f) How often do they criticize you? _____
- (g) How often do they let you down when you are counting on them? _____
- (h) How often do they get on your nerves? _____

Appendix G

The Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OM-EIS)

You will find that some of the items in this scale have more than one part and that you may agree with one part and disagree with another part. You should consider the statement as a whole, without considering the parts separately.

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|
| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 | +3 | +4 |
| very | strongly | moderately | slightly | neither | slightly | moderately | strongly | very |
| strongly | disagree | disagree | disagree | agree | agree | agree | agree | strongly |
| disagree | | | | nor | | | | agree |
| | | | | disagree | | | | |

- 1) ___ I haven't really thought about politics. It just doesn't excite me very much.
- 2) ___ I might have thought about a lot of different jobs, but there's never really been any question since my parents said what they wanted.
- 3) ___ When it comes to religion, I just haven't found anything that appeals to me and I don't really feel the need to look.
- 4) ___ My parents decided a long time ago what I should go into for employment and I'm following through with their plans.
- 5) ___ There are so many different political parties and ideals. I can't decide which to follow until I figure it all out.
- 6) ___ I don't give religion much thought and it doesn't bother me one way or another.
- 7) ___ I guess I'm pretty much like my folks when it comes to politics. I follow what they do in terms of voting and such.
- 8) ___ I haven't chosen the occupation I really want to get into, and I'm just working at whatever is available until something better comes along.
- 9) ___ A person's faith is unique to each individual. I've considered and reconsidered it myself and know what I can believe.
- 10) ___ It took me a long time to decide but now I know for sure what direction to move in for a career.
- 11) ___ I really have never been involved in politics enough to have made a firm stand one way or the other.
- 12) ___ I'm not so sure what religion means to me. I'd like to make up my mind but I'm not done looking yet.
- 13) ___ I've thought my political beliefs through and realize I can agree with some and not other aspects of what my parents believe.
- 14) ___ It took me a while to figure it out, but now I really know what I want for a career.
- 15) ___ Religion is confusing to me right now. I keep changing my views on what is right and wrong for me.
- 16) ___ I'm really not interested in finding the right job, any job will do. I just seem to flow with what is available.
- 17) ___ My folks have always had their own political and moral beliefs about issues like abortion and mercy killing and I've always gone along accepting what they have.

- 18) ___ I've gone through a period of serious questioning about faith and can now say I understand what I believe in as an individual.
- 19) ___ I'm not sure about my political beliefs, but I'm trying to figure out what I can truly believe in.
- 20) ___ I'm still trying to decide how capable I am as a person and what jobs will be right for me.
- 21) ___ I attend the same church as my family has always attended. I've never really questioned why.
- 22) ___ I just can't decide what to do for an occupation. There are so many that have possibilities.
- 23) ___ I've never really questioned my religion. If it's right for my parents it must be right for me.
- 24) ___ Politics are something that I can never be too sure about because things change so fast. But I do think it's important to know what I believe in.

Appendix H

Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP)

These questions are about how things have been going for you lately. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement using the following scale.

| | | | | |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|-------|-------------------|
| -2 | -1 | 0 | +1 | +2 |
| strongly disagree | disagree | neither agree nor disagree | agree | strongly agree |

During the past month I have felt...

1. _____ In high spirits.
2. _____ Particularly content with my life.
3. _____ Depressed or very unhappy.
4. _____ Flustered as I didn't know what was expected of me.
5. _____ Bitter about the way my life has turned out.
6. _____ Generally satisfied with how my life has turned out.

The next questions have to do with general life experiences.

7. _____ I am just as happy as when I was younger.
8. _____ As I look back on my life, I am fairly well satisfied.
9. _____ Things are getting worse as I get older.
10. _____ Little things bother me more this year.
11. _____ Life is hard for me most of the time.
12. _____ I am satisfied with my life today.

Appendix I

Low Point Story Instructions

Thinking back over your entire life, try to remember a specific experience or event in which you felt extremely negative emotions, such as deep sadness, fear, strong anxiety, terror, despair, guilt, shame, etc. This does not necessarily have to be the worse thing that ever happened in your life, if you are not comfortable talking about that. But it should be something pretty bad. Even though this memory is unpleasant, I would appreciate your attempt to be as honest and detailed as you can be in describing it. What led up to this negative scene? What happened? When? Who was involved? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling? What impact has this event had on you?

Appendix J

Life Change Units (LCUs)

| Life change event | LCU |
|---|-----|
| Health | |
| An injury or illness which: | |
| kept you in bed a week or more, or sent you to the hospital | 74 |
| was less serious than above | 44 |
| Major dental work | 26 |
| Major change in eating habits | 27 |
| Major change in sleeping habits | 26 |
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