A Conceptual Analysis of the Link Between Narrative Identity and Family Resilience Through Parent-Child Interaction

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Abstract. This conceptual paper explores the connection between narrative identity and family resilience in parent-child interaction. Research on narrative identity, family resilience and parent-child reminiscing suggests that rich, validating, coordinated and intergenerational narrative practices can help children better understand their own lives and build autobiographical narratives. Based on the above literature, this paper proposes that parent-child narrative interaction may serve as a relational bridge between individual-level narrative identity and family-level adaptation. The proposed link is contingent rather than necessary; coordinated and flexible narrative interaction may support shared meaning-making, whereas imposed, rigid, or silencing interaction may provide less supportive conditions for identity development and family communication. This paper is based on published research and does not present new empirical data. Accordingly, narrative practice is conceptualised as a relational resource within broader social, psychological, and material conditions rather than as a direct cause of family resilience.

Keywords: Narrative identity, family resilience, parent-child interaction, family narratives, autobiographical memory, meaning-making.

1. Introduction

Families respond to stress in various ways, such as mobilizing material resources, seeking formal support, and coping individually; at the same time, they may also share stories, recall memories, make sense of difficulties, and interpret shared experiences through parent-child conversations. Parent-child interaction is therefore also an important context for learning. It is one of the earliest contexts in which young people learn about themselves, their families, and ways of responding to difficulties.

The concept of narrative identity provides a framework for understanding these processes. Narrative identity is the organisation of memory into a coherent and changing story of oneself. For children and adolescents, some of this narrative work takes place in family conversations, where parents may elaborate on, correct, validate or ignore stories from their past. The same difficult event may be framed differently across interactions, for example, as an isolated failure or as a shared problem open to multiple interpretations.

Family resilience refers to the ways in which families adjust, organise and maintain relationships under the pressure of stress or misfortune. This paper examines the possible link between narrative identity and family resilience through parent-child interaction. The discussion is theoretical and based on published research; it does not use original datasets, examine individual family cases, or suggest that storytelling alone can resolve serious social, economic, or psychological problems.

2. 2. Conceptual Foundations of Narrative Identity and Family Resilience

Resilience is now seen less as an exceptional quality of individuals and more as a process grounded in ordinary adaptive systems. Masten's (2001) concept of "ordinary magic" presents resilience as the result of everyday adaptation rather than extraordinary traits. The development-oriented view provides a basis for considering whether ordinary relational processes, such as support, communication, and routine, may also be relevant at the family level. This is a conceptual extension of Masten's (2001) work rather than a direct application.

Narrative identity provides another framework for understanding continuity over time. McAdams (2001) proposes that narrative identity is an organised and evolving life story through which people create meaning and continuity. It involves the selection and interpretation of events, recurring themes,

significant relationships, turning points, and imagined futures. The formation of such narrative systems is closely related to social interaction in childhood and adolescence; young children learn to tell stories, explain and evaluate their own lives by talking with adults and older children.

Family resilience concerns adaptation of the family as a system. Walsh (2003) organises key family-resilience processes into three domains: belief systems, organisational patterns, and communication/problem-solving processes. Family narratives may intersect with these domains by transmitting values of resilience and hope, providing a sense of continuity during periods of disruption, and supporting emotional expression and collaborative problem-solving.

Narrative identity and family resilience are conceptually distinct. Narrative identity is a person's changing story of self, and family resilience is a system-wide and relational process of adaptation. Neither can be reduced to the other. A well-adjusted family may have different or conflicting views on the same issue among its members, and the experience of one person does not guarantee the family's stability. The two constructs may therefore be related while remaining conceptually distinct.

Parent-child narrative interaction may provide one context in which individuals connect their personal narratives with family histories of coping and adaptation. Parents and children create meaning together through questions, additions, discussions, emotion words, silence and shared memories. The quality of this co-construction may shape the child's developing narrative identity and may also influence family communication and shared appraisal during periods of stress.

3. 3. Parent-Child Narrative Interaction and the Development of Identity

Family stories help children learn about their own lives and the history of their families and previous generations. Fivush et al. (2004) suggest that family narratives may help children organise emotions related to their lives, relationships, and family histories. Although autobiographical memory is individually experienced, parent-child reminiscence can contribute to the social construction of its narrative form and interpretation. Children learn what parts of an experience to focus on, whose views are taken into account, and how to express emotions through speech.

The interactional form of family storytelling also matters. Bohanek et al. (2006) identified three narrative interaction styles: coordinated, individual, and imposed perspectives. Coordinated conversations included contributions from several family members; individual conversations had separate views and were not fully integrated; and imposed conversations were led by one person or involved unpleasant discussions. These styles were associated with different parts of the sense of self in early adolescence (Bohanek et al., 2006). Therefore, the effects of family storytelling are not uniform. Coordinated, rich, and validating interactions may provide more supportive conditions for meaning-making, whereas imposed, rigid, or silencing interactions may be less supportive.

Elaborative parent-child reminiscence represents another relevant interactional process. Fivush et al. (2006) examined evidence linking maternal elaborative reminiscing to children's autobiographical memory, language, and socioemotional development, as well as their understanding of self and others. Such practices may support richer autobiographical narratives and socioemotional understanding.

Intergenerational narratives extend beyond children's own autobiographical memories. Fivush et al. (2008) propose that the intergenerational self is a way in which people understand themselves in the context of their family's history. Stories of parents' childhoods, changes in the family, mistakes, losses and recoveries can provide children with more historical and relational contexts for understanding their own identities in the present. However, their meaning may vary depending on who tells the story and how it is framed. Narratives that focus only on defeat or strict moral standards may limit the scope of interpretation for children; however, children can still interpret these stories in different ways.

Relational features of family narratives are also relevant during early adolescence. Bohanek et al. (2008) examined how mothers and fathers scaffold conversations about past emotional experiences and found that patterns of parental emotion expression and explanation are associated with later adolescent self-esteem and adjustment. These findings highlight the relationally situated nature of

family narrative interaction. Based on the current conceptual analysis, it can be inferred that adolescents may benefit from narrative contexts that allow for questioning of inherited narratives and expression of their own views; this is an implication of the present analysis rather than a direct finding reported by Bohanek et al. (2008).

Fivush (2008) argues that autobiographical narratives are formed and reconstructed through everyday family reminiscence. Building on this literature, this paper proposes that parent-child narrative interaction may link individual narrative identity with family adaptation through shared appraisal, emotional validation, and ongoing communication.

4. 4. Narrative Processes as Resources for Family Resilience

Family resilience can be understood as a dynamic systemic process through which families adapt to adversity and significant stress. Walsh (2003) conceptualises family resilience in terms of three key domains: belief systems, organisational patterns, and communication/problem-solving processes. Parent-child narrative interaction may intersect with these domains by shaping how families interpret difficulties, maintain continuity, and communicate about future challenges.

Stories may help family members articulate difficult experiences, recognise emotions, and develop shared understandings of what those experiences mean. This does not require imposed optimism or the minimisation of distress; rather, narrative interaction may provide a relational context for meaning-making under uncertainty.

At the level of organisational processes, narrative continuity can help families maintain a sense of connection during times of change in roles and routines due to relocation, bereavement, illness, school changes, economic difficulties, etc. Intergenerational stories may offer a historical perspective but do not suggest that current problems will be the same (Fivush et al., 2008).

Fivush et al. (2006) examined associations between maternal elaborative reminiscence and children's autobiographical memory, language, and socioemotional development. Based on the above evidence, the present paper proposes that elaborative and validating conversations may also provide support for family communication during times of stress; however, Fivush et al. (2006) did not directly study family resilience.

Bohanek et al. (2006) found that coordinated and imposed narrative perspectives differ in how family members' contributions are integrated during reminiscence. Coordinated and flexible narrative interactions may provide more supportive conditions for identity development and family adaptation, whereas imposed, rigid, or silencing interactions may be less supportive. This is a conceptual extension rather than a direct finding reported by Bohanek et al. (2006).

Walsh (2016) later proposed that family resilience is a dynamic system process rather than a fixed end-state. Family narratives may illustrate this systemic flexibility, as interpretations of family relationships can change as children develop and life circumstances evolve.

Parent-child narrative interaction should therefore be regarded as one relational resource among many rather than as a comprehensive solution. It should not be treated as a substitute for safety, material resources, respectful relationships, or appropriate professional support, and children should not be forced to recount difficult experiences before they are ready.

5. 5. Practical Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

One possible implication concerns everyday family conversations. Open-ended questions and active listening may provide a more supportive context for children to speak openly.

A related implication concerns elaborative and non-coercive reminiscing. Fivush et al. (2006) examined evidence linking open-ended and elaborative reminiscing with children's autobiographical and socioemotional development. However, the above results should not be regarded as a direct intervention plan, and the unwillingness to speak about difficult experiences should also be respected.

Another implication concerns the accommodation of multiple perspectives. Family members may recall the same event differently. Coordinated narrative participation does not require complete agreement; rather, it can allow divergent perspectives to be expressed without blame or exclusion (Bohanek et al., 2006). This may be particularly relevant during adolescence, when young people develop increasingly independent interpretations of family experiences in relation to their emerging identities.

Intergenerational narratives may connect family history with present-day meaning-making. Intergenerational narratives can offer a sense of continuity, but they need not require young people to uncritically reproduce family traditions. Children may understand themselves as situated within family history while still developing distinct future trajectories (Fivush et al., 2008). When parents tell their children about difficulties and coping in life, they may also reveal choices they have made or interactions with society.

These ideas may also inform professional practice. Family practitioners, teachers, and counsellors may draw on narrative approaches when working with families. Walsh (2021) conceptualises family resilience as a dynamic systemic process through which families adapt to significant adversity. Practitioners may consider the family's belief systems, organisational resources, and communication processes while avoiding the assumption that a single culturally preferred narrative style is suitable for all families. The ethical goal is to promote respectful communication, safety and family-defined meanings, not to impose a single correct family story.

A further implication concerns the revision of family narratives over time. Narrative identity is not fixed; it is continually constructed and revised. As children develop cognitively and emotionally and form a more differentiated sense of self, their interpretations of past events may also change. Family narratives may therefore need to be revisited as children's developmental perspectives change, rather than treating earlier interpretations as fixed. McAdams' (2001) concept of narrative identity refers to the changing character of life stories, and Fivush (2008) has also examined how people continue to construct their own stories within family contexts. Retelling a family story does not have to be a break from tradition; it can also be an opportunity to integrate earlier and current interpretations and support more autonomous meaning-making.

This revisability may also be related to the family's adaptation over time. As circumstances change and children learn new things about the past, their families' previous understandings may also be revised. Walsh's (2021) dynamic systemic framework conceptualises family resilience as an evolving process rather than a fixed quality of the family. Therefore, flexibility in the interpretation and narration of family life may serve as a type of relational resource within a broader adaptive system. Accordingly, disagreement, revision, or alternative interpretations of family narratives need not be understood by parents or professionals as evidence of dysfunction or opposition to the family. A supportive narrative context may allow family members to express different feelings and perspectives without undue pressure, so that these perspectives can be discussed and reconsidered. Narrative engagement may therefore be conceptualised as a relational activity embedded within broader social, psychological, and material conditions.

This conceptual analysis has several limitations. It does not include original empirical data, and most of the cited literature focuses on narrative identity, parent-child reminiscence, or family communication rather than family resilience itself. Thus, the proposed link between narrative identity and family resilience should be viewed as a conceptual proposition rather than an established causal pathway. Future longitudinal, dyadic, and interaction-focused research could examine whether the proposed relationships vary across cultures, family structures, developmental stages, digital communication contexts, and levels of resource access, as well as whether coordinated, elaborative, or validating narrative practices are associated with more supportive adaptive outcomes than rigid or silencing practices.

6. 6. Conclusion

This paper proposes a cross-level conceptual link between narrative identity and family resilience through parent-child narrative interaction. Rather than suggesting that storytelling directly produces resilience, the analysis conceptualises parent-child narrative interaction as a possible relational bridge linking individual meaning-making with family-level communication and shared appraisal.

The proposed relationship is likely to depend on interaction quality. Coordinated, rich, validating, and flexible narrative practices may provide more supportive conditions for identity development and family adaptation, whereas imposed, rigid, or silencing interactions may provide less supportive conditions for these processes. Narrative identity and family resilience therefore remain conceptually distinct and should not be treated as interchangeable outcomes.

Parent-child narrative interaction should therefore be regarded as one form of relational resource within a broader adaptive system. Its potential role is likely to depend on emotional safety, material conditions, cultural context, developmental stage, and access to other forms of support.

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