

Narrative Identity: Ethnicity and Self-Event Connections

Elizabeth Flatt, Jordan Booker, Ph.D., Robyn Fivush, Ph.D.



Introduction

Why Narratives?

- People create narratives as a way to understand lived experiences (Fivush 2010)
- Autobiographical reasoning within personal narratives about major life events helps create the life story that will become identity (Banks and Salmon, 2013)
- Developed over a lifetime, that narrative identity becomes every person's unique "you" (Reese et. al., 2016)

Why Ethnicity?

- How individuals create and derive meaning, varies across culture (Reese et. al., 2016)
- Eastern cultures tend to emphasize goals that pertain to change and self-improvement, as opposed to Westerners, who tend to look for ways to maintain a positive self-image (Wang, 2016)

Why Self-Event Connections?

- Having the ability to create that "you" through the integration of life events with the self carries implications for well-being (Pasupathi and Mansour, 2006)

Objectives

1. A) Are there differences across ethnicities in the number of self-event connections made?
B) Do the type of connections vary depending on ethnic ancestry
2. A) Do individuals who make any self-event connection show greater personal growth (examined within ethnic groups)
B) Can the type of connection made predict growth? Does this differ across ethnic groups?

Method

Participants

- 145 Community-recruited Adults (age 18-24) recruited through Amazon MTurk
- 221 College-recruited Adults (age 18-24) recruited through Emory SONA
- 310 selected and combined across samples for analyses based on self-identification as African, Asian, or European

Procedures

- As part of a larger data collection, including multiple narratives and multiple self-report surveys; this study focused on **challenge narratives**
- Ryff's (1995) Scale of Psychological Well-Being; 54 items; 6 subscales: Autonomy ($\alpha = .78$), Environmental Mastery ($\alpha = .87$), Personal Growth ($\alpha = .85$), Positive Relationships ($\alpha = .84$), Sense of Purpose ($\alpha = .82$), and Self-Acceptance ($\alpha = .89$); this study focused on **personal growth**

Narrative Prompt

- All of us have times of personal difficulty. Please think of the most unstable, confusing, troubled, or discouraging time in your life--the one event with the most impact on your values, the way you view yourself, and the way you look at the world. Please describe that difficulty. How old were you? How do you now understand that event, reflecting back on it? Is there any lesson or "bottom line" you take away from that event? What were your thoughts and feelings about that experience?

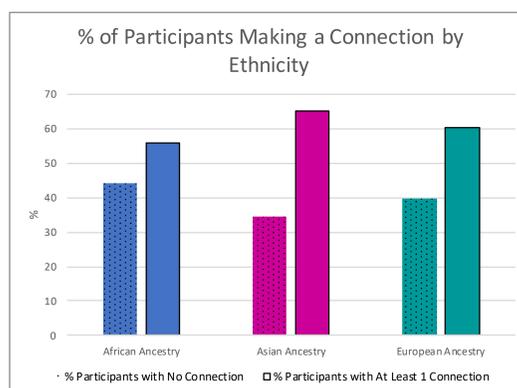
Coding/Narrative Sample

Connection Type	Description	Sample
Disposition	Traits; characteristics; qualities; roles	I have to make sure that my actions don't hurt or trouble anyone because I don't like hurting people. I like to make people laugh and be happy. Thus, I always try my best to be my best self now.
Perspective	Attitudes; perspectives about the world, others, relationships in general, self; values; outlooks	I have to make sure that my actions don't hurt or trouble anyone because I don't like hurting people. I like to make people laugh and be happy. Thus, I always try my best to be my best self now.
Transformation	Maturing, personal development and change	I have to make sure that my actions don't hurt or trouble anyone because I don't like hurting people. I like to make people laugh and be happy. Thus, I always try my best to be my best self now.

Objective 1 Results

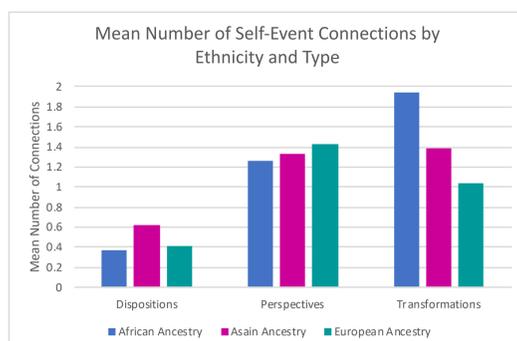
1A)

- **Analysis:** A crosstabulation of ethnicity with whether or not a participant made a connection
- **Result:** There are no significant differences across ethnicities in the % (or number) of individuals who made at least one self-event connection



1B)

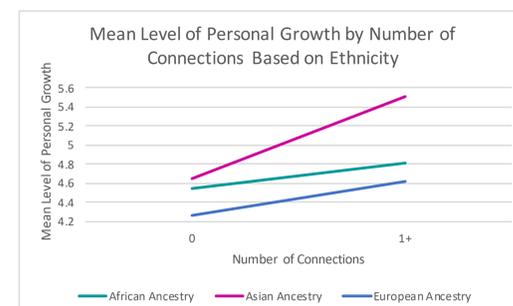
- **Analysis:** analysis of variance on number of self-event connection for those who made at least one connection
- **Result:** Individuals of African ancestry make more transformation connections than those of European ancestry



Objective 2 Results

2A)

- **Analysis:** T-tests within each group on whether or not any self-event connection was made and personal growth
- **Result:** Individuals of African ancestry did not show a relationship between making self-event connections and growth
- **Result:** Asian and European ancestry individuals who made at least one self-event connection showed higher growth than those who made no connections



NOTE: There were no ethnic differences in self-reports of personal growth

2B)

- **Analysis:** on the sample of those who made at least one connection, multiple regressions by ethnicity on type of connection predicting growth
- **Result:** For Asian ancestry participants, making transformation connections was correlated with growth
- **Result:** The type of connection was not correlated to growth in African or European ancestry individuals

Connection Type	African Ancestry		Asian Ancestry		European Ancestry	
	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error	B	Std. Error
Disposition	0.414	0.374	-0.046	0.16	-0.079	0.186
Perspective	-0.036	0.374	0.003	0.164	0.176	0.171
Transformation	-0.182	0.423	0.528*	0.161*	0.205	0.157

* p < 0.05

Discussion

Findings

- Levels of self-reported personal growth do not vary across ethnicities, but the number and types of self-event connections made within challenge narratives – if any – are varied, and carry different meaning depending on ethnicity

Implications

- Within self-event connections, nuances exist that should be further explored
- The lack of cross-cultural data in narrative/self-event connection literature creates a significant deficit in the literature that prompts further research

Limitations

- Data was not collected to study ethnic differences
- Individuals made fewer total connections in general

Future Directions

- Cross-cultural research
- Research on different types of connections across multiple narrative types

Acknowledgements: William & Mary Charles Center Summer Research Grant