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The Narrative Self in Context: An Examination of Narrative Identity within Interpersonal Contexts and Relational Domains

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The Narrative Self in Context:
An Examination of Narrative Identity within Interpersonal Contexts and Relational
Domains

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Psychology

by

Nicole R. Harake

June 2021

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my dad, Hisham, who inspired me to pursue my dreams.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Narrative Self in Context:
An Examination of Narrative Identity within Interpersonal Contexts and Relational
Domains

by

Nicole R. Harake

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Psychology
University of California, Riverside, June 2021
Dr. William Dunlop, Chairperson

Narrative identity is an internal story about the self, capturing the personal past, present,

and anticipated future. In this dissertation, I applied a contextualized approach to the

study of narrative identity. Across four studies, I examined narrative identity via a focus

on three interpersonal contexts and relational domains—a social setting (e.g.,

interpersonal perceptions; Study 1), the romantic domain broadly (Studies 2 and 4), and a

particular event from within the romantic domain (Study 3). In Study 1, I investigated the

extent to which individuals are aware of, and accurately portray, their close social

contacts' significant autobiographical stories. In Study 2, I assessed narrative coherence,

a fundamental feature of narrative identity, within self-definitional love life narratives,

and explored this construct in relation to self-reports of romantic attachment tendencies.

In Study 3, I further contextualized narrative identity by examining narratives of romantic

breakups in relation to these same romantic attachment tendencies. In Studies 1-3,

distinct coding paradigms were used to operationalize narrative identity. In Study 4, I

conducted an expansion and reanalysis of the data presented in Study 2c, by applying the three narrative identity coding paradigms used in Studies 1-3 to these data and explored these distinct features in relation to psychological adjustment. Together, this dissertation further extends the contextualized study of narrative identity.

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Humans rely on narratives to understand themselves and their lives (Bruner,

1990). Narrative identity, or the life story, captures the coherent integration of one's

personal past, present, and anticipated future (McAdams, 1995; Singer, 2004). The

composition of narrative identity begins in late adolescence and develops throughout the

lifespan, providing individuals' lives with meaning and direction (McAdams, 1995,

2001). To assess narrative identity, participants are prompted to describe several key

autobiographical scenes (e.g., low points, high points), and these narrative scenes are then

reliably coded for various features (McAdams, 2008). Features of narrative identity have

been associated with several indicators of psychological functioning and serves as a

resource for navigating the social world (e.g., Adler et al., 2015).

Narrative identity can manifest as highly contextualized illustrations of how

people make sense of significant life experiences (McLean et al., 2007). Consistent with

this perspective, Dunlop (2015, 2017) championed the notion of 'contextualized'

narrative identity, which promotes the study of narrative identity within social roles (e.g.,

employee), life domains (e.g., romantic), and interpersonal contexts (e.g., social settings).

In this dissertation, I explored contextualized narrative identity with an emphasis on

interpersonal contexts and relational domains.

Across four studies, I aimed to understand how individuals make sense of their

lives within interpersonal contexts and relational domains, as well as how these

contextualized narratives are associated with indicators of psychological functioning. In Study 1, I explored narrative identity within an interpersonal setting by investigating the extent to which individuals are aware of, and portray, their close social contacts' significant scenes from their narrative identities. In Study 2, I consider narrative identity as manifest within a particular relational domain, by examining a domain-specific indicator of adjustment in relation to narrative coherence within self-definitional romantic narratives. To do so in a reliable manner, I brought together three datasets. In Study 3, I explored narration within the romantic domain with even greater context specificity, by examining narratives of romantic breakups in relation to romantic attachment tendencies. Finally, in Study 4, I considered the narrative features employed in Studies 1 through 3 in a single sample of participants (Sample 2c) and examined these narrative features in relation to several indicators of psychological adjustment.

Narrative Identity

In late adolescence, individuals begin to construct their narrative identities, as they infuse and integrate life experiences with personal meaning (McAdams, 1995, 2001). Through the composition of a narrative identity, the author aligns his or her representations of the past, present, and anticipated future into a coherent pattern (McAdams, 1995; Singer, 2004). Narrative identity provides a mechanism for individuals to make sense of the twists and turns in their lives, thereby providing them with a sense of unity, purpose, and direction (McAdams, 2013).

Narrative identity is also important for psychological functioning (Adler et al., 2015). For example, individual differences in the features of narrative identity have been

found to correspond with life satisfaction (Lilgendahl & McLean, 2020), self-esteem (McAdams et al., 2001), mental health and well-being (Adler, 2012), prosocial behaviors (Walker & Frimer, 2007), romantic attachment tendencies (Dunlop, Karan, et al., 2020; Graci & Fivush, 2016), and behavior change (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013). Furthermore, narrative identity serves a social function (e.g., Adler et al., 2015; McAdams et al., 2001). In interpersonal and relational contexts and domains, a coherent narrative identity helps individuals communicate to others who they are and how they became that way (Maruna, 2001).

Measuring Narrative Identity

The assessment of narrative identity traditionally involves collecting participants' significant autobiographical experiences, such as high points and low points (Cox & McAdams, 2014; McAdams, 2008). Researchers then code the resulting qualitative data for certain features and themes (e.g., thematic content). For example, one feature of narrative identity that has gained substantial attention is redemption, present when narratives begin negatively and end positively, signifying experiences that were salvaged by positive outcomes, renewed insight, or personal growth (McAdams, 2001). Redemption has consistently corresponded with several indicators of psychological adjustment, such that individuals who narrate their lives with redemptive sequences tend to exhibit enhanced well-being and decreased depression (McAdams et al., 2001).

Contextualizing Narrative Identity

Researchers studying narrative identity have predominantly done so from a decontextualized, or generalized, approach. This approach entails examining participants'

stories across several contexts and domains (Dunlop, 2015). The generalized approach

stems from the origins of narrative identity theorizing, which emphasizes that narratives

serve an integrative function for the self (McAdams, 1995). Although much of the

narrative identity literature has focused on more generalized approaches, theories of

narrative identity highlight the inherently contextualized nature of autobiographical

narratives (Bamberg, 2006, 2010; McAdams, 1995; McLean et al., 2007).

In recent years, researchers have increasingly come to explore narrative identity

from a contextualized perspective (Dunlop, 2015, 2017; Galliher et al., 2017). This

contextualized perspective considers narrative identity with greater specificity through a

consideration of the particular domains, contexts, and situations (Dunlop, 2015, 2017).

Whereas a generalized approach seeks to examine narrative identity *across* a variety of

personally salient experiences, a contextualized approach aims to assess narrative identity

within specific contexts (Dunlop, 2015). Examining narrative identity with greater

(context) specificity may offer unique insights regarding the specific events within

individuals' lives and the contexts in which narrative identity unfolds.

Contextualizing narrative identity offers many benefits. First, assessing this

construct within a single domain may result in the identification of stronger relations with

constructs pertaining to that respective domain (Dunlop, 2015, 2017). The 'bandwidth-

fidelity tradeoff' suggests that broader (i.e., generalized) measures of personality

characteristics correspond with a greater number of outcome variables, compared to more

contextualized personality characteristics. In contrast, contextualized measures are

expected to correspond with a smaller number of outcomes, but these relations will be

stronger, relative to comparable generalized measures. For example, the features present in a narrative pertaining to the health domain should operate as a stronger predictor of domain-specific outcomes, such as psychological well-being, when compared to features drawn from more generalized narratives (Dunlop, 2017).

Second, a contextualized approach to the study of narrative identity provides an opportunity for increased understanding regarding the self-defining events that manifest within a given domain or context. Manifest content has been understudied within the existing narrative identity research (e.g., Galliher et al., 2017; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016). The increased specificity of contextualized narratives enables researchers to quantify nuanced characteristics as emergent within particular domains. For example, 'generalized' low point narratives may display greater variability in events and content between participants, compared to the contextualized narratives generated from prompting participants for a low point moment from a single context (e.g., breakup experience) or domain (e.g., the romantic domain; Dunlop et al., 2017).

The Interpersonal Context

Beyond depicting one's internalized self-representation, narratives are, invariably, disclosed within interpersonal contexts (McCoy & Dunlop, 2016; McLean et al., 2007). Sharing stories is central to the human experience (Bruner, 1990). This is evidenced by the pervasiveness and functional nature of storytelling. In conversations, stories are disclosed every few minutes (Bohanek et al., 2006; Thorne et al., 2007) and individuals tend to share with close others their most salient experiences of the day (Pasupathi et al.,

2009). Furthermore, narrative identity serves as a guide for interpersonal interactions; individuals cultivate relationships by sharing personal experiences (Alea & Bluck, 2003). Prior research demonstrates that using autobiographical stories to support social functions is associated with closer and more satisfying interpersonal relationships (Alea & Bluck, 2007; Alea & Vick, 2010).

Given that narrative identity develops and is expressed within a social backdrop, several studies have emphasized the role interpersonal contexts play in shaping one's identity (McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). Narratives differ based on several interpersonal factors, including the audience (McLean & Jennings, 2012) and the type of narrative scene being shared (Banks & Salmon, 2013; McCoy & Dunlop, 2016; McLean, Pasupathi, et al., 2017; Waters et al., 2014). For example, the content and quality of individuals' narratives is associated with the listener's attentiveness and responsiveness (Bavelas et al., 2000; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009).

The way in which individuals' stories are perceived and received by close friends and family carries implications for the narrator. Consistent with this notion, a growing body of research demonstrates that individuals form mental representations of others' stories, called *vicarious* narrative identities (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). Vicarious stories carry consequences for personal and social functioning, such that one's vicarious memories of close others, such as friends and parents, are used as a reference to construct meaning from personal experiences and guide personal decision making (McLean, 2016; Pillemer et al., 2015). Moreover, vicarious stories contribute to the development and maintenance of social bonds and facilitate an understanding of others (Panattoni &

Thomsen, 2018). Researchers have only begun to explore how narrative identity is understood and remembered by one's close others.

Relational Domains

Narrative identity may be understood as contextualized within specific life domains as well (Dunlop, 2017). This extant research demonstrates that features of narrative identity vary based on the domain of the autobiographical events described (Dunlop et al., 2013, 2017; McLean & Thorne, 2003; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016; Waters et al., 2014). Moreover, features of contextualized narratives have been found to demonstrate relations with domain-specific indicators of psychological functioning (Dunlop et al., 2013, 2017). Despite the associations between narrative identity and domain-specific outcomes (e.g., attachment tendencies), researchers have only recently begun to examine narrative identity as manifest within specific domains.

The romantic domain is a particularly interesting avenue for exploring narrative identity. The methodology employed to examine contextualized narrative identity is well-suited to assess the romantic domain in particular, as the nature of romantic experiences is highly idiographic and dynamic (Bühler & Dunlop, 2019). Storying romantic-related experiences is an essential process for making sense of the complex behavioral and perceptual aspects of such experiences. Beyond providing a sense of meaning for one's romantic life, the stories individuals form about their romantic lives are fundamental for guiding their identities broadly (Josselson, 2007, 2009).

The Current Studies

In light of the recommendation towards a consideration of the storied self from a contextualized perspective (Dunlop, 2015, 2017; Galliher et al., 2017), in this dissertation, I conducted a series of studies examining contextualized narrative identity. I sought to understand how individuals narrate self-defining experiences that manifest within various interpersonal contexts and relational domains, as well as whether these contextualized narratives correspond with domain-specific indicators of psychological adjustment. To do so, I contextualized narrative identity in terms of the vicarious narratives of close others (interpersonal contexts; Study 1), self-definitional experiences within the romantic domain (Study 2), and the narration of a particular experience within the romantic domain (e.g., romantic breakups; Study 3). In each of these studies, I quantified narrative identity using different coding paradigms. Then, in Study 4, the three coding paradigms were brought together and applied to a single dataset, in the interest of exploring the distinct relations between these quantifications of narrative identity and well-being.

In Study 1, I explored narratives within an interpersonal context, by examining the extent to which individuals are aware of, and recall, their close friends and family members' personal narrative identities (Harake, McCoy, et al., 2020). I investigated self-other agreement between features of participants' personal stories and informants' vicarious stories of participants' lives. I explored the agreement between participants' personal stories and informants' vicarious stories in terms of the stories' affective qualities (e.g., redemption, contamination, and tone) and manifest events. Study 1 is the

first to explore whether agreement is present with respect to the manifest events of participants' personal life stories and close others' vicarious stories of participants.

In Study 2, I considered narrative identity as manifest within the romantic domain and examined features of this identity in relation to a domain-specific indicator of adjustment: romantic attachment tendencies (i.e., differences in the affect, behavior, and cognition one displays within the context of romantic relationships). Participants' narratives were coded for coherence and explored in relation to romantic attachment tendencies in nearly 1,400 observations (stories) provided by 578 participants drawn from three samples. Although it is widely accepted that forming coherent life stories provides meaning for individuals' lives (McAdams, 2006; Waters & Fivush, 2015), narrative coherence has yet to be explored in relation to self-reported romantic attachment tendencies.

In Study 3, narrative identity was further considered within a particular romantic domain experience. I investigated narratives of romantic breakups in relation to romantic attachment tendencies (Harake & Dunlop, 2020). In this study, narratives were coded for transformational processing, or the extent to which the narrator explores the difficult experience while demonstrating emotional resolution (Pals, 2006b). This theme is apt for capturing individual differences in the narrative processing of challenging life experiences. As such, Study 3 contributes to understanding regarding narrative identity within relational contexts.

Finally, in Study 4, I conducted an expansion and re-analysis of the data reported in Sample 2c by bringing together the three narrative identity coding paradigms reported

in Studies 1-3 to explore how these narrative identity features corresponded with indicators of psychological adjustment. In this community sample, I examined affective qualities, narrative coherence, and transformational processing in relation to three markers of adjustment—satisfaction with life, relationship contingent self-esteem, and attachment tendencies.

Study 1: Vicarious Narratives

In Study 1, I investigated self-other agreement among the thematic content (Study 1a) and manifest events (Study 1b) of participants' personal stories and the vicarious stories close others generated about these participants. I also explored whether self-other agreement among features of personal and vicarious stories depended on relationship closeness between participants and their social contacts. Hereafter, participants are referred to as "targets" and close others are referred to as "informants" (e.g., those providing stories about the target).

Individuals often understand their lives by integrating them into a storied representation of the self, referred to as the life story (McAdams, 2013; Singer, 2004). Individuals also construct mental representations of *others'* life stories – that is, vicarious life stories (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). For example, if you imagine a highly positive experience in a close friend's life, you are constructing a part of your friend's vicarious life story—as seen through your eyes. Although the personal and social implications of personal life stories, as well as the ubiquitous nature of storytelling, are well-established, only recently have scholars demonstrated an interest in vicarious life stories (Fivush &

Merrill, 2016; McLean, 2016; Pillemer et al., 2015; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017; Zaman & Fivush, 2013).

Research examining vicarious stories has focused on the agreement that exists among individuals' personal life stories and the vicarious stories those individuals attribute to close others (Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). Such agreement has been observed in the temporal distributions (e.g., age at which recalled memories occur) and motivational features (e.g., agency, communion) of individuals' personal and vicarious stories (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). Thus, it appears that when someone narrates the stories of close others, they do so in a way that is not entirely independent of the way they narrate their own life.

While the extant literature on vicarious stories has begun to explore relations among personal and vicarious life stories, this research has largely focused on a comparison of participants' personal life stories and the vicarious stories they generate about close others (e.g., Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). Moreover, the existing studies investigating vicarious life stories have done so predominantly within the context of romantic couples and parent-child dyads (e.g., Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). The existing research has also been concentrated on agreement in terms of the thematic content, rather than the manifest content contained in personal and vicarious narratives. Given the foci of vicarious narrative thus far, several pertinent research questions remain unanswered.

Personal Life Stories

The life story, or *narrative identity* (Singer, 2004), is a story-based representation of the self in which conceptions of personal past, present, and anticipated future are integrated in a coherent manner (McAdams, 1995, 2001). To assess features of life stories, researchers typically prompt participants for significant key scenes from their lives (e.g., high points, low points, and turning points). The resulting narrative material is then quantified for various structural and thematic qualities. Among these qualities, researchers have often focused on those features that are emotional, or affective, in nature (Adler et al., 2017). Three affective constructs in particular have received considerable interest— redemptive imagery, contaminated imagery, and affective tone.

Redemptive imagery refers to narrative sequences that begin negatively and end positively, often depicting personal growth, insight, or silver linings (McAdams, 1999). Contaminated imagery is the opposite, capturing narratives that begin positively and end negatively, indicating experiences that were ultimately spoiled or ruined (McAdams, 1998). Finally, affective tone is the degree of positive, relative to negative, emotional content in participants' stories, illustrating participants' optimistic or pessimistic outlooks (McAdams, 2001).

Individual differences in the affective features of key scenes have been found to correspond with a number of important outcomes, including life satisfaction, well-being, physical health, and prosocial behavior (e.g., Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Bauer et al., 2005; Dunlop & Tracy, 2013; King et al., 2000; McAdams et al., 2001). For example, constructing stories with redemptive sequences and positive affective tone is typically

associated with greater psychological adjustment (e.g., self-esteem, well-being), while generating stories with contaminated sequences corresponds negatively with indicators of adjustment (McAdams et al., 2001).

Manifest Events

Life story researchers have most commonly focused their examination on *how* stories are narrated (i.e., the thematic content of participants' narratives). Alternatively, researchers may assess *what* is narrated, by examining the manifest events that exist within life stories (for example, see Dunlop et al., 2017; Galliher et al., 2017; McLean, Syed, & Shucard, 2016; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016). Manifest events are thought to be "landmarks" of the life story (Thorne et al., 1998, p. 237) and represent an especially foundational component of narrative construction (McAdams et al., 2006; McLean, 2016; Pillemer et al., 2015; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). This personally salient content depicts the context individuals understand to be relevant for their continued development. As such, a consideration of manifest events is required for a full understanding of narrative identity itself.

What Do We Know When We Know Someone?

In his foundational paper, McAdams (1995) posed a central question for researchers interested in individuals' lives—when we believe we know someone, what do we know about them? He used this question to illustrate that knowing someone well involves going beyond an awareness of broad dispositions and motivations. It entails having an understanding of their story. Awareness of how individuals story their personal past offers unique insight into the important moments from their lives, their

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understanding of how they came to be who they are, and what their lives mean to them. Knowledge of close others' narrative identities serves as a guide for interpersonal interactions; it facilitates an understanding of others and helps advance and maintain social bonds (e.g., Beike et al., 2016; Fivush et al., 2011; Lind & Thomsen, 2018; McLean, 2016; Merrill et al., 2017; Pillemer et al., 2015). Furthermore, communicating personal information (including autobiographical stories) provides individuals with a sense of feeling understood (Alea & Bluck, 2003; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Drawing from all of the above, individuals who disclose a greater number of self-definitional stories about themselves may have more intimate interpersonal relationships. Relations between sharing stories and closeness is likely bi-directional in nature (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994), such that those with closer relationships may feel more comfortable disclosing personal information about themselves, and therefore closer dyads may have more knowledge about one another's life stories (Aron et al., 1997; Baron & Bluck, 2009; Bluck & Alea, 2011; Bluck et al., 2005). As such, relationship closeness may correspond with self-other agreement among the thematic content and manifest content of participants' personal life stories and close others' vicarious stories of participants.

Vicarious Life Stories

Vicarious life stories are internalized narratives individuals construct of others' lives (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). A limited number of studies have explored the nature of vicarious life stories, however, there is a longstanding interest within personality psychology regarding the degree of agreement among self-perceptions and other-

perceptions of personality traits (e.g., Cronbach, 1955). The literature on person perception, or personality trait judgements of others, has revealed that individuals are relatively accurate in their judgements of others' personality traits, even if raters have limited information about each other (for a review, see Connelly & Ones, 2010). When it comes to the perception of others' life stories however, one should not assume that the findings drawn from the trait perception literature will directly translate. Unlike traits, that contain distinct behavioral components (see John et al., 2008), life stories do not necessarily manifest in an observable manner.

Research exploring vicarious life stories has revealed several noteworthy findings regarding the degree to which individuals generate personal narratives in a similar manner to their constructions of vicarious stories about close relatives and friends (Harake, Sweeny, et al., 2020; Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). This research provided indication that participants' personal life stories and the vicarious stories they generate about close others exhibited similarities in motivational themes (agency, communion) and emotional tone (Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017).

Panattoni and Thomsen (2018) explored the agreement between participants' personal life stories and the vicarious stories they constructed about their romantic partners. This study has the unique benefit of collecting personal and vicarious stories from both members of romantic couples, allowing for examination of both actor and partner effects in the personal and vicarious life stories. Redemptive sequences, as well as motivational themes of agency and communion were considered. Agreement was

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observed in terms of redemptive sequences, agency, and communion among participants' personal life stories and the vicarious life stories these participants generated about their romantic partners. Comparing participants' vicarious life stories about their partners and those partners' personal life stories, self-other agreement was noted in the motivational, but not affective (i.e., redemption), content of stories.

These previous studies demonstrated that individuals recount vicarious life stories of others with similar motivations and affect as their personal stories (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). This research also showed that the degree to which individuals narrated vicarious life stories of partners with similar thematic features of partners' personal stories depended on the narrative feature considered. While the extant research has laid the foundation for the study of vicarious life stories, this work has primarily concentrated on individuals' personal life stories in relation to the vicarious stories these same participants generate about close others (Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). Moreover, this research has largely examined romantic couples and parent-child dyads (e.g., Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). Finally, researchers have yet to consider self-other agreement among the manifest events of participants' personal life stories and close others' vicarious stories of participants. This represents an oversight, as the manifest events are central components of narrative construction (Thorne et al., 1998). Through this examination, we stand to gain an understanding of whether individuals are aware of the significant events from the lives of close others, as well as whether the closeness of these relationships is associated with the degree of self-other agreement noted. This

understanding may carry implications for relationship closeness between individuals and their close others.

The Current Studies

Across two studies, I investigated self-other agreement among the thematic content (Study 1a) and manifest events (Study 1b) of participants' personal life stories and the vicarious life stories close others generated about these participants. I also explored whether self-other agreement among features of personal and vicarious stories depended on relationship closeness between participants and close others. Hereafter, participants are referred to as "targets" and close others are referred to as "informants" (e.g., those providing stories about the target; e.g., Kenny, 1991).

In Study 1a, I examined self-other agreement among redemption, contamination, and tone between targets' personal life stories and informants' vicarious life stories. This work built upon existing research by considering vicarious stories generated by a number of different social contacts (e.g., peers, siblings, romantic partners, parents). I quantified the closeness of these relationships to determine whether relationship closeness among targets and informants is associated with self-other agreement in personal and vicarious stories. In Study 1b, I examined self-other agreement among the manifest events of targets' personal life stories and informants' vicarious life stories and explored whether this agreement corresponded with relationship closeness between targets and informants.

Turning to the hypotheses considered in Study 1a, I had different expectations regarding self-other agreement in redemption, contamination, and tone, as well as relations between this agreement and relationship closeness. Considering the extant

research demonstrating that redemption in vicarious stories of partners was not associated with redemption in those partners' personal life stories (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018), I anticipated that targets' personal life stories and informants' vicarious life stories of targets would not display self-other agreement in terms of redemption or contamination. Given the absence of agreement expected, I did not anticipate that relationship closeness would correspond with self-other agreement in redemption or contamination. In contrast, drawing from previous work showing positive associations the emotional tone in participants' personal and vicarious stories (Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017), I predicted that affective tone in targets' personal life stories would correspond positively with the tone in informants' vicarious stories. I hypothesized that self-other agreement in tone would be moderated by relationship closeness between targets and informants, such that those with closer relationship would demonstrate greater self-other agreement in tone.

In Study 1b, due to the novel nature of the material considered (i.e., manifest events), I had no a priori hypotheses regarding the degree of self-other agreement that would be observed. However, on the basis of the fact that personality judgments have shown to increase in accuracy with greater interaction among observers and targets (Connelly & Ones, 2010), and that self-disclosure and relationship closeness are mutually related (Collins & Miller, 1994), I hypothesized that targets and informants with closer relationships would exhibit heightened agreement in manifest content. This work was not preregistered.

In the current studies, both samples were collected from undergraduate students enrolled in an upper division psychology course at a large public university in Southern California. Participants received course credit in exchange for their participation in this study and received additional credit if their informants did the same. As such, sample sizes were constrained by the number of participants that could be recruited during the 10-week quarter. According to simulation studies that estimated sufficient sample sizes for similar designs, the sample sizes of target and informant participants obtained in the current studies were adequate for ensuring statistical power in the analyses (e.g., Maas & Hox, 2005). Moreover, the sample sizes obtained in the current studies are consistent with the sample sizes collected in previous studies examining relations between personal and vicarious life stories (e.g., Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018).

Study 1a

In Study 1a, I explored whether targets narrated their personal life stories with similar affective themes as the vicarious stories provided by informants (i.e., whether there was self-other agreement in the affective qualities of key scenes). I operationalized 'affective qualities' in terms of themes of redemptive imagery (e.g., bad beginnings, positive endings), contaminated imagery (e.g., positive beginnings, bad endings) and affective tone (e.g., degree of positive, relative to negative, emotional content). I also determined whether self-other agreement was a function of relationship closeness between targets and informants.

Participants

One hundred and two undergraduate students (M_{age} = 21.13, SD = 1.40) took part in this study in exchange for course credit. Eighty percent of this sample identified as female, and 34% identified as Asian American, 40% Hispanic/ Latinx, 8% White, 8% African American/ Black, 2% Pacific Islander, and 8% identified as Mixed/Other. To obtain full credit for participating, targets were required to recruit between one and four individuals to serve as informants (M = 2.91 informants). Of these informants (M_{age} = 25.51, SD = 10.83), 62% identified as female, and 32% identified as Asian American, 35% Hispanic/ Latinx, 18% White, 8% African American/ Black, and 7% identified as Mixed/Other.

Informants were required to be 18 years of age or older, fluent in English, have known the target for at least one year, have spoken to the target within the past three months, and could not be enrolled in the same course as the target from which they were receiving additional credit (informants could, however, be friends or family members enrolled or employed at the same university as targets). Given that targets were able to recruit any social contact to serve as an informant as long as they met the eligibility criteria, the types of relationships informants had with targets varied considerably. Based on the brief descriptions provided by informants regarding their relationships to the target participant, informants included parents, siblings, friends, co-workers, romantic partners, extended family members (e.g., aunts/ uncles), and roommates. To ensure valid responses and discourage targets from selecting informants that did not meet the inclusion criteria,

research assistants contacted all informants involved in the study to confirm their

eligibility for study participation.[1]

Procedure

Targets and their respective informants received an email link to complete a

survey online. In written (viz. typed) format, targets each described a high point, low

point, and turning point moment in their own lives using McAdams' Life Story Interview

(LSI; McAdams, 2008), modified for response format (typed rather than spoken; see

McCoy & Dunlop, 2016). Informants were prompted to narrate the same three events, but

for the lives of the target participant (i.e., informants described the high point, low point,

and turning point event that they believed represented the targets' life stories). No length

requirement was applied to participants' responses. On average, targets provided

narratives with a length of 184 words, whereas informants' narratives were 87 words on

average.[2] Targets and informants then completed a number of non-narrative

questionnaires assessing relationship closeness and provided demographic information.

Non-Narrative Measures

Relationship closeness

To assess relationship closeness between targets and informants, all participants

completed the 12-item Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS; Dibble et

al., 2012). This measure conceptualizes relationship closeness in terms of the degree of

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[1] The process of ensuring valid responses entailed contacting each informant by phone to confirm that they met the eligibility criteria and completed the survey independently. In cases where informants did not meet eligibility criteria or could not recall completing the survey online, I intended to exclude the informant's data from the current analyses. However, all informants were deemed eligible for study inclusion.
[2] Targets' personal narratives ($M = 183.90$, $SD = 128.89$) were significantly longer than informants' vicarious narratives ($M = 87.38$, $SD = 58.38$), $t = 12.65$, $p < .001$.

affective, cognitive, and behavioral mutual dependence, and provides a reliable and construct valid measurement of closeness across a variety of relationship types (Dibble et al., 2012). Targets and informants each rated items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *(strongly disagree)* to 7 *(strongly agree)*. Exemplary items include "My relationship with _____ is close" and "_____ is a priority in my life." Relationship closeness scores were then aggregated across all informants for each target participant to create a variable representing informants' average reported closeness to targets ($\alpha = .95$). Targets' ratings of closeness to each informant were also aggregated to create a variable representing targets' average reported closeness to their informants ($\alpha = .94$). Given that these two closeness variables were highly correlated ($r = .60$), I aggregated across both closeness variables to create a single relationship closeness variable that represents relationship closeness between targets and informants (See Supplemental Table 1 for descriptive statistics) [3].

Narrative coding

The 1,174 narratives collected from targets and informants were entered into a single spreadsheet. Their order was then randomized so that personal and vicarious stories could not be linked to each other. Two research assistants, both uninformed of the purpose of the study, next coded each narrative for the presence ("1") or absence ("0") of redemptive and contaminated sequences (McAdams, 1998, 1999), as well as the degree of affective tone on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very negative*, 5 = *very positive*; McAdams, 2001). This process resulted in codes that captured redemption ($\kappa = .76$),

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[3] Supplementary data for Study 1 can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2020.104037.

contamination ($\kappa = .83$), and tone ($ICC = .80$) for each target and informant narrative. After coding a set of 100 narratives, the raters met to resolve discrepancies between their codes. This entailed each rater providing justification for discrepant responses and determining whether to change or maintain their initial code.

Due to low base rates of contamination in personal and vicarious stories (only approximately 8% of key scenes contained contamination), I interpret the results pertaining to contamination with caution. Moreover, contaminated imagery was only present in low point narratives. Therefore, scene-specific analyses examining contamination within each type of key scene were not conducted.

Results

In what follows, I first examined self-other agreement in redemption, contamination, and affective tone between personal and vicarious life stories. Then, I determined whether self-other agreement corresponded with relationship closeness between targets and informants. Multilevel modeling was used to account for the nesting in the data. In the primary analyses, level one consisted of targets and level two consisted of key scenes. Informants' ratings of redemption, contamination, and tone were averaged within each key scene for each target participant. For example, all informants' scores of redemption in high point scenes were averaged for each target participant. This aggregated informant score was computed for each affective variable within high, low, and turning point scenes. In supplemental, scene-specific analyses, I did not aggregate across informants. Instead, targets were considered at level one of this analysis while informants were considered at level 2. In scene-specific analyses, I analyzed each key

scene separately to explore self-other agreement in affective qualities *within* each key scene, rather than *across* key scenes.

Analyses were completed using the "lme4" package (Bates et al., 2015) in "R" (R Core Team, 2019). I used "means-as-outcomes" regression models (Cohen et al., 2003). Our interest in these models concerns the fixed effects. Each affective theme (e.g., redemption, contamination, and tone) was entered separately in each model. For example, in the first model, I entered targets' personal life story redemption as the predictor for informants' vicarious life story redemption. The second model considered contamination (e.g., predicting informants' contamination from targets' contamination), and the third model considered affective tone. Redemption and contamination variables ranged from 0 to 1, whereas affective tone variables ranged from 1-5. Targets' affective tone variables were mean centered for ease of interpretation. Below, I report the model used to predict informants' scores on redemption, contamination, and affective tone from that of target participants.

Level One Model:

Informants' scores $= \beta_{0j} + r_{ij}$

Level Two Model:

$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Target score}) + u_{0j}$

In this model, γ_{00} represents the average value of the informant's score when the participant's score is zero on each affective theme (redemption, contamination, and tone). The γ_{01} term (referred to as the target score) represents the change in the informants'

mean for each unit increase in the target's score. The r_{ij} term is the informant level

residual, which has variance σ^2. The u_{0j} term represents the target level residual.

The next model was used to examine whether self-other agreement varied by the

degree of relationship closeness between targets and informants. The model was run

separately for each theme (e.g., redemption, contamination, and tone).

Level One Model:

Informants' vicarious scores of targets $= \beta_{0j}+r_{ij}$

Level Two Model:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(Target\ score) * \gamma_{02}(Closeness) + u_{0j}$$

In this model, γ_{00} again represents the value of the informant's score when the

target participant's score is zero on each affective theme (redemption, contamination, and

tone). The γ_{01} term (referred to as the target score) represents the change in the

informants' mean for each unit increase in the target's score. This is moderated by the

γ_{02} term (e.g., relationship closeness), which represents the degree to which closeness

between targets and informants moderates the relationship between target and informant

scores (e.g., self-other agreement). The r_{ij} and u_{0j} terms refer to the informant level and

target level residuals, respectively.

Primary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and relations among study variables are provided in

supplementary online materials. To assess the primary research aim, I examined self-

other agreement in the affective qualities by predicting informants' redemption,

contamination, and tone from that of targets' personal key scenes (See Table 1.1 for

MLM model parameters). Self-other agreement was not found for redemption or contamination, suggesting that redemption and contamination in targets' personal key scenes did not correspond with that of informants' vicarious scenes (consistent with hypotheses). In contrast, and again consistent with hypotheses, there was self-other agreement noted in affective tone, such that targets' tone within personal key scenes corresponded positively with affective tone in informants' vicarious scenes. To provide an example of how the results in Table 1.1 can be interpreted, the following describes the relationship between target tone and informant tone:

Due to the fact that affective tone was mean-centered, when target tone was at its mean, the expected value of informant tone was 3.19, suggesting that informant tone was slightly positive. Target tone corresponded with informant tone with a slope of .57. Thus, for each one-point increase in target tone, I expected a .57 increase in informant tone. Bootstrapped simulations of the model also resulted in a narrow confidence interval around the unstandardized beta ranging from .52 to .63.

Next, I determined whether self-other agreement among the affective qualities of personal and vicarious scenes varied by relationship closeness between targets and informants (See Table 1.2 for model parameters). To provide an example of how the results in Table 1.2 can be interpreted, the following describes the relationship between target and informant redemption with relationship closeness as a moderator. In the model predicting informant redemption, the main effect of target redemption was not related to informant redemption $(b = .28, \ 95\% \ CI = -.13, .68)$. Although of little interest, the main effect of relationship closeness was unrelated to informant redemption $(b = .02, 95\% \ CI =$

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-.01, .05). Of greater interest is the interaction between relationship closeness and target redemption, which was also unrelated (b = -.05, 95% CI = -.12, .03). This interaction suggests that the relation between target redemption in personal scenes and informant redemption in vicarious scenes was not associated with relationship closeness between targets and informants.

In terms of the relation between self-other agreement in contamination among personal and vicarious key scenes and relationship closeness, the interaction between relationship closeness and target contamination was unrelated. Lastly, the interaction between relationship closeness and target tone was also unrelated.

Table 1.1

Model parameters predicting informants' scores from targets' scores on each affective theme (Study 1a)

Variable	*Intercept*	*b*	*SE*	[95% CI]	*t*-value	*p*-value
Informant redemption	.09					
Target redemption		.03	.03	[-.03, .81]	.95	.34
Informant contamination	.001					
Target contamination		.003	.02	[-.02, 08]	1.20	.23
Informant tone	3.19					
Target tone		.57	.03	[.52, .63]	19.63	.0001

Note. $N = 102$ target participants. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model, b = unstandardized regression coefficient, SE = standard error, CI = 95% Confidence Interval of regression coefficient, t = t-value of regression coefficient. Target's affective tone was mean-centered. Each theme (e.g., redemption, contamination, tone) represents an individual model.

Table 1.2

Model parameters predicting informants' affective qualities from targets' affective qualities with relationship closeness as a moderator (Study 1a)

Variable	*Intercept*	*b*	*SE*	[95% CI]	*t*-value	*p*-value
Informant redemption	-.02					
Target redemption		.28	.21	[-.13, .68]	1.32	.19
Relationship closeness		.02	.02	[-.01, .05]	1.12	.26
Interaction		-.05	.04	[-.12, .03]	-1.22	.22
Informant contamination	.05					
Target contamination		-.13	.19	[-.50, .23]	-.71	.48
Relationship closeness		-.008	.005	[-.02, .004]	-1.33	.19
Interaction		.03	.03	[-.03, .09]	.89	.37
Informant tone	3.15					
Target tone		.50	.22	[.04, .94]	2.31	.03
Relationship closeness		.007	.05	[-.11, .12]	.12	.90
Interaction		.01	.04	[-.06, .09]	.35	.72

Note. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = standard error, CI = 95% Confidence Interval of regression coefficient, *t* = t-value of regression coefficient. Target's affective tone was mean-centered. Each affective quality variable (e.g., redemption, contamination, tone) represents an individual model.

Scene-specific Analyses

In scene-specific analyses, I ran the same models as above, within each key scene type. The models reported here are identical to those in the main analyses with the exception that level two now consists of individual informant scores, rather than informant scores being aggregated within key scenes. As such, informants' scores on redemption and tone were predicted from targets' scores within high points, low points, and turning points individually. Due to the dichotomous nature of redemption within scene-specific narratives, logistic regressions were used. Again, the model was run separately for each key scene (e.g., high, low, and turning point scenes) and each theme (e.g., redemption and tone). Tables 1.3 and 1.4 include MLM model parameters for redemption and tone, respectively.

Evident from Table 1.3, I noted that redemption in targets' personal scenes was unrelated to redemption in informants' vicarious scenes within high, low, or turning point scenes. With respect to affective tone, targets' tone in personal high point scenes corresponded positively with informants' tone in vicarious high point scenes. As noted in Table 1.4, for each one-point increase in target tone, I expect a .18 increase in informant tone among high point scenes. Affective tone in targets' personal scenes did not correspond with informants' tone in vicarious scenes within low point and turning point scenes.

Lastly, I examined whether self-other agreement between personal and vicarious stories varied by relationship closeness, within each key scene. To do so, relationship closeness was added as an interaction term to the original models predicting informants'

redemption and tone from targets' redemption and tone. Model parameters for

redemption and tone are presented in Tables 1.5 and 1.6, respectively. Among high, low,

and turning point scenes, self-other agreement in redemption and affective tone did not

vary as a function of relationship closeness.

Table 1.3

Model parameters predicting informants' redemption from targets' redemption within each key scene (Study 1a)

Variable	Intercept	b	SE	[95% CI]	z-value	p-value
High point story						
Informant redemption	-3.04					
Target redemption		1.20	1.27	[-3.01, 2.67]	.15	.88
Low point story						
Informant redemption	-2.93					
Target redemption		.67	.88	[-2.46, 1.26]	-.45	.63
Turning point story						
Informant redemption	-2.11					
Target redemption		1.28	.40	[-.58, 1.03]	.62	.52

Note. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model and *b* = odds ratios. Individual regression models were conducted for high point, low point, and turning point scenes.

Table 1.4

Model parameters predicting informants' tone from targets' tone within each key scene
(Study 1a)

Variable	*Intercept*	*b*	*SE*	[95% CI]	*t*-value	*p*-value
High point story						
Informant tone	4.12					
Target tone		.18	.07	[.05, .31]	2.72	.008
Low point story						
Informant tone	1.80					
Target tone		-.05	.06	[-.17, .07]	-.84	.40
Turning point story						
Informant tone	3.69					
Target tone		.07	.05	[-.03, .17]	1.36	.18

Note. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient. Targets' affective tone was mean-centered. Individual regression models were conducted for high point, low point, and turning point scenes.

Table 1.5

Model parameters predicting informants' redemption from targets' redemption with relationship closeness within each key scene (Study 1a)

Variable	*Intercept*	*b*	*SE*	[95% CI]	z-value	*p*-value
High point story						
Informant redemption	-5.81					
Target redemption		680.20	5.31	[-4.60, 18.39]	1.23	.22
Relationship closeness		1.61	.31	[-.07, 1.19]	1.54	.12
Interaction		.28	1.15	[-4.12, .91]	-1.09	.28
Low point story						
Informant redemption	-1.68					
Target redemption		3.87	4.02	[-5.21, 10.67]	.34	.74
Relationship closeness		.80	.25	[-.91, .03]	-.90	.37
Interaction		.71	.77	[-2.32, .84]	-.44	.66
Turning point story						
Informant redemption	-3.46					
Target redemption		6.46	2.27	[-2.71, 6.38]	.82	.41
Relationship closeness		1.27	.23	[-.20, .73]	1.02	.30
Interaction		.75	.39	[-1.07, .50]	-.73	.47

Note. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model and *b* = odds ratios. Individual regression models were conducted for high point, low point, and turning point scenes.

Table 1.6

Model parameters predicting informants' tone from targets' tone with relationship closeness within each key scene (Study 1a)

Variable	Intercept	b	SE	[95% CI]	t-value	p-value
High point story						
Informant tone	3.92					
Target tone		.67	.37	[-.06 1.40]	1.80	.07
Relationship closeness		.03	.33	[-03, .10]	1.03	.30
Interaction		-.08	.06	[-.21, .04]	-1.34	.18
Low point story						
Informant tone	2.19					
Target tone		.16	.34	[-.49, .82]	.49	.62
Relationship closeness		-.07	.05	[-.17, .03]	-1.37	.17
Interaction		-.04	.06	[-.15, .07]	-.65	.52
Turning point story						
Informant tone	3.08					
Target tone		.06	.29	[-.54, .45]	.20	.84
Relationship closeness		.11	.05	[.02, .18]	2.29	.02
Interaction		.003	.05	[-.06, .11]	.06	.95

Note. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model, *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient. Individual regression models were conducted for high point, low point, and turning point scenes. Targets' affective tone was mean-centered.

Discussion

I noted an absence of self-other agreement among targets' personal and informants' vicarious stories in terms of redemptive and contaminated imagery. However, targets' personal and informants' vicarious life stories exhibited self-other agreement in terms of affective tone. Informants narrated vicarious stories of targets with similar emotional valence as the targets themselves. In the scene-specific analyses, targets' tone in personal high point stories corresponded with informants' tone in their vicarious high point narratives, suggesting that the aforementioned effect was being driven primarily by self-other agreement among personal and vicarious high points.

The findings regarding the self-other agreement in redemption, contamination, and emotional tone, map on to the existing literature (Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018). Similarly, the findings regarding self-other agreement and relationship closeness are consistent with existing studies demonstrating that the degree of relationship adjustment between romantic partners was unrelated to agreement in redemption between personal and vicarious scenes (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018). Previous studies have yet to examine self-other agreement between targets' personal and informants' vicarious life stories beyond the thematic qualities of narratives. This work, thus, aims to further understand the manner and ways in which the affective features of participants' key scenes are reflected in the vicarious stories provided by those closest to them. One feature of life stories that has yet to be examined within the vicarious life stories literature, however, is the manifest events representing the landmarks of these broader life stories. In Study 1b, I addressed this gap in the literature.

Study 1b

The objectives in Study 1b were to a) assess the degree of self-other agreement in manifest events between targets' personal key scenes and informants' vicarious scenes of targets; and b) determine if self-other agreement in manifest events corresponded with relationship closeness between targets and informants. Existing research has demonstrated minimal agreement between the life script events that both parents and children perceived to be important to the parent's life (Gu et al., 2020). To my knowledge, however, Study 1b is the first to examine self-other agreement of manifest events among targets' personal and informants' vicarious scenes.

Due to the novel and exploratory nature of Study 1b, a priori hypotheses were not entertained regarding the degree of self-other agreement that would be observed among the manifest events. I did, however, hypothesize that targets and informants with greater closeness would exhibit heightened self-other agreement in manifest content in light of prior research suggesting positive relations among self-disclosure and intimacy (Collins & Miller, 1994), as well as the increased accuracy of personality trait judgements with greater interaction among observers and targets (Connelly & Ones, 2010). Like the analyses in Study 1a, I considered both (a) the degree of self-other agreement noted across all events (which corresponded to participants' life high points, low points, and turning points) and within each event category (akin to Study 1a's scene-specific analyses).

Participants

One hundred and forty-six undergraduate students (M_{age} = 21.90, SD = 3.76) took part in this study in exchange for course credit. Seventy-one percent of this sample identified as female, and 40% identified as Asian American, 34% Hispanic/ Latinx, 13% White, 3% African American/ Black, and 10% identified as Mixed/Other. To obtain full credit for participating, targets were required to nominate a minimum of three additional individuals to serve as informants. Like Study 1a, data were collected over the course of a 10-week academic quarter. I sought to enroll as many targets (and informants) as possible during this period. Targets recruited between one and four individuals to serve as informants (M = 3.18 informants). Of these informants (M_{age} = 25.66, SD = 10.35), sixty percent identified as female, and 34% identified as Asian American, 33% Hispanic/ Latinx, 18% White, 5% African American/ Black, and 10% identified as Mixed/Other. The eligibility requirements mirrored that of Study 1a.

Procedure

Targets and their respective informants received an email link to complete an online survey. Each target provided three key autobiographical events that signified a high point, low point, and turning point moment in his or her own life. Informants were prompted to provide the same three events, but in reference to the lives of the target participant, rather than their own. To best capture the events themselves, rather than miscellaneous details/narrative descriptions, the event descriptions provided by participants was limited to a length of 30 words. Targets and informants both completed non-narrative questionnaires assessing relationship closeness and provided demographic information.

Non-Narrative Measures

Relationship closeness

As in Study 1a, all participants completed the 12-item Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URCS; Dibble et al., 2012) to measure closeness between targets and informants. Relationship closeness was averaged across informants for each target participant. I again derived a relationship closeness variable representing targets' reported closeness to each informant ($\alpha = .93$) and each informant's reported closeness to the target participant ($\alpha = .93$). These two variables were positively correlated with one another ($r = .58$). As such, I aggregated across these two relationship closeness variables to create a single measure of relationship closeness. Supplemental Table 2 contains descriptive statistics and relations among variables in Study 1b.

Self-Other Agreement Coding

To examine whether informants were congruent in their descriptions of targets' manifest events, I entered a total of 1,830 events provided by all targets and informants into a single spreadsheet. All identifying information reported within the autobiographical scenes was then removed (e.g., names, locations). Next, targets' and informants' scenes were matched, such that the events provided by targets were organized with the corresponding informant's report of the target's manifest event. Following this, trained research assistants compared the target's event to the scene provided by each informant.

Self-other agreement was quantified using a dichotomous coding system. Research assistants specified a "1" when the target and informant's scene aligned and a

"0" was allocated if the scenes did not match. An example code of "1" occurred when a target reported: "A low point in my life would be when my dad passed away" and one of the informants reported "Her father passing away on her 16th birthday". This resulted in 1,682 codes capturing self-other agreement between targets and informants. As in Study 1a, raters met to resolve discrepant codes after coding a set of narratives. Each rater provided justification for discrepant responses and made a decision to either change or maintain their initial code.

Results and Discussion

On average, informants were congruent with targets' manifest events 25% of the time. Within each type of key scene, informants were congruent with targets' low points 29% of the time, followed by high points 26% of the time, and turning points 19% of the time. Next, I examined whether self-other agreement between targets' personal and informants' vicarious key scenes was a function of relationship closeness between targets and informants. On the basis of the nested nature of this data, I used the same analytic techniques as Study 1a.

Relationship closeness was positively associated with self-other agreement, such that targets and informants who indicated feeling closer to one another demonstrated greater self-other agreement in manifest events (See Table 1.7 for model parameters). Specifically, for each unit increase in relationship closeness, a .02 increase in self-other agreement among manifest events is expected. Bootstrapped simulations of the model also resulted in a narrow confidence interval around the unstandardized beta ranging from .002 to .05.

Turning to the scene-specific analyses, I computed an individual model for each type of key scene, specifically examining the effect of relationship closeness on self-other agreement within high, low, and turning point scenes (See Table 1.8 for model parameters). Relationship closeness between targets and informants did not correspond with self-other agreement in manifest events within high, low, or turning point scenes, suggesting that closeness not associated with agreement in selecting manifest events within key scenes from the target's life. This may be attributed to the fact that the proportion of self-other agreement in manifest events varied across key scenes, and as such, relations among self-other agreement and closeness were better detected when I considered relations across key scenes, rather than within key scenes.

In summary, informants identified manifest events that were congruent with the targets' manifest event 25% of the time. Furthermore, those who indicated feeling greater closeness to one another demonstrated greater self-other agreement in recognizing manifest events of the target's life. These findings are consistent with the notion that sharing autobiographical experiences fosters intimacy and develops social connectedness, which in turn may promote sharing more intimate and personal information (e.g., Baron & Bluck, 2009; Bluck & Alea, 2011; Bluck et al., 2005; McAdams, 1995).

Table 1.7

Multilevel model parameters predicting self-other agreement in manifest events from relationship closeness (Study 1b)

Variable	Intercept	b	SE	[95% CI]	t-value	p-value
Self-other agreement	.10					
Relationship closeness		.02	.01	[.002, .05]	2.17	.03

Note. Target $N = 146$. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model, b = unstandardized regression coefficient, SE = standard error, CI = 95% Confidence Interval of regression coefficient, t = t-value of regression coefficient.

Table 1.8

Multilevel model parameters predicting self-other agreement in manifest events from relationship closeness within each key scene (Study 1b)

Variable	*Intercept*	*b*	*SE*	[95% CI]	z-value	*p*-value
High point story						
Self-other agreement	-2.56					
Relationship closeness		1.21	.15	[-.10, .49]	1.26	.21
Low point story						
Self-other agreement	-2.91					
Relationship closeness		1.29	.16	[-.05, .58]	1.58	.11
Turning point story						
Self-other agreement	-3.18					
Relationship closeness		1.21	.17	[-.13, .53]	1.16	.25

Note. Intercept = fixed effects intercept from means as outcomes model and *b* = odds ratios. Each scene type (e.g., high point, low point, turning point) represents an individual model.

Study 1: General Discussion

In Studies 1a and 1b, I examined self-other agreement among targets' personal and informants' vicarious life stories, as well as whether the agreement observed in these stories varied on the basis of relationship closeness. In Study 1a, I built upon and extended prior research by examining whether the way informants narrated vicarious stories of targets, via affective themes, corresponded with targets' personal life stories. In Study 1b, I extended the vicarious stories literature beyond an examination of thematic content and toward a consideration of manifest events. Altogether, close others narrated vicarious stories of targets in a manner that aligned with the affective tone of participants' own tellings (although the same could not be said for the redemptive and contaminated imagery in participants' stories; Study 1a) and appeared to be relatively capable of identifying the manifest events of targets' lives (Study 1b). Below, I expand upon these results.

The Affective Qualities of Key Scenes

Consistent with previous research (i.e., Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018), redemptive and contaminated sequences within targets' personal life stories did not map onto that of informants' vicarious stories. The affective tone in targets' personal life stories, however, corresponded with the tone in the vicarious stories informants attributed to targets. The lack of self-other agreement among redemptive and contaminated sequences, and presence of self-other agreement in terms of affective tone, suggests that affective tone reflects a more observable or salient quality of storytelling, relative to redemption and contamination. For example, close others may be more cognizant of the emotional

features of the narrator's experience, as these qualities are often evidenced by prominent emotional language, physical animation, or emotional expression. In contrast, the indicators of redemptive and contaminated sequences may be less salient or recognizable for observers, and therefore, demonstrates less self-other agreement when considering close others' vicarious narratives of participants. For example, constructing a redemptive story requires the incorporation of positive endings, meanings, transformations, or insight to a negative experience. These redemptive and contaminated story features may be less discernible and memorable for close others to identify or recount during acts of vicarious storytelling.

The lack of self-other agreement in redemptive and contaminated imagery may be a function of the narrator's unique storytelling style, rather than whose story is being narrated (McLean et al., 2017). Prior studies have demonstrated that individuals narrate vicarious life stories with themes aligning with their own (personal) life stories (e.g., Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). This suggests that individuals' life stories influence their perceptions of the life stories of others. The telling of a vicarious story may encompass the narrator's own thoughts, reactions, and emotional responses, rather than the interpretations of the target themselves. The between subjects-design did not allow us to explore this possibility directly, however the lack of agreement in redemption and contamination may be driven by a general narrative tendency.

The Manifest Events of Key Scenes

Self-other agreement in the manifest events in targets' personal and informants' life story events was present in 25% of observations considered. As a result, it is pertinent

to ask, is this a high or a low degree of self-other agreement? Turning to work exploring the temporal stability within personal life stories may be relevant here. Research exploring the temporal stability of personal life story events demonstrates that only a minority of events are disclosed across tellings, even over short periods of time (McAdams et al., 2006; Thorne et al., 1998). For example, McAdams and colleagues (2006) assessed events within personal life stories at three time points, finding that only 28% of events initially narrated were described three months later (See also, Thorne et al., 1998).

The low temporal stability of personal life story events supports the notion that development and change is an inherent quality of narrative identity (McAdams, 1995). Integrating new experiences into the life story is a central feature of identity development (Pasupathi et al., 2007). As individuals incorporate new and different events into their personal life stories, the task for close others to identify congruent events in vicarious scenes becomes more difficult. Moreover, it is not the case that individuals possess a single high, low, or turning point memory. Rather, people tend to have several experiences that they consider to be significant moments from their lives. When prompted to describe a key scene from their life, individuals select an experience to narrate from these numerous personal memories. Several factors, such as the audience and situational factors, influence how an experience is storied (McLean et al., 2007).

Finally, the current studies included samples of college students, which signifies a critical developmental period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). During this time, emerging adults are often exploring various occupational, interpersonal, and ideological

roles, while also seeking to understand themselves (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The self-other agreement detected among manifest events may be particularly noteworthy given that the participants were in an especially dynamic period of identity development. As such, I consider 25% self-other agreement in manifest events between targets' personal and informants' vicarious key scenes as substantial agreement.

The self-other agreement observed is consistent with the notion that informants were actively engaging with targets around the time of assessment, and therefore, held accurate (and current) views of the key events from participants' lives. In future, it would be informative to determine whether informants are able to recall former key scenes from participants' stories (e.g., identify the scene targets held to be self-definitional one year ago). The fact that informants were cognizant of targets' key scenes, despite the evolving nature of the events within personal life stories, is suggestive of the reciprocal relationship between sharing stories and intimacy.

Relationship Closeness

McAdams (1995) famously proposed that knowing another person entails an understanding of their story. This fosters intimacy, which may in turn promote the self-other agreement evident in targets' personal life stories and informants' vicarious stories. In Study 1a, however, greater relationship closeness among targets and informants was not associated with self-other agreement in redemption, contamination, or tone. This aligns with previous research showing that relationship adjustment of romantic partners did not correspond with the relations among individuals' personal and vicarious stories of their partners (Panattoni & Thomsen, 2018). In contrast, In Study 1b, targets and

informants who reported feeling closer to one another demonstrated greater self-other agreement in selecting key events of the target participant's life.

The data support McAdams' (1995) earlier assertion, that knowing another person entails an understanding of their story, at least with respect to the manifest events in one's story. Indeed, greater intimacy between targets and informants corresponded with greater self-other agreement in manifest events. These relations between closeness and self-other agreement in manifest events did not remain when high, low, and turning point scenes were considered individually, suggesting that closeness corresponded with self-other agreement among personal and vicarious scenes overall, but not within specific key scenes. The proportion of self-other agreement in manifest events varied across key scenes, which may have limited the ability to detect effects within each key scene individually. Moreover, closeness did not correspond with self-other agreement in terms of redemption, contamination, or affective tone. Taken together, it seems that reports of interpersonal closeness are related to self-other agreement in manifest events, rather than affective qualities. The findings thus align with the notion that the life story promotes intimacy through an understanding of the events that constitute one's life story.

Relations between sharing stories and intimacy is bi-directional in nature (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994), such that those with closer relationships may feel more comfortable disclosing personal information about themselves. It follows that closer dyads may have more knowledge about one another's life stories (Aron et al., 1997; Collins & Miller, 1994). At the same time, sharing stories facilitates close relationships (Alea & Bluck, 2003), and therefore individuals who disclose more stories about

themselves may enjoy greater interpersonal intimacy and closeness. However, the design of the current studies was unable to directly assess the bi-directional relationship between closeness and self-other agreement, given that I didn't measure disclosure. In future, researchers should test this possibility by examining how the extent to which individuals share stories is associated with self-other agreement between personal and vicarious scenes.

Limitations and Conclusions

The current studies had several inherent limitations. To begin, Study 1b is the first known to examine self-other agreement in manifest events between targets' personal life stories and informants' vicarious stories of targets. Therefore, interpretation of the degree of self-other agreement observed should be done cautiously. Moreover, the sample of targets in both studies were composed solely of undergraduate students, suggesting a potential limit to the generalizability of the studies. The samples of targets were also relatively small, and therefore, the studies may have been underpowered to detect effects examined at the level of targets. Prior research has demonstrated that sample sizes at level two of analysis is essential for obtaining unbiased effects (e.g., Maas & Hox, 2005). In the current studies, the sample sizes at levels one and two of analysis were sufficient for detecting reliable effects (e.g., Maas & Hox, 2005). However, future researchers should replicate relations between personal and vicarious narratives with larger sample sizes to gain a more reliable estimate of the magnitude of such effects. Moreover, it is possible that relations between affective qualities in targets' personal and informants' vicarious scenes is associated with self-other agreement in the manifest events described.

Future researchers interested in addressing this possibility could do so by identifying whether the manifest events within life stories corresponds with self-other agreement in affective qualities.

In future, researchers should assess the impact of vicarious stories on individuals' personal identity development through an examination of the ways in which vicarious representations of others' stories correspond with positive psychological outcomes (e.g., well-being; Harake, Sweeny, et al., 2020). Finally, future studies should examine the ways in which the vicarious representations of others' life stories correspond with outcomes for targets, informants, and their mutual relationships. This subsequent work will continue to unveil the ways in which our personal and vicarious life stories contribute to the broader *narrative ecologies* (McLean, 2016) that envelope us all.

From the Interpersonal Content to the Relational Domain

In Study 1, I situated narrative identity in an interpersonal context through an investigation of the degree to which close others are aware of individuals' personal life stories. In Study 2, I incorporated domain-specificity in my research, by examining a domain-specific indicator of adjustment in relation to self-defining romantic experiences. There are several strengths of Study 2.

First, the romantic domain is apt for a consideration of narratives regarding interpersonal and relational matters, such as romantic relationships (Buhler & Dunlop, 2019). Moreover, some features of the stories individuals form and tell about their love lives correspond with their functioning within the romantic domain (Dunlop et al., 2017). For example, Dunlop and colleagues (2017) assessed autobiographical narratives from

participants' love lives in relation to attachment tendencies and relationship contingent self-esteem. These researchers noted that individual differences in avoidant attachment tendencies and relationship contingent self-esteem differently related to levels of communion (e.g., belonging, unity) and positive affective tone (e.g., emotional imagery). Anxious attachment tendencies corresponded with the positive tone and integrative complexity (e.g., integrating multiple perspectives) of participants' stories.

While researchers have investigated narratives from the romantic domain (e.g., Frost, 2013), these studies have primarily focused on accounts of participants' current relationships and couples' co-constructed stories of their current romantic relationship (Doohan et al., 2010). Considerably fewer studies have examined the romantic domain broadly. Moving beyond narratives of current relationships will demonstrate the ways in which people understand themselves within their romantic lives generally, as well as how individual differences in features of narrative identity are associated with psychological functioning within the romantic domain.

Beyond incorporating a domain specific approach to the exploration of interpersonal matters, Study 2 differs from Study 1 in terms of the operationalization of narrative identity. Rather than quantifying narrative identity via the affective features (e.g., redemption, contamination, tone) and manifest content, I operationalized narrative identity in terms of the degree of coherence in participants' stories. Coherence is an essential characteristic of narrative identity. Constructing a coherent narrative identity provides a sense of continuity through time and meaning for one's life (McAdams, 2006). In fact, several studies have demonstrated that greater coherence in autobiographical

narratives is associated with enhanced psychological well-being (e.g., Adler, 2012; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Reese et al., 2011; Waters & Fivush, 2015).

Aside from its central role in narrative identity, coherence depicts one's ability to communicate who they are to others (McAdams, 2006). Interpersonal and relational contexts bring coherence to the forefront. For example, the ability to communicate in a clear and unified manner becomes especially important in a relational context. Despite the significance of narrative coherence for interpersonal and social functioning, researchers have yet to explore coherence within narratives from the romantic domain.

Study 2: Coherent Stories of the Romantic Domain

Developing and maintaining close relationships is necessary for human flourishing. Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding the emotional bonds that people form with others (for review, see Fraley, 2019; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In adulthood, attachment is typically examined using two distinct approaches. Within clinical, counseling, and developmental psychology, researchers most commonly rely on the semi-structured Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George et al., 1996), which measure adults' perceptions of their childhood experiences with caregivers (Hesse, 2008). From this standpoint, the extent to which individuals form consistent narratives about their childhood attachment figures and experiences indicates their underlying and enduring attachment representations, or "state of mind with respect to attachment" (George et al., 1996, p. 4; see also Main 1991, 2000).

In contrast, social and personality researchers typically study attachment via self-report measures designed to assess current (i.e., adult) tendencies and patterns of affect,

behavior, and cognitions within romantic relationships (e.g., Fraley, Waller, et al., 2000). These patterns are operationalized along continuous dimensions of anxiety and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998). Anxiety refers to an uncertainty about others' support, commitment, and responsiveness. Avoidance is characterized as a difficulty trusting, relying on, and being close to others. Whereas highly anxious individuals tend to fear that their partners will leave them, those who score high in avoidance tend to prefer independence and emotional distance (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Individuals who have low levels of anxiety and avoidance are considered secure, as they are comfortable being close to, depending upon, and trusting others (Brennan et al., 1998; Fraley, Waller, et al., 2000).

As noted above, the conceptualizations and measurement traditions in the study of attachment differ across areas of psychology. On one hand, the interview methodology utilized to measure attachment yields behavioral data, wherein observers' ratings are used to quantify participants' responses to a given prompt (see Funder, 2019). On the other hand, attachment is measured via participants' self-reported tendencies in the context of romantic relationships. A considerable number of researchers have explored the degree of overlap between different sources of data assessing the same construct. For example, researchers have assessed the degree of convergence between self-reported data and behavioral observations in measuring motives (e.g., Bilsky & Schwartz, 2008; McClelland et al., 1989; Sheldon et al., 2007), narrative identity (Dunlop, Harake, et al., 2020), and attachment (Ravitz et al., 2009; Roisman et al., 2007).

In one such study, Sheldon and colleagues (2007) assessed motives (e.g., power, intimacy), values, and goals using self-report and narrative measures (e.g., thematic apperception test, IAT; TAT). Consistent with previous studies (e.g., McClelland et al., 1989), these researchers found that the narrative measures were more strongly correlated with behavioral outcomes, than self-reported measures (Sheldon et al., 2007). Within the narrative identity literature, researchers have explored self-ratings and observer-ratings of narrative features, including redemption, contamination, and tone (Dunlop, Harake, et al., 2020). In this study, researchers found that self- and observer- ratings of redemption and tone corresponded moderately with one another. Within the attachment literature, a key point of discussion concerns the degree of convergence between constructs derived from the interview methodology, often utilized within developmental psychology, and those derived via self-report measures of attachment, often utilized within social and personality psychology (Roisman et al., 2007). Across several studies, research has demonstrated that constructs derived from narrative and self-report measures do not typically converge to a robust or redundant degree (Bilsky & Schwartz, 2008; McClelland et al., 1989; Ravitz et al., 2009; Roisman et al., 2007).

The modest degree of overlap between narrative and self-report measures of the same construct have been attributed to the notion that behavioral data captures more of the unconscious, or implicit, aspects of a phenomenon whereas self-reported measures capture conscious appraisals of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors (McClelland et al., 1989; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2004). For example, narrative methodology may best assess features or processes of which participants themselves are unaware of (e.g., identity),

whereas equivalent self-report measures best assess more explicit attitudes and behaviors. As such, constructs measured through narratives and equivalent self-report assessments do not typically demonstrate high convergent validity. In some studies, for example, attachment tendencies measured through interview (e.g., AAI) and self-report measures have been found to demonstrate weak to moderate relations (e.g., Roisman et al., 2007). This highlights the notion that different methods assessing the same construct may allow for an understanding of a more nuanced understanding of a construct.

Attachment and Narrative

Extant research examining attachment using narrative methodologies has done so primarily through reliance on the AAI (e.g., Fivush et al., 2011; Zaman & Fivush, 2013). In this approach, the degree of structure, elaboration, and emotion within individuals' descriptions of their childhood attachment experiences is used to determine their attachment tendencies themselves (Oppenheim et al., 2007). Individuals who describe their childhood attachment experiences with clear structure and organization are classified as securely attached (e.g., Hesse, 2008). In contrast, adults who describe such attachment experiences with less structure, elaboration, and emotional expression are classified as insecurely attached (Crowell et al., 2008; Main et al., 1985). Constructing more coherent narratives about one's childhood attachment experiences has been shown to correspond with more supportive relationships with close others (Waters & Fivush, 2015) and better relationship quality (Adler et al., 2012).

Few researchers have examined romantic attachment tendencies in relation to autobiographical narratives (but see, Dunlop et al., 2018, 2019; Dunlop, Karan, et al.,

2020). This emerging body of research is distinct from research relying on the AAI in at least two important ways: the content of the narratives considered (recounts of childhood attachment experiences in the case of the AAI, descriptions of significant romantic experiences occurring in adulthood in the case of this emerging research area), and the manner in which attachment is determined (on the basis of participants' narratives in the case of the AAI, as compared to participants' self-ratings of affective, cognitive, and behavioral patterns in romantic relationships in the case of this emerging research area on autobiographical narratives). As such, examining self-reported romantic attachment tendencies in relation to autobiographical love life narratives will inform how functioning within the romantic domain corresponds with the ways in which individuals come to understand, and story, their romantic lives.

Some evidence has been amassed for a relation between romantic attachment tendencies and the forms and features of participants' autobiographic narratives about their adult romantic experiences. For example, anxiously attached individuals described their romantic experiences with greater first-person singular pronouns, or "I-talk," (e.g., "I," "me," "mine"), and decreased first-person plural pronouns, or "we-talk" (e.g., "we," "us," "ours;" Dunlop, Karan, et al., 2020). Avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the use of "we-talk" in these stories suggesting that avoidantly attached adults described their romantic experiences with less interdependence or closeness with others. Further, Dunlop and colleagues (2019) found that participants high in anxious attachment narrated their love lives with greater complexity and less positive affect than less anxious individuals. A negative association was also found between avoidant

attachment, positive affect, and themes of unity and belonging (i.e., communion) in romantic autobiographical stories. While researchers have explored several features of individuals' narratives, they have yet to examine the relation between self-reported romantic attachment tendencies and the degree of unity and structure in autobiographical love life narratives.

Narrative Coherence

As highlighted above, researchers have begun to examine romantic attachment tendencies in relation to several themes within autobiographical romantic narratives, such as characteristic pronouns, positivity, complexity, communion, exploration, and emotional resolve (Dunlop et al., 2018, 2019; Dunlop, Karan et al., 2020). One feature that has yet to be considered in this emerging literature, however, is narrative coherence. Narrative coherence is a central feature of storytelling, representing the extent to which a narrator communicates the important details of an experience in a logical order, clearly expresses their feelings, and links the event to overarching life themes and meanings (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). This construct is multi-dimensional in nature, conceptualized in terms of: *Orientation,* which refers to the extent of sufficient background information provided to understand the story, *Structure,* which captures the extent to which the story follows a clear temporal sequence, *Affect* is the expression of emotion in a clear and understandable way, and *Integration* captures the author's ability to connect the narrated events to the larger framework of their life.

Several theorists have argued that narrative coherence in autobiographical stories is both a signal of, and vital for, psychological functioning and well-being (Blagov &

Singer, 2004; McAdams, 1993, 2006; Waters & Fivush, 2015). Consistent with this possibility, the ability to construct and disclose coherent autobiographical stories has been found to correspond with a number of indicators of psychological adjustment (e.g., Adler, 2012; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Reese et al., 2011; Waters & Fivush, 2015). Researchers, however, have yet to consider romantic attachment tendencies, which represents a domain-specific indicator of adjustment (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), in relation to narrative coherence, nor, as recognized above, consider narrative coherence as manifest in participants' stories within the romantic domain.

In Study 2, I sought to address these gaps in the literature by examining self-reported romantic attachment tendencies in relation to narrative coherence within autobiographical love life stories. This pursuit stands to provide insight into the ways in which romantic attachment tendencies inform, and correspond with, the narrative processing of one's romantic life. To do so, I brought together three independent samples wherein participants provided ratings of their anxious and avoidant tendencies and disclosed narratives regarding romantic experiences. The consideration of three independent samples resulted in an analysis of 1,394 stories provided by a total of 578 participants. Given the past research demonstrating relations between attachment and coherence, I anticipated that anxious and avoidant attachment would correspond negatively with narrative coherence.

Method

In each of the three samples, participants were prompted to provide autobiographical narratives pertaining to the romantic domain and complete a self-report

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measure of romantic attachment tendencies. Table 2.1 provides a summary of each of these samples. In each of the three samples, attachment was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire – Revised (ECR-R; Fraley, Waller, et al., 2000). Participants were asked to rate the 36-item ECR-R on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), with higher values indicating greater endorsement. Exemplary items from the ECR-R include "*I'm afraid that I'll lose my partner's love*" (anxious attachment; 18-items; α = .95) and "*I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close*" (avoidant attachment; 18-items; α = .95).

Participants and Procedure

    Sample 2a. One hundred and forty-nine participants (50% female, M_{age} = 36.17 years, 80% White) were recruited from an online survey-based website. Participants were compensated $4.00 for their involvement in the study. In written format, participants responded to a total of three prompts related to the current study. These prompts were taken from the Love Life Story Interview (LLSI; Dunlop et al., 2018), which entailed prompting participants to provide a high, low, and turning point moment from their love lives. The prompts were relatively broad in nature, such that participants were able to describe a moment from any point in their romantic lives (i.e., prompts were not specific to a single relationship). For each prompt, participants were asked to describe the event in detail, including what happened, when and where the event took place, who was involved, and what they were thinking and feeling (for more information on this sample, see Dunlop et al., 2019).

    Sample 2b. Three hundred and forty participants (70% female, M_{age} = 20.50, 42%

Latinx, 34% Asian/Asian American, 6% Black/African American, 5% White, and 13% Mixed/ Other), were drawn from a longitudinal study of undergraduate students, *The Riverside Assessment of Individual Lives Study* (TRAILS). A total of 361 participants took part in the study, however 21 participants were not considered in the current analyses, as they chose not to respond to the prompts of interest. Participants were provided the option of course credit in an introductory psychology course or $25.00 in exchange for their involvement in the study.

TRAILS participants completed a one-hour semi-structured interview in verbal format, which included two prompts relevant to the current study. In the first prompt, participants were asked to specify an experience from their love life that they considered to be salient, emotionally meaningful, and important to who they are as a person. The second prompt requested an important love life experience that occurred during adolescence or young adulthood. As was the case in Sample 2a, participants were asked to describe each event in detail, including what happened, when and where the event took place, who was involved, and what they were thinking and feeling (for further details regarding this sample, see Baranski et al., 2020).

Sample 2c. Eighty-nine participants (63% female, $M_{age} = 41.70$, 46% White, 29% Latinx, and 13% Black/African American) from the Riverside community were recruited to take part in a broader investigation of "personality and positive psychological functioning." A total of 97 participants took part in the study, however 8 participants were not considered in the current analyses, as they chose not to respond to the prompts of interest. Individuals were required to be fluent in English and at least 30 years of age

to be eligible for study participation. Each participant was compensated $50.00 in exchange for their involvement in this study.

As in sample 2a, participants completed prompts drawn from the LLSI interview. Participants were asked to verbally describe a high point, low point, and turning point moment from their love lives. The prompts and follow-up questions were identical to that of Sample 2a (for further details regarding this sample, see Dunlop et al., 2018).

Narrative Coherence Coding

The first author of this manuscript and one additional research assistant coded the narratives from each sample for coherence. The secondary coder associated with each dataset was otherwise unconnected to these studies, such that they did not have access to participants' demographic information nor their ERC-R scores. In the interest of blind coding, in each of the three studies, narratives were entered in a single spreadsheet and their order was randomized. The narratives were coded in batches of 50. In order to establish inter-rater reliability in these ratings, discrepancies in coding responses were discussed twice monthly in meetings where portion of the raters' discrepant responses were discussed and resolved. During these meetings, each rater provided justification for any discrepant responses and then determined whether to change or maintain their initial code.

Drawing from Baerger and McAdams (1999), coherence was operationalized in terms of four dimensions—orientation (e.g., background information), structure (e.g., temporal sequence), affect (e.g., emotional expression) and integration (e.g., connecting the event to life themes). The four dimensions of coherence were coded independently

from one another on a four-point scale ranging from 0 = *no coherence* to 3 = *high coherenc*e. Once all narratives were coded, the coherence scores were averaged across both raters for each coherence dimension. Finally, the sum of these four independent dimensions represents each narrative's total coherence score, with higher values indicating greater narrative coherence (see Table 2.2 for interrater reliabilities). Table 2.3 contains examples of narratives with high or low levels of coherence.

Table 2.1

Summary of Samples (Study 2)

	Study Characteristics			Demographic Information		
Sample	Source	Response format	N	M_{age} (SD)	% Female	% White
2a	Online	Written	149	36.17 (11.44)	50	80%
2b	Undergraduate	Verbal	340	20.50 (2.14)	70	5%
2c	Community	Verbal	89	41.70 (9.03)	63	46%

Table 2.2

Means and Standard Deviations of Variables across Samples (Study 2)

Variable	Sample 2a		Sample 2b		Sample 2c	
	M (SD)	ICC	*M* (SD)	ICC	*M* (SD)	ICC
Coherence	2.15 (0.43)	.81	1.43 (0.60)	.93	1.53 (0.39)	.85
Orientation	2.22 (0.66)	.76	1.51 (0.67)	.83	1.53 (0.50)	.70
Structure	2.46 (0.46)	.62	1.76 (0.72)	.88	1.79 (0.54)	.78
Affect	2.45 (0.43)	.76	1.67 (0.74)	.89	1.61 (0.50)	.74
Integration	1.45 (0.61)	.70	0.77 (0.61)	.71	1.19 (0.49)	.79
Non-Narrative Variables						
Anxiety	2.82 (1.57)	--	3.48 (1.31)	--	3.05 (1.37)	--
Avoidance	2.54 (1.28)	--	3.01 (1.12)	--	2.80 (1.16)	--

Note. ICC = Intraclass Correlation.

Table 2.3

Romantic narratives depicting high and low levels of coherence across samples (Study 2)

Low coherence	High coherence
Online sample (Sample 2a)	
I found out that my boyfriend of several years had been cheating on me. I felt betrayed. It was a low point because I felt like I had let it happen to myself because I didn't care enough about MY feelings.	I was dating a guy who was in the military. We had met online and got to know each other through chatting. He lived about 6 hours away on a base and I would visit him almost every weekend. We had been dating for about 9 months when he was going to be deployed to South Korea. I was so upset. I was supposed to graduate from college then we were going to be together down at his base. The month before he left, he had leave and stayed a good portion with me at my apartment. I would still have to go to school, and he would stay at my apartment while I was in class. One night while he was visiting a friend, I checked my chatting history and noticed that he had been using my chat name to talk to other girls. When asked why he had such a feminine name, he said he was using his sisters chat name. I was so hurt. He came home and we talked about it. He cried and said he didn't know why he was doing it. He promised he would never do it again. I forgave him because nothing but talking had actually happened and I didn't want to ruin the last few days we had together. Towards the end of his visit, he went to stay with his mom. While he was there, I checked my history again and saw that he had continued to talk to other girls using the same MO and I couldn't believe it. I felt betrayed and sick with the things he was writing to random girls when we were supposed to be in love. In fact, he had proposed a couple of days before and although I said no, it was more of a not right now. I was hurt and I didn't know what to do. I printed out the papers with the intention of calling him out in

front of his family. By the time I got there, I had calmed down and I couldn't do that to his family but after he left, we stopped talking within a month. I realize now that it never would have worked out but at the time, my confidence was shot and I felt very down on myself. I think this moment was so bad because I felt like I wasn't good enough or I wasn't pretty enough. It was very demoralizing to find that someone you thought loved you would do this behind your back. I think this says about my love life is that we all make mistakes and we have to move on from them.

Undergraduate sample (Sample 2b)

Uh, well freshman year I was just, you know, I thought it was fun because I got to know her uh, but senior year when she told me that she actually liked me too I was like I was like oh, I should of asked her out- yeah it was, uh just uh, uh, it was just, uh, you know. It's just like the chance passed kind of feeling and like, oh well. I just realized that uh, instead of dilly dallying I guess I should always just you know take that chance and also grow up you know maybe she would like me but maybe she won't.

This is kind of a funny story. It was with the juvie guy. Um, so after we broke up the first time, and I actually dated him again for like a week or two. But cause he had cheated on me and that's why we broke up. Like, he legit cheated on me, like straight up had sex with another girl, like I hacked into his Facebook, really, I was stalker girlfriend at the time- not like that. And I hacked into his Facebook, found out he cheated on me, but like, November-ish that same year, I was um, like hey, we started talking again and I didn't know if I still had feelings for him, so like, I kinda wanted to test it out again, and he wanted to too. But it ended up turning out that he was just using me and that he was actually with another girl, the same girl he cheated on me with. So he was with her and he just wanted to like get revenge for me like breaking his heart, or something, and so he stopped- slowly stopped talking to me as we were like dating, so he slowly stopped talking to me during those couple weeks. And I just realized I was like, I'm my own person, I don't need someone in my life to be happy, so I like went up to him, as he was hugging the same chick he was with, and I like broke it off with him. And after that, I turned around and I smiled actually, like after breaking up with him, I was smiling, and I laughed

because I realized the whole "I don't need no man!" so, I realized that. And it was kinda like I'm my own independent person, and like I shouldn't rely on another person to make me happy, so I feel like that was a pivotal moment in my love life, so every relationship after that, I realized that if I didn't need the person then, I didn't need them. I wasn't gonna keep holding onto something that wasn't there. Um, I was actually feeling like kinda like freedom, like I was free for once. Like cause I've always been a really, a person that depended on others a lot, like as I was growing up and stuff, cause it was like father issues and all that other stuff. So I was a really dependent person on other people, so I was really clingy in that relationship, and after that, I realized, I was like I don't need anyone, like so I felt free. It was like a really revealing feeling to like finally to recognize that, and finally get that sense of like yourself, like sense of self like you know who you're starting to become, so. It's important to me because, like I said, I realized I'm my own person, like a lot of people depend on others to be happy when I know what makes me happy, and I can do it all on my own and I don't need a relationship or love life or anything like that, just to prove that I'm happy. Like, that's what friends, family, dogs are for.

Community sample (Sample 2c)

An experience that, really low point, was um, in a past relationship, he just not having the ambition to do anything in life, and not wanting to go to work, yeah and just not wanting to do anything. He just wanted other people to take care of him. That was the lowest point, and just realizing that, had I made a really big mistake, you know, being with this person, cause, because of that person, I got into a lot of conflict with my family, you know, parents wanting the best for you, they were telling you, you know, that's not the right person, just, you'll see what we're talking about, and yeah, having to admit also, that they were right, and then after, you know, we had the really huge conflict and me trying to defend him, and yeah, realizing that, you know, that I was wrong.

It was [date]. Uh I was living in [location A] with um my prior relationship prior to my husband, the long term one. Um I had been in a relationship with him since right at my senior year in high school. And um we moved out to [location A] in [date], were both from [location B]. S we'd been living together for about 2 years. Prior to moving to [location A], we didn't live together for the length of our relationship when we were both in college. And we spent a lot of time together obviously but didn't live together yet. And so um moving out in [date]. He went on a hunting trip and came home and said that um while he was out in the woods hunting that he was thinking and just decided that he just didn't wanna do it anymore. And that was like completely out of the clear blue sky. There was nothing wrong there was no per- we didn't argue really hardly ever. I mean it was very, very strange and came completely out of no where. So that really slapped me upside the head so to speak. And um having moved from [location B] to [location A] even at that point of being there about a year and a half, I still didn't meet know a whole lot of people there. I didn't have any family there. Especially he was my only family him and his sister. And it was um such a significant event in my life, not only because at the end of that relationship which was heartbroken- I thought that was the person I was gonna marry. I mean I was absolutely in love with him even up until that day and devastated, completely devastated. But having to branch out on my own. Get a place on my own you know, have my own life after almost 11 years. I was part of a unit and had and surrounded by people all the time. You know mutual friends, family members, what not, and then I'm in a brand new state you know and it's um it was- it goes down in the books. It took me a couple of years to get right after that. Just get on my feel um and be used to being by myself. But essentially it was huge it was a necessary catalyst for my growth for sure

because um I find how dif- I see how different I am in this relationship with regard to dependency, um codependency, just everything regarding, you know feeding off someone else's moods as opposed to you know being empathetic, but at the same time retaining your own mood. Very codependent, very codependent. He was in a bad mood, put me in a bad mood, um he was a very moody person so he kinda you know it was an enabling thing on his part I think. He kinda put me in a position where I felt like that was the right thing to do. But at the same time, it sacrificed my moods and my well-being quite a bit. Um I was constantly trying to make someone happy that a lot of times wasn't happy but about things that had nothing to do with us you know- work or what not. I that's the biggest thing I can describe about that relationship was being incredibly codependent and never had the slightest thought of what I would do or who I you know who I would be. I didn't feel like I was an individual outside of that relationship. I was almost identified completely by that relationship and it's not I wasn't myself I was his girlfriend. You know where as when that relationship ended I guess that it took me a good couple years to get to a point where I was genuinely happy by myself alone, living alone you know without a partner content, very content. Um, and like I said not in this relationship the codependency issues aren't there, not on my part anyway. There completely gone it's almost like a complete role reversal that who I was in my past relationship um he is and who my boyfriend was in my past relationship I am with regard to role reversal. Independent.

Note. Narratives are edited to remove identifying information.

Data Analytic Plan

Three analytical techniques were employed to explore relations between romantic attachment tendencies and narrative coherence in autobiographical narratives. I also determined whether relations between attachment and narrative coherence remained after controlling for age (in years), gender (male/female), and ethnicity (White/non-White). All models were conducted with and without covariates, however the interpretations and tables focus on estimates with covariates. Estimates for the models without covariates are presented in the supplemental materials.

The first analytic technique used was Integrative Data Analysis (IDA). IDA entails pooling together data from separate samples into a single dataset to increase statistical power, which allows for a greater sensitivity to, and detection of, small effects (Curran & Hussong, 2009). Data were standardized from the full sample and then regression analyses were conducted; coherence, and each dimension of coherence, was predicted by anxiety or avoidance individually, resulting in 10 models. Second, multi-level models (MLM) were conducted to account for the nesting of participants within the three samples. This approach allowed us to account for the interdependence between participants within each study. Person-level data was pooled across the three studies and then all variables were standardized within study. Regression models were then used to determine whether anxious or avoidant attachment tendencies corresponded with narrative coherence. As with the IDA analyses, 10 MLMs were constructed.

Third, I used meta-analytic techniques to calculate reliable effect sizes (Rosenthal, 1991). This approach compliments the person-level IDA and MLM analyses, while

providing generalizable and reliable estimates of the observed effects. Following the procedures outlined by Rosenthal (1991), I first derived raw correlations between attachment and coherence within each study. I then computed the Z equivalent for each p value from the correlations (referred to as Z_p). The Z_p values were next pooled across the three studies to determine a fixed effect Z. The fixed effects provide an indication of the magnitude of the effect size across the three samples, regardless of the variance across samples. By taking into consideration the variance of effects across samples, the random effects provide an indication of the degree to which the effects are generalizable beyond the current samples considered.

Finally, in supplemental analyses, I explored whether narrative coherence varied by ethnicity, as well as whether coherence varied based on the amount of time that passed since the event occurred. Within a single sample of undergraduate participants (Sample 2b), these person- and prompt-specific analyses descriptively explored how narrative coherence may differ based on participants' ethnicity or the amount of time that passed since the event occurred. Exploring these supplemental research questions stands to culturally contextualize this research and provide insight into how the narrative construction of significant experiences may be related to the amount of time that has passed since an event occurred.

Results

Table 2.2 contains the means and standard deviations for attachment and narrative coherence variables within each study. First, I conducted bivariate correlations between attachment and narrative coherence within each study. Anxious attachment was unrelated

to narrative coherence in two of the samples (Samples 2a and 2c), and negatively related

to narrative coherence in Sample 2b ($r = -.17$, $p = .04$). Avoidant attachment was

negatively associated with narrative coherence in two of the samples ($rs = -.29$ and $-.16$,

$ps < .05$), and unrelated to narrative coherence in Sample 2c ($r = -.05$, $p = .66$).

Bivariate correlations between attachment and coherence across all studies are

presented in Table 2.4. In these bivariate analyses, anxious and avoidant attachment were

negatively associated with narrative coherence, and negative relations were also noted

between attachment and the dimensions of coherence. The model estimates from the IDA

analyses, MLM analyses, and meta-analyses are presented in Tables 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7,

respectively. The relations between attachment and coherence are depicted in Figure 1.

Anxious Attachment and Narrative Coherence

The IDA results indicated that anxious attachment exhibited a small negative

relation with narrative coherence, $\beta = -.11$, 95% CI $= [-.21, -.03]$, $p = .02$ (see Table 2.5).

Anxious attachment was also negatively related to the orientation, affect and integration

dimensions, $\beta s \geq -.10$, $ps \leq .04$, but not significantly related to the structure dimension, β

$= -.09$, $p = .06$.[4] In contrast, within the MLMs, anxious attachment did not significantly

correspond with narrative coherence, $\beta = -.06$, 95% CI $[-.17, .03]$, $p = .20$, nor with any

of its individual constituents, $\beta s \leq -.07$, $ps \geq .20$ (see Table 2.6).

As noted in the meta-analysis estimates in Table 2.7, no reliable relation was

observed between anxious attachment and narrative coherence at the fixed effect, $Z = -$

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[4] In the IDA analyses that did not include covariates, relations between anxious attachment and each dimension of coherence were significant (see Supplemental Table 1).

1.38, $p = .16$, $r = -.07$, 95% CI: [-.29, .15], or random effect, $t(2) = -1.50$, $p = .27$, $r = -.06$, 95% CI: [-.29, .16], levels. Similarly, anxious attachment was not reliably related to structure, affect, and integration at the fixed or random effect levels (rs $\leq -.07$, ps $\geq .12$). However, a negative relation between anxious attachment and orientation was observed at the random, but not fixed, effects levels, $t(2) = -6.49$, $p = .02$, $r = -.07$, 95% CI: [-.29, .15]. Importantly, this is the only observed estimate that was reliable and is modest in magnitude. Tests of heterogeneity indicated that the associations between anxious attachment and narrative coherence were not heterogeneous ($\chi^2(2) = 1.73$, $p = .54$).

Avoidant Attachment and Narrative Coherence

Turing to relations between avoidant attachment and coherence, the IDA results indicated that avoidant attachment was negatively related to narrative coherence, $\beta = -.21$, 95% CI = [-.29, -.11], $p = .00005$. Avoidance corresponded negatively with each dimension of coherence as well, βs $\geq -.14$, ps $\leq .003$. Similarly, in the MLM analyses, avoidant attachment was negatively associated with narrative coherence, $\beta = -.18$, 95% CI = [-.28, -.08], $p = .0005$. That is, participants with more avoidant attachment tendencies narrated less coherent narratives (see Table 2.6). Further, the dimensions of coherence demonstrated a similar pattern and magnitude of effects, such that avoidant attachment was negatively associated with each of the coherence dimensions, βs $\geq -.11$, ps $\leq .03$.[5]

Following the patterns found in the IDA and MLM analyses, the meta-analyses

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[5] In the MLM and meta-analyses, patterns of findings between attachment and narrative coherence remained consistent with and without controlling for covariates (see Supplemental Tables 2 and 3, respectively).

indicated that avoidant attachment negatively and reliably related to coherence (see Table 2.7 for estimates). Avoidant attachment was negatively related to narrative coherence at the fixed effect level, $Z = -3.56$, $p = .0004$, $r = -.18$, 95% CI: [-.20, -.16], but not at the random effect level, $t(2) = -1.58$, $p = .26$, $r = -.15$, 95% CI: [-.37, .07]. The fixed effect indicates that there is evidence of a negative relationship between avoidance and coherence within the set of three studies, while the random effect indicates that I do not have sufficient evidence to suggest that this association would emerge in studies of the same ilk. A similar pattern of findings was noted between avoidant attachment and the dimensions of coherence. Avoidant attachment demonstrated negative associations with all four coherence dimensions at the fixed effect (rs $\geq$ -.10, ps $\leq$ .04), but not random effect levels (rs $\leq$ -.16, ps $\geq$ .21). Tests of heterogeneity indicated that the associations between avoidant attachment and narrative coherence were not heterogeneous ($\chi^2(2) = 5.59$, $p = .06$), suggesting that the effect sizes were consistent across studies. In further support of these findings, it would take approximately 7 studies with an average null effect for the relations between avoidant attachment and narrative coherence analyzed here to be reduced to non-significant.

Table 2.4

Bivariate Correlations Across Studies (Study 2)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Coherence									
2. Orientation	.89***								
3. Structure	.94***	.87***							
4. Affect	.90***	.74***	.82***						
5. Integration	.75***	.50***	.56***	.58***					
6. Anxiety	-.17***	-.14**	-.13*	-.14*	-.16***				
7. Avoidance	-.25***	-.24***	-.22***	-.18**	-.21***	.59***			
8. Age	.28***	.24***	.22***	.20***	.33***	-.15**	-.04		
9. Gender	.34***	.30***	.29***	.32***	.29***	-.12*	-.11*	.37***	
10. Ethnicity	-.22***	-.19***	-.19***	-.21***	-.16***	.06	.10	-.20***	-.41***

Note. *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001

Table 2.5

IDA Predicting Coherence from Anxious and Avoidant Attachment with Age,

Gender, and Ethnicity as Covariates (Study 2)

Predictor Variable	β	SE	95% CI	t	p
Narrative coherence					
Anxious attachment	-.11	.05	-.21, -.03	-2.42	.02
Avoidant attachment	-.21	.05	-.29, -.11	-4.48	.00005
Orientation					
Anxious attachment	-.11	.05	-.21, -.009	-2.15	.03
Avoidant attachment	-.22	.05	-.32, -.13	-4.51	.00006
Structure					
Anxious attachment	-.09	.05	-.18, .002	-1.91	.06
Avoidant attachment	-.17	.05	-.27, -.09	-3.86	.0001
Affect					
Anxious attachment	-.10	.05	-.19, -.004	-2.04	.04
Avoidant attachment	-.14	.05	-.23, -.04	-3.00	.003
Integration					
Anxious attachment	-.10	.05	-.20, -.008	-2.14	.03
Avoidant attachment	-.18	.05	-.24, -.04	-3.79	.0001

Note. CI = 95% Confidence Interval of regression coefficient

Table 2.6

MLM Predicting Coherence from Anxious and Avoidant Attachment with Age,
Gender, and Ethnicity as Covariates (Study 2)

Predictor Variable	β	SE	95% CI	t	p
Narrative coherence					
Anxious attachment	-.06	.05	-.17, .03	-1.27	.20
Avoidant attachment	-.18	.05	-.28, -.08	-3.50	.0005
Orientation					
Anxious attachment	-.07	.05	-.17, .03	-1.28	.20
Avoidant attachment	-.19	.05	-.28, -.08	-3.62	.0003
Structure					
Anxious attachment	-.05	.05	-.15, .05	-.90	.37
Avoidant attachment	-.16	.05	-.26, -.06	-3.12	.002
Affect					
Anxious attachment	-.05	.05	-.15, .05	-.97	.33
Avoidant attachment	-.11	.05	-.21, -.008	-2.12	.03
Integration					
Anxious attachment	-.06	.05	-.16, .03	-1.25	.21
Avoidant attachment	-.14	.05	-.24, -.04	-2.77	.006

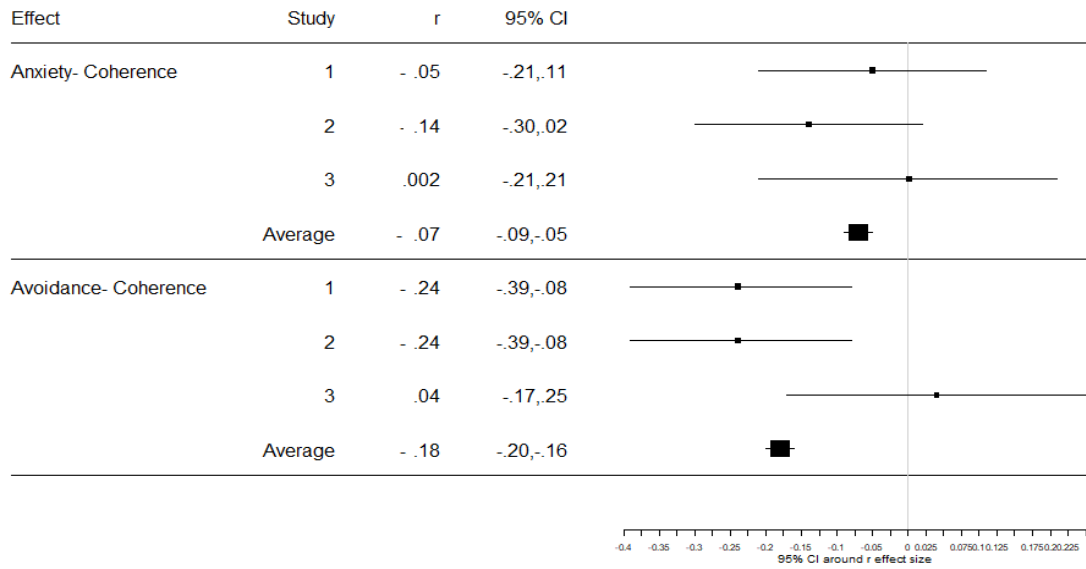*Note*. CI = 95% Confidence Interval of regression coefficient

Table 2.7

Meta-Analytic Effects Across 3 Studies Examining Relations Between Attachment and Coherence with Age, Gender, and Ethnicity as Covariates (Study 2)

Predictors	Fixed effects					Random effects			
	r	95% CI	Z	p	r	95% CI	$t(2)$	p	χ^2
Coherence									
Anxiety	-.07	-.29, .15	-1.38	.16	-.06	-.29, .16	-1.50	.27	1.73
Avoidance	-.18	-.20, -.16	-3.56	.0004	-.15	-.37, .07	-1.58	.26	5.59
Orientation									
Anxiety	-.07	-.29, .15	-.93	.35	-.07	-.29, .15	-6.49	.02	.07
Avoidance	-.18	-.20, -.16	-3.65	.0003	-.16	-.38, .06	-1.85	.21	5.45
Structure									
Anxiety	-.05	-.27, .19	-1.11	.27	-.03	-.26, .18	-0.57	.61	2.47
Avoidance	-.16	-.18, -.14	-3.36	.0008	-.13	-.35, .09	-1.27	.34	7.21
Affect									
Anxiety	-.06	-.28, .16	-1.07	.28	-.06	-.29, .16	-2.58	.12	.50
Avoidance	-.10	-.12, -.08	-2.00	.04	-.08	-.31, .14	-1.71	.23	1.59
Integration									
Anxiety	-.06	-.29, .16	-1.33	.18	-.05	-.27, .17	-.68	.56	3.54
Avoidance	-.15	-.17, -.13	-3.01	.003	-.12	-.34, .10	-1.00	.42	11.14

Note. $k = 3$; χ^2 = chi squared of the effect size

Figure 1

Forest plot for anxious and avoidant attachment (Study 2)

Effect	Study	r	95% CI	
Anxiety- Coherence	1	- .05	-.21,.11	
	2	- .14	-.30,.02	
	3	.002	-.21,.21	
	Average	- .07	-.09,-.05	
Avoidance- Coherence	1	- .24	-.39,-.08	
	2	- .24	-.39,-.08	
	3	.04	-.17,.25	
	Average	- .18	-.20,-.16	

-.4 -0.35 -0.3 -0.25 -0.2 -0.15 -0.1 -0.05 0 0.025 0.075 0.1 0.125 0.175 0.2 0.225
95% CI around r effect size

Supplemental Analyses

   In supplemental analyses, I took a closer look at sample 2b to examine whether narrative coherence varied on the basis of participants' ethnicities, as well as whether coherence varied based on the amount of time that passed since the event occurred. First, I descriptively explored whether narrative coherence varied by participants' self-reported ethnicity. To do so, I examined relations between narrative coherence and ethnicity within the most ethnically diverse sample of undergraduate participants (Sample 2b). Second, I examined whether narrative coherence varied between self-defining romantic experiences that occurred *prior* to attending college and experiences that occurred *since* attending college.

   Person-specific analyses. I explored whether narrative coherence differed as a function of ethnicity. As described above in sample 2b, participants self-reported ethnicities were organized into 5 ethnic groups. Participants' average coherence scores were 1.48 (SD = .58), 1.31 (SD = .63), 1.64 (SD = .42), 1.07 (SD = .52), and 1.46 (SD = .58) among participants that identified as Latinx, Asian/Asian American, Black/African American, White, and Mixed/Other, respectively. The one-way ANOVA showed that narrative coherence did not differ significantly as a function of ethnicity, $F(4,323) = 2.20$, p = .07, η^2 = .03.

   Prompt-specific analyses. In order to examine how narrative construction may be related to the amount of time that has passed since an event occurred, I examined whether coherence differed between narratives of romantic experiences that occurred *prior* to attending UCR and experiences that occurred *since* attending UCR. To

do so, I compared mean-levels of coherence between narratives of romantic experiences that occurred *prior* to attending UCR and experiences that occurred *since* attending UCR (in Sample 2b). A paired samples t-test demonstrated that salient romantic memories that occurred *prior* to attending UCR (*M* =1.08, *SD* = .63) contained lower levels of narrative coherence relative to memories that occurred *since* attending UCR (*M* = 1.83, *SD* = .70), t(323) = 18.50, *p* < .0001, 95% CI = [.65, .80].

Study 2: General Discussion

In Study 2, I examined romantic attachment tendencies in relation to narrative coherence manifested within self-defining romantic narratives. Across three samples, I determined the extent to which attachment tendencies corresponded with the degree of narrative coherence in autobiographical stories of participants' salient romantic experiences. Across three distinct analytical techniques, reliable and robust relations between anxious attachment and narrative coherence were not observed. In contrast, negative relations between avoidant attachment and narrative coherence were reliably observed across analytical techniques. Further, the negative relations between avoidant attachment and coherence demonstrated parallel effect sizes across the three analytical techniques, highlighting the consistency and robustness of these effects.

Forming a coherent story requires outlining the contextual details of a given experience and describing this experience in a logical sequence of events. Narrators of coherent stories express emotion in an understandable way and integrate the event into a broader framework of their lives. This lies in contrast to some of the features of avoidant attachment. Individuals with more avoidant attachment tendencies are more resistant to

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emotional expression, feel uncomfortable with emotional intimacy and prefer less investment in relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). As such, and on the basis of the results, participants with more avoidant attachment tendencies may have been less likely to engage with their experiences in the romantic domain, leading to less engaging and lucid stories.

Although the meta-analysis indicated evidence of a negative relationship between narrative coherence and avoidance, at the bivariate level, the findings of Sample 2c indicated a nonsignificant relationship between coherence and avoidant attachment. This begs the question: How is this sample of community participants different from the other samples of participants included in this study? The sample size of Sample 2c was considerably smaller and the average age of participants was slightly older, relative to the other two samples. Alternatively, there could be additional factors that make this community sample of participants unique from the participants of Samples 2a and 2b. Given the inconsistent relations at the bivariate level between coherence and avoidance in Sample 2c, further examination of this community sample is warranted. In Study 4, I examined this sample with greater depth to explore relations between features of narrative identity and psychological adjustment.

While I observed a robust relation between avoidance and narrative coherence, anxious attachment was not reliably associated with narrative coherence. These findings deviate from prior research demonstrating that individuals with anxious attachment tendencies formed more complex, reflective, and emotionally negative narratives about their romantic experiences (e.g, Dunlop et al., 2019). Across analytical techniques,

relations between anxiety and coherence pointed to non-significant, or small (e.g., IDA results), effects, however each of the effects were trending in the negative direction. Nevertheless, the tendency to construct coherent stories about one's romantic experiences appears to be largely orthogonal to anxious attachment. Collectively, then, this body of research suggests the existence of both relevant (e.g., complexity, negative affect) and irrelevant (e.g., coherence) characteristics of the romantic stories disclosed by people that are high in attachment anxiety.

Finally, the supplemental analyses of Sample 2b suggested that narrative coherence was constant across ethnic groups. This aligns with the results of the primary analyses as well, such that relations between attachment and narrative coherence remained consistent after controlling for ethnicity. This finding may be due to the fact that I had disparate numbers of participants representing each ethnic group. Turning to the prompt-specific analyses (again in Sample 2b), romantic experiences that occurred more recently were narrated in a more coherent manner, relative to narratives of romantic experiences that occurred earlier in participants' lives. In contrast to the notion that stories become more coherent over time as the individual makes sense of the experience, the data suggest that as individuals develop, their experiences and stories develop also (e.g., Conway & Holmes, 2004). Participants were more sophisticated in the ways they narrated more recent events, relative to events that occurred earlier in their lives.

Future Directions

The analytic procedures employed in this study have several advantages. Bringing together multiple narratives from three samples increased the statistical power to detect

reliable and robust effects. Further, relations between attachment and narrative coherence were considered across several different narrative prompts, drawn from different assessment contexts (e.g., written vs. spoken), and across three demographically different samples. This variety of narrative prompts and variation across samples offered a better understanding of the importance of narrative identity coherence. In future, researchers should build on this work by examining a greater variety of thematic features within contextualized narratives. For example, expanding this research to themes beyond narrative coherence, such as the affective qualities, would provide a reliable indication of how these themes of narrative identity correspond with psychological adjustment. Doing so would further inform the ways in which individuals come to understand specific life experiences, while providing greater insight into contextualized narrative identity.

From the Romantic Domain to a Romantic Event

In Study 2, I explored romantic attachment tendencies in relation to self-defining experiences within the romantic domain. In Study 3, I further contextualized relational matters through a consideration of a prevalent event within the romantic domain. Here, I examined narratives of romantic breakups in relation to romantic attachment tendencies. With respect to particular events within the romantic domain, prior research has noted that participants often recognize the end of relationships as key scenes in their love lives (Dunlop et al., 2017), further underscoring the need to target these types of stories in research settings. Construct stories of breakup experiences helps individuals construct meaning from these challenging life events and may even provide indication of romantic domain functioning.

In addition to increasing context specificity within the romantic domain, Study 3 is unique from Studies 1 and 2 in two ways. First, I considered differences in participants' breakup accounts on the basis of their self-reported roles in these dissolutions. Second, I adopted a transformational processing framework to examine experiences of romantic breakups. Within the transformational processing framework, autobiographical narratives are distinguished on the basis of the degree to which they contain (a) exploratory narrative processing, which refers to engaging with the emotional significance of the event, and (b) coherent positive resolution, which captures the degree of emotional closure regarding the difficult experience. These themes of exploration and resolution have been particularly illustrative of individual differences in the narrative processing of challenging life experiences (Pals, 2006a;b).

Study 3: Breakup Narratives

In Study 3, I examined differences in participants' breakup accounts on the basis of their self-reported roles in these dissolutions. I determined (1) if levels of transformational processing varied as a function of participants' roles in the breakups narrated, (2) if romantic attachment styles related to the transformational processing of breakup experiences, and (3) if relations between attachment styles and transformational processing varied as a function of participants' roles in their breakup accounts.

As Taylor Swift stated in her song, *Wildest Dreams*, "Someday when you leave me, I bet these memories follow you around." Like many of her songs, this work concerns a promising romantic relationship gone wrong. In this particular song Swift intonates that, despite the fact that the given relationship has ended, the way in which her

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former partner remembers, or *stories*, their shared experiences will likely carry implications for his psychological functioning (or, in her words, 'follow' him around). Although Swift may have been unaware of the fact at the time she composed this work, there exists a sizable literature in the social and behavioral sciences examining the processes and implications storying previous relationships holds for personal and social functioning (e.g., Boals & Klein, 2005; Bourassa et al., 2017; Dunlop et al., 2017, 2019; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). In the two studies reported here I contribute to this literature by focusing on the analysis of breakup accounts – that is, autobiographical narratives of relationship dissolutions (Weiss, 1975). Our interest lay in identifying differences in the content of self-initiated relative to other-initiated breakup accounts (for a parallel, see Baumeister et al., 1990), as well as determining whether variations in these accounts corresponded with adult romantic attachment tendencies.

Sense Making: A Story-based Enterprise

Over the last few decades, psychologists have increasingly come to endorse the notion that individuals often work to understand themselves and the world around them via the narrative processing of autobiographical experiences (Bruner, 1990; Cohler, 1982). This sense making enterprise culminates in the authoring of a coherent and compelling life story, or narrative identity (McAdams, 1995, 2013). Researchers interested in measuring narrative identity typically prompt participants for a series of key scenes, or self-definitional experiences, such as life high points, low points, and turning points. The resulting narrative material is then quantified via various coding systems (see Adler et al., 2017). Among these systems, Pals' (2006a;b) *transformational processing*

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framework has been particularly illustrative in the study of autobiographical narratives pertaining to difficult personal experiences.

Transformational processing. Within the transformational processing framework, autobiographical narratives are distinguished on the basis on the degree to which they contain (a) exploratory narrative processing, which captures the extent to which the narrator engages with the emotional significance of the difficult event he or she is describing, while learning from the experience and identifying a meaningful change to the self, and (b) coherent positive resolution, which captures the degree of emotional closure regarding the difficult experience, while incorporating a sense of distance from the event and renewed positive affect. The tendency to engage in exploratory processing has been found to correspond positively with ego development, emotional awareness, and cognitive sophistication. In contrast, those who apply a coherent positive resolution to descriptions of negative and difficult experiences typically report higher levels of life satisfaction and well-being, relative to those who do not exhibit this narrative style (Baerger & McAdams, 1999; Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Bauer et al., 2005; King & Raspin, 2004; King et al., 2000; Pals, 2006b).

Themes of exploration and resolution capture individual differences in the narrative processing of challenging life experiences. Researchers, however, have suggested that different types of personal experiences may require distinct forms of narrative processing (Mansfield, 2015; McLean, Pasupathi, et al., 2017; Pasupathi et al., 2015). For example, a sense of positive resolution may be more important when narrating particularly difficult life experiences relative to less difficult events. Thus, these and other

narrative themes offer indication of both the character of the narrator as well as the experience he or she is narrating.

Storying the Heartbreak

Narrative psychologists have considered accounts of a number of different types of difficult experiences, from battles with alcohol and alcoholism (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013), to the trials and tribulations of incarceration (Maruna, 2001), and parenting (Dunlop et al., 2016). As efforts from the broader social sciences (in particular, sociology) have revealed, however, there may be something particularly important about the stories individuals form regarding the *end* of their romantic relationships (e.g., Hopper, 1993, 2001; Pettit & Bloom, 1984; Riessman, 1990; Slotter & Ward, 2015; Vaughan, 1986; Weiss, 1975).

Riessman (1990), for example, explored the ways in which individuals use narrative to derive meaning from their divorces. She asserted that the process of constructing a breakup account is an essential step in this process. This work aligns with the earlier efforts of Weiss (1975, pp. 14-15), who championed the importance of the breakup account for current and subsequent functioning within the romantic domain:

The [breakup] account is of major psychological importance to the separated, not only because it settles the issue of who was responsible for what, but also because it imposes on the confused material events that precede the separation a plot structure with a beginning, middle, and end and so organizes the event into a conceptually manageable unity. Once understood in this way, the events can be dealt with. They can be seen as

outcomes of identifiable causes and, eventually, can be seen as past, over, and external to the individual's present self. Those who cannot construct accounts sometimes feel that their perplexity keeps them from detaching themselves from the distressing experiences (Weiss, 1975, pp. 14-15).

Interpreting the writing of Weiss (1975) from a transformational processing perspective, those who come to reach a coherent positive resolution regarding their breakup experiences may also demonstrate a heightened level of functioning in the romantic domain, relative to individuals who, for whatever reason, have not (yet) managed to form a coherent and positive resolve regarding these breakups.

Recounting breakup experiences helps individuals construct meaning from these challenging life events, and may even provide indication of romantic domain functioning, yet these relationship narratives also serve an important function for an individuals' narrative identity. In recent years, narrative identity has been examined with greater specificity, or contextualization – that is, exploring participants' life stories within particular domains (e.g., romantic domain; Dunlop, 2015, 2017). Investigating narrative identity from a contextualized perspective may increase the strength of relations between narrative variables (e.g., exploration, resolution) and domain-specific indicators of functioning (e.g., relationship satisfaction). With respect to the romantic domain in particular, prior research has noted that participants often recognize the end of relationships (i.e., breakups) as key scenes in their love lives (Dunlop et al., 2017), further underscoring the need to target these types of stories in research settings.

Asymmetry in the Breakup Experience

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Of course, the roles adopted in breakup experiences are not interchangeable (at least not typically, see Perilloux & Buss, 2008). In most cases, someone initiates the breakup (hereafter referred to the *rejector*) and someone else responds to this decision (hereafter referred to as the *rejected*). Research suggests that, relative to rejectors, the rejected tend to report higher levels of rumination, depression, and loneliness following the breakup (e.g., Hill et al., 1976; Perilloux & Buss, 2008; Sprecher, 1994). Rejected individuals typically also report feeling less recovered than rejectors (Frazier & Cook, 1993). Rejectors, in contrast, experience a greater burden when it comes to explaining the end of the relationship to themselves and others, or risk the negative social implications of being considered 'cruel' (Perilloux & Buss, 2008).

This previous research leads to competing hypotheses regarding the levels of transformational processing in rejectors' and rejected individuals' breakup accounts. On the basis of the higher levels of rumination demonstrated by the rejected, one may anticipate a heightened degree of exploratory processing in their breakup accounts, relative to the accounts of rejectors. In contrast, given that the burden of explaining the end of the relationship is placed more squarely at the feet of rejectors (Perilloux & Buss, 2008), they may exhibit heightened levels of exploratory and resolution processing, when compared to the rejected, indicative of the attempt to craft good, socially acceptable stories explaining the end of their relationships. These findings suggest that the strength of relations between transformational processing and romantic domain functioning may vary on the basis of one's role in the breakup. This, however, begs the question: How is 'functioning' in the romantic domain best operationalized?

Functioning, by way of Romantic Attachment Styles

Romantic domain functioning may be defined in any number of ways. Despite the diversity that exists in the operationalization of this construct, however (see for example Dunlop et al., 2017; Li & Chan, 2012), researchers are generally in agreement that one's romantic attachment styles are intimately tied to successes and failures in this domain (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). As such, here I consider functioning by way of attachment tendencies.

In adulthood, attachment styles capture differences in the affect, behavior, and cognition one displays within the context of romantic relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). They are typically operationalized in terms of anxiety (an insecurity about others' support and commitment) and avoidance (a dislike for being close to and/or depending upon, others; Fraley, Waller, et al., 2000). High levels of both provide indication of an orientation towards insecure attachment. Conversely, low levels of both anxiety and avoidance correspond with a secure attachment (Simpson et al., 1996).

Anxious and avoidant attachment styles provide a framework for understanding how individuals manage relationship-relevant threats (e.g., presence of attractive alternative partners; Simpson et al., 1999), relationship conflicts (e.g., discussion of relationship issues; Campbell et al., 2005), and breakup experiences (e.g., Fraley, Garner, et al., 2000; Simpson, 1990). Speaking to the latter, attachment styles have been found to have implications for post-relationship coping, as well as the degree to which individuals exhibit a preoccupation with the former romantic partner (Davis et al., 2003).

Narrative Identity, Attachment Styles, and Relationalism

In addition to explaining affect, cognitions, and behaviors within the romantic domain, attachment styles have been found to relate to features of participants' autobiographical narratives. Securely attached individuals provide well-structured and emotionally regulated narratives about their childhood experiences and their current relationships (Treboux et al., 2004). Insecurely attached individuals, in contrast, recall memories in a more disorderly and inconsistent style (Main, 1995).

Building upon these findings, Graci and Fivush (2016) explored adult romantic attachment styles in relation to narrative themes of meaning making. Participants were prompted to describe a highly stressful experience and complete measures of psychological health (e.g., event-related distress and stress-related growth). Narratives were coded for exploration (e.g., the extent to which participants recognize the impact of distressing situations) and support seeking (e.g., employing an adaptive, secure strategy of relying on close others in times of stress or threat). Attachment styles moderated the relation between meaning making and psychological health outcomes of stress and growth. Avoidantly attached individuals exhibited less growth when narrating their experiences in a highly exploratory manner, compared to those with lower levels of avoidance (see also Fivush & Graci, 2017). Thus, attachment styles may serve as the foundation for one's narrative identity, with individual differences in the way social relationships are viewed coming to influence the major autobiographical experiences that are salient, as well as how these experiences are narrated.

Of course, it is likely that the causal arrow swings in the other direction as well – that is, the manner in which one comes to understand, or story, his or her experiences in

the romantic domain will likely impact the functioning of the attachment behavioral system (e.g., Dunlop, 2015; Sarbin, 2004). When examining the processes by which attachment styles demonstrate continuity and change across the adult lifespan, a distinction is often drawn between the prototypical and active model of attachment relationships (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017). Although the prototypical model is resistant to change, the active model is understood to be capable of being revised and updated on the basis of new and more relevant experiences (in the romantic domain, and beyond). As such, one's interpretation of difficult romantic breakup experiences is likely to be both influenced by, and come to influence, the attachment behavioral system. Thus, I conceive of these two psychologically rich psychological phenomena – autobiographical narratives and attachment styles – as mutually constitutive (for further discussion, see Dunlop, 2015).

The Present Studies

In the present studies, I examined differences in participants' breakup accounts on the basis of their self-reported roles in these dissolutions. Across studies, I had three objectives: to determine (1) if levels of transformational processing varied as a function of participants' roles in the breakups narrated, (2) if romantic attachment styles related to the transformational processing of breakup experiences, and (3) if relations between attachment styles and transformational processing varied as a function of participants' roles in their breakup accounts.

With respect to (1), I did not entertain a directed hypothesis regarding the possibility that levels of transformational processing in breakup accounts varied as a

function of breakup role. This was due to the competing hypotheses outlined in the Introduction. With respect to (2), drawing from the writings of Weiss (1975) and Riessman (1990), as well as previous research from outside the romantic domain noting a positive relation between the resolution processing of difficult life experiences and positive psychological functioning (e.g., Pals, 2006a;b), I predicted that individuals with lower levels of anxious and avoidant styles would exhibit greater levels of positive resolution in their breakup accounts, relative to individuals with higher levels of anxiety and avoidance. Finally, with respect to (3) I again refrained from offering directed hypotheses regarding the possibility that the relation between attachment styles and positive resolution may be moderated by participants' self-attributed role in the breakup experience.

Study 3a

In Study 3a participants provided narrative accounts of their most difficult romantic breakups. Participants also indicated who initiated the dissolution of the relationship and completed a measure of romantic attachment tendencies.

Participants and Procedure

Three-hundred and ninety-six individuals were recruited for participation in this study by way of Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online survey-based website (for a discussion on the appropriateness of this website, see Buhrmester et al., 2011). The average age of the sample was 34.2 years ($SD = 11.5$), 62% were women, 75% self-identified as being of Euro-American descent, and 80% were currently in a romantic relationship. In exchange for their involvement in the study, participants received a $1.00

honorarium. Portions of these data appeared in Dunlop and colleagues (2017, Study 2). In this earlier research, however, participants' breakup accounts were not considered or analyzed.

After consenting to participate, respondents were asked to provide two narratives unrelated to the current study, as well as a narrative account of their most difficult romantic breakup, using the following prompt:

> Please describe the most emotionally upsetting, difficult breakup that you have been a part of. Give an account of the sequence of events leading up to and culminating in this breakup, as well as the breakup experience itself. Please provide as much detail as possible when outlining this account. For example, you should highlight the reasons why this breakup happened as well as how you responded once the breakup had occurred.

The average length of participants' responses was 162 words ($SD = 130$). Following the provision of these breakup accounts, participants indicated the party (or parties) who initiated the breakup and completed a battery of questionnaires which included Fraley et al.'s (2000) 36-item Experiences in Close Relationships– Revised inventory (ECR-R) Scale. The ECR-R provides indication of respondents' anxious and avoidant styles within the context of romantic relationships generally (rather than within a single relationship in particular). Exemplary items from the ECR-R, which were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with higher values indicating greater endorsement, include "I'm afraid that I'll lose my partner's love," (anxious attachment; $\alpha = .96$) and "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close" (avoidant attachment; $\alpha = .96$).

Conceptual Coding of Breakup Accounts

The first author and a research assistant otherwise unconnected with this study coded all breakup accounts. In the interest of blind coding, while quantifying these accounts, coders did not have access to participants' demographic information nor ERC-R scores. Following the quantification of the sample, coders' ratings were averaged. All breakup accounts were quantified for levels of exploration and resolution (Pals, 2006a;b). As outlined in the Introduction, exploration captures the degree to which the narrator actively engages with the emotional and evocative elements of the experience described, as opposed to describing this experience in a detached manner. In contrast, resolution provides indication of the extent to which the narrator has achieved a degree of adaptive closure regarding the event in question. Both exploration (*ICC* = .89) and resolution (*ICC* = .88) were rated on a three-point scale with higher values corresponding with more pronounced narrative features (see Table 3.1 for examples of breakup accounts with high and low levels of exploration and resolution).

Table 3.1

Breakup accounts varying in exploration and positive resolution (Study 3a)

Resolution	Exploration	
	Low	High
Low	The worst breakup I went through was the one related to the last story I wrote. I had been dating my girlfriend for almost 5 years. After I graduated from college, I moved to a different state to be with her. I lived with her for a year there, helped her with her school work, paid the majority of the bills and was supportive and kind while she struggled with college work. That summer after we moved, she decided that she just didn't want to be in a relationship anymore. She kept stringing me along, though, so it was hard to believe we were really broken up. We decided to sign a lease again together, and she even continued to sleep in the same bed with me. Then one night, she went out to a bar and I asked if I could come and she said no. When she got home, she kept giggling on the phone all night. The next day she told me she had met someone and that we should move into different rooms.	I had just lost my mom who I was very close to. Sam spent the night at my house and helped me with some funeral preparations. That night, we made passionate love. It was so wonderful and deep. As we were falling asleep at around 2am, he got a text on his phone which never happened before, especially on a weeknight. He looked at his phone and visibly became very uncomfortable, but tried to play it off. I asked him who it was and he lied. The person then started blowing up his phone, texting and calling over and over again. He wouldn't tell me the truth. I then answered his phone and it was her. I got my answers and silently just stared at him for the longest time in disbelief. I should have kicked him out, but I didn't. I just walked away and cried myself to sleep in another room. I think I was too emotionally exhausted to react in any other way. I had my mom's death to think about and a funeral to arrange all by myself. He left the next morning. About a week later, he called me from a mental institution. Not only was he cheating on me with this younger woman, they were also doing drugs together and he ended up in a facility. He called me every day after that and I was there for him. Then, one day he stopped calling. I called him to see what was up and he was very cold to me. I assumed she was back in his life. About a month later, he emailed me trying to get

When at the time, I knew I was moving to a new city and she would not be able to come with. We had been going out for roughly 4 or 5 years and as the time drew closer to the day I was going to leave, the more emotionally exhausting it became. The breakup was for no reasons really between us (not getting along or grew disinterested in each other, etc.) but because I was going to have to leave in order to acquire a job that I could not pass up. We discussed the possibility of her moving with me, but do to circumstances, she was unable to come. We both longed for each other after I had moved for quite some time, but eventually time healed the sadness, but beforehand, I couldn't have imagined my life without her, but had to deal with the harsh reality.

High

me back. I ignored him and moved on with my life… haven't spoken to him since.

I was in college and my freshman year I met a girl and we got close fast. We started seeing each other all the time and we became an item quick. We lasted for 3 years. I was thinking this is the girl I am going to marry when I graduate college. I was so wrong about that. The summer of our Junior year we had made plans to go away but she changed her mind I understood there was some family things going on. I was supportive and I noticed she was becoming more distant. We saw little of each other that summer and the last two weeks of summer she called me and said we needed to talk. I had a feeling some bad news about her family was coming my way. Little did I know that the call was going to break my heart. She in a matter of fact and pretty cold way told me that she had met another guy during the last semester and they had spent much of the summer together and said we were growing apart. I didn't say a word. My mind was blank kind of reminded me of when I was on that girl's couch. Either way I didn't say a word to her. After she was done with her nonsense I simply said goodbye and hung up. I refused to allow her the pleasure of hearing me hurt. I made it a point to stay away from her during that upcoming semester and it was difficult since we were in the same degree and almost all of the same classes. I spent those last two weeks crying and hiding from everyone. One day it was roughly 2 days before the last time to register and I was thinking maybe I should take the semester off. I realized how silly

that was and instead made a vow of no dating and if I saw her I was going to make sure not to allow her to see me hurt. I did a good job and pretended that our breakup didn't bother me. Every time I saw her however it hurt. Thankfully my mother was right and time heals all wounds. I made it a point to study and focus only on my studies. That turned out to be a good decision. I ended up graduating in the top 5% of the class. I heard through mutual friends that she was having a hard time because her and that guy broke up. After graduation she contacted me but I refused to meet with her or have any contact. I gave her my heart once and she destroyed it I was not going to allow her to do it again.

Results

Participants reported that they were, on average, 23.9 years of age ($SD = 8.0$), at the time of their narrated breakups. 85% of participants reported being involved in a subsequent relationship since these breakups. The most frequent role adopted in participants' accounts was that of the rejected (49% of the sample, total $n = 194$), whereas 36% of the sample ($n = 143$) provided accounts from the perspective of the rejector, and 15% ($n = 59$) provided accounts of breakups that were initiated mutually.

Breakup Role and Transformational Processing

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether transformational processing varied as a function of participants' roles in their breakups. Both exploration and resolution were found to differ as a function of participants' roles in the breakup, Fs(2,386) =12.98 and 11.03 , ps < .001, η_p^2s =.06 and .05, respectively. Unpacked, I noted that levels of exploration were higher in narratives provided by rejectors, relative to narratives provided by rejected individuals, and those describing mutual breakups (see Figure 2). A Tukey post hoc analysis indicated that levels of exploration were significantly higher in narratives provided by rejectors, relative to narratives provided by rejected individuals, and those describing mutual breakups (ps < .001). A significant difference was not observed between the levels of exploration contained in the narratives provided by rejected individuals and those describing mutual breakups ($p = .37$). A relatively similar pattern was noted with respect to resolution, as it was highest in rejectors' stories, followed by those of individuals in mutual breakups, and lowest in narratives of rejected individuals (again, see Figure 2). A Tukey post hoc analysis

indicated that levels of resolution were significantly higher in narratives provided by rejectors, relative to narratives provided by rejected individuals ($p < .001$), and those describing mutual breakups ($p = .03$). However, there was not a statistically significant difference in levels of resolution between narratives provided by rejected individuals and those describing mutual breakups ($p = .72$). Taken together, both exploration and resolution differed as a function of participants' roles in the breakup, with rejectors displaying higher levels of transformational processing, relative to rejected individuals.

On the basis of the high inter-relation between exploration and resolution (see Table 3.2), I next explored differences in transformational processing as a function of breakup role, while controlling for the corresponding narrative theme and length of participants' breakup accounts (viz., word count) via ANCOVA.[6] Under these conditions results pertaining to exploration and resolution remained comparable, $Fs(2,384) = 6.98$ and 4.39, $ps = .001$ and $= .01$, $\eta_p^2s = .04$ and .02, respectively.

Breakup Accounts and Adult Romantic Attachment Styles

Table 3.2 reports descriptive statistics and relations among study variables. Conducting a series of correlational analyses between exploration and resolution processing of participants' breakup accounts and adult romantic attachment styles, I noted anxious attachment was unrelated to exploration, $r = -.06$, $p = .24$, whereas avoidant attachment was significantly negatively related to this narrative theme, $r = -.11$, $p = .03$. Both of these relations, however, were rendered non-significant once I accounted

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[6] In the original work on transformational processing (Pals, 2006a), the standardized residuals of exploration and resolution were utilized as independent variables to account for the shared variance between narrative themes. In the cases of the current data, standardized residuals produced parallel results to those reported in the main text.

for resolution and word count, rs = .06 and .003, ps = .28 and .95, respectively. In contrast, and consistent with hypotheses, anxious and avoidant attachment styles correlated negatively with resolution in participants' breakup accounts, rs = -.18, ps = .000. These relations remained significant after controlling for exploration and word count, rs = -.18 and -.15, ps = .001 and .003, respectively. Finally, the strength of these associations did not differ significantly among rejectors, rejected individuals, and those describing mutual breakups, Zs ≤ 1.4, ps ≥ .16.[7]

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[7] In a supplemental analysis, I determined whether participants' attachment styles predicted the role they adopted in their breakup accounts. Anxious attachment varied to a marginally significant degree as a function of participants' roles in breakup accounts, $F(2,393) = 3.00$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Unpacked, I noted that levels of anxious attachment were highest among participants who described mutual breakups and lowest among those who described self-initiated breakups. By contrast, avoidant attachment did not differ as a function of breakup role, $F(2,393) = 1.05$, $p = .35$, $\eta_p^2 = .005$

Table 3.2

Descriptive statistics for, and interrelations among, variables (Study 3a)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4
Narrative processing						
1. Exploration	1.84	0.60	—			
2. Resolution	1.54	0.55	.53**	—		
Attachment styles						
3. Anxiety	3.25	1.47	-.06	-.18**	—	—
4. Avoidance	2.83	1.28	-.11*	-.18**	.45**	—

Note. ***$p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, *$p < .05$, +$p < .10$

Figure 2

Mean differences of transformational processing by breakup role (Study 3a)
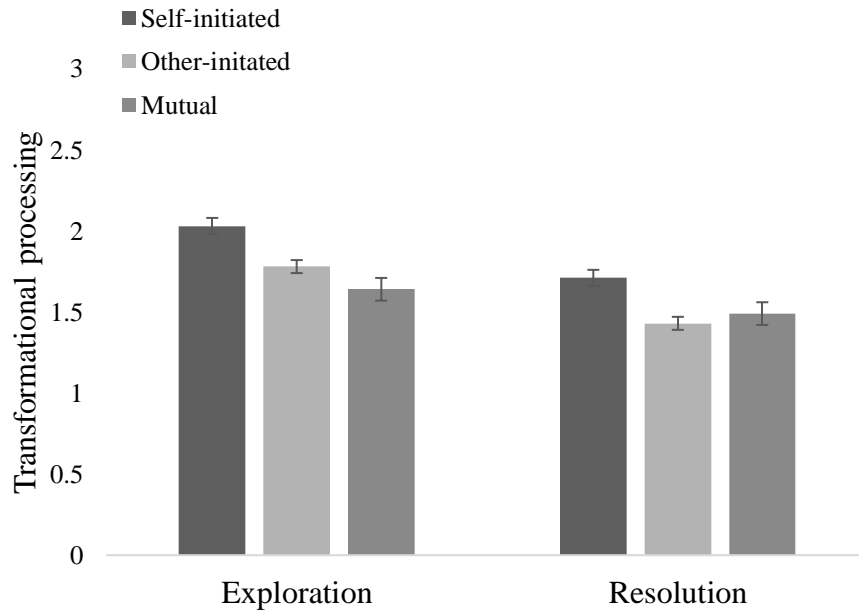
Note. Error bars represent standard errors

Discussion

The results of Study 3a suggest that (a) the transformational processing of breakup experiences differs on the basis of one's role in the breakup, and (b) irrespective of the breakup role adopted, more adaptive attachment styles are associated with constructing a breakup account that is positively resolved. Recall, however, that participants themselves determined whether they provided stories in which they did, or did not, initiate the breakup. To become clearer about the manner in which transformational processing may differ as a functioning of breakup role, as well as the potential implications one's role in the breakup plays in the relation between features of narrative accounts and attachment tendencies, in Study 3b I prompted individuals for breakup accounts from the perspective of the rejector and the rejected. The within-person design of Study 3b allows for a more systematic examination of the way(s) in which transformational processing varied as a functioning of breakup role. Such a design also allows for more systematic examination of relations between transformational processing and attachment tendencies, as a function of the type of breakup account narrated.

Study 3b

Participants and Procedure

One-hundred and fifteen individuals were recruited from the same online survey-based website used in Study 3a. The sample had a mean age of 32.2 years ($SD = 9.4$), 46% were female, 83% self-identified as being of Euro-American descent, and 63% were currently in a romantic relationship. Participants received an honorarium of $1.00 for their involvement in this study. After providing

informed consent, participants were asked to describe one experience in which they initiated the termination of a relationship (i.e., an account from the rejector role) and one experience in which a former romantic partner initiated a breakup (i.e., an account from the rejected role). The prompts for the 'rejector' (e.g., self-initiated) and 'rejected' (e.g., other-initiated) narratives are presented below:

> Please consider a significant romantic relationship that you ended (i.e., a relationship in which you 'dumped' someone). Please tell the story of the breakup of this relationship. Give an account of the sequence of events leading up to and culminating in this breakup. Please provide as much detail as possible when outlining this account. For example, you should highlight the reasons why this breakup happened as well as how you responded once the breakup had occurred.

> Please consider a significant romantic relationship that was ended by the person you were dating at the time (i.e., a relationship in which you were 'dumped'). Please tell the story of the breakup of this relationship. Give an account of the sequence of events leading up to and culminating in this breakup. Please provide as much detail as possible when outlining this account. For example, you should highlight the reasons why this breakup happened as well as how you responded once the breakup had occurred.

The order in which these stories were requested was counterbalanced across participants. The average length of participants' self-initiated and other-initiated narratives was 165 words ($SD = 124$) and 167 words ($SD = 121$), respectively. Participants next completed a

battery of measures which included the ECR-R (αs = .96). Participants then provided basic demographic information.

All narratives were entered into a single spreadsheet and, in the interest of blind coding, their order was then randomized. In a manner paralleling the coding procedure described in Study 3a, two research assistants otherwise unconnected with the current study each independently read and coded, on a three-point scale, all narrative accounts for exploration (ICC = .71) and resolution (ICC = .72). Ratings were subsequently averaged between coders.

Results and Discussion

The average amount of time elapsed since their recounted self-initiated and other-initiated breakup was 5.89 and 7.39 years (SDs = 6.59 and 7.46), respectively. 85% of participants reported being involved in a relationship since the time of their most recent breakup experiences. To determine whether transformational processing differed as a function of breakup role, I conducted a 2(Transformational processing; exploration, resolution) x 2(Breakup initiator; self, other) ANOVA. This analysis revealed significant main effects for both transformational processing and breakup role, Fs(1,114) = 13.14 and 8.23, ps = <.001 and .005, η_p^2s =.10 and .07, respectively. These main effects indicate that (a) participants exhibited higher levels of exploration relative to resolution across their stories and (b) transformational processing was higher in participants' accounts of self-initiated breakups relative to those breakups that were initiated by their former partners (see Figure 3). These main effects, however, were qualified by a significant transformational processing x breakup initiator interaction, F(1,114) =4.43, p

= .04, η_p^2 = .04. Unpacking this interaction within each narrative process, I noted that levels of exploration were consistent across participants' breakup accounts, $F(1,114)$ = 2.16, p = .14, η_p^2 = .02. In contrast, resolution was significantly higher in recounts of breakups from the perspective of the rejector relative to the rejected, $F(1,114)$ = 13.99, p < .001, η_p^2 = .11.

In a supplemental analysis, I controlled for the length of participants' responses by including the word count of both narratives (e.g., rejector and rejected accounts) as covariates in an ANCOVA again examining transformational processing as a function of breakup role. When controlling for word count, the main effect of transformational processing ($F(1,113)$ = 2.00, p = .16, η_p^2 = .02) and the interaction effect ($F(1,113)$ = 1.40, p = .24, η_p^2 = .01) became non-significant, however the main effect of breakup role remained significant, $F(1,113)$ = 5.93, p = .02, η_p^2 = .05. The significant main effect of breakup role indicates that both exploration and resolution were higher in participants' accounts of self-initiated breakups when compared to other-initiated breakup accounts.

Table 3.3 presents the descriptive statistics and interrelations among attachment styles and narrative constructs. Evident from this table, the sole significant relations observed were between anxious and avoidant styles and the resolution processing of self-initiated breakups (i.e., rejectors' breakup accounts). Those with lower levels of anxious and avoidant attachment tended to construct narratives of self-initiated dissolutions that were coherently and positively resolved (rs = -.18 and .21, ps = .05 and .02, respectively). After controlling for word count and exploration, the relationship between resolution and avoidant attachment remained significant (r = -.22, ps = .02). Under these conditions,

however, the relationship between resolution and anxious attachment became non-significant ($r = -.13$, $p = .17$). Thus, across both studies, the resolution processing of breakup accounts was associated with an avoidant attachment style. That being said, there also appears to be something particularly important or impactful about breakup accounts from the perspective of the rejector. It is to a consideration of these and other topics that I now turn.

Table 3.3

Descriptive statistics for, and interrelations among, variables (Study 3b)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
Narrative processing – Rejector role							
1. Exploration	1.89	0.66	—				
2. Resolution	1.83	0.61	.62***	—			
Narrative processing – Rejected role							
3. Exploration	1.77	0.62	.17+	.21*	—		
4. Resolution	1.57	0.58	.16+	.24**	.64***	—	
Attachment styles							
5. Anxiety	3.41	1.41	-.12	-.18+	.09	-.02	—
6. Avoidance	2.87	1.24	-.06	-.20*	.04	-.09	.55***

Note. ***$p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, *$p < .05$, +$p < .10$

Figure 3

Mean differences of transformational processing by breakup role (Study 3b)
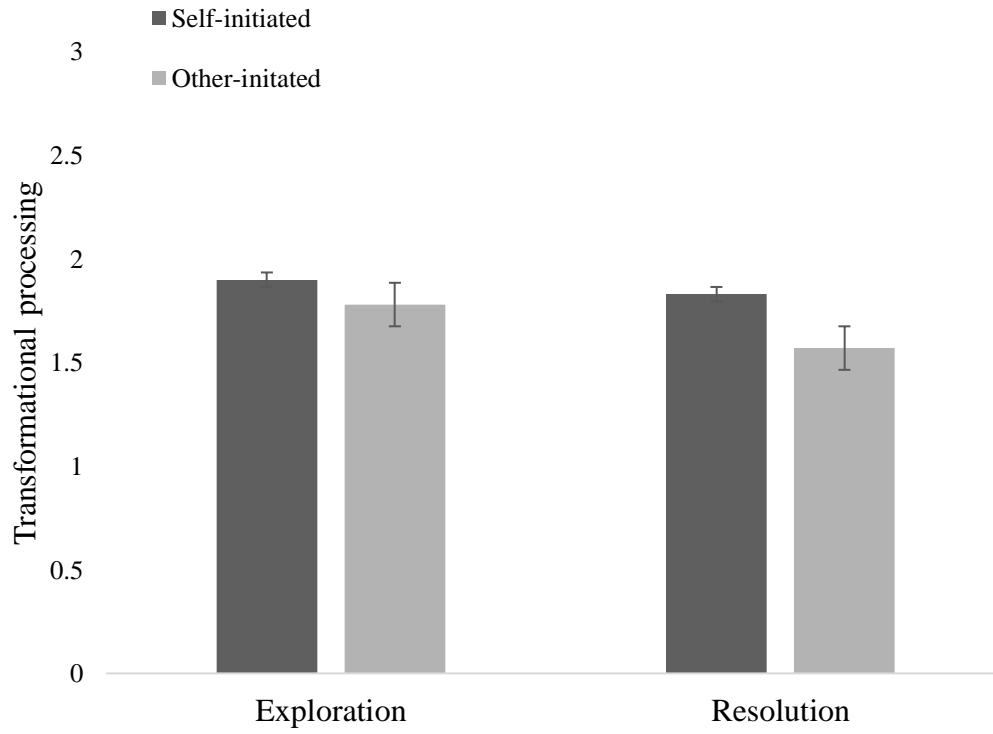
Note. Error bars represent standard errors

Study 3: General Discussion

In this project, I applied a narrative identity approach to study breakup accounts. Across the two studies, narratives were quantified in terms of their degree of exploration and resolution (Pals, 2006a;b). I noted that levels of transformational processing differed on the basis of one's breakup role. I also observed a negative relation between resolution processing and avoidant attachment tendencies. Finally, in Study 3b, a significant negative relation was observed between levels of resolution processing within breakup accounts from the perspective of the rejector, but not the rejected, and avoidant/anxious attachment styles.

Transformational Processing and Breakup Role

Over the course of the two studies, I tested competing hypotheses regarding breakup role and levels of transformational processing. The first hypothesis, drawn from the finding that, relative to rejectors, rejected individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of rumination and more difficulty moving on (see, for example, Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), predicted that rejected individuals' accounts would exhibit higher levels of exploratory processing. In contrast, the second hypothesis, drawn from the notion that, relative to rejected individuals, rejectors face a greater burden to explain the relationship dissolution to others (Perilloux & Buss, 2008), predicted that rejectors' breakup accounts would exhibit heightened levels of both exploratory and resolution processing.

Greater support was gathered for this latter hypothesis insofar as, in Study 3a, levels of exploration and resolution were higher in rejectors' breakup accounts, relative to the accounts provided by rejected individuals. This finding supports the idea that

rejectors' are more likely to elaborate on the emotional significance of the breakup experience, while describing the ways in which he or she has learned or changed from the breakup. Furthermore, in Study 3b, the within-person study design revealed that levels of both exploration and resolution were higher in accounts of self-initiated, relative to other-initiated accounts. I interpret these results to affirm the fact that personal stories carry both personal and social implications (see Maruna, 2001) and that the roles we adopt throughout our lives carry with them expectations, narrative and otherwise (Dunlop et al., 2013, 2014).

Breakup Accounts and Attachment Styles

In Study 3a, I found that anxious and avoidant styles negatively predicted the degree of positive resolution in participants' breakup accounts. In Study 3b, avoidant, but not anxious, attachment styles demonstrated a robust negative relation with positive resolution in participants' breakup accounts. This relation, however, was present only when participants described a breakup from the perspective of the rejector rather than the rejected. Prior research has asserted that, following romantic dissolution, avoidantly attached individuals seek to minimize contact with the former romantic partner, whereas anxiously attached individuals seek the opposite (Davis et al., 2003; Fox & Tokunaga, 2015). The finding that those with avoidant, but not anxious, attachment styles displayed lower levels of resolution in their self-initiated breakup accounts (in Study 3b) is consistent with the notion that these individuals are less invested and preoccupied with their former relationship, and therefore, may seek less emotional closure following a romantic breakup.

In the interest of fleshing out these relations, consider the story provided by "Karen", a participant in Study 3b who demonstrated a low level of avoidant attachment:

I was with my boyfriend for almost two years but the last six months or so leading up to the break up I knew it needed to happen I just wasn't quite ready yet. We had been fighting all the time. I tried everything in my power to make this relationship worked because he was my first love. We even tried couples therapy but nothing seemed to be helping. The fighting was only getting worse. I finally realized it just had to end and I found a new apartment and moved out. I told him I just needed some space to figure out if I could ever work together again. After being apart I realized very quickly that I were much better friends than I ever were as a couple. We are still friends to this day and have no desire to have any sort of romantic relationship ever again. It took a while to get there but once I did I felt much happier about my friendship with him.

Evident from this account, Karen conveys the emotional weight of her experience. Also present in her account, however, is a clear sense of positive resolve, noting that their relationship was much better once it became platonic in nature. Such resolve is decidedly absent in the narrative account provided by "Shane", another of the participants in Study 3b:

I started going out with someone at my work. She seemed really nice at the time. However, later on in the relationship she started becoming overly controlling and very clingy. I tried to distance myself from her for a

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while but that causes her to become rather insecure and it got much worse.

Eventually I decided to end the relationship. It was really frustrating and I

ended up quitting my job just to get away from her.

In Shane's story, things start off quite promising but quickly turn sour – so sour that he describes making the choice to quit his job, so that he does not have to interact with this person anymore. Shane reported a high level of avoidant attachment.

It is possible that an adaptive attachment profile leads to crafting more coherent stories. Consistent with this notion, research on attachment suggests that those with lower levels of anxious and avoidant styles process attachment-relevant information through an optimistic appraisal of threatening events, and are also able to maintain a more adaptive affective profile when dealing with relationship-based stressors (e.g., Mikulincer et al., 2001). For reasons I outlined in the Introduction, however, it is equally plausible that the manner in which individuals have come to understand, or story, their experiences within the romantic domain may impact the attachment styles they demonstrate therein (see Dunlop, 2015). The current data simply do not allow us to disentangle these two possibilities. As such, it falls to future research to more thoroughly examine relations between the attachment behavioral system and the storied self.

Limitations and Future Directions

Turning to the limitations of the current studies, the samples were largely ethnically homogenous and Westernized, which speaks to an inherent limitation of samples drawn from most online survey-based websites. Researchers theorizing on the basis of the current findings should note the narrow generalizability of the present studies

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due to the use of participants recruited from mTurk. Future researchers should replicate the relations noted here using more diverse samples. To more thoroughly explore the nature of the relation between positive resolution and attachment styles, as well as the impact of breakup role, researchers are encouraged to proceed along at least two methodological routes. First, this relation can and should be explored via experimental frameworks in which either (a) the ending of participants' stories is systematically manipulated (Jones et al., 2018) or (b) certain attachment styles are primed (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Second, researchers should study the relation between positive resolution and attachment styles using a longitudinal framework in which fluctuations in both positive resolution and attachment styles are examined, over time. Pursuing these avenues will no doubt further understanding regarding the breakup experience, as well as the implications this experience holds for functioning within the romantic domain and beyond.

Integration Across Studies

In Studies 1-3, I have examined contextualized narrative identity through a consideration of an interpersonal context and a relational domain, and quantified narrative identity via three conceptually distinct coding paradigms. In Study 4, I conducted an expansion and reanalysis of the data from Study 2c by bringing together the distinct narrative identity coding paradigms thus far presented. This was done to explore how these narrative features correspond with indicators of psychological adjustment. In this community sample, affective qualities, narrative coherence, and transformational processing were examined in relation to three indicators of adjustment—satisfaction with

life, relationship contingent self-esteem, and attachment tendencies.

The current project has at least two advantages. First, bringing together three distinct paradigms allowed for a side-by-side consideration of both affective and structural themes, as well as themes of integrative meaning (Adler et al., 2016; Adler et al., 2017; McLean et al., 2020). Second, examining several markers of psychological adjustment, namely satisfaction with life, relationship contingent self-esteem, and romantic attachment tendencies, provides a more inclusive understanding of how these narrative features correspond with adjustment. Thus, Study 4 stands to inform understanding of how individuals make sense of the self-defining experiences that manifest within the romantic domain and how the features of contextualized narratives correspond with general and domain-specific measures of psychological adjustment.

Study 4: An Expansion and Reanalysis of Contextualized Narrative Identity

A substantial body of research demonstrates that the way individuals understand, and narrate, their lives is associated with well-being (Adler et al., 2015; Blagov & Singer, 2004; McAdams, 1993, 2006). Several indicators of narrative identity have consistently corresponded with psychological functioning (Adler et al., 2015; McAdams, 2001). For example, the affective tone of participants' stories is positively associated with well-being, self-esteem, and secure attachment tendencies (McAdams et al., 2001; Dunlop et al., 2017, 2018). Individual differences in the features of narrative identity are associated with life satisfaction (Lilgendahl & McLean, 2020), self-esteem (McAdams et al., 2001), mental health and well-being (Adler, 2012), adult attachment tendencies (Dunlop, Karan, et al., 2020; Graci & Fivush, 2016), and behavior change (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013).

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Further, a growing number of researchers have suggested that narrative identity comes to influence psychological adjustment (Adler, 2012; Adler & Hershfield, 2012; Dunlop, 2015; Sarbin, 2004). Over the course of psychotherapy, for example, researchers observed that changes in narrative identity preceded improvements in participants' mental health (Adler, 2012). Although additional research is needed to examine causal relations between narrative identity and well-being, the stories individuals form about their lives may play an important role in their psychological adjustment.

Despite the robust relations between narrative identity and well-being, these studies have often examined narrative identity within a single story or explored only a limited number of narrative themes. Further, many studies examining narrative identity and well-being have relied upon single indicators of well-being. In the current study, I examined several narrative features within self-definitional romantic stories in relation to three indicators of psychological adjustment. The findings from this study will provide insight into how individuals narrate their romantic lives, as well as how individual differences in narrative features corresponds with adjustment. Applying several narrative identity paradigms across three contextualized stories represents a strength of the current study, as the aggregation of narrative features across stories allows for a more reliable estimate of contextualized narrative identity.

Quantifying Narrative Identity

The narrative features examined in the current study represent affective, structural, and integrative meaning themes (Adler et al., 2016). *Affective* themes depict the emotional qualities of a narrative, such as the overall positive or negative valence, or

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shifts in the emotional tone, of a narrative. *Structural* themes represent the configuration of stories in terms of the order of the content within a narrative, such as the degree of elaboration or sophistication, or the details of the story. Themes of *integrative* meaning refer to the degree of interpretation and evaluation of the event being narrated, as well as the extent of integration between the storied event and the narrator's self. The current study includes several affective themes (e.g., redemption, contamination, affective tone, and resolution), one integrative meaning theme (e.g., exploratory processing), and one structural element (e.g., narrative coherence).

In Study 4, I applied the three coding paradigms from Studies 1, 2, and 3 to the romantic autobiographical narratives from a single sample of community participants (Study 2c). That is, participants' narratives of salient romantic experiences were coded for affective qualities, narrative coherence, and transformational processing. The objective of Study 4 was to examine whether several distinct narrative features corresponded with indicators of adjustment. This pursuit provided insight into how individuals make sense of self-defining romantic experiences, as well as how their storied representation corresponds with psychological adjustment.

Method

Study 4 consisted of a re-coding and re-analysis of Sample 2c. As described in Study 2, participants in this study provided a high point, low point, and turning point moment from their love lives (LLSI; Dunlop et al., 2018). Using three distinct paradigms, narratives were coded for affective qualities (e.g., redemption, contamination, and tone), narrative coherence, and transformational processing (e.g., exploratory processing and

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coherent positive resolution). All participants provided demographic information and completed a battery of questionnaires that included measures of life satisfaction, relationship contingent self-esteem, and attachment tendencies.

Participants and Procedure

As stated earlier, Sample 2c consisted of 89 participants (63% female, M_{age} = 41.70, 46% White, 29% Latinx, and 13% Black/African American) from the Riverside community. Participants were required to be fluent in English and at least 30 years of age. After providing informed consent, participants verbally described a romantic high, low, and turning point experience (LLSI; Dunlop et al., 2018) and completed several measures of psychological adjustment. Each participant was compensated $50.00 in exchange for their involvement in the study.

Psychological Adjustment Measures

Life Satisfaction. Life satisfaction was assessed using the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). Participants rated items such as "The conditions of my life are excellent" and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life" on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly* (α = .91).

Relationship Contingent Self-Esteem. Participants completed the 11-item Relationship Contingent Self-Esteem Scale (RCSW; Knee et al., 2008), which provides indication of the extent to which participants' self-esteem is dependent on their romantic relationships in general. Participants rated items such as "I feel better about myself when others tell me that my partner and I have a good relationship" and "An important measure

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of my self-worth is how successful my relationship is" on a 5-point scale (i.e., 1 = *not at all like me*, 5 = *very much like me,* α = .83).

Romantic Attachment tendencies. As in Study 2, participants completed the 36-item ECR-R on a seven-point scale (Fraley, Waller, et al., 2000). Exemplary items from the ECR-R include "I'm afraid that I'll lose my partner's love," (anxious attachment; α = .93) and "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close" (avoidant attachment; α = .94).

Narrative Measures

Narratives of romantic high, low, and turning point moments were coded using the paradigms from Studies 1 (e.g., affective qualities), 2 (e.g., narrative coherence), and 3 (e.g., transformational processing). Following the protocol of the previous studies, the first author and one research assistant all narratives for the nine themes that comprise affective qualities, coherence, and transformational processing. After the coding process was complete, ratings were aggregated across romantic high, low, and turning point stories.

Affective Qualities. As described in Study 1a, the affective qualities in narrative are represented by three constructs in particular— redemption, contamination, and affective tone. Redemption refers to narrative sequences that begin negatively and end positively, often depicting personal growth, insight, or silver linings (McAdams, 1999). Contamination is the opposite, capturing narratives that begin positively and end negatively, indicating experiences that were ultimately spoiled or ruined (McAdams, 1998). Finally, affective tone is the degree of positive, relative to negative, emotional

content in participants' stories, illustrating participants' optimistic or pessimistic outlooks (McAdams, 2001). Redemption and contamination were coded using a dichotomous coding system (i.e., presence/absence; ks = .76; McAdams, 1998, 1999). The degree of affective tone on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very negative*, 5 = *very positive*; ICC = .75; McAdams, 2001).

Narrative Coherence. As described in Study 2, narrative coherence represents the extent to which a narrator communicates the important details of an experience in a logical order, clearly expresses their feelings, and links the event to overarching life themes and meanings (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). Coherence is operationalized in terms of four dimensions—orientation (e.g., the degree of sufficient background information to understand the story), structure (e.g., the extent to which the story follows a temporal sequence), affect (e.g., the extent to which the story expresses emotion in a clear and understandable way) and integration (e.g., the author's ability to link the narrated events to larger life themes and meanings). The four dimensions of coherence were coded on a four-point scale ranging from 0 = *no coherence* to 3 = *high coherence* (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). The sum of these four dimensions represents each narrative's coherence score, with higher values indicating greater narrative coherence. The inter-rater reliability for narrative coherence was acceptable (*ICC* = .85).

Transformational Processing. As noted in Study 3, transformational processing refers to the degree to which narratives contain exploratory narrative processing (e.g., recognizing the emotional significance of the event, learning from the experience, and identifying a meaningful change to the self), and coherent positive resolution (e.g.,

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emotional closure, a sense of distance from the event, and renewed positive affect; Pals,

2006b). Exploration ($ICC = .72$) and resolution ($ICC = .74$) were rated on a four-point

scale with higher values corresponding with more pronounced narrative features.

Results and Discussion

Table 4.1 includes the descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among study

variables. Redemption corresponded positively with life satisfaction ($r = .23$, $p = .03$),

negatively with attachment anxiety ($r = -.22$, $p = .04$), and was marginally negatively

associated with relationship contingent self-esteem ($r = -.18$, $p = .09$) and attachment

avoidance ($r = -.18$, $p = .09$). Contamination was unrelated to all measures of adjustment

($rs < .06$, $ps > .59$). Affective tone corresponded positively with life satisfaction ($r = .21$,

$p = .05$), negatively with attachment anxiety ($r = -.25$, $p = .02$) and avoidance ($r = -.30$, $p

= .004$), and was unrelated to relationship contingent self-esteem ($r = .11$, $p = .30$).

As noted in Table 4.1, narrative coherence corresponded positively with life

satisfaction ($r = .21$, $p = .05$), and was unrelated to relationship contingent self-esteem ($r

= .03$, $p = .76$) and anxious and avoidant attachment tendencies ($rs = -.09$ and $-.05$,

respectively and $ps > .89$). Turning to the transformational processing framework,

exploration was unrelated to life satisfaction ($r = .17$, $p = .11$), relationship contingent

self-esteem ($r = -.05$, $p = .63$), and anxious and avoidant attachment tendencies ($rs = -.15$

and $-.12$, respectively and $ps > .15$). Resolution was positively related to life satisfaction

($r = .35$, $p = .0008$), negatively related to anxiety ($r = -.30$, $p = .004$) and avoidance ($r = -

.34$, $p = .001$), and unrelated to relationship contingent self-esteem ($r = -.07$, $p = .50$).

In addition to the bivariate correlations, I explored the unique correspondence of each narrative theme with each indicator of well-being. To do so, each measure of well-being was regressed onto the six narrative themes simultaneously, resulting in a total of four linear regression models. The model estimates are presented in Table 4.2. In the model predicting satisfaction with life, coherent positive resolution demonstrated a positive relation with life satisfaction, $\beta = .29$, 95% CI [.14, 2.07], $p = .02$. Each the six narrative themes were unrelated to relationship contingent self-esteem when considering simultaneously, $\beta s \leq .10$, $ps \geq .16$. The same was true with respect to anxious attachment, $\beta s \leq .02$, $ps \geq .10$. Lastly, positive resolution was negatively associated with avoidant attachment when holding all other narrative themes constant, $\beta = -.28$, 95% CI [-1.54, -.08], $p = .03$.

Table 4.1

Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among thematic features and psychological adjustment variables (Study 4)

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		Narrative features												
1. Redemption	.42 (.27)													
2.Contamination	.14 (.18)	-.26*												
3. Tone	3.35 (.62)	.52**	-.46**											
4. Coherence	1.53 (.39)	.30**	-.14	.16										
5. Orientation	1.52 (.50)	.11	.07	-.02	.84**									
6. Structure	1.79 (.54)	.16	-.01	-.01	.86**	.81**								
7. Affect	1.61 (.50)	.23*	-.35**	.26*	.77**	.50**	.54**							
8. Integration	1.19 (.50)	.43**	-.17	.27**	.56**	.23*	.22*	.30**						
9. Exploration	2.12 (.35)	.44**	-.27*	.33**	.46**	.21*	.26*	.36**	.60**					
10. Resolution	2.04 (.40)	.42**	-.25*	.55**	.28**	.20+	.20+	.23*	.24*	.29**				
		Adjustment												
11. SWLS	4.23 (1.5)	.23*	-.03	.21*	.21*	.28**	.15	.16	.04	.17	.35**			
12. RCSE	3.60 (.85)	-.18+	.01	-.11	.03	.04	.06	.01	.01	-.05	-.07	-.20+		
13. Anxiety	3.05 (1.35)	-.22*	.03	-.25*	-.09	-.05	.09	-.05	.04	-.15	-.30**	-.29**	.29**	
14. Avoidance	2.79 (1.16)	-.18+	.06	-.30**	-.05	-.05	.06	-.02	.01	-.12	-.34**	-.37**	-.18	.48**

Note. SWLS = Satisfaction with life, RCSE = Relationship contingent self-esteem. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, + $p < .10$

Table 4.2

Model parameters predicting well-being from thematic content (Study 4)

Variable	*b*	*SE*	β	[95% CI]	*t*-value	*p*-value
SWLC	.33					
Redemption	.51	.73	.08	-.95, 1.97	.69	.49
Contamination	1.24	.95	.15	-.64, 3.13	1.31	.19
Tone	.12	.35	.05	-.57, .82	.35	.73
Coherence	.42	.47	.10	-.51, 1.35	.89	.37
Exploration	.08	.55	.02	-1.01, 1.18	.15	.87
Resolution	1.10	.49	.29	.14, 2.07	2.27	.02
RCSE	3.85					
Redemption	-.58	.41	-.19	-1.40, .23	-1.42	.16
Contamination	-.26	.53	-.06	-1.31, .80	-.48	.63
Tone	-.06	.20	-.05	-.45, .33	-.31	.75
Coherence	.20	.26	.10	-.32, .73	.76	.45
Exploration	-.02	.31	-.01	-.64, .59	-.08	.93
Resolution	-.008	-.27	-.004	-.55, .54	-.03	.97
Anxious attachment	6.16					
Redemption	-.34	.65	-.07	-1.65, .96	-.53	.60
Contamination	-.81	.85	-.11	-2.50, .87	-.97	.34
Tone	-.30	.31	-.14	-.93, .32	-.96	.34
Coherence	.06	.42	.02	-.77, .90	.45	.89
Exploration	-.21	.49	-.05	-1.19, .77	-.43	.66
Resolution	-.71	.43	-.21	-1.58, .15	-1.64	.10
Avoidant attachment	5.57					
Redemption	-.01	.55	-.002	-1.11, 1.08	-.02	.98
Contamination	-.59	.71	-.10	-2.01, .82	-.84	.40
Tone	-.35	.26	-.19	-.87, .18	-1.31	.19
Coherence	.37	.35	.13	-.32, 1.08	1.07	.29
Exploration	-.20	.41	-.06	-1.02, .62	-.49	.62
Resolution	-.81	.37	-.28	-1.54, -.08	-2.22	.03

Note. SWLS = Satisfaction with life, RCSE = Relationship contingent self-esteem

Taken together, the zero order correlations suggest that there is something particularly adaptive about constructing romantic narratives in a redemptive, affectively positive, and emotionally resolved manner. These findings align with the existing body of research demonstrating the adaptive nature of storying one's life, and romantic life in particular, with these features (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2017; Frost, 2013; Harake & Dunlop, 2020; McLean et al., 2020).

Moreover, the results of the regression analyses suggest that resolution may be particularly associated with life satisfaction and avoidant attachment. Resolution is an indication of emotional closure, which is conveyed by narratives that contain a positive ending, coherent story structure, and a sense of emotional distance or renewed affect (Pals, 2006a). In many ways, resolution signifies a well-defined and optimistic end to a challenging story plot. Considering that forming resolved stories suggests that narrators have moved beyond difficult experiences and restored the positive in their lives, it's perhaps unsurprising that the ability to construct resolved stories has been associated with several indicators of well-being (King et al., 2000; Pals, 2006a,b). The findings of Study 4 suggest that the relations between resolution and well-being emerge within the romantic domain as well, such that those who narrated emotionally resolved narratives of their romantic lives exhibited greater life satisfaction and less avoidant attachment tendencies.

Despite the small sample size, the findings of the current study suggests that individuals who are able to make sense of their romantic experiences exhibit heightened psychological functioning. It is equally possible that those with higher levels of psychological adjustment tend to form more redemptive, positive, and resolved stories. In

the current study, I was unable to determine the direction of the observed effects, however future researchers could thoroughly examine the direction of effects among narrative themes and indicators of adjustment (Adler, 2012; Adler & Hershfield, 2012). I now turn to a broader discussion of these and related topics.

Narrative Identity in Context: Next Steps

In this dissertation, I applied a contextualized approach to the study of narrative identity. Across four studies, I explored an interpersonal context (e.g., vicarious narratives of others; Study 1), stories from the romantic domain (e.g., Studies 2 and 4), and stories about romantic breakups (e.g., Study 3). Together, my findings highlight that the ways in which participants' self-definitional narratives varied based on the interpersonal contexts and relational domains considered. Further, both positive and negative correlates of psychological adjustment were identified.

In Study 1, I found evidence consistent with the notion that an understanding of the significant events in another's life may facilitate interpersonal closeness. For example, the manifest events within informants' vicarious scenes corresponded with participants' personal life stories 25% of the time, and this degree of agreement positively correlated with greater relationship closeness. Additionally, individuals' personal life stories and the vicarious stories their close others attributed to them were narrated with a convergent degree of affective tone (however, this was not the case for redemption or contamination). In Study 2, I found that avoidantly attached individuals generated less coherent narratives about their romantic lives (although this relation differed among my three subsamples). In Study 3, I found that individuals with avoidant attachment narrated

self-initiated breakups in a less resolved manner than securely attached participants. Finally, the results of Study 4 demonstrated that individuals who described their romantic lives with themes of redemption, positive tone, and emotional resolution exhibited more adaptive psychological adjustment. Resolution, in particular, uniquely corresponded with life satisfaction and avoidant attachment. Lastly, narrating emotionally resolved self-defining romantic narratives was uniquely associated with higher life satisfaction and less avoidant attachment tendencies.

Implications

Given the call for a greater consideration of contextualized narrative identity (Dunlop, 2015, 2017; Galliher et al., 2017), the focus on interpersonal contexts and relational domains in the current studies contributes to the extant literature in several ways. The studies included in this dissertation built upon existing research on contextualized narrative identity (e.g., Dunlop & Hanley, 2019), while also expanding upon the extant research by focusing on three interpersonal contexts and relational domains. Interpersonal contexts and relational domains are likely central to narrative identity development (e.g., McLean et al., 2007, 2016). That is, identities develop by sharing stories with others in such contexts (Bruner, 1990; McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). The studies included in this dissertation explored contextualized narrative identity with varying levels of context specificity. This pursuit provided insight regarding how individuals make sense of themselves in different interpersonal contexts and relational domains.

In Studies 1-3, I applied different coding paradigms to quantify participants' narratives. The ability to adopt and apply distinct coding systems on the basis of the research questions and data on hand is a strength of the narrative identity approach. Participants' self-defining romantic experiences were quantified in terms of themes of narrative coherence (Study 2), whereas narratives of participants' romantic breakups were quantified in terms of dimensions of exploratory processing and coherent positive resolution (Study 3). Further, in Study 3, the degree of transformational processing in participants' breakup narratives varied on the basis of one's role in the breakup. As such, this suggests that the coding paradigms applied were appropriately sensitive to the nature of data from each study.

Future Directions

In future, researchers should replicate these findings by examining how features of narrative identity vary across multiple contexts within-participants (see, Dunlop & Hanley, 2019). This approach would allow researchers to examine variations in narrative identity, across contexts, systematically. For example, future research could consider similarities and differences in narrative identity features across contexts, domains, and events, as well as the degree of intra-individual variability among individuals' narratives across contexts (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2013; McLean et al., 2017).

Building upon the current studies by exploring additional interpersonal and relational contexts, domains, and events would further contribute to the literature on contextualized narrative identity. For example, examining other interpersonal domains (i.e., familial, friendship, professional domains) or events (i.e., first love, infidelity)

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would offer indication as to whether people narrate their lives in distinct or consistent ways across contexts. Moreover, applying a contextualized approach to the study of how individuals narrate their lives across contexts would allow for an understanding of whether relations between the thematic content of participants' contextualized stories and indicators of adjustment vary based on the event considered (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2013; McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2016). For example, it is possible that the way in which participants' story their personal experiences (e.g., thematic content) within specific domains (romantic domain vs. familial domain) varies based on the manifest content therein.

In Study 1, I explored self-other agreement between features of participants' personal stories and informants' vicarious stories of participants' lives. Although researchers have begun to examine vicarious life stories, there are several avenues to expand upon in future research. Building upon the findings of Study 1, which indicated significant self-other agreement of manifest themes, researchers should examine *which* manifest events demonstrate higher levels of self-other agreement among targets and informants. This research would inform whether the degree of self-other agreement varies based on the life domain from which the event is drawn. Given the importance of the interpersonal context for sharing stories and bonding with close others, informants may be more aware of manifest events that pertain to a relational domain, rather than a professional domain, for example. Expanding research on similarities and differences among personal and vicarious life stories will underscore the importance of the interpersonal context for narrative identity.

Furthermore, future researchers should extend the growing area of research examining the stability and change of narrative identity (e.g., Adler, 2019; McAdams et al., 2006; Thorne et al., 1998) by investigating contextualized narrative identity over time. For example, how do narratives of individuals' breakup experiences or romantic low point moments develop over time? Extending this research to contextualized narrative identity is an especially interesting avenue for future research, given that contextualized stories may demonstrate different degree of stability or change, relative to generalized narrative identity (Dunlop, 2017).

Finally, while the current studies examined indicators of psychological and romantic adjustment, future research would benefit from a greater consideration of the factors that may correspond with functioning within the romantic domain. One important avenue to explore in future research is cultural or ethnic differences that may moderate relations between narrative identity and psychological functioning (e.g., Pasupathi et al., 2012; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Participants' current relationship status, relationship history, or sexual orientation, for example, might also have an effect on relations between contextualized narrative identity and psychological adjustment (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Research on contextualized narrative identity is growing day by day. In this dissertation, I brought together a collection of studies to examine contextualized narrative identity within three interpersonal contexts and relational domains—a social setting, the romantic domain broadly, and a particular event from within the romantic domain. Building upon and expanding the research on contextualized narrative identity to a

consideration of interpersonal and relational contexts and domains informs how people understand who they are and what their lives mean to them, in the contexts in which individuals' identities unfold. Considering the four studies together, this dissertation supports the notion that features of contextualized narrative identity carry distinct associations with psychological adjustment.

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