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Personal Stories of Empathy in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

by

Kendall M. Soucie

Honours Bachelor of Arts, University of Windsor, 2005

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Arts

Wilfrid Laurier University

2008

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Abstract

Empathy, the ability to understand and experience the emotions of others, has yet to be investigated from a narrative or life story perspective. The purpose of the present study was, therefore, to examine the ways in which emerging adults and adolescents, through their self-defining stories, process and come to extract meaning from their personal empathic and non-empathic experiences. Twenty-nine adolescents (14-17, $M = 15.28$, $SD = .99$), and 31 emerging adults (18-20, $M = 18.23$, $SD = .56$) narrated stories about their empathic (times when they felt sad for someone, times when they put themselves in someone else's shoes) and non-empathic experiences (times when they didn't experience those events) and completed measures of dispositional empathy (*IRI*, Davis, 1994) and perceptions of family parenting (Barber et al., 2005). Participants' narratives were coded for level of meaning-making (the extent to which either simplistic or complex experiences had important implications for one's sense of self), empathic identity (the extent to which participants viewed their stories as demonstrating empathy), prosocial engagement with others, other-oriented feeling depictions, type of perspective-taking process, and narrative quality (represented as detailed, highly specific, serious experiences occurring in the distant rather than recent past). Participants' positive empathic experiences, compared with their negative experiences, were found to produce more sophisticated insights into the self, a stronger sense of self as empathic, greater prosocial engagement, and a higher level of narrative quality (for vivid/specificity and event severity). Age differences were also present in that emerging adults, compared with adolescents, were found to extract more meaning from their experiences, incorporate a stronger sense of self as an empathic person from their narratives and display greater prosocial engagement. Dispositional

empathy was found to predict a stronger sense of self as an empathic person and greater prosocial engagement. Perceptions of family authoritative parenting, particularly adolescents' perceptions of their fathers as authoritative, were found to predict dispositional empathy on the questionnaire, consistent with past research. However, stronger perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting were found to relate to more sophisticated meaning, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, and greater prosocial engagement. These results suggest that type of empathic experience, personality dispositions, perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting and age all play an important role in understanding stories of one's empathic experiences. This study further provides support for a narrative framework as a useful tool in examining the unique, personal empathic experiences of individuals.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to extend my immense and sincere gratitude to Dr. Michael Pratt, my Masters Thesis Supervisor, for his endless patience, guidance, and support over these past two years. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to work with such a highly respected figure in the psychology field.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Eileen Wood and Dr. Tobias Krettenauer for their insightful feedback, encouragement, and dedication to my MA research. Their contributions to this project are greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank my colleague, lab mate, and great friend, Heather Lawford, who remained dedicated and supportive throughout the entire process. Her contributions have been invaluable!

To Dr. Joan Norris, Tara Dumas, Amanda Nosko, Elizabeth Flynn-Dastoor, and Thanh-Thanh Tieu, for their support and guidance.

To my interviewers, Elise Bission, Sam Al-Dabbagh, and Jessica Rathwell, I offer sincere thanks for their patience and dedication while conducting numerous interviews.

To Susan Alisat, I thank her for her hard work in quickly transcribing numerous interviews which, at times, can be an extremely cumbersome process.

Finally, I am grateful for the lasting friendships I have been fortunate enough to form throughout my time in the Social and Developmental Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. Thank you to Meagan Mackenzie, Glen Gorman, Carolyn and Brian Hoessler, Enoch Landau, and Krystal Kellington. They have made this experience truly unforgettable. I will cherish the friendships formed and the memories created for many years to come.

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Personal Stories of Empathy in Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood

Overview

Empathy, the ability to understand and experience the emotions of others, is a complex and multidimensional construct. It has typically been investigated through a variety of quantitative assessments involving either questionnaires regarding dispositional traits or responses to hypothetical scenarios, without regard to the unique and personal empathic experiences that individuals have. With the current emergence of narratives as a powerful tool in understanding the self and identity (McAdams, 2001), the purpose of the present study was to examine the ways in which emerging adults and adolescents, through their self-defining stories, process and come to extract meaning from their personal empathic and non-empathic experiences.

The following literature review presents a brief historic perspective on empathy, tracing its historical roots forward to current conceptualizations and definitions. It then explores three theoretical perspectives on the development of empathy, as well as the way in which empathy has been previously assessed, in an attempt to introduce a new, innovative way to understand the empathic process through the use of a narrative framework. Several aspects of the narrative process are described, including self-defining memories and their relation to meaning-making, sense of identity, narrative quality, and thematic content. Adolescents' perceptions of their parents' socialization practices, as well as their self-reports of dispositional empathy were also defined as factors in the empathic process.

Empathy

Empathy was first introduced by Lipps (1897, cited in Goldstein & Michaels) in the early nineteenth century as *Einfühlung*, which meant “feeling oneself into [another]” (Goldstein & Michaels, 1987, p. 4). In its original usage, *Einfühlung* was as “a projection of the self into [an] object of beauty” (Wispé, 1987, p. 18). When examining an object (e.g., art, nature, etc.), Lipps demonstrated that an individual projected him or herself onto that object. This notion was later elaborated upon to include people as targets, such that identification between a person and a target resulted in inner imitation, an ability to consciously or unconsciously assume that target’s physical stances, gestures, or expressions (Wispé, 1987). Later, Titchener (1910, cited in Davis, 1994) translated *Einfühlung* by means of the Greek word *empathia* which implied “an active appreciation of another person’s feeling experience” (Astin, 1976, p. 57) and coined the term “empathy”.

As time progressed, empathy moved away from aesthetics to encompass a variety of sub-disciplines in psychology. As a result, empathy was defined on the basis of either developmental, social, personality or counseling psychology. For instance, empathy has been described as a therapeutic “process that involves entering the private and perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it” (Rogers, 1975, p. 4). It has also been conceptualized as “an affective response more appropriate to another’s situation than one’s own” (Hoffman, 2000, p. 4). Other definitions of empathy have included “an affective state stemming from apprehension of another’s emotional state or condition and which is congruent with it” (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987, p. 92), “vicarious introspection” (Katz, 1963, p. 93), role-taking or perspective taking (Kerr & Speroff,

1954, cited in Goldstein & Michaels, 1985), and the projection of oneself onto the thoughts and feelings of others (Coutu, 1951).

While empathy has been conceptualized in a variety of different ways, there has been remarkable consistency in how empathy is presently defined (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987). Today, it is most comprehensively defined by Eisenberg, Spinrad and Sadovsky (2006) as an “affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another’s emotional state or condition and is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel in the given situation” (p. 518). In this regard, empathy is the outcome of being directly exposed to another’s emotions, identifying, understanding and processing them, and experiencing a similar affective reaction.

Since identifying with another’s emotional experience or situation is a necessary component of the empathic process, it is important for individuals to view themselves as distinctly different from either the distressed person or the emotion-eliciting situation (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Feshbach, 1997; Hoffman, 2000; Wispe, 1987). Otherwise, the self-other boundaries become blurred and an observer becomes fixated on his or her own emotional reaction when exposed to another’s distress (Saarni, 1999). Such reactions fall under the umbrella of personal distress, an egoistic, self-focused reaction to the distress and discomfort of others (Batson, 1991; Davis, 1983). This stems from empathetic overarousal, which involves high levels of vicariously induced aversive emotion as well as insufficient emotion regulation (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). Individuals who respond to others’ distress with anxiety, discomfort, and apprehension are believed to be concerned with reducing their own emotional arousal. As a result, these individuals experience high levels of skin conductance, heart rate, facial distress, and fear

(Eisenberg et al., 1991). Moreover, they are less likely to attend to a victim than those who experience sympathy or concern (Batson, 1991; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). This leads many researchers to assume that personal distress is conceptually different from empathy since the latter does not involve an egoistic focus (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2006; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987).

Other reactions involve sympathy, which often has been confused with empathy and personal distress in popular culture as well as within psychological literature (Feshbach, 1997). This has led researchers such as Wispe (1987) and Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo and Knight (1991) to clarify the differences inherent within these two related constructs. Empathy includes vicariously matching emotions and experiencing a range of other-oriented emotions and cognitions in response to the observed experiences of others. In contrast, sympathy refers to a response that is associated with an increased sensitivity to the emotional experience of others. This sensitivity encompasses feelings of sorrow, pity, or concern for another person as a result of his or her distressing situation. Thus, sympathy is generally the result of empathetic sadness and is assumed to be a more affective response to the observed emotions of others, rather than an experience of direct emotion matching or mimicry (i.e., experiencing the same emotion). As such, sympathy is predominately concerned with feeling *for* a person whereas empathy is commonly understood as feeling *with* that person (Saarni, 1999). It is not surprising that sympathy has been related to emotion regulation (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1995), altruism (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990) and social competence (Eisenberg et al., 1996).

Theoretical Models of Empathic Development

Debates have surfaced concerning whether empathy is considered to be an entirely cognitive process, referring to the intellectual understanding of another's experiences (Gladstein, 1983), or an entirely affective phenomenon involving a visceral emotional reaction to the experiences of others (Hogan, 1969). Although these two independent components have become useful in understanding empathy, developmental researchers have shifted their conceptualizations of empathy from a unidimensional approach to one that is multidimensional, embracing both cognitive and emotional aspects of empathy (Davis, 1983; Hoffman, 1987, 2000).

Hoffman (1987, 1990, 2000) has proposed a multidimensional model of empathetic development in which empathetic affect or distress serves as a motivational basis for both moral development and just behavior. His model is based on an individual's propensity to respond emotionally to the misfortune of others while gaining the cognitive abilities necessary to fully comprehend another's situation as distinctly different from his or her own. According to Hoffman, empathic affect is mediated by social-cognitive development according to a progressive developmental sequence which yields four levels of empathetic distress.

Global empathy, the most rudimentary form of empathetic distress, occurs when distress cues originate from another person, but result in a global empathetic distress response toward one's self. For example, upon viewing a child fall and cry, an infant or toddler may look as though he or she may also start to cry and then provide comfort toward himself or herself rather than the distressed child. "*Egocentric*" empathy occurs when children become aware that others are physically distinct from themselves. When

creating separate mental representations of both one's self and another, a child becomes aware that, although he or she experiences emotional distress when viewing another's misfortune, such distress becomes associated with the other person, rather than the self. Attempts to provide comfort or assistance are made, but confusion regarding one's own and another's internal state continues to occur. *Empathy for another's feelings* is demonstrated with the advent of role-taking abilities. Children become increasingly aware that other people's feelings, needs, and interpretations of events can be quite different from their own. As a result, children become more responsive to the cues emitted from those around them.

With further cognitive advancements (e.g., sophisticated language acquisition, advanced mental operations), children become capable of empathizing with a wide range of complex emotional experiences. This leads to the final level of empathetic development, *empathy for another's life condition*. With the understanding that others embody separate histories and identities, children become aware that others feel a variety of emotions, not only due to one's immediate situation but also as a result of one's ongoing level of distress or deprivation, based on life circumstances (e.g., poverty). When children are able to view things as qualitatively different from before, their knowledge base expands and they become able to form mental representations of an entire group (e.g., the poor, oppressed, outcast) and experience empathetic distress towards that group. This advanced form of empathetic development contributes to what Hoffman (1987, 1990) refers to as distributive justice, a moral motive necessary for the development of particular political ideologies which are based on helping or ameliorating the suffering of disadvantaged others.

As an extension of Piaget (1952) and Kohlberg's (1968) original notions of cognitive structural development, Selman (1971, 1975, 1980) developed a theoretical model of perspective taking in which social role taking, the ability to view the world from another's perspective, was viewed as a hierarchical process, with qualitative, structural differences emerging with both physical and experiential maturation. Each qualitative change was assigned a developmental level determined by open-ended response categories to moral dilemmas. *Level 0, Egocentric social perspective taking* (ages 3-6), was denoted by the inability to differentiate between different perspectives of the same event. Although a child can understand that both the self and others exist as separate entities, he or she is unable to differentiate both points of view. A child incorrectly assumes that, in similar situations, his or her feelings and perspectives will not differ from those of another person. *Level 1, Subjective role taking* (ages 5-9), occurs when a child views him or herself and others as actors with different interpretations of the same event. This social perspective taking involves new insights into the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of others as distinct from the self. However, he or she is unable to understand reciprocity between perspectives, i.e., to consider that his or her view of others is the result of others' viewpoints of the child. *Level 2, Self-reflective perspective taking* (ages 7-12), occurs when a child becomes aware that the perceptions of both the self and others are reciprocal, rather than independent, and are susceptible to the scrutiny and evaluation of others. However, he or she is unable to view a two-person situation from a third-person perspective. *Level 3, Third person, mutual perspective taking* (ages 10-12), occurs when a child acquires the ability to remove him or herself from the dyadic interaction so as to understand the perspectives of others from a third-person perspective.

He or she is aware of subjectivity in terms of others' thoughts, feelings, and motivations as separate from him or herself. *Level 4, In-depth and societal-symbolic perspective taking* (ages 12 to adult) is present when actions, thoughts, motives and feelings are understood to be psychologically determined by each person's own developmental history. In a dyad, subjective perceptions can be shared at multiple levels through either overt communications or of deeper, non-verbal communications. An adolescent can engage in perspective taking in abstract or generalized terms, such as engaging in multiple, mutual perspectives of social, conventional, legal or moral perspectives, all of which can be shared among different people.

Selman (1975) noted that the levels of perspective taking are not directly the result of the accuracy of person perception (i.e., correct insight into others' thoughts, feelings, and motivations). Rather, this process helps to facilitate children's empathic development as a skill necessary to gain insight into the feelings or thoughts of others, and to better understand human beings. Both the levels of perspective taking and the reasoning associated with cognitive development, assessed primarily through responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas, have been found to steadily increase with age (Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005; Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley & Shea, 1991; Selman, 1971, 1980; Selman & Bryne, 1974).

The Empathic Process

Following from the work of Hoffman (1987) and Selman (1975), Davis (1994) developed a model (see Figure 1) of the empathic process. This particular model demonstrates a typical empathetic episode during which an observer is exposed to a distressed individual. Within this model, several constructs are identified as contributing

to the ways in which observers experience empathy for a target. The first construct concerns *antecedents*, or observer characteristics, such as an inherent capacity for empathy as well as parental socialization of empathy-related values and behaviors.

The second aspect of Davis' model concerns *processes*, the particular mechanisms by which empathetic outcomes occur. These processes are non-cognitive, such as primary circular reactions and motor mimicry. The emotional reactions which result from basic, non-cognitive responses have been well-documented in the literature, with mimicry of others' facial expressions increasing the likelihood that observers will experience similar emotions to those of the target (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Deignan, Fontella, Hong, Levy & Pacheco, 1994; Gallese, 2003; Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson, 1994; Strayer, 1993).

Simple cognitive processes (i.e., classical conditioning, direct association, labeling), and advanced cognitive processes (i.e., elaborated cognitive networks, language-mediated association) are also involved in the empathic experience. These advanced forms of cognitive processes have been found to produce perspective taking in two different ways: a) imagining the self in the other's position and b) imagining the other without direct reference to the self (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996; Stotland, 1969).

The first process occurs when an observer imagines how he or she would feel if he or she were in the target's place. In this particular process, an observer activates self-related knowledge structures in an attempt to imagine how he or she would feel in either the same situation or in a similar situation (Davis, 1994; Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991). By priming such self-related knowledge, self-relevant traits become

readily accessible and can therefore be fully applied to the target (Davis et al., 2004). Consequently, characteristics which were originally attributed to the self become associated with the other and characteristics ascribed to the other become applied to the self when some level of familiarity with the target has been established (Davis et al., 1996).

Through imagined reflection of situational cues (such as failing a test or losing a race), the observer attempts to recall personal experiences during which he or she experienced the same type of situation in order to draw inferences about the target's thoughts and feelings. By activating personally relevant information, both the observer's and target's experiences become merged and "self-like" (Davis et al., 1996, p. 714). This self-other merging has been found to occur more readily in people with whom close relationships are shared (e.g., spouses, family, and friends; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991).

The second route by which perspective taking occurs is through imagination; that is, imagining how another person perceives a particular situation and would feel as a result of the situation, without regard to the self (Stotland, 1969). This particular route has been found to produce less self-related thoughts and more target-related thoughts (Davis et al., 2004). Likewise, in comparison to imagining the self in a situation of need, Batson, Early, and Salvarni (1997) found that, when imagining another person in such a situation, other-oriented empathy, rather than personal distress, ensued. Although both provide a motivational basis for imagining how another person would feel in a need-based situation, the latter perspective produces decreases in egoistic distress and increases in other-oriented empathy.

The final components in Davis's (1994) model are *intrapersonal outcomes* which are the affective (i.e., parallel and reactive outcomes) and non-affective responses (i.e., attributions, interpersonal accuracy) occurring within the observer. *Interpersonal outcomes*, on the other hand, are behavioral responses directed toward the target which result from previous exposure to that target. Such responses fall under the categories of altruism and prosocial behaviors.

Previous literature has confirmed an association between prosocial behaviors, or voluntary behaviors that benefit others, including sharing, caring, comforting others, instrumental helping, volunteer, or cooperative behaviors, and empathy in adolescence (Carlo, 2006; Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff & Laible, 1999). Similarly, prosocial reasoning has been linked with both perspective taking and empathic concern (Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Selman, 1975, 1980), which have been found to increase with age (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998).

Consistent with the developmental frameworks of both Hoffman (1990, 2000) and Selman (1975, 1980), prosocial moral reasoning and prosocial behaviors become more abstract over time (i.e., less hedonistic and more self-reflective, reciprocal, abstract and internalized) and such abstraction leads to a linear trend in prosocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 1991; Eisenberg et al., 2005). Eisenberg and colleagues (1991) parallel this process with that of justice-oriented reasoning, in that in late elementary school and thereafter, many children verbalize prosocial reasoning in terms of abstract principles, internalized affective reactions (e.g., guilt as a result of behaving in ways which conflict with internalized values), and self-reflective sympathy or perspective taking. In later adolescence, stereotypical reasoning declines (e.g., stereotyped images of good or bad),

and adolescents tend to engage in reasoning about role taking, internalized norm/rule/values, internalized affective reactions based on concern for others, and positive affect as a result of living up to their internalized values. Moreover, it has been postulated that both individual (e.g., pubertal changes, the advent of perspective taking, moral reasoning, empathy, problem-solving skills, interpersonal communications skills, Berg, 1989; Fabes et al., 1999) and contextual factors (e.g., family influences, peer relationships, culture, Carlo, Fabes, Laible, Kupanoff, 1999) contribute to this process of growth and development.

Measurement of Empathy

Although the definition of empathy has remained consistent over time, there are slight nuances associated with how empathy has been operationalized (Zhou, Valiente, & Eisenberg, 2003). Since empathy can be viewed as a mix of behaviors, emotions, and cognitions, a variety of measures has been developed in order to fully capture its meaning.

Picture story measures have been developed primarily for child populations (e.g., the Feshbach and Roe Affective Situations Test for Empathy or FASTE [1968]). Participants are told brief stories while being shown photographs or drawings depicting hypothetical characters engaging in emotionally-evocative situations. Empathy is operationalized as the degree of correspondence between a participant's emotions and a protagonist's emotions in a story. Although these methods were an important early instrument for the study of emotional empathy, they have been shown to be influenced by demand characteristics as well as gender of the experimenter (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990; Zhou et al., 2003). Similarly, experiments have been designed in order to investigate the emotional experience of empathy influenced by hypothetical emotion-evoking audiotapes,

videotapes, or realistic enactments designed in order to make participants believe the events are real (e.g., Strayer, 1993). After exposure to a distressing stimulus, participants report the extent to which their moods have changed to reflect empathy-based adjectives (i.e., concerned, sympathetic, compassionate; Batson, 1991).

Other trait measures have also been developed in order to conceptualize empathy as a personality construct (e.g., *Interpersonal Reactivity Index*; IRI; Davis, 1983). Since these measures provide information concerning stable and consistent estimates of empathic responding over a broad range of situations, they are regarded as highly valid assessments of empathy as a disposition (Zhou et al., 2003). These measures have been found to relate positively to both adults' and children's prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990) and negatively to aggression (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1995). Unfortunately, trait measures are highly susceptible to social desirability, in that both children and adolescents prefer to view themselves in ways which are consistent with societal expectations (Eisenberg et al., 1991). In order to reduce such biases, parents and teachers have provided information concerning a participant's empathetic responses through various other-reported measures (Zhou et al., 2003). These measures use items similar to self-report measures, while providing researchers with additional information from multiple perspectives.

Researchers are beginning to understand facial, gestural, and vocal reactions to empathy in experimental contexts. Eisenberg and Fabes (1990) and Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow, Wagner, and Chapman (1992) have differentiated among naturally occurring facial expressions which reflect sympathy, empathy, and personal distress. For example, facial expressions of concern are indicated by the eyebrows pulling downward and

inward over the nose with the head moving forward to display intense interest in the films being shown. Although these measures are strong for younger children who have not captured the meaning behind display rules and self presentational biases, they become more limited as children age. Strayer (1983, cited in Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990) found that negative facial expressions of personal distress and sympathy become masked as children age into the elementary school years. Moreover, differences in empathy-related responding may reflect the extent to which participants are generally emotionally expressive in their tone, facial expressions, and vocal reactions. For example, emotionally expressive children have been found to be more empathetic than less expressive children, suggesting that an individual's overall level of expression should be considered when assessing empathetic displays (Zhou et al., 2003).

With an increased focus on the biology of empathy, interest in the physiology (i.e., heart rate, skin conductance) of empathy-related responding has recently emerged (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, & McShane, 2006). Researchers have validated these measures by examining their occurrence in response to different types of emotionally-based stimuli (e.g., distress films), as well as their association with prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg, et al., 1991). Since individuals are unlikely to consciously control their physiological reactions, these types of measures are less likely to be subject to social desirability (Zhou et al., 2003). However, because of their influence by other factors such as attention, cognition, and random external stimuli, they have proven difficult to interpret (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). Moreover, it has been difficult for researchers to tease apart specific physiological markers of empathetic concern and personal distress, since both can occur concurrently.

Since most measures of empathetic responding are either based on dispositional or experimentally-induced procedures, they fail to capture the idiosyncrasies associated with an individual's life experiences. Zhou et al. (2003) have suggested that empathy-related responding during real-life experiences may differ from the way in which empathy is experienced during experimental settings. In order to capture empathy during daily life events, these researchers have suggested that participants record diary entries. These entries are expected to be useful in learning more about how individuals process and respond to real-life empathy events. Other self-descriptive methods, which assess personal life experiences and the meaning associated with such experiences, may be better understood in terms of personal narratives.

Identity Formation and the Life Story

Erikson (1968) defined identity as an integrated set of values, beliefs, and perspectives about relationships, vocations, political orientations and religious ideologies emerging during late adolescence and early adulthood. With advances in both cognitive development and physical maturation, adolescents are able to reason in terms of formal operations, which allows for increased self-reflection, perspective taking, and insightful interpretations and transformations of the self. It is during this time that adolescents are most vulnerable and therefore open to the multitude of possible identities and roles offered by the society in which they live. This vulnerability, coupled with an increased ability to engage in self-reflection, is crucial to the process of identity exploration and development. While temporal notions about the self exist and are important in the process of securing a personal identity, each adolescent considers the past, present, and future in

settling upon his or her own personal identity, as a way of integrating the self over time and across situations.

Since a crucial component in the development of a secure, personal identity involves self-reflection and integration of several life experiences, a narrative approach to identity development has become a respected tool in understanding the self (McAdams, 1996, 2001). Given that humans have been found to utilize a narrative mode of thought (Bruner, 1990), the knowledge they acquire about themselves becomes understood in the context of a cultural narrative, a story set in a particular time and place. Much like Erikson's (1968) notion of identity, the life story emerges during late adolescence and early adulthood (Habernas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1996, 2001). According to McAdams (2001), the life story is a person's sense of identity, as expressed in those living in modern cultures.

Proponents of narrative research contend that every person has his or her own story, an autobiographical narrative through which events and experiences are integrated in order to form a coherent and meaningful life story (McAdams, 1996, 2001). According to McAdams (2001), "people living in modern societies begin putting their lives together into integrated narratives of the self, reconstructing the past, and imaginatively anticipating the future in such a way as to provide their lives with some sense of unity and purpose" (p. 117). One's identity is formed through extensive reflection and understanding of one's own unique and evolving story.

These stories are organized synchronically through the integration of different, conflicting roles or relationships and diachronically through the integration of different time periods (McAdams, 2001). Each person's story is set in a particular time and place

and is complete with its own influential characters, settings, themes and plots.

Furthermore, each story contains rich descriptions of imagery, nuclear episodes (e.g., high points, low points, turning points), central characters who are multifarious in nature and represent various aspects of the self and others and sophisticated endings or resolutions (McAdams, 1996, 2001).

Memories that an individual elects to share and reflect upon contain core characteristics which are described by Pillemer (1998) and Blagov and Singer (2004) as *personal event memories* or *self-defining memories*. These memories prototypically represent specific events which took place at particular times, evoke strong emotions at the time of recollection, are representative of other memories which share the plot line, emotions, and themes, evoke vivid sensory images (visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile) which contribute to feeling as though one is reliving the event (similar to a snapshot or video clip), and are believed to reflect actual events.

Given that self-defining memories are most salient in one's overall memory system since individuals elect to share such memories, they generally revolve around important concerns and conflicts which contain high levels of meaning or insight into the self (e.g., successes, failures, moments of insight and disillusionment; Blagov & Singer, 2004). Meaning-making refers to what one learns or understands from such particular life experiences (McLean & Thorne, 2003). Meaningful interpretations can range from learning *lessons*, which refer to learning a specific lesson from an event which tends to direct future behavior in similar situations, to *gaining insight*, which refers to acquiring meaning from an event that is applicable to a wide range of situations. Although lesson learning is important, insights allow for a more coherent and meaningful understanding

of the self which becomes reflected upon and transformed over time, and so can be seen as more of an advanced form of learning (McLean & Thorne, 2003).

Previous research has suggested that both lesson learning and meaning-making increase with age. Pratt, Norris, Arnold and Filyer (1999) assessed lesson learning in a cross-sectional sample of late adolescents, middle aged adults, and older adults. As predicted, Pratt and colleagues found not only that lesson learning increased with age (particularly in middle and late adulthood), but that older individuals may be more likely to reflect upon past experiences and derive meaning and insight from such experiences as compared to young and middle aged adults. Similarly, Thorne, McLean and Lawrence (2004) suggested that there are qualitative differences in the breadth of self-reflection displayed by adolescents and adults. They argued that adolescents' lessons reflect specific situations or behaviors, while adults' lessons appear to be more self-reflective in nature.

Furthermore, narratives which concern relationships appear to be associated with more meaning-making than other types of narratives (e.g., achievement, leisure, autonomy). In a study examining adolescents' self-defining memories for traces of meaning-making, McLean and Thorne (2003) found that both lesson learning and gaining insight occurred in relation to interpersonal conflict (e.g., separation). Conflict and conflict resolution were thought to compel an individual to reflect upon the meaning behind a particular situation in an attempt to discover new and meaningful insights about the self. Similarly, Thorne, McLean, and Lawrence (2004) found, in a large sample of college students, that insightful meaning was the most prevalent form of meaning for both relationship and mortality narratives. These types of narratives were further

associated with tension (particularly within relationship narratives) which implied that stressful life events may promote higher levels of insightful reflection.

Parental Socialization as a Predictor of Adolescent Empathy

Although empathy during childhood has been widely documented (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987), only a few researchers have explored the ways in which parents or family systems influence the development of empathy during adolescence (Goldstein & Michaels, 1985; Henry, Sager, & Plunkett, 1996; Koestner, Franz, & Weinberger, 1990; Soenens, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, & Goossens, 2007). Moreover, most studies examine the socialization practices of mothers, without regard to the influence of fathers' parenting on adolescents' empathic development. With fathers' influence unexplored in the domain of empathy and sympathy (Laible & Carlo, 2004), the present study attempts to assess adolescents' perceptions of both parents' socialization practices as unique and important to their experiences of empathy. Since there are significant transitions and challenges associated with this developmental period, it is worthwhile to examine how youth understand and attribute meaning to such a key construct.

Researchers have explored specific aspects of parenting associated with empathy-related responding. More specifically, parental support, behavioral control, and psychological control (reverse coded and presented as psychological autonomy) have been consistently associated with a variety of positive aspects of development, such as adolescent well-being and adjustment (Bean, Barber, & Crane, 2006). Researchers have generally aggregated these three dimensions in order to create an optimal level of

parenting, namely, “authoritative parenting” which is reflective of these components as discussed below (Soenens et al., 2007).

Parental Support

Parental support is a parenting dimension characterized by the transmission of positive affect through praise, encouragement, warmth, and physical affection (Henry et al., 1996). Supportive parents are described as warm, sensitive and involved in their children’s lives. They are highly responsive to their child’s emotional experiences and provide affection in times of distress or discomfort (Soenens et al., 2007). For example, when their child experiences distress, supportive parents tend to model sympathy, and demonstrate that they are willing to take their child’s perspective in order to help reduce his or her distress. In doing so, they model concern for others to their children. This concern, embedded within the socialization processes of encouragement and affection, can allow for a child to generalize concern to other individuals, both within and outside of the family.

Supportive parenting has been associated with both empathetic concern and sympathy in adolescents. Youth who perceive their mothers and fathers as demonstrating high levels of support are more likely to show higher levels of concern for others. A study conducted by Henry et al. (1996) assessed adolescents’ perceptions of family system variables and their relation to empathy in adolescence. Youth who perceived their parents as supportive scored higher on measures of emotional empathy. Since parental support involves behaviors which communicate concern for others, adolescents who are socialized in such environments may experience higher levels of connectedness and closeness within their interpersonal relationships.

To further examine this finding, Soenens et al. (2007) examined maternal support as a predictor of adolescent empathy (i.e., both sympathy and perspective taking). Maternal support, as indicated by both mothers' and adolescents' perceptions, related positively to adolescent perspective taking and sympathy, which remained significant after controlling for the effects of other types of parenting (e.g., psychological control and behavioral control). Likewise, the independent contributions of paternal support have been found to predict adolescent sympathy (Laible & Carlo, 2004). However, when adolescents had an unsupportive relationship with their fathers, support from mothers was associated with higher amounts of sympathy, suggesting that mothers may act as a protective factor in the development of adolescent sympathy. These types of studies suggest that adolescents who receive maternal support are more likely than those who do not to show genuine concern and understanding for the feelings and needs of others.

Furthermore, when adolescents perceive a sense of connectedness and cohesion within their families, they are able to experience the emotional support needed to explore both their own feelings and the feelings of others. When examining college students' perceptions of family cohesiveness, Eisenberg and colleagues (1991) found that family cohesion was related to self-reported sympathy in response to a distressing film. In a later study assessing adolescent perceptions of family system characteristics and empathy, Henry et al. (1996) found family cohesiveness to be associated with greater empathetic concern. This suggests that youth who perceive the family as an emotionally close and connected unit, are able to generalize their concern for their family members into concern for other individuals.

Parental Control

Parental control has been defined as parental behaviors which are directed toward the child in an attempt to direct his or her behavior in a manner that is acceptable to the parent (Barnes & Farrell, 1992). In contrast to parental support, the influence of parental control on adolescent adjustment has been unclear and generally depends on the type of control (Laible & Carlo, 2004). For example, rigid and intrusive control has been associated with poor adolescent psychosocial development (Barber, 1996), whereas rational control and parental monitoring have been linked with a variety of positive outcomes (Barnes & Farrell, 1992). Since control has been previously associated with a variety of parental behaviors, both effective as well as ineffective, recent researchers have separated this dimension into two specific factors: psychological control and behavioral control (Barber, Olsen, & Shagle, 1994).

Psychological Control. Psychological control refers to a parent's attempt to control his or her child in such a way that it infringes and intrudes upon the psychological and emotional development of the child (Barber, 1996). Parental behaviors associated with this type of control include invalidating feelings, constraining verbal expression, love-withdrawal, and guilt induction. According to Bean, Barber and Crane (2006), psychological control negatively impacts on child and adolescent well-being as it involves intrusions and manipulation by caregivers. Since such control is generally harsh, coercive and rigid, it significantly disrupts the parent-child bond. Not surprisingly, parental psychological control has been associated with externalizing problems such as deviance and aggression in adolescence (Barber, 1996), all of which have been linked to empathy-based disorders (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988).

In an assessment of parental socialization practices in the development of empathy in adolescence, Eisenberg-Berg and Mussen (1978) found, for adolescent boys, that maternal child-rearing practices associated with empathy were practices which were non-punitive, non-restrictive and egalitarian, all of which are not coercive or controlling. Interestingly, boys' empathy scores were negatively associated with maternal punishment, scolding, criticism, threats, silencing emotion and love-withdrawal. Their scores were however positively related to maternal praise, encouragement, affection and tenderness. Similarly, Eisenberg and McNally (1993) found that mothers' expressions of positive emotions as well as rational independence training (i.e., a combination of independence, control and rational guidance) were associated with adolescents' more competent perspective taking. Perspective taking scores continue to develop well into adolescence (Selman, 1980). Eisenberg and McNally (1993) suggested that adolescence may be a crucial developmental period during which mothers may play an important role in fostering understanding and concern for others.

Behavioral Control. Behavioral control refers to the provision of regulation or structure in a child's world through parenting behaviors such as parental monitoring and induction (Barber et al., 2005; Barnes & Farrell, 1992). Parental monitoring refers to parental awareness, knowledge and attention to adolescents' schedules, friends, activities and interests (Dishion & McMahon, 1998). Parents who engage in monitoring are more involved in their children's lives, provide ample guidance, and promote healthy psychological development. When examining adolescent perceptions of overall family system functioning, Henry, Robinson, Neal and Huey (2006) found that balanced family functioning (i.e., associated with high levels of cohesion and adaptability) was associated

with parental support and monitoring, suggesting that behavioral control is an aspect related to close and connected families.

Parental induction is defined as the use of logical reasoning coupled with explanations by parents in an attempt to control adolescents' behavior (Eisenberg, 1992). Parental use of inductions provides reasons for behaviors as opposed to direct consequences, communicates adolescent responsibility for his or her behaviors, and provides a model which children and youth associate with caring and controlled behaviors. Eisenberg also suggests that inductions promote and encourage the development of empathy insofar as induction allows for parents to direct both children and adolescents to attend to the needs and emotional states of others. When attending to others, it becomes possible to take on their perspectives in such a way so as to promote empathy and concern. For example, adolescents who perceived their parents as engaging in inductive discipline scored higher on self-reported perspective taking (Henry et al., 1996). Thus, when parents are perceived as engaging in behaviors reflecting reasoning and explanations of youths' behaviors, adolescents become socialized into understanding the circumstances of others.

Authoritative Parenting and Identity

Although limited research has examined the relationship between perceptions of authoritative parenting and adolescents' subsequent identity development (Smits et al., 2008), perceptions of authoritative parenting have been found to be associated with a more achieved identity status (Allen & Land, 1999; Berzonsky, 2004). Since identity achievement (e.g., high commitment, high exploration) involves an information-processing approach in which commitment to a particular identity is acquired after

thorough exploration, the contributions of parents can either promote or hinder identity development. For example, Berzonsky (2004) found that adolescents' perceptions of their parents as authoritarian hindered the ability to engage in exploration, as indicated by adolescents' higher frequency of identity foreclosure (e.g., high commitment, low exploration), and identity diffusion (e.g., low commitment, low exploration). A lack of openness or experience in reflecting upon feelings or ideas has also been shown to produce identity foreclosure (Adams, Berzonsky, & Keating, 2006).

In contrast, Grotevant and Cooper (1998) have demonstrated that identity achieved statuses are encouraged when parents provide adolescents with both individuation, or self-assertion in communicating one's own point of view and connectedness, or a strong sensitivity and openness to such viewpoints. In this regard, parents provide a secure base from which adolescents can explore their social worlds and develop a sense of self through their own self-reflections. Thus, since authoritative parents are highly supportive and provide a reasonable level of behavioral control, their contributions and assistance with adolescents' identity formation appear to be important for the processes of self-reflection, exploration and commitment.

Gender Differences in Empathy

Most studies of empathy have been motivated by the desire to test the widely held stereotype that females are more empathetic than males (Davis & Franzoi, 1991; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987). Since women are assumed to be concerned with care giving and embracing the role of harmonizing the family, and men are traditionally concerned with instrumental tasks, empathy has been seen as a female characteristic.

In his review of eleven studies (including 16 samples), Hoffman (1977) found results consistent with this preconceived notion; females were indeed more empathetic than males. This finding had emerged in every study he examined, with six samples reaching either significance or marginal significance. Unfortunately, his samples consisted of young children for whom a single measure of empathy was employed (i.e., the FASTE, Feshbach & Roe, 1968).

In their review of earlier studies, Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) and Lennon and Eisenberg (1987) also found similar gender differences; however, such differences were inconsistent and qualified by the type of methodology used to examine empathy. Eisenberg and colleagues, in accordance with Davis (1983) and Eisenberg and Fabes (1998), have demonstrated support for gender differences in self-report methodology, where females are found to report higher levels of empathy than males. However, for other types of measures, gender differences were minimal at best and, in some cases, non-existent. For example, Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) found small gender differences, in favor of females, for simulated emotional experiments (e.g., videotapes or audiotapes of a person in need), but failed to find such differences when utilizing facial/gestural, vocal, and physiological measures of empathy and empathy-related responding.

Age Differences in Empathy

The capacity to experience empathy, in addition to the emotional reactions associated with it, has also been empirically documented to increase with age (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1987; Hoffman, 2000). When examining age and gender differences in empathetic responsiveness in four relatively large samples of early adolescent (i.e., grades 6 through 9) Norwegian youth, Olweus and Endresen (1998) found increases in

empathetic concern for girls over time, regardless of the sex of the stimulus person (i.e., through questionnaires addressing empathic responsiveness directed toward either a “hurt” boy or a “distressed” girl). Boys displayed similar increases in empathic concern over time, but only when the sex of the stimulus person was female. Their empathic concern, on the other hand, decreased when such concern was directed toward another boy.

This developmental trend is suggested to occur as a result of advances in children’s understanding of others’ feelings and thoughts, in addition to an increased ability for perspective taking (Eisenberg et al., 2006; Davis & Franzoi, 1991). In two meta-analytic reviews, Eisenberg and Lennon (1987) and Eisenberg and Fabes (1998) found age-related increases in both empathy and sympathy from preschool into adolescence. However, much like gender differences, results were qualified by the type of measurement used and tended to level off around the age of eleven. For instance, age-related increases have been generally reported for studies employing self-report methodology. Davis and Franzoi (1991), in line with Hoffman’s (1987, 1990, 2000) rationale, found increases in self-reported perspective-taking and empathetic concern (and decreases in personal distress) over a three-year period (e.g., from grades 9-12).

Purpose and Hypotheses

The purpose of the present study was to examine the ways in which adolescents, as compared to emerging adults, narrate self-defining empathic and non-empathic personal experiences. Participants’ ages, their perceptions of their parents’ parenting (e.g., perceived support and control), and their self-reports of dispositional empathy were measured as predictors. Stories that participants told across contexts (e.g., empathic vs.

non-empathic stories) were rated for meaning-making, sophistication or quality of the experience (i.e., vividness, specificity), event severity, route by which perspective taking occurs, sense of empathic identity, prosocial orientation, time period, and the presence or absence of several types of themes (relationship, achievement, mortality, tension/conflict).

Hypothesis 1: Type of Story Elicited

Since participants' positive instance stories, as compared to their negative instance stories, should reflect self-defining empathic moments, they were predicted to concern more serious events, to contain higher amounts of meaning-making, prosocial engagement, other-oriented feelings, and reflect a stronger sense of empathic identity. Since such positive empathy stories likely would have been reflected upon and incorporated more fully into the life story, they were expected to be about more specific and detailed self-defining moments set in a previous time and place, compared with negative instances.

Hypothesis 2: Age and Gender Differences in Narratives

Following from the work of Pratt et al. (1999) and Thorne et al. (2004), differences in the type of meaning-making, quality or salience of the story (i.e., vividness, specificity, depiction of others' feelings), prosocial engagement, sense of empathic identity, event severity, and time frame were expected by age group. Emerging adults' narratives, as compared to adolescents' stories, were expected to contain more advanced, insightful meaning-making, reflect more distant events (as such events may require more post-event processing in order for them to be self-defining), express higher levels of prosocial engagement and sense of empathic identity. Their stories were also expected to be of a higher quality (i.e., more vivid and specific), concern more serious events (e.g.,

death of a parent or friend), and contain a higher frequency of reference to others' feelings. Gender differences were also expected, with females scoring higher than males on dispositional empathy. However, given the exploratory nature of the present study, there were no specific gender hypotheses for the narrative coding measures.

The total number of stories/events that were recalled during the warm-up listing exercise for each story type was also expected to be related to age. Since older participants were expected to have a more highly developed life story, they should also have more access to such memories through such recall elicitation, and thus produce these stories more readily.

Given the developmental frameworks of both Selman (1975) and Hoffman (1990), emerging adults were predicted to demonstrate more self-reflective perspective taking (i.e., imagine-other types of responses). Adolescents, on the other hand, were expected to demonstrate more egoistic perspective taking (i.e., imagine-self) when attempting to empathize with others.

Hypothesis 3: Dispositional Empathy Differences in Narratives

Adolescents and emerging adults were not expected to differ with respect to their overall scores of dispositional empathy on the questionnaire measure. However, individual differences in dispositional empathy were expected to predict differentially to many of the narrative variables, given that high scores on self-reported empathy should reflect greater investment in this area of one's experiences, and thus be more strongly tied to one's narrative sense of self. Adolescents who scored higher on dispositional empathy as assessed by the Davis questionnaire were expected to tell stories that scored higher on measures of prosocial engagement, meaning-making, sense of empathic identity, and

depiction of others' feelings. Their experiences were also expected to be more specific, vivid, and set in a particular time and place, thereby more clearly representing self-defining, personal empathic experiences.

Hypothesis 4: Parenting Style and Empathy

Consistent with previous literature (Henry et al., 1996; Soenens et al., 2007), adolescents who perceived both parents as supportive and demonstrating reasonable amounts of behavioral control and lower amounts of psychological control (i.e., showing more authoritative parenting overall), were expected to score higher on dispositional empathy. However, this effect was expected to be more prevalent for adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' authoritative parenting, as compared to perceptions of their fathers' parenting (Eisenberg-Berg & Mussen, 1978; Eisenberg & McNally, 1993), given the influence of mothers' socialization practices in the development of adolescents' empathy and empathy-related responding (Laible & Carlo, 2004). Parallel results were expected for the narrative coding variables, in that perceptions of maternal authoritativeness were predicted to be associated with more insightful meaning-making, better story quality, more depiction of others' feelings, more advanced empathic identity, and greater prosocial engagement in the stories told.

Method

Participants and Recruitment

The two age groups of participants recruited for this study were 29 adolescents, 13 males, 16 females, who ranged in age from 14-17 ($M = 15.28$, $SD = .99$), and 31 emerging adults/first year university students, 18 male, 13 female, who ranged in age from 18-20 ($M = 18.23$, $SD = .56$). Of the first year university students, most lived with

both parents (73.5%), and with younger (70.6%) or older siblings (67.6%). A few also lived with grandparents in the home (8.8%, grandmother, 5.9% grandfather) and 20.6% lived in university residence. Of the adolescents, all lived in two-parent households, with 12% not living with their biological mother. A few adolescents lived with a step parent (8.3% for both), with one participant reporting living in both households. No adolescents reported currently living with grandparents in the home.

Recruitment of University Students

First year university students at Wilfrid Laurier University were invited to participate in the current study through an online advertisement in the Psychology Department's "Psychology Research Experience Program (PREP)." This program allowed for students to earn bonus points by participating in research projects. Since this study was part of a list of several projects, research participants were able to choose to participate in the "Stories of Empathy" research project.

Recruitment of Adolescent Participants

Adolescent participants were recruited as either part of a new wave of data collection in an ongoing, longitudinal study, the *Three Generations Project*, or as "New Recruits", recruited through the local Kitchener/Waterloo and surrounding area Penny Saver newspaper.

In the *Three Generations Project*, adolescent participants were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in a follow-up wave of the study. Phone numbers were obtained from the contact information received from the last round of data collection (when children were at a mean age of 8). Since a few of the adolescent

participants in this follow-up were under the age of 16, a parent/guardian was instructed to provide consent on their behalf.

Questionnaire Materials

Dispositional Empathy

Participants completed a shortened version of Davis' widely-used *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (IRI; Davis, 1983, 1994; see Appendix A). This 14-item questionnaire assesses dispositional empathy, and consists of two 7-item subscales labeled *Perspective Taking* (PT) and *Empathetic Concern* (EC). Participants were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert scale (0=does not describe me well to 4=describes me well) to items such as "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me" and "When I am upset at someone, I usually try to 'put myself in his shoes' for a while". Each subscale is scored separately, with a range of 0 to 28. Higher scores on each subscale represent a stronger dispositional tendency on that subscale. Davis (1983) reported the psychometric properties of the measure as having satisfactory internal consistency (alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .78) and test-retest (from .61 to .81 over a two-month period). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .70 for the perspective taking subscale and .76 for the empathic concern subscale. Since both empathic concern and perspective taking subscales were significantly correlated, $r(60) = .28, p < .04$, they were aggregated into a single dispositional empathy score for purposes of analysis below.

Perceptions of Parenting

Participants were asked to complete a parenting style questionnaire (see Appendix B) in order to assess their independent perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' support, psychological control, and behavioral control (taken from Barber et al., 2005). Since both

support and behavioral control were positively correlated for mothers, $r(60) = .59, p < .001$, and for fathers, $r(60) = .65, p < .001$, a *Perceptions of Parental Authoritativeness Index* was created (parental support + parental behavioral control – parental psychological control), separately for mothers and fathers. The components within this construct are discussed below.

Perceptions of Parental Support were measured using the 10-item acceptance subscale from the revised Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (CRPBI, Schaefer, 1965, cited in Barber et al., 2005). Participants were asked to rate, on a 3-point Likert scale (1=not like him/her; 3=a lot like him/her), how well items describe their mother and father. Sample items include, “Enjoys doing things with me” and “Is easy to talk to”. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived parental support. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients have been found to be .85 for maternal support and .90 for paternal support (Bean et al., 2006). In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha was .92 for maternal support and .91 for paternal support.

Perceptions of Psychological Control were assessed using both the Psychological Control Scale-Youth Self-Report (PCS-YSR, adapted from Barber, 1996) and the CRPBI (originally adapted from Schaefer, 1965, cited in Barber et al., 2005). The resulting scale is an 8-item psychological control subscale which asks participants to respond on the same 3-point Likert scale how well items describe both parents. Sample items include, “Often interrupts me” and “Blames me for other family members’ problems”. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived parental psychological control. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients for the CRPBI have been found to be .73 and .76 for mothers

and fathers respectively (Bean et al., 2006). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .81 for maternal psychological control and .61 for paternal psychological control.

Perceptions of Behavioral Control were assessed using a 5-item parental monitoring scale (adapted from Brown et al., 1993, cited in Barber et al., 2005). It is a 5-item subscale which asks participants to respond on a 3-point Likert scale (1=doesn't know to 3=knows a lot) how well items reflect how much their parents "really know" about them. Sample items include "Where you go at night" and "who your friends are". Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived parental behavioral control. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients have been found to be .81 for males' reports of parents and .80 for females' reports of parents (Barber, 1996). In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was .81 for maternal behavioral control and .83 for paternal behavioral control.

Narrative Coding

Participants were asked to narrate specific events/situations which involved empathetic responding or the lack thereof. The first author and an independent rater coded these narrations for meaning making, story themes, quality of the experience, event severity, depiction of others' feelings, route by which perspective taking occurs, empathic identity, prosocial orientation, and time period (see Appendix D for coding protocol).

Meaning Making

Depth of learning and meaning-making were assessed using a linear coding scheme in which a higher score indicated an increased complexity of meaning-making (derived from McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean & Thorne, 2003). *No Learning* (Coded as 0): This code was given for stories which contained no evidence of learning. *Lesson Learning* (Coded as 1): This code was given for stories which involved learning a

specific lesson that had implications for subsequent behavior. *Vague Insight* (Coded as 2): These stories contain meanings which were slightly more sophisticated and general than lessons but were not as explicit as insights. *Gaining Insight* (Coded as 3): These stories contained insights defined as meanings extending beyond the specific event to explicit transformations in one's understanding of oneself, the world, or relationships. The correlation between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories (41% of the total sample), was .64.

Story Themes

Each story was categorized based on predominant themes, as outlined by both McLean and Pratt (2006) and Thorne, McLean, and Lawrence (2004). *Relationship themes* involved events in which the reporter's relationship to someone else was the central theme. *Achievement themes* involved effortful attempts at mastering vocational, physical, social, or spiritual goals, such as getting into college and excelling at sports, work or leadership. *Mortality themes* concerned events which emphasize one's own or another's mortality, including stories about accidents, deaths, or near death experiences. Finally, *Tension/conflict* themes involved any explicit report of discomfort, disagreement, or unease on the part of any character during the event. Since single events could be classified according to multiple themes (e.g., themes of relationship and conflict), many stories contained more than one theme. Cohen's kappa, between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories, were .78, .80, .95, .86, for relationship, achievement, mortality, and tension/conflict, respectively.

Quality of Empathy Experiences

Stories were coded in terms of their overall quality, represented by vividness and

specificity. Specificity was coded on a 5-point Likert scale (1=general class of events, 5=Specific event), as well as vividness (1=devoid of detail, no imagery, 5=rich in detail, striking imagery). The correlations between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories, were .73 and .66, for vividness and specificity, respectively.

Event Severity

The magnitude of the event within each story was measured using Miller and Rahe's (1997) Life Changes Questionnaire (LCQ, see Appendix E). This measurement tool ranks 74 life changing episodes in terms of daily life stress and magnitude of the life change. Events were coded following an interpolation procedure, approximating the most appropriate example of the scale. For example, death of a parent is characterized by an LCU of 100. The correlation between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories, was .83.

Depiction of Others' Feelings

Stories were assessed for the frequency with which participants spontaneously report others' feelings. The correlation between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories, was .83.

Perspective Taking Routes

The route by which empathy is experienced was broken down into four separate components which involved either parallel or non-parallel experiences (1=self is easily transposed into an experience as a result of observer-target similarity, 2= self is projected into an experience without observer-target similarity, 3=self is not transposed into experience, but an attempt is made, 4= participant unable or unwilling to project self into others' experience). These categories were further combined into three separate routes:

parallel experiences (imagine-self), non-parallel experiences (imagine-other), and perspective taking failure. Inter-rater reliability for this measure was $\kappa = .65$.

Empathic Identity

An empathic identity was coded through five separate categories (0=a non-empathic person, 1=irrelevant or ambiguous, 2=slightly an empathic person, 3=moderately an empathic person, 4=clearly an empathic person) for each story. The correlation between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories, was .74.

Prosocial Engagement

Prosocial Orientation was assessed for each story through a 5-point Likert scale (1=no evidence of prosocial orientation in the episode, 5=completely prosocial in orientation in the episode). The correlation between the two independent raters, using a randomly selected set of 24 stories, was .81.

Time Frame

An indication of time since the event was experienced was recorded in months.

Coding Examples

The following “sad for someone” narrative was from an 18 year old male. It was categorized into themes of achievement and tension/conflict with an LCU (event severity) score of 35 for “troubles with persons under supervision”. It was coded a 3 for depth of learning (gaining insight), 4 for vividness, 5 for specificity, 4 for identity (an empathic person), 5 for prosocial engagement (completely prosocial in orientation), and 2 for perspective taking route (perspective taking non-parallel).

“March of last year I went to Jamaica on a self-help mission... we had to teach and I had to take over the entire classroom and we learned early on that some

of the students that were at the back of the classroom, they weren't the smartest ones and so they got pushed to the back of the classroom. And, they didn't get any academic attention. So, I felt sad for the fact that, you know, even though those kids might want to get in the front, they keep getting pushed back and they will never get up there....so I worked with them so I could bring them forward. I would take them outside and read stories, work on comprehension, do class lessons, one-on-one stuff...it was all about the kids...it was just unreal, I can't imagine. When we left everyone was realizing that we don't know if they got out of it as much as we got from them because we learned so much about ourselves...we wanted to stay, we wanted to help...in a sense I'm empathic, I sympathize for them, I felt reall bad, it was almost a sense where you wanted to cry..."

The second "sad for someone" narrative was from a 15 year old male. It was categorized into a theme of mortality with an LCU (event severity) score of 100 for "death of a parent". It was coded 1 for depth of learning (lesson learned), 2 for vividness, 4 for specificity, 2 for identity (slightly an empathic person), 2 for prosocial engagement (slight evidence of prosocial orientation), and a 2 for perspective taking route (perspective taking non-parallel).

"Um, it was just pretty much last week when my best friend's grandfather died. I just felt really sad because I met him a couple of times and he was a really cool and my best friend he was really sad too so I felt sad too... Well, his grandpa was just [died] and he had a hard time and he died and my friend he found out and he got really upset and I felt bad for him. His grandma came in and found him and he had passed away. I was just like how could this happen because and like why did he have to go because he looked like a really strong guy...[*What did you do?*]. I tried to help my friend out. I was happy my friend talked to me about it and that's pretty much what I did. [*Did this story change or impact you*]Yeah, sort of, just be thankful for what you got now because you don't know what will happen like tomorrow because he just died unexpectedly, so.. he never really thought about it like that would ever happen to him."

Procedure

University students and adolescents were invited to participate in a 1 hour research session at either Wilfrid Laurier University (standard procedure for all university students) or at participants' homes (standard procedure for most *Three Generations*

Project participants and New Recruits). The interview session consisted of a verbal, audio-taped interview, followed by the administration of a questionnaire booklet.

During the interview portion of the study, participants were asked to write down two situations/events in which they felt sad for someone, did not feel sad for someone when it seemed that they should, a time when they put themselves in someone else's shoes, and a time when they did not put themselves in someone else's shoes when it seemed that they should (see Glück et al., 2005, for similar methodology). Upon completion of this brief brainstorming exercise, participants were asked, for each situation/event, to choose one of the two situations/events written down that was the most memorable or representative of that category and tell the research assistant more information about that time. Research assistants (a female and a male) were trained to clarify and follow-up participants' narrative accounts with probes such as, "When did the event occur (how old were you?)", "What led up to this event?", "What exactly happened in the event?", "Who was involved in the event?" "What were you thinking?" "What were you feeling?" "What did you do?" and "What does this story say about who you are?"

Once the narrative section was complete, participants completed the Perceptions of Parenting Questionnaire and Davis's Interpersonal Reactivity Index.

To conclude, all participants were debriefed. The purpose of the study was explained and participants received compensation in the form of course bonus points (for the university student participants) and \$30.00 movie vouchers (for the adolescent participants).

Results

Given the number of multiple comparison tests and correlations computed in the present study, a stringent alpha level of .01 was employed for all of the analyses presented below.

Six independent sample t-tests demonstrated that “New Recruits” and “Three Generations Project” participants did not differ significantly on any of the narrative measures ($ps = .03$ to $.69$), with the exception of New Recruits ($M = 12.80$, $SD = 3.75$) showing higher levels of vividness in stories than Three Generations Project ($M = 8.84$, $SD = 2.94$) participants, $t(21) = 2.68$, $p = .01$. No differences emerged for perceptions of authoritative parenting, dispositional empathy, or the ability to recall either empathic or non-empathic experiences ($ps > .05$).

Descriptives

In the warm-up for each story to be told, participants were asked to think of two instances in their past in which they felt sad for someone, did not feel sad for someone when it seemed that they should, put themselves in someone else’s shoes, and did not put themselves in someone else’s shoes when it seemed that they should, providing a possible total of 8 such experiences overall. Using one-tailed, zero-order correlations (with a stringent alpha level set at .01), age was found to be significantly correlated with the ability to recall more empathic and non-empathic experiences, $r(61) = .45$, $p < .001$, particularly, a perspective taking story, $r(61) = .40$, $p < .01$, and a non-perspective taking story $r(61) = .40$, $p < .01$. Likewise, age was marginally related to the ability to recall a “sad for someone” story, $r(61) = .31$, $p < .02$. This domain of the individual’s life story thus appeared to become more elaborated with age.

The means and standard deviations for all narrative measures by age are reported in Table 1. Overall, there were low to moderate amounts of meaning-making, prosocial engagement, and empathic identity ratings for both samples across the four stories. Stories were moderately vivid and specific, with only a modest level of depiction of others' feelings. Event severity, measured as a Life Change Unit (LCU), was fairly high, with an overall mean of 55.30; this is an LCU roughly characterized by a major change in the health or behavior of a family member. Most story events took place in the distant past (i.e., at least two years ago).

The frequencies of coded themes by age are presented in Table 2. Adolescents' stories were mostly about tension (23 stories), followed by achievement (18 stories), mortality (15 stories) and relationships (15 stories). However, since themes were not mutually exclusive, adolescents' tension stories were also coupled with themes of achievement (23 stories), mortality (22 stories) or relationships (16 stories). Likewise, emerging adults' stories were predominately concerned with tension (30 stories), followed by relationships (22 stories), mortality (21 stories) and achievement (18 stories). Many of their tension stories also contained achievement (31 stories), mortality (30 stories), or relationships (16 stories). Thus, adolescents and emerging adults' narratives do not appear to differ substantially in their thematic content overall.

The means and standard deviations for participants' perceptions of authoritative parenting and dispositional empathy are reported in Table 3. Age was not significantly related to measures of dispositional empathy ($r_s = .17$ to $.02$). Age was, however, marginally related to maternal authoritativeness, $r(59) = -.33$, $p < .03$, but not paternal authoritativeness, $r(59) = -.15$, $p > .26$ ($p > .26$). Perceptions of maternal

authoritativeness were, therefore, found to be lower in emerging adults than in adolescents.

A word count was computed on each of the four stories in order to control for the possibility that adolescents who tell longer stories produce higher scores on the narrative measures. An examination of the means indicated that the sad for someone story was the longest ($M = 931.61$, $SD = 443.28$), followed by the not sad for someone story ($M = 865.84$, $SD = 435.53$), the perspective taking story ($M = 839.59$, $SD = 435.29$) and the non-perspective taking story ($M = 791.96$, $SD = 477.95$). Generally, though correlations were often marginal, age was found to be positively related to word count for the not sad for someone story, $r(61) = .26$, $p < .05$, the perspective taking story, $r(61) = .30$, $p < .03$ and the non-perspective taking story, $r(61) = .34$, $p < .01$. Word counts for each story type were substantially positively correlated across participants ($r_s = .61$ to $.74$), and therefore an overall total word count was obtained. Furthermore, zero-order correlations revealed modest relationships between total word count and all of the narrative measures, $r_s = .31$ to $.47$. Thus, for all narrative analyses, total word count was used as a covariate.

For a summary of the intercorrelations between the predictor variables (and total word count), see Table 4. Word count was not significantly related to dispositional empathy or perceptions of maternal and paternal authoritative parenting ($r_s = .05$ to $.11$).

Hypothesis 1: Type of Story Elicited

In order to investigate whether positive instance stories reflected higher scores on the narrative measures than negative instance stories, paired-sample t -tests (with a stringent alpha level set at $.01$, see Table 5) were employed. As predicted, positive stories were found to produce higher (marginally) amounts of meaning-making, $t(59) = 2.45$, p

= .02, prosocial engagement, $t(59) = 7.87, p < .001$, and a stronger sense of empathic identity, $t(59) = 9.23, p < .001$, as compared to negative stories. Positive stories were also found to be about specific, $t(59) = 3.04, p < .01$, highly vivid experiences, $t(59) = 2.84, p < .01$, which were more serious in nature, $t(59) = 4.09, p < .001$, than negative instance stories. Such stories were, however, not more likely than negative stories to have occurred in the distant past, $t(58) = -1.41, p > .16$ nor to show an elevated frequency of other-oriented feeling depictions, $t(59) = 1.84, p = .07$. Overall, however, Hypothesis 1 was largely supported, as positive instance stories appeared more closely tied to the narrative life story and the person's sense of self than were negative instance stories.

For the following analyses, scores on the narrative measures were aggregated across the four stories. The intercorrelations between individual story scores ranged from ($r_s = -.17$ to $.50$), with most significant and positive, which suggests that this aggregation was generally appropriate. Thus, participants had one total score for each of the dependent measures.

Hypothesis 2: Age and Gender Differences in Narratives

In order to examine the relations between age and gender for all of the narrative measures, zero-order correlations, one-tailed, were employed (see Table 6).

Age Differences

As predicted, emerging adults' narratives were found to contain more meaning-making, $r(59) = .35, p < .01$, a marginally stronger sense of empathic identity, $r(59) = .22, p < .05$, and event severity $r(57) = .22, p = .05$, as well as higher frequencies of prosocial engagement, $r(58) = .33, p < .01$. Age was not significantly related to the tendency to recall more distant events, $r(59) = .17, p < .10$. Contrary to prediction, as

well, no relationships were found for age and vividness, specificity, and other-oriented feeling depictions ($r_s = .02$ to $.12$).

Partial correlations, one-tailed (controlling for word count), generally paralleled these findings (see Table 6). Age remained marginally correlated with meaning-making, $r(54) = .25, p = .03$, event severity, $r(54) = .24, p < .04$, and prosocial engagement $r(54) = .21, p = .06$. However, surprisingly, age was marginally negatively correlated with vividness with total words controlled, $r(54) = -.24, p = .04$. No relationships were found between age and specificity, sense of an empathic identity, other-oriented feeling depictions, and time frame with number of words controlled ($r_s = .07$ to $.13$).

Chi square tests of independence were performed (with a stringent alpha level set at $.01$) in order to examine whether emerging adults' narratives contained higher frequencies of imagine-other perspective taking and lower frequencies of imagine-self perspective taking, as compared to adolescents. As predicted, there was a significant, marginal, relationship between the frequencies of types of perspective taking, $\chi^2(3, N = 52) = 6.52, p < .04$, and age for the "sad for someone" story. Emerging adults were found to display higher frequencies of imagine-other and lower frequencies of imagine-self perspective taking on this story. They were also less likely to show perspective taking failure (see Table 6 for cross tabulated frequencies). The same pattern emerged for the positive perspective taking story, although this relationship was not found to be significant overall, $\chi^2(3, N = 59) = 3.56, p < .17$, see Table 7).

In terms of the negative stories, opposite relationships were found between perspective taking and age (see Table 7). Emerging adults, in contrast to adolescents, were found to display higher frequencies of perspective taking failure and slightly less

imagine-other self-reflection in the not sad for someone story, although this difference was not statistically significant, $\chi^2 = (3, N = 59) = 2.07, p > .35$. In the non perspective taking story, a similar pattern emerged, in that emerging adults showed more imagine-self perspective taking and less imagine-other, as well as an increased frequency of perspective taking failure as compared to adolescents. However, this difference also was not statistically significant, $\chi^2 = (3, N = 59) = 1.69, p > .35$.

Gender Differences

In order to examine whether gender differences were present for the narrative variables, eight independent sample *t*-tests (with a stringent alpha level set at .01) were computed. Females ($M = 8.71, SD = 6.91$) were found to score marginally higher than males ($M = 6.10, SD = 3.64$) on other-oriented feeling depictions, $t(56) = -1.83, p < .08$. However, females were not found to score significantly higher than males on any of the other narrative measures ($ps > .21$). Thus, no clear gender differences emerged for the narrative measures.

Hypothesis 3: Dispositional Empathy Differences and Narratives

A zero-order correlation coefficient, one-tailed, confirmed, as expected, that dispositional empathy on the two subscales of the Davis (1994) questionnaire was not significantly correlated with age, $r(60) = -.10, p > .45$. Dispositional empathy on the questionnaire, however, was found to marginally differ by gender, $t(58) = -2.14, p < .04$, with females ($M = 37.97, SD = 6.69$) scoring significantly higher than males ($M = 34.45, SD = 6.02$), consistent with previous evidence in this literature (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983, Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987). Dispositional empathy,

however, was not related to the ability to recall both empathic and non-empathic experiences during the warm-up ($r_s = .03$ to $.23$, *ns*).

In order to examine the relations between dispositional empathy scores and the narrative measures, both zero-order and partial correlations, one-tailed, were employed (with a stringent alpha level set at $.01$, see Table 6). In contrast to prediction, dispositional empathy on the Davis (1994) measure, was not significantly related to meaning-making, $r(59) = .18$, $p < .09$. However, it was significantly related to a sense of empathic identity, $r(59) = .33$, $p < .01$ and prosocial engagement, $r(59) = .40$, $p = .001$. Contrary to prediction, however, dispositional empathy was not significantly related to vividness, specificity, other-oriented feeling depictions, time frame, or event severity ($r_s = -.05$ to $.10$).

One-tailed, partial correlations (controlling for total word count) demonstrated a similar pattern, in that no relationship was present for dispositional empathy and meaning-making, $r(54) = .18$, $p < .09$. Significant associations, however, were found for a sense of empathic identity, $r(54) = .35$, $p < .01$, and prosocial engagement, $r(54) = .43$, $p < .001$. Dispositional empathy was not related to vividness, specificity, other-oriented feeling depictions, time frame or event severity for these partial correlations ($r_s = -.12$ to $.09$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported. Although higher scores on dispositional empathy appeared to be unrelated to narrative quality, or the way in which particular events were remembered, such scores were found to be associated with higher amounts of self-reflection, understanding, and integration of an empathic self into one's overall life story, for dispositional empathy.

Hypothesis 4: Parenting Style, Dispositional and Narrative Empathy Measures

Dispositional Empathy

In order to determine whether higher scores on dispositional empathy were related to perceptions of mothers' and fathers' authoritative parenting, zero-order correlations, one-tailed, were computed. Contrary to prediction, higher scores on dispositional empathy were not related to perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting, $r(59) = .15$, $p > .13$, but were marginally related to adolescents' perceptions of their fathers as more authoritative $r(59) = .25$, $p = .03$. Thus, hypothesis 4 was generally not supported.

Narrative Empathy

Perceptions of Maternal Authoritativeness. The relationships between adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' authoritative parenting and scores on the narrative measures were examined through both zero-order and partial correlations, one-tailed (with a stringent alpha level set at .01, see Table 6). Contrary to prediction, perceptions of maternal authoritativeness were not significantly associated with meaning-making, $r(59) = .09$, $p = .24$. Such perceptions were, however, significantly correlated, as expected, with a stronger sense of an empathic identity, $r(59) = .36$, $p < .01$, and marginally with prosocial engagement, $r(59) = .20$, $p < .07$. A negative relationship was also present for other-oriented feeling depictions, $r(59) = -.32$, $p < .01$. No significant relationships were found for vividness, specificity, time frame, or event severity ($r_s = .05$ to $.18$).

Partial correlations (controlling for word count) generally revealed a parallel pattern (see Table 5). Adolescents' perceptions of their mothers' authoritativeness were not significantly associated with higher amounts of meaning-making, $r(54) = .19$, $p < .08$.

However, such perceptions were significantly related to a stronger sense of empathic identity, $r(54) = .50, p < .001$, and higher prosocial engagement, $r(54) = .31, p < .01$. Moreover, such perceptions were also now marginally related to narrative quality, represented by specific, $r(54) = .23, p < .05$, highly vivid experiences, $r(54) = .26, p < .03$, with number of words controlled. Perceptions of maternal authoritativeness were, however, still found to be negatively related to other-oriented feeling depictions, contrary to hypotheses, $r(54) = -.26, p < .03$. No relationships were found for event severity or time frame ($r_s = .07, .08$, respectively).

Perceptions of Paternal Authoritativeness. The relationships between adolescents' perceptions of their fathers' authoritative parenting and scores on the narrative measures were examined through both zero-order and partial correlations, one-tailed (with a stringent alpha level set at .01, see Table 6). As expected, perceptions of paternal authoritativeness were not found to significantly correlate with higher amounts of meaning-making, $r(59) = .19, p < .08$. Such perceptions were also significantly correlated with a stronger sense of empathic identity, $r(59) = .31, p < .01$, higher frequencies of prosocial engagement, $r(59) = .27, p < .02$, greater vividness, $r(59) = .26, p < .01$, and more story specificity, $r(59) = .31, p < .01$. No relationships were present for other-oriented feeling depictions, time frame, and event severity ($r_s = .09$ to $-.16$).

Partial correlations, one-tailed (controlling for total word count), demonstrated that adolescents' perceptions of their fathers' authoritative parenting were not significantly related to higher amounts of meaning-making ($p = .11$), but were significantly related to a stronger sense of an empathic identity, $r(54) = .31, p < .01$, and marginally higher amounts of prosocial engagement, $r(54) = .26, p < .03$. Such

perceptions were also marginally related to more specific, $r(54) = .29, p < .02$, highly vivid stories of one's experiences, $r(54) = .23, p = .03$. No relationships were found for time frame, other-oriented feeling depictions, or event severity ($r_s = .07$ to $-.15$). Overall, then, both mothers' and fathers' authoritativeness predicted adolescents' abilities to remember high quality, other-oriented experiences, which appeared to be important to their developing self-concepts.

Summary Regressions: Preliminary Models

In order to determine whether age, gender, dispositional empathy, and perceptions of parental authoritativeness were unique predictors of the narrative measures, seven linear regressions were computed (all with a stringent alpha level set at .01), one for each of the dependent measures (see Table 8 for a summary of all analyses). In the first step of these regressions, total word count was entered as a control variable. Since event severity was not found to be a significant covariate in any of the regression models (all $p_s > .20$), it was not included in the overall models. Gender was found to be a significant predictor only for other-oriented feeling depictions. Thus, it was not included in any of the other models ($p_s > .13$).

Moreover, as can be seen in Table 6, a suppression effect of word count was found for perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting and meaning-making, empathic identity, and prosocial engagement. A suppression effect occurs when one variable increases the predictive validity (assessed by the magnitude of the beta weight) of another

variable as a result of its inclusion in a regression equation (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Thus, regressions were also computed with total word count removed.¹

Meaning-Making

In the regression model for meaning making, age, as expected, was found to be a unique, positive predictor of meaning-making ($\beta = .35, p < .01$). Dispositional empathy and independent perceptions of mothers and fathers as authoritative were not found to contribute significantly to the overall model ($ps > .14$). However, when perceptions of paternal authoritative parenting were removed from the model, perceptions of mothers' authoritative parenting were found to marginally predict higher amounts of meaning-making ($\beta = .23, p < .06$).

Empathic Identity

In the regression model of empathic identity, age, dispositional empathy and perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting were found to uniquely predict a stronger sense of self as an empathic person. However, judging by the significance levels and the beta weights, perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) appeared

¹ Since total word count was found to produce a suppression effect for meaning-making, empathic identity and prosocial engagement (see Table 6), regressions were re-computed with total word count not included in the final models (see Table 9). Dispositional empathy was now found to be a marginal predictor of higher amounts of meaning-making ($\beta = .24, p < .06$) and age remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .43, p < .01$). Perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting, however, did not remain significant in this model ($\beta = .22, p = .09$). No differences were found for empathic identity with total word count removed. Similarly, all of the findings for prosocial engagement remained the same, with the exception of adolescents' perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting becoming a non-significant predictor ($\beta = .23, p < .08$) of prosocial engagement.

more important than participants' ages ($\beta = .30, p < .01$), and scores on the Davis (1994) measure of dispositional empathy ($\beta = .27, p < .02$). Nevertheless, as predicted, all three variables appeared to make an independent contribution to the narration of a more pronounced empathic self.

Prosocial Engagement

In the regression model of prosocial engagement, age ($\beta = .38, p = .001$) dispositional empathy ($\beta = .37, p = .001$), and perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting ($\beta = .28, p = .02$) were each found to significantly predict greater prosocial engagement, as expected (although the latter finding was only marginal). Perceptions of fathers' authoritative parenting were not found to significantly contribute to this overall model ($p > .55$).

Narrative Quality and Time Frame

In the three regression models for narrative quality and time frame (recorded in months since the event had occurred), representation of vivid and specific experiences, and time frame, participants' ages, dispositional empathy, and perceptions of both mothers and fathers as authoritative did not significantly predict more vivid, specific, or distant personal experiences (all $ps > .13$). These findings were generally consistent with the correlational analyses, and in contrast to what was predicted. Story length was a significant positive predictor of the measures of story quality (vividness, specificity), although not of story time frame (see Table 8).

Other-Oriented Feeling Depictions

In this regression model, gender was found to be a marginally significant predictor of other-oriented feeling depictions ($\beta = .28, p < .02$), with females displaying a

higher frequency of such depictions than males, as expected. However, in contrast to our expectations, perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting were found to be a significant, negative predictor of other-oriented feeling depictions ($\beta = -.40, p = .002$). Age, dispositional empathy, and perceptions of paternal authoritativeness were not found to significantly contribute to this overall model ($ps > .13$).

In sum, several of our findings from the regression analyses were consistent with our expectations, in particular, the relations between age, dispositional empathy and perceptions of maternal authoritativeness for meaning-making, prosocial engagement, and empathic identity as reflected in the stories. However, the predictions of the narrative quality measures, other-oriented feeling depictions, and time frame, on the other hand, generally did not support our hypotheses, although in several cases (especially for parenting style) these effects were found for zero-order correlations, as described above. This suggests that these relations were non-unique and largely attributable to other factors in the regression analyses.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how type of story, adolescent age, level of dispositional empathy, and perceptions of authoritative parenting predicted the ways in which empathy is experienced, reflected upon, and integrated into the overall life story. Several important findings from this study emerged, which were consistent with previous literature and highlighted the importance of a narrative framework in providing insight into the empathic process, and its meaning for the individual's sense of self.

Story Length

Story length, as measured through total word counts of all four stories, was found to be positively associated with all of the narrative measures. Moreover, emerging adults were found to tell longer stories than adolescents with the exception of the “sad for someone” story, a story highly representative of a general empathic experience. However, even after controlling for total word count (i.e., the possibility that longer stories produce higher scores on the narrative measures by virtue of them containing more information), several of the predictor variables (e.g., age, dispositional empathy, perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting) remained significant in both the regression models and through correlational analyses on major dependent variables.

However, there was some evidence of a weak suppression effect for total word count (see Table 6). Although several of the findings documented for adolescents’ perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting were consistent with our narrative identity-based expectations, the relationships present should be interpreted with caution. Since the magnitude of the correlation increased somewhat for these variables when word count was included as a predictor, further exploration of the influence of story length is needed in order to clearly understand the meaning of this finding, and the nature of any suppression effects.

In addition to story length acting as a suppressor, many of the findings for maternal parenting may have also been suppressed largely by age. With age being negatively related to maternal authoritative parenting and positively to many of the narrative measures, including word count, the inclusion of age in the regression models of meaning-making, sense of empathic identity, and prosocial engagement, may be one

factor in many of the findings for maternal authoritativeness (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Given the complexity of the suppression effects, further exploration of the complex effects of both word count and age are needed to understand fully how they may interact in the development of narrative identity. Although such effects are problematic insofar as they complicate the interpretation of our data, many important, identity-based findings and implications contribute to the understanding of narrative identity.

Type of Story Elicited

Participants' positive instance stories about their empathic experiences, rather than their negative instance stories, were expected to be about serious, specific, highly descriptive events occurring in the distant, rather than recent, past. Since these types of experiences would have been particularly salient in participants' memories, they were predicted to have been reflected upon more and more fully incorporated into the life story, demonstrating increased levels of self-reflection, prosocial engagement, other-oriented feeling depictions, and a stronger sense of self as an empathic person. As hypothesized, positive instance stories were found to be more serious, specific, and highly descriptive. These events were also found to produce a trend toward more insightful meaning, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, and greater ratings of prosocial engagement, compared with negative instance stories. However, positive instance stories were no different from negative instance stories in terms of either time frame or the tendency to produce more other-oriented feeling depictions. Thus, the types of empathic experiences that individuals report greatly impact the extent to which empathy is incorporated into the developing sense of self.

The negative empathic experiences in adolescents' lives did not appear to produce the tension and conflict necessary to generate identity questioning and subsequent transformations of the self (as might be represented by an identity challenge, McAdams, 1985). Since these experiences proved to lack insight into the self and failed to disrupt the expected flow of life, they did not require extensive narrative identity processing. One possible explanation for this finding may be that the negative instance stories produced psychological distancing in order to preserve a positive self-image (Baumeister, Stilman, & Wotman, 1990). By distancing themselves from their negative experiences or empathic transgressions through either rationalizations or justifications, adolescents may fail to determine whether such experiences are important to their developing self-concepts.

The following "not sad for someone" story was told by a 19-year old female.

"My best friend, she didn't do well on her final exam and she felt really sad because she worked really hard for it...she was cramming for the exam...she didn't have that much time. She was involved in a lot of clubs and extracurriculars and she was really busy and I reminded her before had that "it is a really important year for us and you shouldn't get involved in stuff" that the main focus is study. But then she didn't do well for her final exam... I feel bad for her, but I don't feel sad for the situation. I kind of predicted that was going to happen. I tried to remind her, what else can I do? I asked her if she wants to come alone, but she was always busy with her extracurriculars. I tried a few times, but just gave up. If I was in her situation, I knew I wouldn't have handled it nicely...after I reminded her...I was just thinking "should have listened to me!"... When you think that you're capable of handling a lot of stuff and when you give yourself too much pressure it will backfire and I think we should prioritize things. But, I don't think it changed me."

Moreover, the interpersonal concerns surrounding these types of events may have emphasized socially desirable ways in which to reflect on and discuss such negative life events during the interview. Since first impressions have been found to produce self-enhancing responses during discussions with strangers (Tice, Butler, Muraven, &

Stillwell, 1995), such responses are likely to have also occurred during the interview. In this regard, it is possible that participants may have chosen to withhold pertinent information about both the event and its relation to the self in order to “save face” and appear as good, moral people in front of a stranger (e.g., the interviewer).

Since impression management has been well-documented in the literature as a mechanism of distortion in cognitive processing (both intentionally and unintentionally, Dunning, Griffin, Milojkovic & Ross, 1990; Potosky & Bobko, 1997), the interpersonal consequences of indirectly presenting one’s self in a negative light may have produced the motivation to conceal, distort, and revise the memories of such events before their consequences for the self were acknowledged. Memories for these types of events, therefore, may have been more fragmented, disconnected, and less likely to be subjected to high levels of cognitive processing. With their lack of relevance to the self, negative events may remain as parts or pieces of the life story that are not worth the cognitive effort required to process them fully. Consequently, they remain simple, less detailed, and less likely to generate self-reflection.

The positive experiences, which were likely more consistent with adolescents’ positive self-views, were instead depicted as more insightful and particularly relevant to the overall life story. This finding has been found to emerge in the earlier parts of adolescence (McLean & Lilgendal, forthcoming, cited in McLean, 2008). These authors found that younger adolescents use positive memories in order to develop and sustain a positive, anticipated view of the self. The participants in our study, most of whom were relatively young (with an overall mean age of approximately 17), may have

used their positive empathic moments instead of their negative moments in the development of a hoped for or anticipated, other-oriented self.

The following positive empathy story was told by an 18-year old male.

“So, last year, I was on the track team and we practiced around the track and it just so happened that there was a rugby game that day. So, we were running around the track and we had a grade 9 girl on the team that was top in Ontario. So, we were running around and it was a hot day and it was a black track so heat was coming off everywhere. At one point, the track actually started melting to the bottom of my shoes and my feet felt like they were on fire. So, she took off her shirt and had a sports bra on, and the rugby players were running around and they were making comments to her, and so after a while, I just got fed up...if someone were doing that to me I'd be so upset. I just felt bad because she is a grade 9 girl, she could feel intimidated, she is just trying to practice...as a leader of the track team, I felt that something needed to be done, if it wasn't going to be the coach, it was going to be me, so I said “have some respect”, “who do you think you are”, “she is just trying to practice”, “look away”....I am empathic, I want respect for not just for me but for other people....it goes back to the whole justice thing, someone needed to tell them to stop”

The positive, emotional moments in one's life are typically remembered with more detail, clarity, and with greater imagery than the negative or neutral moments (D'Argembeau, Comblain, & Van der Linden, 2003; Destun & Kuiper, 1999). Such memories are also discussed with others more frequently, have a greater ease of recall, and have a stronger impact on current feelings and conceptualizations of the self (Collins, Pillemer, Ivcevic, & Gooze, 2007). Since individuals have a tendency to process pleasant information (especially when such information is consistent with the self) more accurately and efficiently than unpleasant information, their negative, or difficult life events may often not be represented as an identity challenge (McAdams, 1985). Consequently, more reflection, meaning, and sense of purpose may be directed toward the positive, self-defining moments in one's life.

In this respect, current or hoped for self-definitions may have influenced and shaped the way in which adolescents recalled their positive empathic experiences (Ross, 1989; Wilson & Ross, 2003). Adolescents with a sense of self as empathic may be more likely to remember, in great detail, instances in their lives in which they were empathic toward others, reflect upon those instances, and integrate them into their developing self-concepts. The prosocial behaviour (e.g., providing solace, assistance, or care to unfortunate others) associated with such experiences may further serve as an indication of this self-concept consistency. For instance, if individuals define themselves as empathic, and then engage in behaviors which are consistent with an empathic self, such behaviors may be automatically encoded into their memories with greater ease and adjustment than experiences which were inconsistent with their self views. Thus, the motivation or tendency to view the self as continuous and consistent over time (McAdams, 1985; McAdams et al., 2006) may have important implications for the way in which self-defining, autobiographical experiences are constructed, stored, and later recalled.

Age and Gender Differences in Narratives

Age Differences

Emerging adults' narratives, as compared to adolescents' narratives, were expected to be about specific, highly vivid experiences set in the distant, rather than recent, past. Their narratives were also expected to contain more advanced, insightful meaning-making, more other-oriented feeling depictions, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, greater prosocial engagement, and an increased amount of "imagine-other" perspective taking. These hypotheses were partly supported. Not only did emerging adults have a greater repertoire of personal empathic and non-empathic

experiences from which to draw during the warm-up, their narratives contained a trend toward greater depth or learning, reflected a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, showed greater prosocial engagement, and more imagine-other perspective taking, particularly for positive instance stories, as compared to adolescents' narratives. However, their experiences were not any more specific, vivid, or different from those of adolescents in terms of other-oriented feeling depictions or the time frame in which the stories took place, contrary to our hypothesis.

Overall, these age-related findings were broadly consistent with previous literature demonstrating that the developmental differences present in the formation of a life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001; McLean, 2008; Pals, 2006) and the extent to which meaning or insight can be extracted from such stories (Pratt et al., 1999; Thorne et al., 2004) can be extended to the domain of empathic experiences. Explanations for this finding may center on both cognitive maturation and experiential differences in the ability to integrate past experiences into present and future knowledge about the self.

McLean (2008), Bluck and Habermas (2001) and McAdams (1996) note that the transition from childhood to adulthood produces a major change in the ability to engage in complex thought processes (e.g., abstract thought, meta-cognition, analytical reasoning, perspective taking, self-reflective thinking, and autobiographical reasoning). These cognitive advancements allow for older adolescents or emerging adults to integrate temporally- and context-specific notions of the self into a coherent and meaningful life story. Since the ability to reflect upon the experience of empathy is a difficult, highly abstract process requiring more advanced perspective taking abilities, the formation of an

empathic identity may be associated with a partly formed sense of a narrative self as unique but inter-connected to the identities of others. Such a connection is strongly represented by more advanced self-other differentiation and growth in perspective-taking abilities (e.g., Selman, 1971, 1975, 1980).

With cognitive advancements, emerging adults may be better able to consider the developmental trajectories of others without reference to the self, consider mutual perspectives at once, and understand how the same experience can have a different meaning depending on either the person or the context. Adolescents, on the other hand, may require a more direct perspective taking route, that is, by reflecting upon the emotional experiences of others with direct reference to the self as a prerequisite. This finding is similar to the development of prosocial or moral reasoning (see Eisenberg et al., 1991; Eisenberg et al., 1995), insofar as such reasoning becomes highly abstract, internalized, and self-reflexive in nature with increasing age.

Interestingly, both adolescents and emerging adults were found to tell the same types of stories (as evidenced by no difference in thematic content present in their stories), taking place only a few years or so ago, with the same amount of specificity, detail, and attempts at other-oriented feeling depictions. The stories both age groups told were thus similar in content, structure, and quality. Differences, however, were present in their interpretations, insights, and the extent to which their experiences were self-defining, as reflected by their sense of self as empathic, their level of meaning-making and the behaviors and prosocial responses described in their narrative experiences.

These age differences in the self-defining memories for empathic experiences are consistent with the developmental trajectory of a narrative identity (Bluck & Habermas,

2001; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McLean, 2008). With a greater amount of experiential knowledge, coupled with cognitive maturation, emerging adults acquire the ability to redefine, reintegrate, and constantly assimilate their life experiences into an overall life narrative. Adolescents, on the other hand, are in the process of engaging in exploration in an attempt to understand their roles in a complex and multifaceted society (Erikson, 1968). They have yet to integrate their past, present, and future notions of the self into a coherent and meaningful self or life story. Thus, the same empathic experiences may promote self-reflection and integration for an emerging adult, but fail to fully register as self-defining or worth insightful reflection for younger adolescents, even though the basic descriptions of these experiences are similar for both age groups.

The following “did not put self in someone’s shoes” story was told by an 18-year old male.

“I had a rough grade 8 year, bullying wise. I was a quiet kid in class, and I was smart, but if you do your work, if you try, you’re looked down at like the nerd or geek. So, one day my best friend and I, and I don’t know why, everything that annoyed us or bugged us about this [new] kid, we wrote down on a piece of paper and one day dropped it in his backpack. I guess he took it home and was fairly upset about it. I don’t know why, it was so stupid, it would have been a turning point in my life, I was never a bully before this. I was bullied, I should have understood what it would have felt like, what it would have done to someone’s morale or personality. I blame myself for it...it was almost a taste of my own medicine...this was my only mishap, and now I do charity events and stuff, so it could have been a life-changing opportunity where I felt bad that I did it and I think that people deserve better than that...it’s the whole justice thing.”

The following “did not put self in someone else’s shoes” story was told by a 16-year old female.

“It was when my friend, she couldn’t come to a dance—it was a school dance, and it’s like not the first time. She has really over protective parents so like with me-me and my friends got used to her not coming like but we started feeling bad for her. But after like um—from like 4 years

she's our friend—and, that time when she couldn't come to the dance, she kind of like makes us feel bad for her. And stuff, but I just kind of like stopped—when she couldn't come I was like oh...and I didn't really—be mean, but I don't, It was kind of like, I think she said “what if you couldn't go” or something and I'm like, well I can. But, I didn't really think much about it. So, I didn't really put myself in her shoes where she never got to go and she felt left out. Like um, it was just for those certain things. I was kind of thinking, like when she told us she couldn't go, I was kind of thinking, well there isn't really a surprise there because she couldn't go. And, I was like, just basically it was kind of like a fact because like, It would take like a lot of her to actually get to go. So, I was kind of thinking, oh that's not new or whatever but, yeah. [*Was there anything that you did?*]. No, not really. [*What does this story say about who you are?*] I kind of think it says that—well I don't know—if there is an issue or whatever and it keeps on coming up, and the same answer is put every time, at first Ill take it, and to feel for it and after a while, ill get kind of bored of it, and just kind of like, be like okay, like maybe- not a short attention span, but something that, ill kind of just get bored of the idea. Just be like, okay, and shove it off or something.”

Gender Differences

Since females have been found to score higher than males on self-report measures of dispositional empathy, we had expected this difference to emerge in the current study. Our findings were consistent with previous literature (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987); females were found to score marginally higher than males on the Davis questionnaire measure of empathic concern. No gender differences were predicted for the narrative measures, given the exploratory purpose of the study, and in general, none were observed, with the exception that females displayed a marginally higher frequency of other-oriented feeling depictions in their stories.

This finding is rather surprising given the gender differences typically found in the socialization of emotion-related narrative events (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000; Haden, 2003). It has been well-documented that the socialization patterns present for boys and girls are markedly different. Girls tend to be socialized into

expressive, warm, nurturing, altruistic individuals with strong interpersonal sensitivities. Boys, on the other hand, are more instrumental, asserting dominance and independence rather than the sensitivities associated with interpersonal relationships. Emotion and empathy are clearly more salient in the lives of girls and the motivation to understand the self with regard to other-oriented experiences seems to be of particular importance for females.

Although several studies examining emotion-related autobiographical narratives fail to examine gender as a predictor variable or do so only through secondary interests, females have been found to differ in terms of their overall ease of recall of emotion-related events, greater themes of communion in their life narratives, and more references to sadness than the life stories of males (Davis, 1999; McAdams et al., 2004). Moreover, in the wisdom narratives of women, empathy and support were more frequently experienced as a form of wisdom, as compared to forms of self-determination and experiential knowledge (Glück et al., 2005). Our findings did not parallel these results, given that the empathic stories of males and females were no different in content, quality, or importance for the self-concept. It may be plausible that empathic life events, for both genders, are stored and processed in similar ways. Although characters may play different roles and empathic responding may occur in dissimilar forms (e.g., providing advice vs. a shoulder to cry on), the importance of the life event for the self may transcend the boundaries of gender and gender-role stereotypes. The life experience of empathy, therefore, may be just as meaningful and significant for males as it is for females.

Moreover, females, as compared to males, were found to display a somewhat higher frequency of other-oriented feeling depictions. Since females have been found to

be more relationally-oriented, in the sense that they are connected to others and emotionally invested in the lives of those around them, their tendency to describe the feelings of others more fully is not surprising. Males, on the other hand, are viewed as more independent and autonomous, presenting themselves as independent of others (Fivush & Buckner, 2003). This difference, although somewhat uneven in its manifestations, appears to translate into the narratives of empathy that adolescents tell. Previous research has documented this finding, with females narrating relationship-oriented events in which the feelings of others are incorporated into their overall life stories (Thorne, 1995). Given that females and males have somewhat different orientations, the life experiences females have may be constructed in their memories differently than the life experiences of males. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that there were few gender differences in our narrative measures, consistent with findings from previous reviews that suggested that sex differences in this domain are largely confined to self-report questionnaire measures (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983).

Dispositional Empathy Differences in Narratives

Higher scores on self-reported dispositional empathy were expected to predict specific, highly vivid narratives set in the distant, rather than recent, past. The narratives of these individuals were also expected to contain more advanced, insightful meaning-making, more other-oriented feeling depictions, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, and greater evidence of prosocial engagement, given the apparent higher investment of these individuals in an “empathic” self concept. Although higher scores on dispositional empathy did not relate to the narrative quality measures or other-oriented feeling depictions, or the time frame in which the event had occurred, higher self-

reported dispositional empathy was found to predict a stronger sense of self as an empathic person in the stories, and greater prosocial engagement.

Personality dispositions have been found to play an important role in the construction of a narrative identity (McAdams, 1995; McAdams et al., 2004; Raggatt, 2006). McAdams and Pals (2006) outline a framework for describing personality that relies on three levels of depiction: traits, personal concerns, and life stories. Both traits and personal concerns are relatively stable individual differences in behaviors and motivations. They may influence the development of a life story in several ways. According to McAdams (1996), individual differences in personality greatly contribute to the ways in which individuals view, reflect on, construct, and make sense of their personal experiences. For instance, previous research has demonstrated that neurotic people tell stories higher in negative emotional tone than individuals who are not neurotic (McAdams et al., 2004). Likewise, those who scored higher on ego identity reported more growth and transformation in descriptions of their personal experiences (King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000).

The following “sad for someone” story was told by a 20-year old male who scored in the 90th percentile on the Davis (1994) empathy questionnaire.

“In high school, one of my good friends, her dad died from ALS, which is like a disease that eats away at your body. So, she knew about it for two years, all through high school and like he slowly got sicker and sicker, so it was kind of hard to watch her like go through that and see him, because he was a good friend too and just to see him slowly like die or whatever, it was kind of hard. She kind of opened up to me about it before she started letting everyone know and it was gonna happen for like two years so she kind of just didn’t want everyone to know about it, but she kind of told me...yeah, like a lot of the school went to the funeral and stuff, like it was during school, but we all just skipped it and were there for whatever. And she was really good about it, like ‘cause she knew for so long, so she didn’t really break down and stuff, so, which is good, but

personally I just thought like I would not be able to handle it this well, like I was really like proud of her 'cause she didn't break down. She said her whole speech without breaking down and crying and like she was just really brave and strong about it and I was thinking like, like I could never do that, like I would, if that was my dad, I would be a mess, for sure... our family sent their family flowers and a card and I see her a lot still so... every year now we all go on this like walk for her, like a donation thing so, we do a walk for ALS for her. [*How did this experience impact/change you*] .It changed me in the sense that you don't realize like how..easily life can like, you can't take life for granted. You have to appreciate the people, like, my dad and like the people around you like every day because you never know what's gonna happen, right, you could end up dying tomorrow, it me be um more happy about who I am and like appreciative, I guess".

The following "sad for someone" story was told by an 18-year old male who scored in the 6th percentile on the Davis (1994) empathy questionnaire.

"Okay, well, one of the most sad was uh, my ex-girlfriend, who I was still dating at the time, after we broke up, but she got caught for smoking weed from her mom, and her mom made it such a big deal and like made her go see a counselor and everything and made her, gave her like a month of being grounded. And I found that really unreasonable, also, because of all the problems that she already goes through, like some of them, like with her ex-boyfriend, she's still, like has mixed feelings for him, and also the fact of like her trying to get over me because things happened and she cheated on me twice... she's just trying to getover me, basically...I knew she usually does the drugs and stuff to stop thinking most of the time and to relax and stuff, and she's really shy and she really keeps a lot of herself in, and so, eventually, sooner or later I figured she would get caught...I was just thinking like that really sucks and her mom is like overreacting way too much and this is all just so dumb, everyone smokes weed, like everyone smokes weed well, in my school, basically, and um, I just thought it was really unreasonable and I really wished like her mom knew about all the other kinds who do a lot more intense drugs and smoke weed a lot more and stuff... [*what did you do?*].. There wasn't really much I could do because at that time I was moving out of my house [*And, what does this say about who you are?*] I try not to get too close to her. Because I don't try to get too close to anybody anymore, but also .. .it's too late because I already figured I am too close to her and most of the time, like things when people are hurt and stuff, or like when they're sad, I don't really care."

Our findings were consistent, for the most part, with previous research, since individuals who scored higher on dispositional empathy were found to reflect on their personal empathic moments as part of their narrative identities and to report engaging in

behaviors consistent with such identities, as compared to the stories of those who scored lower on dispositional empathy. However, dispositional empathy was not found to predict the ability to recall either empathic or non-empathic experiences, suggesting that the quality, rather than the quantity, of empathic episodes in the lives of highly empathic individuals are especially distinctive to their sense of self.

These findings parallel both Raggatt's (2006) and McAdams and colleagues' (2004) link between personality dispositions and life narratives. Raggatt (2006) found associations between agreeableness, characterized by trusting, loving, altruistic, caring and tender characterizations (as part of the Five-Factor Model of Personality, Costa & McCrae, 1992) and self-descriptions of love, nurturance, and connectedness with others (much like the self-descriptions noted for participants in the present study, which often relied on adjectives such as sympathetic, empathic, caring, understanding, and compassionate). Themes of communion, as found in McAdams's (2004) study, are evidenced by higher amounts of prosocial engagement in the stories of those scoring higher on dispositional empathy in the present study. Empathic individuals may, therefore, narrate events in their lives with a greater orientation toward the needs of others and highlight the importance of caring and helping others as important to their own sense of self.

Dispositional Empathy and Perceptions of Authoritative Parenting

Higher scores on dispositional empathy were not found to relate significantly to participants' perceptions of their mothers' authoritative parenting. However, such scores did relate positively to perceptions of paternal authoritative parenting practices, though only marginally, and ultimately to overall family authoritativeness (as measured through

aggregating both parents' authoritative indices, which were highly intercorrelated, into an index of family authoritativeness, as suggested by previous research within this area of dispositional empathy).

Overall, adolescents' perceptions of family authoritativeness have been documented in the literature as important predictors of adolescent empathy and caring (Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Henry et al., 1996). The present findings were consistent with this previous research, and further support the possible influence of authoritative parenting in the development of empathy in adolescence, though they are only correlational in nature and cannot directly address such a causal hypothesis. The combined parenting practices of both parents who provide reasons for behavior, communicate a sense of responsibility for one's actions, and who grant ample guidance for the development of social responsibility, may contribute over and above the unique contributions of one parent (Henry et al., 1996; Laible & Carlo, 2004). Furthermore, because there is usually a high degree of similarity between the perceived child-rearing practices of both parents (as also demonstrated by the present study), it seems reasonable to assume that a single index of overall family functioning may be a stronger predictor of dispositional empathy. In this regard, the overall family system characteristics, such as family responsiveness, cohesion, and the ability to adapt to the changes in family dynamics during adolescence, may promote a stronger sense of regard toward others. Thus, the family may be viewed as an emotional foundation from which other-oriented concern can be established and subsequently generalized to other aspects of an adolescent's life (e.g., friendships, romantic relationships, volunteering).

Perceptions of Authoritative Parenting and Narrative Measures

Adolescents' perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting, rather than paternal authoritative parenting, were expected to predict narratives about specific, highly descriptive events occurring in the distant, rather than recent, past. Moreover, narratives were also expected to concern higher amounts of meaning-making, other-oriented feeling depictions, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, and greater prosocial engagement. These predictions were partly supported. Perceptions of higher levels of maternal authoritative parenting were found to marginally predict more insightful self-reflection, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, and a trend toward prosocial engagement in adolescents' narratives. However, contrary to prediction, only weak relations were present between such perceptions and the narrative quality measures in the zero-order correlations (see Table 6). When story length was controlled, there were somewhat stronger positive relations between maternal authoritativeness and story vividness and specificity, consistent with our hypotheses. However, maternal authoritativeness was found to significantly predict a lower frequency of other-oriented feeling depictions, contrary to hypothesis, and was unrelated to story time frame. In the summary regression analyses, maternal authoritativeness predicted uniquely to meaning-making, sense of self and prosocial engagement, as expected, but did not show unique predictions to the story quality measures (see Table 8).

To date, there has been no research examining the potential correlates of adolescents' perceptions of maternal child rearing practices and narrative empathy. However, given that significant, highly disruptive life events are likely to be discussed with others, the listener's response can either promote or hinder narrative identity

processing (McLean, 2008; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004). Because mothers play a large role in the socialization of early adolescents' empathy (Laible & Carlo, 2004), their responses to adolescents' personal experiences have the potential to promote a great deal of self-reflection.

Since perceptions of mothers' authoritative parenting were found to be associated with more insightful reflection, a stronger sense of self as an empathic person, and greater prosocial engagement in adolescents' narratives, it is possible that such mothers may engage higher quality narrative, post-event processing with their adolescents as compared to non-authoritative mothers. Since authoritative mothers promote the growth and development of their children and are aware of the significant events in their lives, it may be reasonable to assume that such mothers may be more likely to discuss such events more frequently as a means of fostering closeness and intimacy with their children.

Through the experience of both connectedness and an emphasis on individuality or autonomy-granting in parenting practices, adolescents have been found to form a sense of self they feel strongly connected and committed to (Campbell, Adams, & Dobson, 1984; Grotevant, & Cooper 1998). Since such parenting helps to promote the self-reflection and self-concept integration needed in the formation of a secure sense of identity, the other-oriented experiences adolescents have may be processed more thoroughly, with greater knowledge acquired about the self, and with greater integration of the past, present and future. Thus, authoritative mothers may enhance the process of identity exploration in their children through their assistance in their children's narrative interpretations. If so, these effects of authoritative parenting may be largely mediated by identity development as reflected in the narrative self represented by stories.

The following “sad for someone story” was told by a 15-year old adolescent female who scored in the 99th percentile for perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting.

“Okay, um, so, my friend, she’s like one of my really close friends... her dad just recently died...and that was really hard for everyone. She goes to my church and she’s in our, in my youth group...it was hard for all of us because her dad was close to so many people, so, I felt so bad for her then. I was pretty sad myself, too. He had been sick for a long time but we didn’t think it would happen as soon as it did... we were all kind of getting ready for the “what if this actually does happen” and she was preparing herself and the whole, like all our friends were kind of like “hey, well, we need to be ready, just in case something bad happens.” I was kind of scared for her because you could tell, like she had been skipping school a lot and she was really scared and she was really nervous because it had, like it had gotten better then it got worse again... so as a group, we had gone to visit her dad with her in the hospital, just to kind of, like make him smile, because he had stopped smiling so, we started um, well, we started praying for her a lot, and then we started hanging out with her more, we just tried to help, like, and we made cards, and we just called everyone and we made dinners for them to stick in their freezer...as much as we could, just to kind of, like, I don’t know, build her up and stuff ... I don’t really know what it says about me, but I think, well, I think my friendship with her, with her grew even stronger because we were such good friends, and this only made it, like, it was sad, but it made it better because I could like comfort her and stuff...”

The following “sad for someone” story was told by an 18-year old female who scored in the 5th percentile for perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting.

“When I was, I think I was eleven um, my great grandma on my dad’s side died, and she’d been like really sick for a really long time, so it wasn’t really a surprise, but I remember like when I found out that when she died, but like I didn’t really know her that well ‘cause you know, I was only 11, I didn’t really see her that often. She had like a heart condition and she’d been sick for a really long time, and she’d had an operation like 12 years earlier, that, like on her throat or something and so she couldn’t talk very well either and then um .. when we found out that she died, I remember I was like sitting at my table, it was like a Sunday afternoon and we were eating like Kentucky Fried Chicken, and then um .. I, I guess it was my grandpa who was her son, he called and my dad answered the phone and then he hung up and said that she had died, so., yeah...and then, I remember at her funeral, my dad had to like,

like a whole bunch of her grandchildren had to like get up and talk about her and stuff, and my dad didn't get through it because he ended up crying and I remember like that was the only time that. I really felt sad because I'd never seen my dad cry before...I think I just, I think I just felt really bad for him 'cause like um .. he didn't have a bad childhood but his parents were just kind of um .. like, well, they forgot his birthday one year, like they were just really like inattentive, and his grandma was like, I don't know, she was like kind of the one that was more of a mother figure to him than his mom...*[What does this story say about who you are?]*. I don't know, over-sensitive I think sometimes, like if I see people crying, I usually start crying even if I don't know why they're sad."

According to Haden (2003), authoritative mothers may use a highly elaborative-topic extending, narrative style in the post-event processing of their adolescents' narratives of their experiences. By investing a great deal of time and interest into the narratives of their children, such mothers obtain an extensive amount of information. This information is evaluative in nature and has the goal of conveying the importance, significance, or meaning of a particular event. Such information, through orienting information (e.g., when, where, who was present) as well as with explicit evaluative statements (e.g., "It was the best time I've ever had"), provides ideas which connect the event to some larger context, such as identity. By reflecting with her adolescent on the meaning or significance of a personal event to his or her sense of self, personal experiences may become understood as a personal, highly self-defining narrative.

Interestingly, as expected, adolescents' perceptions of their fathers as authoritative did not significantly predict any of the narrative measures in the regression models. This finding is not surprising given the influence of mothers' support in the development of adolescent empathy (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Laible & Carlo, 2004; Soenens et al., 2007). However, significant relationships were found for perceptions of fathers' authoritative parenting through correlational analyses. Although adolescents'

perceptions of their fathers as authoritative were not related to more insightful self-reflection, such perceptions were however associated with a trend toward greater narrative quality (e.g., vivid and specific experiences), a stronger sense of self as empathic, and greater prosocial engagement. This finding demonstrates that fathers may play a role in how adolescents remember and later recall their empathic experiences. Perhaps single, highly descriptive events, deemed important to adolescents' sense of self, are interpreted through adolescent-father interactions in such a way as to promote the development of a secure identity from such high quality experiences. The role of father relationships in this narrative framework on empathy surely deserves further investigation and analysis, given that earlier work has concentrated on mothers.

Previous research has documented age-related changes in the parent-adolescent relationship. Mothers have been found to spend more time with their adolescents, are involved in a broader range of activities with them, and provide the bulk of care giving (Larson & Richards, 1994). Fathers' relationships, on the other hand, have been found to concern leisure and instrumental activities (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998). In contrast to mothers' elaborative or indirect discussions about the meaning of identity and self-relevant knowledge from personal events, fathers may play a more direct role in their interactions with their adolescents. For instance, it may be through leisure activities (e.g., through walks, outdoor activities, or sports) that fathers' discuss adolescents' personal experiences. With such discussions taking place in a less routine way, adolescents may be more likely to remember specific, detailed events as important to their sense of self. However, the discussions may lack the depth, demonstrated by the

lack of meaning associated with adolescents' stories of such experiences present in maternal discussions.

In contrast to our predictions, perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting were found to be negatively related to the frequency of other-oriented feeling depictions. Although this finding exists in contrast to a host of studies in childhood (see Eisenberg et al., 1998 for a review) and adolescence (Henry et al., 1996; Soenens et al., 2007), this was the first study examining such depictions through the use of a narrative framework. Since the type of methodology has been found to influence empathy and empathy-related responding, particularly in studies employing self-reported assessments (Zhou et al., 2003), the use of a narrative approach may provide unique and important insight into the ways in which mothers teach their adolescents about the quality of their personal, self-defining experiences. Since self-report or experimentally-induced procedures fail to establish the idiosyncrasies associated with adolescents' personal life experiences, the parenting relationships present through narrative stories may be different from those reflected by other methodologies.

Authoritative mothers, who may use more of an elaborative, topic-extending narrative style in discussing events, may provide their children with the tools necessary to organize their memories into coherent and meaningful narratives. By using less referential (i.e., who, what, when, and where the event happened) and more orienting information (e.g., providing descriptions and explanations which help to bridge events to other experiences), mothers may help their adolescents understand the qualities of a "good story". Through such stories, layers of the self are developed, elaborated upon, and incorporated into a larger, self-relevant context. Consequently, the information gathered

during these discussions conveys why an event was interesting, significant, meaningful, and a memorable experience (Haden, 2003).

Considering the importance these mothers place on self-reflection and identity formation, rather than on the influence of referential information, the feelings of others may not be as memorable as the interpretation or significance of the life event. Perhaps, in order to integrate several temporal notions of the self into a meaningful and coherent life story, the feelings of others are not considered as meaningful or salient to one's sense of self and are, therefore, not included in discussions. With a focus on the self, as compared to the feelings of other characters within the story, the ability to remember the exact feelings of others depicted during the event may not provide any additional or relevant information necessary in the process of identity development. As a result, such feelings are not incorporated into the overall life story as readily as the overarching meaning, interpretation, or significance of the event as a whole. This line of interpretation is admittedly speculative at best, and further research should be carried out to confirm the validity of this one, somewhat counter-intuitive finding regarding the depiction of others' feelings and maternal authoritativeness.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There were several limitations in this research which will need to be addressed in future studies. Since analyses used to examine the relationships between the predictor variables and the dependent measures were correlational in nature, no causal interpretations or conclusions can be made. Potential "third variable" associations, which need to be explored further, may be driving many of the current study's findings. Furthermore, since the data were collected simultaneously and not longitudinally, inverse

causal patterns (e.g., adolescents' empathic concern levels influencing parenting) also cannot be ruled out.

One such variable, whether or not the experiences participants told were discussed with friends or family members beforehand, may have influenced the extent to which the story was reflected upon and integrated into participants' sense of self. For instance, the majority of peoples' significant and memorable events are disclosed to others almost immediately following the event (Thorne et al., 2004). If this is so, it may be the case that more empathic individuals, or those from more authoritative families, are more likely to do such sharing, and consequently develop a more integrated and reflective analysis of the self's empathic qualities in stories.

Unfortunately, participants in the current study were not asked whether or not the memories they had elected to share were in fact previously discussed with significant others. Since the simple act of repeating or discussing events may prompt self-understanding, self-reflection, and validation from others, the stories that participants chose to share may have already been deemed important to their sense of self. Thus, future research should examine the impact of re-telling or re-experiencing significant, emotionally salient, other-oriented events on one's developing empathic self (Thorne et al., 2004).

In the current study, participants were instructed to tell both positive and negative instance stories. The positive instance stories appeared to be strongly tied to the life narratives of the participants, while the negative stories were not. The latter stories, which may be classified as moral transgressions, may be considered "untold stories" (McLean, 2008, p. 11) in the sense that they do not reflect cultural standards or ideals and should,

therefore, really not be told. With these types of stories silenced, they lose their ability to produce growth, transformations, or intensive reflection into the self. In this respect, participants' non-empathic, non-moral, and potentially harmful stories may be important for the study of life narratives. Since identity is formed through the integration of several life experiences, both positive and negative, it is worthwhile for developmental researchers to perhaps direct their focus to the stories in which the self may be silenced. In the present study, however, there was little indication that narrative variables were differentially related to predictors across negative and positive stories. Negative stories did not seem to be fully suppressed, but rather simply were less linked to the sense of self, and perhaps distanced in telling from the self through greater blaming of the target.

Since social desirability and impression management might have played a role in the recollection and discussion of such negative events, it may be worthwhile to examine, through either diary entries or computer-based questionnaire systems, the impact of distortions and biases on the information gathered in these types of studies. For example, social desirability has been found to decrease in studies employing computer-administered questionnaires (see Richman, Kiesler, Weisband, & Drasgow, 1999, for a review) as an alternative to face-to-face interviews. Given the highly personal nature of the questions asked in the present study, a different, more modern approach to life narratives, through computer blogs for example, may prove a useful alternative to many of the traditional modes of measurement and may curb many of the issues surrounding impression management.

Participants were recruited from the local community in the Kitchener-Waterloo and surrounding areas. Although there is cultural and ethnic diversity within this

community, it is likely that the differences are not strong enough for this research to be generalized beyond the confines of Western culture. It was not possible, in this relative small sample, to examine cultural background as a factor. Since cultural differences have been found with respect to life narratives (see Wang & Brockmeier, 2002) and because narrative identity is not entirely limited to modern cultures, it may be worthwhile to examine the influence of culture on narrative identity construction, particularly for empathy narratives. For example, because many interdependent cultures value social relationships, their empathy narratives may be remembered and constructed differently than cultures which do not embrace interdependence as strongly.

Moreover, since the target age groups in the present study were early and late adolescents, we were unable to examine empathic narratives across the lifespan. According to McLean (2008), the content and function of narrative identity development changes as adults enter into the later stages of life. Mature adults (65 -85 years of age) have been found to construct and reflect on their life narratives in terms of stability or self-consistency (e.g., “this experience shows that I am a strong person”, McLean, 2008, p. 6). Younger adults (17-35 years of age), on the other hand, engage in identity construction through their life changes (e.g., “I became a stronger person after that experience”, McLean, 2008, p. 6). These differences have been suggested to be adaptive, as older adults attempt to maintain a stable and continuous sense of self in the face of severe threats or losses later in life (Bluck & Habermas, 2001).

Since older adults have a more stable and fully-formed sense of self, the experiences in which they were empathic may be more likely to be integrated into their empathic identities because such experiences are more representative of self-concept

stability. Younger adults, in contrast, may reflect upon the experiences in which they were not empathic in order to better understand who they are in relation to their hoped for or anticipated self (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Such experiences, which are inconsistent with a present sense of self as empathic, may bring about conflict, tension, and subsequent transformations of the self (McLean & Thorne, 2003; Piaget, 1965). As a result, the depth of processing for these types of events may be greater in adulthood and decrease as adults mature later on in life (Labouvie-Vief, 2003). Thus, it is worthwhile for future research to be directed at understanding the ways in which other-oriented identities are maintained in the later stages of life.

Another limitation concerns the low inter-rater reliabilities found for meaning making and psychological control (.64 and .61, respectively). Although relatively low in terms of the literature for meaning-making (e.g., see McLean, 2005; Thorne et al., 2004), the nature of the code itself, for this type of study, was extremely abstract and difficult. Participants were asked to describe how a particular experience impacted, changed, or influenced their current view of the self. Throughout the interviews, many of these young participants had difficulties with the nature of these types of questions. Although probes were intended to help clarify any problems or concerns with these questions, they may have generated confusion. This confusion, coupled with the highly abstract nature of the types of questions asked, may have proven too complicated for adolescents to fully grasp.

Moreover, when such descriptions were coded, the responses were rarely clear-cut or well-defined. Personal judgments based on the entirety of the transcript, rather than systematic evaluations of single answers to questions about change or impact of the

experience, were often used, which may have compromised the reliability of the meaning-making code to a degree.

The low internal consistency for the paternal psychological control subscale, as compared to the high alpha for maternal psychological control, may be explained, in part due a restricted range of responses. The range for the maternal psychological control subscale was 8 to 37, whereas the range for the paternal psychological control subscale was 8 to 22. Given the negative connotations associated with these types of questions (e.g., “blames me for other family members’ problems”) and the conflicts associated with maternal child-rearing in adolescence (Laible & Carlo, 2004), participants may be more likely to be more forgiving of their fathers’ attempts at psychological control and thus rate such statements much lower. Moreover, given their increased contact with mothers, adolescents and emerging adults may be more likely to remember more instances of psychological control as stemming from their mothers rather than their fathers. More research on these differences between adolescents’ memories of parents is clearly warranted however.

Another limitation inherent in the present study concerns the influence of adolescents’ perceptions of authoritative parenting. Since we used an aggregated model of parenting (in which we combined dimensions of support and control for mothers and fathers independently), the unique contributions of maternal and paternal support, psychological control, and behavioral control were not examined as unique predictors of both dispositional empathy and the narrative measures. Disaggregated models of parenting practices (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Bean et al., 2006; Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003) in which the contribution of each dimension is isolated and

then examined as a predictor of adolescent outcomes, may be a more useful approach in understanding the independent contributions of each parent in the socialization process. Furthermore, since most empathy socialization research is conducted with mothers, little information is known about fathers. Thus, future research should examine the influence of fathers' parenting practices on the development of empathy in adolescence.

Conclusion

Overall, it is apparent that the ways in which empathic experiences are recalled, reflected upon, and incorporated into the life story are highly characteristic of salient and meaningful empathic identities. Being older, rating oneself as high on dispositional empathy, and stronger perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting were all important predictors of a stronger sense of self as empathic. Moreover, these results further illuminate the strengths associated with a narrative approach as an innovative technique in furthering the study of empathy and as a potential model for integrating empathy into the research literature on the development of personal identity in adolescence as revealed in the life story (McAdams, 2001).

On a final note, the ways in which empathic experiences were recounted (e.g., specificity, vividness, time frame, other-oriented feelings, and thematic content) did not differ with respect to most of the predictor variables. However, the ways in which such events were processed, reflected upon, and integrated to one's sense of self appeared to be related in predictable ways to several of the independent measures (e.g., age, dispositional empathy, and perceptions of maternal authoritative parenting). These developmental and identity-based findings broadly support McAdams' (1996, 2001) life story model and indicate that it may be fruitfully extended to the domain of empathic

experiences.

Table 1

Means and SDs for All Narrative Measures for Adolescents and Emerging Adults

Measures (Totals)	Age Group	
	Adolescents	Emerging Adults
Meaning-Making	3.34 (2.54)	4.90 (2.10)
Empathic Identity	7.13 (2.04)	8.19 (2.70)
Prosocial Engagement	7.61 (2.31)	8.68 (2.93)
Vivid	10.92 (3.92)	11.16 (3.46)
Specific	14.78 (2.30)	14.74 (2.85)
Time (in months)	97.67 (66.09)	120.31 (84.27)
Depiction of Others' Feelings	6.80 (6.91)	7.90 (4.14)
Seriousness	204.50 (47.19)	235.25 (54.14)
Total number of stories/events produced	6.03 (1.76)	7.25 (1.24)

Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 2

Frequency of Coded Themes for Adolescents and Emerging Adults

Story Themes	Age Group	
	Adolescents	Emerging Adults
Relationship	15	22
Achievement	18	18
Tension/Conflict	23	30
Mortality	17	21
Tension/Achievement	23	31
Mortality/Tension	22	30
Relationship/Tension	16	16
Relationship/Achievement	20	26
Relationship/Mortality	20	27

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Authoritative Parenting and Dispositional Empathy for Adolescents and Emerging Adults

Measures	Age Group	
	Adolescents	Emerging Adults
Family Authoritativeness	51.75 (13.52)	40.81 (17.04)
Maternal Authoritativeness	27.59 (8.56)	21.98 (10.37)
Paternal Authoritativeness	24.16 (8.533)	18.83 (9.06)
Dispositional Empathy	37.34 (6.10)	35.03 (6.84)

Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 4

Intercorrelations between Age, Dispositional Empathy, Perceptions of Maternal and Paternal Authoritative Parenting, and Total Word Count

Predictors	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	—	-.10	-.32**	.15	.29**
2. Dispositional Empathy		—	.15	.25*	.05
3. Maternal Authoritativeness			—	.47***	.15
4. Paternal Authoritativeness				—	.11
5. Total Word Count					—

Note. * $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Type of Story (Positive vs. Negative) Elicited

Measure (Totals)	Type of Story	
	Positive	Negative
Meaning-Making	2.40 (1.62)	1.76(1.45)
Empathic Identity	5.18 (1.45)	2.50(1.72)
Prosocial Engagement	5.16 (2.10)	3.01 (1.20)
Vivid	5.82 (2.15)	5.22 (1.88)
Specific	7.72 (1.64)	7.03 (1.46)
Time	49.41 (46.14)	60.36 (50.67)
Depiction of Others' Feelings	4.04 (3.22)	3.33 (3.23)
Event Seriousness	124.39 (41.83)	96.84 (30.45)

Note: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses.

Table 6

Zero-order and Partial Correlations (Controlling for Story Length in Words) between Narrative Measures, Age, Dispositional Empathy, and Perceptions of Authoritative Parenting

Narrative Measures	Age	Dispositional Empathy	Maternal Authoritative	Paternal Authoritative
Meaning-Making	.35***	.18*	.09	.19*
Empathic Identity	.22**	.33**	.36***	.32***
Prosocial Engagement	.33***	.40***	.20*	.27**
Vivid	.02	.10	.26**	.26**
Specific	-.05	.06	.18*	.30***
Others' Feelings	.12	.07	-.32***	.11
Time Frame	.17*	-.12	.05	.09
Event Severity	.22**	-.05	.07	-.16

Note. Partial correlations are in boldface font.

* $p \leq .10$ ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$

Table 7

Frequency of Perspective Taking as a Function of Age Group (Emerging Adults vs. Adolescents)

Perspective Taking	Positive Stories		Negative Stories	
	Emotion	Cognition	Emotion	Cognition
	Emerging Adults (n = 31)			
Imagine-Self	2	12	0	4
Imagine-Other	22	19	3	2
Failure	1	0	28	24
	Adolescents (n = 28)			
Imagine-Self	3	16	1	1
Imagine-Other	16	11	5	3
Failure	8	1	22	19

Table 8

Summary of Regression Analyses for Age, Dispositional Empathy and Perceptions of Maternal and Paternal Authoritative Parenting as Predictors of Narrative Measures

Dependent Measures	Independent Variables	R ²	B	SE B	β	t
Meaning-Making	Total Word Count	.32	.001	.000	.34	2.78***
	Age		.51	.18	.35	2.78***
	Dispositional Empathy		.06	.04	.16	1.34
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.05	.03	.23	1.94*
Empathic Identity	Paternal Authoritativeness		.02	.03	.07	.51
	Total Word Count	.47	.001	.000	.36	3.34***
	Age		.44	.16	.30	2.17***
	Dispositional Empathy		.10	.04	.27	2.60**
Prosocial Engagement	Maternal Authoritativeness		.11	.03	.45	3.75***
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.01	.03	.04	.37
	Total Word Count	.43	.001	.000	.32	3.10***
	Age		.61	.17	.38	3.51***
Specificity	Dispositional Empathy		.14	.04	.37	3.58***
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.08	.03	.28	2.40**
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.02	.03	.07	.59
	Total Word Count	.19	.001	.000	.33	2.15**
Vivid	Age		-.13	.21	-.09	-.63
	Dispositional Empathy		-.01	.05	-.03	.76
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.02	.03	.10	.69
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.06	.04	.22	1.53
Vivid	Total Word Count	.51	.002	.000	.70	6.81***
	Age		-.28	.23	-.13	-1.21
	Dispositional Empathy		.009	.05	.01	.13
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.04	.04	.11	.94
Paternal Authoritativeness			.04	.05	.11	.98

Others' Feelings	Total Word Count	.42	.002	.000	.44	3.86***
	Age		-.28	.39	-.08	-.72
	Gender		3.11	1.24	.28	2.52**
	Dispositional Empathy		-.02	.10	-.02	-.18
	Maternal Authoritativeness		-.23	.07	-.40	-3.18***
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.12	.08	.19	1.53
Time Frame	Total Word Count	.07	.005	.007	.10	.69
	Age		8.03	6.70	.17	1.19
	Dispositional Empathy		-1.60	1.59	-.14	1.00
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.77	1.23	.10	.62
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.74	1.31	.09	.57

Note. *p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01

Table 9

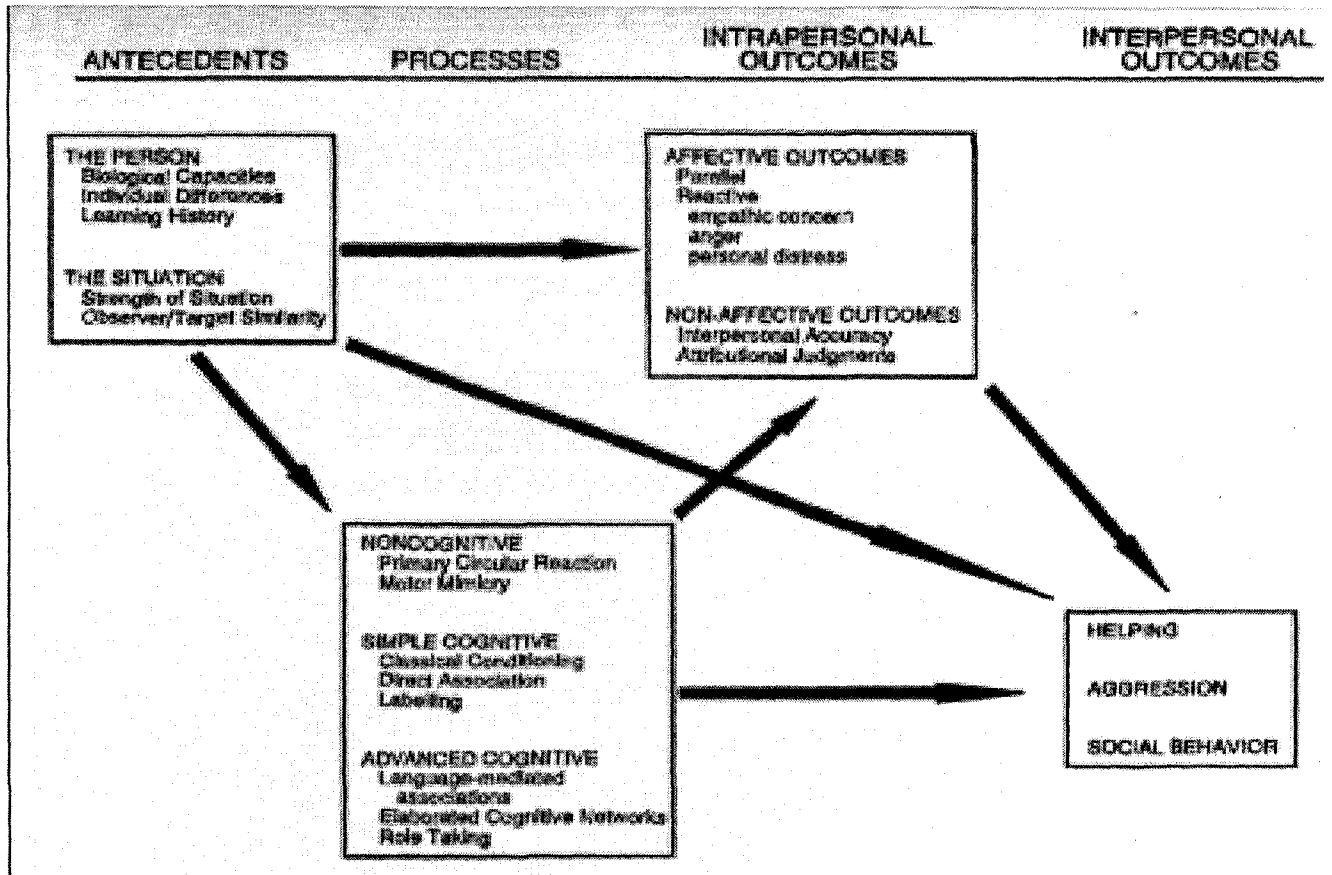
Regression Analyses for Age, Dispositional Empathy and Perceptions of Maternal and Paternal Authoritative Parenting as Predictors of Narrative Measures with Total Word Count Removed

Dependent Measures	Independent Variables	R ²	B	SE B	β	t
Meaning-Making	Age	.24	-9.77	3.91	.43	3.39***
	Dispositional Empathy		.09	.05	.24	1.95*
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.05	.03	.22	1.73*
Empathic Identity	Age	.36	.57	.17	.39	3.35***
	Dispositional Empathy		.11	.04	.30	2.59**
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.09	.03	.39	3.00***
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.03	.03	.13	1.00
Prosocial Engagement	Age	.40	.75	.18	.46	4.08***
	Dispositional Empathy		.16	.05	.41	3.58***
	Maternal Authoritativeness		.06	.03	.23	1.83*
	Paternal Authoritativeness		.04	.04	.15	1.21

Note. *p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01

Figure 1

Empathy: An Organizational Model



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Appendix A

Empathy Questionnaire

Please choose the response that best describes you by circling the appropriate number on the following scale:

0	1	2	3	4
Does not describe me well				Describes me well

- 1) _____ Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal.
- 2) _____ I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the "other guy's" point of view.
- 3) _____ Sometimes I don't feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems.
- 4) _____ I try to look at everybody's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
- 5) _____ When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.
- 6) _____ I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective.
- 7) _____ I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.
- 8) _____ If I'm sure I'm right about something, I don't waste much time listening to other people's arguments.
- 9) _____ When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them.
- 10) _____ I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.
- 11) _____ I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both.
- 12) _____ I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.
- 13) _____ When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to "put myself in his shoes" for a while.
- 14) _____ Before criticizing someone, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place.

Appendix B

Parenting Style

Please circle the appropriate number to indicate how much each statement reflects your mother's parenting (on the left) and your father's parenting (on the right).

MORE ABOUT PARENTS/CAREGIVERS						
MOTHER/ADULT FEMALE CAREGIVER			My mother or my father is a person who:	FATHER/ADULT MALE CAREGIVER		
Not like her	Some-what like her	A lot like her		Not like him	Some-what like him	A lot like him
1	2	3	1. makes me feel better after talking over my worries with him/her	1	2	3
1	2	3	2. changes the subject whenever I have something to say	1	2	3
1	2	3	3. often praises me	1	2	3
1	2	3	4. is easy to talk to	1	2	3
1	2	3	5. is less friendly with me if I do not see things his/ her way	1	2	3
1	2	3	6. often interrupts me	1	2	3
1	2	3	7. enjoys doing things with me	1	2	3
1	2	3	8. believes in showing her/his love for me	1	2	3
1	2	3	9. is always trying to change how I feel or think about things	1	2	3
1	2	3	10. smiles at me very often	1	2	3
1	2	3	11. is able to make me feel better when I am upset	1	2	3
1	2	3	12. blames me for other family members' problems	1	2	3
1	2	3	13. cheers me up when I am sad	1	2	3
1	2	3	14. makes me feel like the most important person in her/his life	1	2	3
1	2	3	15. brings up past mistakes when s/he criticizes me	1	2	3
1	2	3	16. will avoid looking at me when I had disappointed her/him	1	2	3
1	2	3	17. gives me a lot of care and attention	1	2	3
1	2	3	18. if I have hurt her/ his feelings, stops talking to me until I please her/him again	1	2	3

MORE ABOUT PARENTS/CAREGIVERS						
MOTHER/ADULT FEMALE CAREGIVER			My mother or my father is a person who:	FATHER/ADULT MALE CAREGIVER		

Doesn't know	Some-what know s	Knows a lot		Doesn't know	Some-what know s	Knows a lot
1	2	3	1. where you go at night	1	2	3
1	2	3	2. where you are most afternoons after school	1	2	3
1	2	3	3. how you spend your money	1	2	3
1	2	3	4. what you do with your free time	1	2	3
1	2	3	5. who your friends are	1	2	3

Appendix C

Empathy Interview Protocol

Now, we're going to talk a little bit about empathy. Empathy means different things to different people. What does empathy mean to you/How do you define empathy?

That's a really good definition of empathy. In our research, we define empathy as having to do with thoughts and feelings that we have when we see someone else experiencing an emotion like sadness. So, when we see a person who looks sad, and we feel sad because of that, we are showing empathy. Or, when we see another person experiencing a different emotion, and can put ourselves in his or her place, we are also showing empathy. Does that make sense to you? So, now that we understand what empathy means, we are going to talk about your empathy experiences.

I am going to ask you about situations/events in your life where you may/may not have experienced empathy. But, first I am going to ask you to:

Please write down 2 situations/events in your life where you felt: [*participant is given a blank piece of paper to write down events in point form*]

1. Sad for someone
2. Did not feel sad for someone when it seemed that you should
3. Put yourself in someone else's shoes
4. Did not put yourself in someone else's shoes when it seemed that you should

1) Sad for someone---I would like you to choose one of the situations/events that you wrote down where you feel like you felt the most sad for someone and tell me about that time.

2) Did not feel sad for someone when it seemed like you should--- I would like you to choose one of the situations/events that you wrote down where you felt you did not feel sad for someone when it seemed that you should and tell me about that time.

3) Put yourself in someone else's shoes---I would like you to choose one of the situations/events that you wrote down where you felt that you strongly put yourself in someone else's shoes and tell me about that time.

4) Did not put yourself in someone else's shoes when it seemed that you should---I would like you to choose one of the situations/events that you wrote down where you felt you did not put yourself in someone else's shoes when it seemed that you should and tell me about that time.

[*Be sure that all points on cue card are covered efficiently*]

- a) When did this experience occur (how old were you?)
- b) What lead up to this event?
- c) What exactly happened in the event?

- d) Who was involved in the event?
- e) What were you thinking and feeling?
- f) What did you do?
- g) What does this story say about who you are?

Appendix D
Coding Protocol

Meaning-Making

0—No Learning

Stories which contain no learning.

1—Lesson Learning

Stories which involve learning a specific lesson which has implications for behavior.

2—Vague Insight

Stories which contain meanings slightly more sophisticated than lessons but are not as explicit as insights.

3—Gaining Insight

These stories contain insight, defined as meanings that extend beyond the specific event to explicit transformations in one's understanding of oneself, the world, and relationships.

Quality

A) Seriousness of Event: Life Chance Units (Millar & Rahe, 1997)

B) Vividness

- 1—Devoid of all detail, no imagery
- 2—Slight detail and imagery
- 3—Moderate detail and imagery
- 4—High level of detail and imagery
- 5—Rich in detail, striking images

B) Specificity

- 1—General
- 2—Predominately general, but contains some specific elements
- 3—Equally contains both general and specific elements
- 4—Predominately specific, but contains some general elements
- 5—Specific

C) Depiction of Others' Feelings (freq. count)

e.g., "she felt bad after the exam", "she felt upset", "she was really worried"

Identity: Self-Definition: What does this story say about who you are as a person?

- 0—Not an empathic person ** in transcripts (e.g., says I am not empathic, sympathetic)
- 1—Irrelevant (e.g., says nothing about who I am)
- 2—Slightly an empathic person (e.g., says I like to help others)

- 3—Moderately an empathetic person (e.g., says I am caring and understanding toward others)
- 4—An empathic person (e.g., says I am sympathetic, empathetic, take the needs of others into consideration)

Predominant Theme(s)

A) General Themes (presence vs. absence)

Relationship Themes—relationship with others is the central theme.

Achievement Themes—effortful attempts at mastering vocational, physical, social, or spiritual goals (e.g., school, sports, or work themes)

Mortality Themes—emphasize one's own or another's mortality (e.g., accidents, deaths, or near death experiences)

B) Tension/Conflict Themes—explicit reports of discomfort, disagreement, or unease on the part of any character during the event)

Routes

A) Parallel vs. Non-Parallel Experiences

- 1—Perspective Taking: Parallel experiences (self is easily transposed into experience, can be easily imagined because it had occurred before) “I was in a similar situation before, it's a similar situation where you have to withdraw from your promise”
- 2—Perspective Taking: non-parallel experience (projecting self into situation even though it had not happened before) e.g., “If I were in her situation, I would have” or perspective Taking: non-parallel (participant tries to transpose self into others' experience but is unable to) “I cant imagine that—I was like, what would I do if I was in her position, so I tried—its like I don't know if I'd be able to find the strength”
- 3—Perspective Taking: failure (participant unable to put self in others' experience, unwilling to do so)

Prosocial Orientation: What did you do?

- 1—no evidence of prosocial orientation (did nothing)
- 2—slight evidence of prosocial orientation (helped slightly)
- 3—moderate evidence of prosocial orientation
- 4—mostly prosocial in orientation
- 5—completely prosocial in orientation

Time Frame

Number of Months/weeks/years ago story took place

Appendix E

Life Change Units (LCUs)

Life change event	LCU
Health	
An injury or illness which:	
kept you in bed a week or more, or sent you to the hospital	74
was less serious than above	44
Major dental work	26
Major change in eating habits	27
Major change in sleeping habits	26
Major change in your usual type and/or amount of recreation	28
Work	
Change to a new type of work	51
Change in your work hours or conditions	35
Change in your responsibilities at work:	
more responsibilities	29
fewer responsibilities	21
promotion	31
demotion	42
transfer	32
Troubles at work:	
with your boss	29
with coworkers	35
with persons under your supervision	35
other work troubles	28
Major business adjustment	60
Retirement	52
Loss of job:	
laid off from work	68
fired from work	79
Correspondence course to help you in your work	18
Home and Family	
Major change in living conditions	42
Change in residence:	
move within the same town or city	25
move to a different town, city, or state	47
Change in family get-togethers	25

Life change event	LCU
Major change in health or behaviour of family member	55
Marriage	50
Pregnancy	67
Miscarriage or abortion	65
Gain of a new family member:	
birth of a child	66
adoption of a child	65
a relative moving in with you	59
Spouse beginning or ending of work	46
Child leaving home:	
to attend college	41
due to marriage	41
for other reasons	45
Change in arguments with spouse	50
In-law problems	38
Change in the marital status of your parents:	
divorce	59
remarriage	50
Separation from spouse:	
due to work	53
due to marital problems	76
Divorce	96
Birth of a grandchild	43
Death of a spouse	119
Death of other family member:	
child	123
brother or sister	102
parent	100
Personal and social	
Change in personal habits	26
Beginning or ending school or college	38
Change of school or college	35
Change in political beliefs	24
Change in religious beliefs	29
Change in social activities	27
Vacation	24
New, close, personal relationship	37
Engagement to marry	45
Girlfriend or boyfriend problems	39
Sexual difficulties	44
"Falling out" of a close personal relationship	47
An accident	48
Minor violation of the law	20
Being held in jail	75
Death of a close friend	70
Major decision regarding your immediate future	51
Major personal achievement	36
Financial	
Major change in finances:	
increased income	38
decreased income	60

investment and/or credit difficulties	56
Loss or damage of personal property	43
Moderate purchase	20
Major purchase	37
Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	58
