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Blair Thompson

Western Kentucky University, blair.thompson@wku.edu

Jody Koenig Kellas

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jkellas2@unl.edu

Jordan Soliz

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, jsoliz2@unl.edu

Jason Thompson

Western Kentucky University, jason.thompson2@uky.edu

Amber Epp

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, amber.epp@wisc.edu

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Blair Thompson, Jody Koenig Kellas, Jordan Soliz, Jason Thompson, Amber Epp, and Paul Schrodt



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Family Legacies: Constructing Individual and Family Identity through Intergenerational Storytelling

Blair Thompson,¹ Jody Koenig Kellas,² Jordan Soliz,² Jason Thompson,¹
Amber Epp,² and Paul Schrodts³

1. Department of Communication, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA
2. Communication Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA
3. Communication Studies, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Corresponding author – Blair Thompson, Western Kentucky University, Department of Communication, Fine Arts Center Room 159, 1906 College Heights Blvd., Bowling Green, KY 42101–1029, email blair.thompson@wku.edu

Abstract

The current study focused on discovering the ways in which the intergenerational transmission of family legacy stories both enables and constrains individual family members' sense of their own identities. Using semistructured interviews, 17 third-generation family members identified a multitude of both positive and negative family legacies. Both positive and negative legacies were influenced by the storytelling context. Positive legacies portrayed families as hardworking, caring, and cohesive while negative legacies were more idiosyncratic. Individual family members typically responded to their family legacies by embracing the positive and rejecting the negative. However, individuals' responses also pointed to additional complexities in accepting or rejecting family legacies. Specifically, some individuals embraced negative family legacies and rejected positive ones; others accepted only portions of the legacies; and some reported their legacies as unembraceable.

Keywords: family legacy, storytelling, intergenerational, identity

Introduction

Family members participate in creating stories together, a process which is particularly important because it helps constitute the identity of the family and its individual members (e.g., Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwaglr, & Rimmer, 1995; Fiese & Marjinsky, 1999; Koenig Kellas, 2005; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). Family narrative research has addressed the role family stories play in constructing family and personal identity as well as in fostering family culture (e.g., Koenig Kellas, 2005; Langellier & Peterson, 2004). Despite these contributions, researchers have yet to examine how individual family members embrace, reject, or extend family stories. There is a general consensus among narrative scholars that identity is narratively configured (Bamberg, 2004). As Redman (2005) observed, the idea that “the stories we tell to and about ourselves in some sense construct who we are” (p. 28) is echoed throughout narrative scholarship. Family storytelling represents one narrative form that plays a role in the construction of identity as family is one of the first places where people get a sense of who they are (Stone, 1988). Given that multiple participants across generations not only co-narrate their shared stories but also jointly evaluate them, intergenerational family storytelling becomes important to identity development (Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). In this sense, intergenerational family stories both affect and reflect individual and family identity, and narrative scholars have further argued that the construction of identity through storytelling is a dynamic process that occurs at individual, family, and cultural levels of analysis (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2004; Langellier & Peterson, 2004, May, 2004; Nelson, 2004).

Although some family stories merely capture the essence of specific events, other family stories may combine over time and generations to become *family legacies*. According to Stone (1988), as a family story continues to be told across generations, the story becomes a legacy. Analyzing family legacies provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which family meaning is communicated across generations and in situated contexts. In order to discover how individuals make sense of these legacies in the construction of their familial and individual identities, we focused on third-generation family members (i.e., young adult children) as they provide a multigenerational-influenced perspective on family storytelling and legacies. During the process of emerging adulthood the lessons culled from family legacies might be particularly important to their emerging identities. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the intergenerational family legacies that third-generation members report by examining how individuals innovate nuggets of meaning from both positive and negative family legacies. Specifically, we explored how third-generation family members embrace, reject, and/or extend family legacies in an effort to further our understanding of (a) how individual and family identities are influenced by family legacies and (b) how such stories might be sustained or changed across generations.

The construction of family legacies

Legacies help to preserve identity across generations (Langellier & Peterson, 1993), typically communicating relatively simple themes that family members can easily recall, such as “Turners are stubborn” or “sons are important” (Stone, 1988, pp. 169, 177). This is true,

in part, because legacies are constitutive of a “family’s life world reshaped over time in a family’s particular situation and influenced by family, culture, and society” (Plager, 1999, p. 52). In addition, various scholars have described family legacies as living traditions or condensed histories (Byng-Hall, 1998; Plager, 1999). Expanding upon these conceptions, we defined family legacy as *strands of meaning that run through the family in ways that give it identity or sense, are constituted in communication through family storytelling, and are continually reshaped over time*. This perspective underscores the malleability of family legacies since stories about these legacies may be told, retold, and reshaped across generations. The fluidity, or constantly changing nature of identity, is an idea central to narrative scholars studying identity, as identity is produced and reproduced through the narrative process (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2004; Kraus, 2006; Watson, 2007). Studying family legacies provides an important context to analyze the fluid nature of identity formation as well as the role family culture and contextual constraints play on both individual and family identity construction.

The research to date suggests that the stories that combine over time to shape a family’s life world (i.e., its legacy) are powerful, lasting, and may both enable and/or constrain family identity and individual family members’ sense of themselves (Stone, 1988). Although the literature on individual and family storytelling positions identity formation as a central function of narrating our lives, it has done less to explore the interplay between family legacy transmission and individual identity formation. Existing research has overlooked how individual family members shape and reshape their family legacies over time. Looking at the types of legacies that guide family behavior in conjunction with individual family members’ assessments of those legacies provided insight into *how* the strands of meaning that run through the family are shaped and reshaped within and outside the family.

Family legacies and emerging adulthood

Stories, and therefore legacies, are situated in time, culture, and history (Nelson, 2004) making the analysis of *who* tells the story and the conditions in which the stories are told important to narrative scholars (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). One particular time in which family legacies might be important to an individual’s everyday life is during emerging adulthood. In the present study, we focused on family members who represented emerging adults currently attending college. These individuals represent third generations of the family, still belonging to the younger generation to whom the senior and middle generations pass down their stories (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Identity development and exploration represent developmentally distinctive features of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2005, 2007), especially for college students who leave home, go to college, and move closer to becoming adults (McAdams et. al., 2006; Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005). Recently, a historical shift has occurred for emerging adults (age 18 to 25) in the United States as one’s character (i.e., accepting responsibility and making independent decisions), rather than marriage, has become the prominent sign of becoming an adult (Arnett, 1998, 2007). Arnett (1998) argued that this individualistic criterion for emerging adults in America today is “unique, in human cultural history” (p. 311).

Although today's emerging adults tend to have a smaller familial role with fewer family obligations than during other phases of their lives, they do maintain at least some connection with their family during this time period (Arnett, 1998, 2007). Of greater importance, it is typically during emerging adulthood that individuals begin to think about starting their own families and thinking about larger community needs (Arnett 1998, 2007). Thus, family legacies may be especially important to emerging adults as they move closer to developing their own identities as adults, warranting research that focused on the role family legacies play in identity construction during emerging adulthood.

Focusing on the content of family legacies offers insight into the meaning of family stories during emerging adulthood, a potentially transitional period of identity development. Meaning making is at the heart of the content level of storytelling, as the content level includes "how information, experiences, and lived meanings are organized so they can be stored, retrieved, and transmitted" (Langellier & Peterson, 2006, p. 103). Scholars have argued that individuals incorporate the *meaning* behind family stories into their own realities (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Langellier & Peterson, 2004), making analysis of how this process occurs important. Further, Langellier and Peterson (2006) suggested "ordering content works to ensure transmissions across generations . . . by timing the distribution of content so that the stories are told when they are most salient and likely to be perpetuated" (p. 104). Thus, when analyzing stories at the content level, researchers focus not only on the theme of the story but also when the story is told. When and where a story is told represent important elements as the social context of storytelling (Stanley & Billig, 2004). In this project, we looked at the meaning that emerging adult family members take with them in the form of family legacies, including how they take and interpret meaning and then extend these meanings outside of family.

When considering the content of family legacies, it is important to recognize that legacies can have both positive and negative messages regarding both individual and family identity. As Stone (1988) argued, "For better or worse, and whether we collaborate with our families or not, we are shaped by our families' notions of our identities" (p. 167). Little empirical research has investigated the positive and negative aspects of legacies and how they might be modified and shaped across generations. Learning how stories that get told in the family get interpreted into negative and positive meanings is important to understanding how family storytelling shapes individual identity. Most research on family stories and legacies lauds the positive nature of collaborative meaning-making. However, family stories are not always blessings, nor do we necessarily exercise a great deal of control over them in our lives (Stone, 1988). As Stone (1998) noted, "Now and then our legacy of stories is exactly what we need . . . but more usually our family stories about ourselves are passed along to us without special regard for whether we want them or not" (p. 195). Collectively then, legacies can be viewed by family members as blessings and/or curses. Some legacies enable, while others constrain the identity of the family as well as its individual members (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Because family legacies can have both a positive and negative impact on family and individual identity, we examined how intergenerational stories affect and reflect individual family members' sense of their family legacies as both enabling and constraining to their own identities.

Thus, we first sought to identify positive and negative legacies reported by third-generation family members from their respective families:

RQ1: What do third-generation family members identify as positive and negative intergenerational family legacies?

Embracing, rejecting, and extending legacies

In addition to analyzing the content of family legacies, in this study, we assessed how young adult children embrace, reject, and/or extend in their own daily lives the larger meanings that family stories communicate. Narrative scholars have called for research focusing on how individuals “create sense of themselves” by embracing, rejecting, or extending specific identities (Bamberg, 2004; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). Yet researchers have generally neglected the process by which family members embrace, reject, or extend intergenerational family legacies as they are passed down across generations. Individual family members take the meanings from family stories and use them to understand both personal and collective identities and to function in their everyday daily lives. Thus, as socializing agents, family stories help to teach individual family members personal lessons, morals, values, and meanings (Bamberg, 2004; Bennett et al., 1988; Galvin, 2003). The meanings that individual family members derive from those stories stay with them beyond the family context and likely impact their interactions, decisions, and perceptions about everyday life.

Family stories play a critical role in developing family and individual identity since members of this generation have some control over how the stories will be passed on to subsequent generations, becoming part of the family’s legacy. Third-generation family members play a unique role in the storytelling process as they are put in the task roles of both listening to, and interpreting, the stories that are passed down (Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Task-ordering reflects “the interactional work” of storytelling across generations (Langellier & Peterson, p. 104). The third generation can modify family stories, determining if they will be saved and passed along as part of their individual and family identity (Langellier & Peterson). Schwartz et al. (2005) found that the level of agency emerging adults display during this time period plays a key role in establishing their identity; therefore, how emerging adults modify and sustain family legacies may play a pivotal role in their identity formation.

Scholars who have studied the self suggest that while history shapes us as individuals, individuals are also active agents in developing their identity (Bruner, 1990), giving us at least some opportunity to accept or reject the stories we are told. In positioning one’s identity, Bamberg (2004) explained that individuals “position themselves vis-à-vis cultural discourses and normative positions, either by embracing them or displaying neutrality, or by distancing, critiquing, subverting, and resisting them” (p. 336). Not only can individuals embrace or reject “normative positions,” but they can do the same with their family legacies, which are also culturally influenced. Thus, we explored how individuals help to shape and reshape legacies over time by embracing, rejecting, and/or extending those legacies in their own lives. Specifically, we examined the transmission of both positive and negative family legacies, as well as how family members embrace or reject family legacies in an

effort to further our understanding of how individual identities are constituted through family legacies:

RQ2: In what ways do third-generation family members embrace or reject family legacies?

Finally, we were interested in how third-generation family members pass along or extend their family legacies in a situated context. Learning how individuals take meanings from inside the family and how they get used both within and outside the family, at times extending their legacies to nonfamily members, is of prime importance in narrative research. Thus, we also explored how family legacies play out in interaction by analyzing how family members extend their legacies both within and outside the family to better understand how family legacies might be sustained or changed across generations:

RQ3: In what ways do third-generation family members extend family legacies?

Family storytelling and narrative identity: Analytic approaches

Although identity construction is central to narrative theorizing, the process of analyzing identity construction in narrative research has not gone without debate. In addressing our research questions, we considered salient topics of this debate. Recently, much discussion in narrative scholarship has centered on the *big* story (i.e., stories told in an interview context which enable participants to reflect on significant aspects of their lives) vs. *small* story (i.e., stories derived from everyday interactions) debate as to which represents the most beneficial approach to narrative analysis (Bamberg, 2006; Freeman, 2006, Watson, 2007). The big-story approach tends to focus more on the content of the stories themselves while the small-story approach focuses more on the storytelling process (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2006; Freeman, 2003). Until recently, researchers focusing on identity have generally analyzed “big stories.” However those advocating a small-story approach have raised specific concerns about this analytic approach to identity, including the tendency to portray the stories people tell as representative of their identity rather than viewing identity as an interactive process (Bamberg, 2006; Watson, 2007). Small-story researchers suggest that to understand the identity process, scholars need to analyze how identity is constructed and emerges as part of an interactive process within the content of a story.

Despite such contrasts in analyses, Freeman (2006) argued that analytical approaches to identity can work in a complimentary fashion. For instance, narrative scholars can focus on the content of stories by analyzing identity construction via reflection on significant aspects of one’s life while at the same time devoting attention to how the stories are produced, who is speaking, in what circumstances, as well as the constraints the narrator faces (Freeman, 2003, 2006). As such, our research questions focus on content while also addressing how these legacies play out in people’s everyday lives (e.g., small stories). Thus, we examined how individual family members constructed family identity through reflection on storytelling content and process, the meanings that emerged from such processes, and how these stories impacted individuals’ everyday lives away from the family.

Whether taking a big-story or small-story approach, researchers face three main challenges when analyzing identity. First, identity is fluid and, thus, it is constantly changing (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Watson, 2007). Many narrative scholars view identity as a situational, dynamic, and interactive process, making it difficult for individuals' to accurately pinpoint their identity at any specific point in time (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2004; Kraus, 2006; Watson, 2007). As a result, the idea that participants can correctly identify their own identity has been criticized (Bamberg, 2004; Watson, 2007). Bamberg (2006) wrote "narrative cannot be taken simply and interpreted solely for what has been said and told" (p. 141). Because of the fluid nature of identity, we recognize that both the familial and individual identity of third-generation family members will continue to be reconstructed over time.

Second, whereas individuals have a degree of agency in the identity construction process, identity is contextual, shaped by both the situation and context (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Nelson, 2004, Stanley & Billig, 2004). In this study, we viewed family members as having a level of agency in forming their identity, but at the same time recognized in our analysis that their family legacies (and the larger cultural context) also played a key role in constructing their identity for them. Although family members had a level of agency that enabled them to embrace, reject, and extend family legacies, they are also constrained by both family and culture with respect to these decisions or actions (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Langellier & Peterson, 2006; Stone, 1988).

Third, identity is constantly under revision and interactively renegotiated. As such, many methods of inquiry (e.g., interviews) represent moments when this takes place (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). Thus, although participants may present themselves as knowing who they are, the interview, like any other context, represents a moment when identity may be changing (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2004). When analyzing identity, researchers need to also consider the constraints of the interview process and consider the issues which arise when interviewers ask participants to discuss their identity. Questions about one's identity are rare; inquiry questions represent a unique set of questions for participants which they are not generally asked in other contexts. Additionally, disclosing negative aspects or events surrounding one's identity represents an issue participants face, as participants may want to present their identity in a positive fashion (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). The power relationship between the interviewer and interviewee represents a context in which participants may try to construct socially acceptable identities (Archakis & Tzanne). In our analysis we take these challenges into account and approach the data recognizing that identity is fluid and family stories reflect identity at a specific point of time. Likewise, we recognize the reciprocal influence of the interviewer and interviewee on the telling and interpretation of family stories. Thus, in our analysis, we also attend to the influence of process on the stories shared by participants.

Method

Consistent with research on family stories, we conducted in-depth semistructured interviews (e.g., Bylund, 2003; Fiese et. al., 1995; Plager, 1999) because they employ open-ended

questions which are likely to elicit narratives (Riessman, 1993) and because they help researchers obtain details and examples which can be put in context (Bylund, 2003). Participants reflected on significant portions or events in their lives (Freeman, 2006) in order to focus on what influence their family legacies have had on their individual and family identity.

Participants

The participants consisted of 17 third-generation family members at a large Midwestern university recruited from introductory communication courses. We received permission from the directors of the courses, and the instructors read a brief description of the study to potential participants. Participants received extra credit in their courses, the amount of which was determined by the instructor. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years. Fourteen of the participants were Caucasian, two were multiracial/ethnic, and one was African American. Twelve of the participants were female, while five were male.

Procedures

Following Fiese et al.'s (1995) recommendation, we asked participants to tell family stories to get some examples and to put the participants in a "family story mode" (cf. Bylund, 2003, p. 220). In this study, we asked participants "to tell a story that you remember being told by a family member that reflects or characterizes your family." Because of the importance of context in the storytelling process, participants were also asked who tells the story and when the story is told (cf. Bylund, 2003; Martin, Hagestad, & Diedrick, 1988). Next, we explained the notion of family legacy and encouraged participants to list as many family legacies as they could think of, both positive and/or negative. After participants listed their family legacies, we asked them to tell stories which helped to illustrate each legacy on their list. Finally, in order to discover how third-generation family members sustain or modify their family legacies, we asked how participants tell stories which illustrated how they have embraced, rejected, and extended their legacies.

Data analysis

Following the interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed furnishing 144 single-spaced pages of data. We used analytic induction (Bulmer, 1979; Riessman, 1993) to analyze the content of family legacies and stories for themes; we followed the same procedure for analyzing narratives about the ways in which the legacies were embraced, rejected, and/or extended (see also Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006 for a similar method). We first separately read the transcripts in their entirety to create a general sense of the data. In the initial stories, we focused on the storytelling process by analyzing which family member typically told the story and when the story is told. We also analyzed the specific situation and context of the storytelling during the interviews themselves, to emphasize the importance of context and culture in our analysis. This helped us to better address under what conditions the storytelling process occurred. We also analyzed the data to identify patterns among both positive and negative legacies. After individual assessment of the data in which we noted emergent themes, we met to compare our analyses and collapse and categorize responses into recurring patterns according to the individual research questions (Bulmer,

1979; Riessman, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These steps involved analyzing the transcripts to identify patterns regarding how participants embraced, rejected, or extended their family legacies. Finally, we analyzed the transcripts again to select exemplar statements from the participants to represent the categories.

Findings

Participants first told family stories which characterized or reflected a positive and/or negative family legacy (RQ1). In the end, we uncovered three overarching positive legacies, along with a set of idiosyncratic negative legacies.

Positive legacies

For each legacy a participant listed, the interviewer asked the participant to tell a family story which helps illustrate why they see this as a positive or negative family legacy. Participants had an easier time coming up with stories for positive legacies than negative legacies and were much more decisive in their responses related to positive legacies, as illustrated in the following interaction:

I: Can you give a story for the open-minded legacy?

P: Yeah, I'm biracial. My mom's white and my dad is black, so they always taught us to be open-minded.

In this case, the participant seemingly took pride in his identity, giving a direct, affirmative response.

Even though identity is fluid, we were able to discern patterns in the positive family legacies third-generation family members reported. Three distinct categories of positive family legacies emerged in the data: *hardworking*, *caring for others*, and *family cohesion*. Not surprisingly considering the sample (i.e., participants from a Midwestern university), each of these legacies reflect what is typically characterized as "Midwestern values" in popular culture. First, participants portrayed their families as *hardworking*, creating a positive legacy which demonstrated families' dedicated work ethic. Legacies in this category included being goal-oriented and persevering. For multiple participants, their families' work ethic grew out of a Midwestern background, as their family worked long hours to make it on the family farm. Further, the participants' student status may have influenced their likelihood to portray themselves as hard working. In providing a story illustrating the hard-working legacy in their family, one participant explained, "My great grandparents were the ones who first came over from Denmark. And they bought land here. They started out with only 100 acres, and eventually grew, through working extremely hard." This work ethic was also reflected in future generations as the participant's father "averaged around 70 hours a week working."

A second way individuals favorably portrayed their family was by listing legacies that characterized the family as being a tight-knit group who helped others. *Caring for others* included being giving, showing compassion for others, and helping others when they were

in need. Once again, this legacy may have been influenced by cultural values in the region. To represent these legacies, the participants typically told stories which involved helping members outside of the family such as friends, roommates, or coworkers. For instance, in characterizing the family legacy as one of giving, one individual stated, "Whenever one of my brother's friends was having a difficult time . . . or could not afford to pay for something for basketball, then my mom would just pay for it. So that is a way of giving." This portrayed the family as altruistic.

The third category, *family cohesion*, described legacies in which families valued holding things together, being close, and setting aside differences. Similar to the second category, this legacy pattern reflected cultural values, specifically family values. The following example reflected the legacy, "always there for each other":

My sister and I were raised that even though you are so angry at each other and you want to do something mean, you are still family. You're still connected, and we're still there for each other. So it was basically when someone needs help you are there to help them because you are family.

This quotation underscored the importance of families sticking together despite difficulties within family ties. In most instances, positive family legacies fell into one of the recurring patterns as participants portrayed their families as hardworking, caring, and cohesive.

Negative legacies

Unlike positive legacies which were thematically similar, negative legacies were idiosyncratic (i.e., those reported in each individual interview). In other words, participants had little difficulty portraying their family positively as a hardworking group of people who stuck together and willingly helped others as these legacies reflected Midwestern cultural values and views of family. However, we were unable to identify thematic patterns among the negative family legacies, we suspect in part because negative family legacies do not fit with a Midwestern view of the family, thereby constraining the participant's identification of negative family legacies. Further, participants may have wanted to save face with the interviewers, and thus tried to avoid portraying their families and themselves negatively. In multiple instances, participants were unable to identify negative family legacies:

- I: One of the things that I've noticed is that you just have a list of positive legacies that you've constructed but you don't have a list of negative legacies. Why is that?
- P: Well, as I thought and thought about the different stories that my family tells and the different principles that are taught and modeled by my family . . . sure bad things have happened and we have had some bad stories, but I wouldn't go so far as to say that they are principles that are embraced by my family. Like we had this one vacation where it was like Murphy's law . . . everything that could happen . . . that could go wrong . . . went wrong. But we kind of just took it and griped about it at the time but it's not a legacy . . .

it's not something that we look back on and say, "Well yeah, every time we take a vacation the worse thing is going to happen."

This interaction demonstrates the participants' reluctance or struggle to identify negative family legacies. Even when participants were able to identify negative legacies, they often displayed much difficulty coming up with family stories to illustrate them.

While we could not discern distinct themes in the negative legacies, a set of idiosyncratic negative legacies were evident. These included things such as curses about moving from location to location and other more trivial characteristics such as the family being loud or messy eaters. One participant who identified a negative family legacy, "Smiths are messy eaters," shared a story about her family eating cherry Jell-O: "Someone had just dug in and thrown it on their plate and missed it and it stained right away . . . we christened the dining room table once again." Although less flattering than the positive legacies, this negative legacy still served to identify the family. Other negative legacies were more consequential such as those that had communication at their core, including how the family ineffectively dealt with conflict or problems, being antisocial, and having family "policies" such as "don't ask, don't tell." Each of these family legacies potentially constrained the daily interaction of the emerging adult who reported the negative legacy. The "don't ask, don't tell" legacy implied an even higher level of constraint on individual identity, preventing the family member from openly discussing his/her sexual preference within the family.

Individuals tried to put a positive spin on some negative legacies by indicating how these legacies helped individual family members. Thus, participants reported that negative legacies served positive functions in several instances, representing one way to address the cultural constraints imposed on portraying one's family in a negative fashion. The following participant identified a negative legacy that served a positive function:

My grandfather was like the worst gambler ever, that is actually why he and my grandmother eventually divorced. He would just like leave the kids at home and go off to Vegas, and gamble and come back with a lot less than he left with. It's kinda bad, which is why no one else in our family gambles, because of what it's done to him.

In this case, it appears as if the negative legacy worked as an instructional tool to assist in overcoming the struggles it caused individual and immediate family members. Many family members overcame the constraint associated with negative family legacies by explaining how the negative legacy could help make the family even stronger. This finding emerged within the interviews, as participants put a positive spin on their negative legacies in the process of telling stories which represented them. Participants' responses indicated that family members did not want to characterize their family negatively, therefore they reframed their negative legacies in order to provide advice for the family.

Beyond the interview context, two contextual factors became particularly important to the legacies identified. First, the cultural background of the participants became highly meaningful. All participants came from a Midwest background (as did a majority of the interviewers), which influenced the themes in the legacies they reported (as mentioned

above). The Midwestern context represented the conditions of the storytelling itself, as both the culture and economics of the Midwest influenced the family legacy and the stories told within the family.

Second, the fact that participants were emerging adults attending college was a relevant contextual factor in the storytelling process. All emerging adults, except one, were living away from their biological families and had not yet started their own families through marriage and childbearing, factors which played a key role in the family legacies they reported and how these legacies contributed to their individual and family identity. The mere fact the participants were away from their biological families during the interview process had significance. While these emerging adults may have been somewhat removed from the family storytelling context during this time, this transitional period may have also served as a time for reflection on the influence of their family legacies.

The overwhelming positive nature of the legacies may have resulted from a third contextual factor—the interview process itself. While other family members were typically the storyteller in the stories participants reported, the family member who participated in this study became the storyteller during the interview process. By telling stories which characterized their families in addition to the other family stories they told during the interviews, these participants extended their family legacies and stories in storytelling acts to outside members (the interviewers). In a sense, the family members became key representatives of their family and their families' legacies, increasing the likelihood that participants might portray their family in positive ways. Further, the fact the participants were college students and the interviewers were college teachers increased the possibility that the emergent adults interviewed might portray their individual identity in socially and culturally acceptable ways. Additionally, the interviews took places in their interviewers' offices, a somewhat unusual context for telling family stories. Combined, these elements may have influenced the legacies participants reported as well as the storytelling process that occurred during the interviews.

In terms of the storytelling process, participants struggled coming up with stories to characterize their family and represent the legacies they reported. In fact, two participants indicated during the interviews that they had been trying to think of stories told within their family since they had been informed by one of their instructors about the study, explaining they had struggled to think of stories to share during the interviews. Additionally, more than one participant specifically stated “this is harder than I thought” after being asked to tell a story which represented a family legacy. Also, though the interviewers defined the term “story” (something with characters, most of whom will presumably be members of your family, and something happens to the characters) for participants during the interview, participants occasionally offered examples that did not necessarily represent family stories. When participants were asked to tell a story, it often took them a moment to think of one, and they often began by saying “um” followed by a brief pause, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Interviewer (I): In other words, can you think of a story that is often told or somehow reflects what it means to be a member of your family?

Participant (P): Ummmm . . . just my nuclear . . . my nuclear family . . . but my extended family. . . my dad has seven brothers and sisters and they come from a zillion cousins and stuff like that, so ummmmm . . . one thing that we've always been told about and have always talked about is how much we stick together and that we never kind of abandon each other or leave each other and that we can make it through anything . . . my ummmmm . . .

These verbal pauses illustrate the struggle some participants had in telling stories which represented their family.

Finally, embedded in many of these stories was a discussion of who tended to tell these specific family stories and when they were told. Thus, in attending to the research question focusing on identifying positive and negative legacies and their accompanying family stories, we are able to identify aspects of the storytelling context. For instance, participants revealed that a variety of family members told these stories yet in a majority of cases, a female family member (e.g., mother, grandmother, aunt) was the primary storyteller or part of the collaborative storytelling process, suggesting a gendered role in invoking family identity.

After participants told the story which represented their family in its entirety, the interviewers then inquired about when the story was typically told. Four patterns emerged related to *when* family members told stories: family-related events, context-dependent situations, everyday informal communication, and third-generation requests. First, emerging adults reported the stories which characterized their families were often told at or during family-related events, including holiday celebrations, vacations, weddings, and funerals. Second, family members told the memorable story based on the specific context. For example, when a similar situation occurred or when the family was at a location that reminded them of the story, the context initiated the storytelling process between family members. One participant chose to tell a family story about the time her mom spilled tuna casserole, explaining the story was retold "almost any time that that meal is had." Third, family members told these stories during everyday informal communication, or simply when the family was together. Finally, the telling of these memorable stories occurred when the family member specifically asked to hear the story.

Responding to legacies

The second research question asked how participants embraced and rejected family legacies. In this section, participants' reactions to their families' legacies both enabled and constrained their individual identity. We know that individuals embrace or reject legacies. Our focus is on the complexity in individuals' decisions to sustain or modify legacies.

Embracing the positive

We asked third-generation family members how they have embraced their legacies (i.e., passed them down or enacted them). A majority of the participants embraced their positive family legacies. The following participant illustrated embracing a family legacy of dedication/perseverance by enacting it in his/her own life:

My first semester (in college) was really tough. . . . I had a lot of illness and you know I stuck through it. And my dad came to me and said, "Do you want to switch schools after this year and finish someplace else?" And I said, "Well no, I want to finish what I started." I am graduating in May.

This family member embraced this positive legacy by enacting it in his own college experience, thus forging his individual identity in the college context while at the same time reinforcing his families' legacy of dedication and hard work. This example also illustrated participants' tendency to share examples of how they enacted family legacies in their own lives as opposed to sharing stories in response to how they have embraced family legacies. In another example, a participant illustrated embracing the family legacy of being "hard-working" in order to earn what one receives:

That kinda reflected on the rest of us. Like I know now with me in college, I know if at all possible I will not ask him for any money. Like I'll work. Like now I have three jobs that I work and go to school full time. So there is really no partying. Don't ask for any money. My brother and my sister were always like that too. So my sister, she works hard at all her little activities.

Not only did the participant embrace what she saw as a positive legacy as part of her individual identity but her siblings also acted out this legacy in their daily lives by being hard workers. Thus, participants primarily embraced their family legacies by enacting them in their everyday lives.

Rejecting the negative

We asked participants how they have rejected their family legacies as a reflection of their own identity by telling a story that illustrates this process. Similar to their reluctance to identify negative family legacies in comparison to positive legacies, participants were less decisive in their responses about rejecting legacies than embracing them. Further, participants, in some cases, were unfamiliar (or perhaps uncomfortable) with the idea of "rejecting" ideas passed down from their families. One participant asked, "What do you mean in terms of rejection?" when asked to identify family legacies they have rejected. Further, several participants directly stated they did not reject any of their family legacies. Perhaps more telling, one participant stated, "I don't think that I have rejected any, because I didn't reject, it just wasn't part of who I became. I didn't say . . . you know my family is perfectionist and so I am going to try my hardest to not be that." This statement exemplifies some of the problems which emerged in relation to the idea of rejecting legacies in the interviews. Conversely, some participants seemed embarrassed to admit that they occasionally enacted a negative legacy:

I: Tell me a story that illustrates how you have rejected these legacies.

P: Umm . . . well I did gamble once. I think especially, my dad has passed down to me that it is bad to gamble. Cause I'm not into that at all, I'm afraid of the effects of it.

This participant was clearly hesitant to admit she had enacted the negative family legacy of gambling, if only once.

While some participants did not reject legacies, and other struggled with the term itself, some participants indicated they did reject specific family legacies. When third-generation family members rejected legacies, they tended to reject negative legacies. For example, one participant rejected the negative legacy of not confronting problems, "If we're upset with each other we don't confront the problem or just let it build," a legacy which this emerging adult found to be constraining in her own life experiences. This individual rejected her negative family legacy explaining how she tries to confront her problems:

It is a part of me I don't like it, but I, I'm just like that. I guess the good thing about noticing it is that sometimes I cannot be like that. Last year a friend of mine had a girlfriend who was kinda a liar. Like for a while, I was like really mad at her and didn't say anything. But like, once I realized what I was doing, I was like I'm mad at this girl and she doesn't know why. So finally I was just like I don't like it that you are lying all the time. And it didn't help the problem at all, but it felt good. It felt really good to say what the problem was.

This participant rejected the negative legacy by making the effort to confront the problem, in a sense, altering her actions to distinguish between her individual and family identity. Thus, third-generation family members can change their individual and family identity by doing the opposite in their own lives. In this case, it seems that confronting one's problems may help to establish one's own identity as an emerging adult, enabling this participant to pass down a new legacy when they begin their own family.

Interestingly, in some cases participants gave decisive responses when they rejected negative legacies. The following example illustrates participants' readiness to reject negative legacies:

I: Tell me a story that illustrates how you have rejected these legacies.

P: With the negative legacies, most definitely the alcohol one. I don't really think alcohol is a fun part of everything you do. So I've just rejected that. I've found like my own path, and I've been become a Christian and that is something I want to pass on to my family.

This response appears to indicate that while some participants may have been uncomfortable to reject family legacies, if the legacy was negative then rejecting it was more socially acceptable in the interview context. Further, in this passage the participant avowed their own identity by rejecting a negative family legacy, taking ownership of the term "reject." Not only did she reject the alcohol legacy in interactions with her family but she also

sought to create a new family legacy through her individual actions. In summary, family members in our study rejected family legacies by not enacting the legacy in their own lives, by doing the opposite in their daily lives, or by creating new legacies which they could pass on to the next generation.

Embracing and rejecting positive and negative legacies was more complex than simply accepting the positive and dismissing the negative. In some instances, individuals only partially embraced or rejected a family legacy. In other instances, participants rejected the positive and embraced the negative. These instances are especially important because they represent times when the younger generation demonstrated agency in resisting cultural expectations.

Partial acceptance and rejection

First, legacies were not always embraced or rejected as absolutes. Instead, participants often noted *degrees* to which they embraced or rejected family legacies, representing a continuum that demonstrates the complex nature of legacies. For example, one participant shared a story about her family competing in marathons. Her dad always had to win, and she concluded the story saying, "I'm competitive, but not like the rest of my family." This example emphasized how family members can be similar, but yet different on an individual level. In essence, this participant modified the legacy by being "less competitive" than other family members.

Family members also responded to family legacies on a situational basis. For instance, family members selected when they embraced or rejected the same theme based on the context, including who was present. Whether or not the individual embraced or rejected the legacy was also contingent upon the relationships with the people involved, and thus, the acceptance or rejection of legacies occurred within their interplay with people in their own daily experience. For example, when talking about the legacy "play too much," a participant explained how she embraced the legacy in one situation and rejected it in another:

I: In what ways, if any, have you rejected these legacies as a reflection of your own identity? Tell me a story that illustrates how you have rejected these legacies.

P: Ummmm. . . I'd say that I probably reject at times . . . not all of the time . . . the negative one which is play too much . . .

I: So you partially reject it?

P: Yeah I partially reject it . . . umm . . . the other day I was with my girlfriend and um I was just really in a playful mood . . . you know. . . I kept playing with her . . . just kept nagging at her . . . and I could sense that she was getting upset . . . not upset but she was just kind of like "could you please be serious with me for like one minute." . . . And uhhhhh . . . OK fine so I just cooled out a little bit and so uhhhh . . . so you gotta know when to turn it on and turn it off.

This example highlights the fact that individuals can respond both positively and negatively to the same family legacy. Moreover, emerging adults can learn when and when not to enact a legacy in their own lives.

In some cases, participants indicated that legacies were only partially embraced within the family. One family member explained specific segments of the family embraced the legacy of “closeness,” whereas other members of the family rejected the legacy:

As a whole, I’d say there are certain members of our family who are really close. But as a whole of the Eriksons, we aren’t really that close. Like we don’t really fit in with the rest of our outward family.

In this family, their level of cohesion differed based on their lack of interaction. Consequently, the data revealed that intergenerational legacies can be accepted by one family member and at the same time be rejected by others. Moreover, this scenario illustrates that individuals, in some cases, do not adhere to cultural values.

Embracing the negative, rejecting the positive

A common theme across interviews was that participants embraced positive legacies and rejected negative legacies. However, examples also emerged in which family members embraced negative legacies and rejected positive legacies. These responses to family legacies are especially telling, as they represent instances in which third-generation family members demonstrated agency in how they reacted to what may be acceptable or unacceptable within their family and the larger culture.

First, in a few examples family members embraced negative legacies. One participant described how he embraced a legacy of being unhealthy: “I probably embrace the unhealthy one . . . I don’t eat right, I don’t exercise . . . I’m a, a . . . social smoker . . . I drink on occasion,” adding later in the interview, “I would love to reject the unhealthy one, but I don’t see myself exercising any time soon.” Though this third-generation family member was reluctant to enact a negative family legacy, he/she acknowledged that it was difficult to reject the legacy in his/her own life. By embracing negative legacies, third-generation family members in this study enacted negative family characteristics making them part of their own individual identities.

In addition, participants also rejected positive family legacies. For instance, one participant rejected a family legacy of power that he identified as positive:

P: I guess the power issue on my mom’s side. . . . I guess I feel like I’m just me. There is no power behind it. My mom always said that I have a very strong name . . . um but I don’t think that I use it to my advantage. My personality is enough I guess I’d say. But I never walk around and say, “Oh because of this, this and this I have more power over you.” Even if I was to be at a point in a Director’s position with my full time staff I would never want them to feel like they were afraid to come talk to me about their job. Yes, I am over you and I am your boss, but we gotta work here and whatever would make

this place run a lot better I want that feedback. I would never want anyone to work for me and feel intimidated, or felt like something was wrong.

I: Can you think of a story where you have actually rejected this legacy of power?

P: Well, on my team I was the captain. So I guess you can say that was power on your track team, basketball team, whatever, I guess you can say that was power. But I've always told my teammates that we're only as strong as our weakest link. I may be leading you all but if you don't think that something is right or you think that we should be doing something else then speak up.

This participant encouraged his teammates to speak up, rather than simply accepting what those with power/influence tell them to do. In this example, the participant helped to establish his individual identity by becoming a democratic leader and modifying this family legacy by providing important advice to people outside of his own family about how to deal with power, important advice in the college context. Third-generation family members' responses to their family legacies sheds light on how the college context enables emerging adults to embrace negative legacies and/or reject positive legacies in their own daily lives.

Extending legacies

In order to address the third research question, we inquired about how, as third-generation family members, participants have extended their family legacies both within and outside of their families. Extending legacies has the connotation of passing down stories to the next generation. However, if one does not have children, it is easier to extend a family legacy to one's social network. Because of the college context, few participants reported passing stories onto the next generation, as illustrated by this participant: "Ummmmm . . . well passed them down to . . . there's really nobody to pass them down to." Because most participants were not at a point in their lives where they could readily extend their legacies within their own families, they struggled to provide instances when they have extended family legacies. Only one participant in this study was married, allowing her more opportunity to extend legacies in her newly formed marriage. She gave an example in which she extended a positive family legacy:

I: Tell me a story that illustrates how you have extended these legacies or made them part of who you are as person, both inside and outside of your family?

P: I am no longer living with my family of origin . . . and am starting a family of my own. . . . I am really starting to model these original legacies in my own family. My husband and I are both working . . . we're both in school . . . and . . . we start to implement this idea of work hard, play hard in our own family.

This participant was able to offer a decisive response when asked if she extended her family legacies because she was in the process of extending family legacies with her child. Whereas this participant extended the family legacy of “working hard, playing hard” by modeling this legacy within her new family, participants who were not married had difficulty extending family legacies. Because of the participants represented the youngest generation in the family, we found that family members in this study extended fewer legacies than they embraced or rejected. Although this would likely change as family members grow older and likely have interactions with younger generations, one method emerging adults found for extending family legacies at this point in their life was moving outside the family to others such as friends, other students, and coworkers.

Another facet of extending legacies was that some individuals did not actively try to extend a legacy; instead actions spoke louder than words. Simply put, some individuals extended legacies by way of example rather than through stories. The following participant struggled to tell a story about how he/she has extended their family legacies, but instead indicated that he/she tries to lead by example:

I: OK let’s talk about how you have extended these legacies or passed them down, or added to them. Tell me a story about that . . .

P: OK . . . um I don’t know that I can think of a specific instance that I have passed them on . . . a specific story . . .

I: So you can’t think of a specific story to tell me?

P: Yeah . . . ummmm . . . but I know that I try and emulate these in my everyday actions.

Thus, some participants viewed enacting a legacy as a way to indirectly extend their family legacies to outside members. Another participant described a specific instance which illustrated leading by example:

I have extended the “lend a helping hand” mostly through example. My fiancée and I have friends that never understood that concept that you lend a helping hand and people will give it back to you. We are throwing them a baby shower and so they are going to help me move. And it’s not that I said, “Well if you lend a helping hand then that’s the best thing to do,” I think that it’s by example mostly. That’s me showing them that it benefits.

Leading by example extended legacies without directly telling outside family members their family legacy. In this way, third-generation family members in this study extended their family legacy in their daily lives to people outside of the family. Their legacies reportedly had an impact on their interactions with others and enabled them to share their family lessons with their friends and other acquaintances in the college context.

Discussion

In this study our goal was to examine the content of family legacies from the perspective of third-generation family members and how these individuals work to reinterpret and shape and reshape intergenerational legacies over time. Whereas family and individual identity are fluid processes, we were able to identify patterns of positive family legacies and participants provided stories and examples to illustrate how they have incorporated their family legacies into their own identity and daily lives within the context of emerging adulthood during their college experience. Interestingly, participants reported positive legacies however had far greater difficulty identifying negative family legacies. The negative legacies participants reported were idiosyncratic, likely due to the cultural context and desire to portray their families in socially acceptable ways. Similarly, participants responded to their family legacies by generally embracing the positive and rejecting the negative; however, variations developed in which the opposite occurred illustrating that third-generation family members have some level of agency in developing their individual identity (Bruner, 1990; Schwartz et al., 2005). Additionally, these family members both modified and sustained their family legacies, enacting some of their family legacies in their everyday lives. Collectively, then, the results of this study both support and extend narrative research.

Initially, the stories family members told during the interviews illustrate the importance of context in the storytelling process (Nelson, 2004; Stanley & Billig, 2004) Who tells the stories and when they are told represent key contextual factors in the storytelling process. Two specific contextual factors merit discussion. First, the interviews themselves represented the conditions of storytelling (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). As narrative scholars have argued, the interview process constrains the narrative process (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2006; Watson, 2007). In this study, the interview context affected the storytelling process, as participants constructed family stories in response to the questions we posed, offering them as evidence to support the legacies they listed rather than telling the stories within the family context. This offers one explanation as to why participants struggled in many instances to come up with and tell family stories. Narrative scholars should take note of the difficulty that participants can display in telling stories in the interview context and to fully understand what constitutes a story. The interview context may have also influenced the predominance of positive legacies, as participants made efforts to portray their family (and themselves) in a positive nature. As narrative scholars suggest, in the interview context storytellers can be particularly selective in how they tell their family stories and try to portray them in social and culturally acceptable ways (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). Researchers must be careful in taking participants' responses about their individual and family identity at face value (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2004; Kraus, 2006; Watson, 2007), which was especially important in this research in light of the influence cultural upbringing appears to have had in the legacies third-generation family members reported. However, it is important to note that the family members did display some agency in how they incorporated (or did not incorporate) family legacies in their own lives as well as how they modified certain legacies. Thus, individuals do have some level of agency in forming

their identity; however, cultural elements also influence and even constrain the identities they form (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Langellier & Peterson, 2006; Stone, 1988).

Additionally, the interview context may have had an effect in that the responses participants constructed drew on the vocabulary we used in the interview questions, including terms such as “reject” or “extended” in conjunction with family legacies. Such terms may not be part of participants’ normal everyday experience. However, in other instances, participants took ownership of these terms. Generally, participants were able to answer the responses and provide family stories to support their legacies.

A second contextual factor was that the participants were emerging adults attending college. The fact that these emerging adults lived away from their biological families and were yet to begin their own families likely had an impact on how family legacies influenced their identity. Individuals’ identities are heavily influenced by cultural institutions, including both family and school (Nelson, 2004). Like other emerging adults, our participants may have been more focused on seeking individual growth at college rather than focusing on getting married and immediately starting a family (Arnett, 1998). While emerging adults play smaller familial roles during the college experience (Arnett, 1998, 2007), based on their responses in the interview context, it appears that third-generation emerging adults do incorporate their family legacies into identity development during this period of their lives. Although a majority of the emerging adults in this study had yet to start their own families, emerging adulthood represents a period when individuals begin to start thinking about beginning their own families (Arnett, 2007).

In addition to the context associated with the storytelling process, the content of the family legacies became essential in the construction of third-generation family members’ individual and family identities, illustrating the complementary nature of narrative approaches to identity (Freeman, 2006). Not surprisingly, families identified more positive legacies than negative legacies since family is one of the central institutions of a culture. Consistent with our findings, researchers have found that emerging adults construct more emotionally positive stories (McAdams et al., 2006). One of the common threads within the positive legacies third-generation family members reported was that each tended to reflect Midwestern cultural norms as the patterns portrayed families as hardworking, cohesive, and helpful to members outside of the family. The emergence of these overarching legacies should not be surprising, as they reflect both family and cultural identity (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; Bamberg, 2004; Langellier & Peterson, 2004, May, 2004; Nelson, 2004). Based on these findings, it can be argued that sociocultural discourses require the production of particular identities and that narratives represent one way this process occurs as individuals shape family narratives or legacies to perform certain cultural aspects of identity.

Conversely, negative legacies were more idiosyncratic. In a few cases, participants were unable to identify negative family legacies. Moreover, participants struggled to remember or identify stories which illustrated negative themes within their family. One possible reason no overarching themes emerged for negative legacies is that they do not conform to Midwestern cultural views of the family. In other words, the third-generation family members in our study were constrained by the importance placed on family, specifically portraying the family as a positive social institution. May (2004) argued that while individuals do not have to accept cultural narratives, they cannot completely escape them either as

they are constrained by them. In the idiosyncratic negative family legacies participants identified, they typically tried to portray these “negative” themes positively, in effect reframing them in ways that appeared functional. Interestingly, participants’ displayed a tendency to put a positive spin on negative legacies occurred as they told the stories which represented these legacies. For example, some participants used negative legacies to caution other family members, so that the legacy serves a purpose. As Stone (1988) argued, even negative legacies have utility to the extent that they serve as a reminder of what not to do. Further, family stories can serve as socializing agents, functioning as instructional tools which have the potential to instill morals and values within family members (Bamberg, 2004; Bennett et al., 1988; Galvin, 2003).

In response to our second and third research questions, individuals responded to family legacies by embracing, rejecting, and extending them in ways that allow them to shape and reshape upon their own individual identities. Thus, the findings illustrate how family legacies are both sustained and modified across generations. Third-generation members indeed play a unique role in the storytelling process as they listen to and interpret the family stories passed down across generations (Langellier & Peterson, 2006), and in some instance even become the storyteller. Perhaps more importantly, the analysis demonstrates the powerful ways in which family legacies both enable and constrain individual and family identity (Androutsopoulou, 2001; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Based on our analysis, in some instances third-generation family members rewrite their family stories through the ways they embraced, rejected, or extended them to fit with the production of their identity within specific sociocultural contexts.

The participants in our study embraced family legacies far more than they rejected them, again reflecting cultural values. Emerging adults embraced family legacies into their individual identities by enacting them in their daily lives. In several instances, participants’ responses to their family legacies were ambivalent, suggesting we embrace them because they are uniquely ours, even though as individuals we may not agree or like them. People also tend to reject most negative legacies. This may be because, as Stone (1988) suggested, individuals do not want these negative legacies to become part of their individual identity. This may also be due to selective remembering, focusing on positive themes or stories. Third-generation family members in this study rejected negative legacies by choosing not to enact them, enacting alternative legacies, or contradicting the legacy.

Our research adds to narrative inquiry by illustrating how legacies are embraced and rejected on a continuum. Moreover, this process is contextual, as the legacies within a family demonstrate how individuals conduct themselves in various situations. Narrators tell stories in highly selective ways which depends on changing situations and social expectations; narratives are always context dependent (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005). In some cases, participants only rejected legacies in certain instances. This finding highlights the idea that individuals can be selective in their responses to the legacies and that their responses can be contradictory (Archakis & Tzanne, 2005; May, 2004). Further, the possibility exists that individuals can embrace a family legacy but not extend it, or reject a family legacy but still pass on its meaning to future generations. In essence, individuals learn from experience when to enact certain legacies, depending on the situation and the relationships with the people involved. We speculate that when family legacies are adopted at the individual

level, it is necessary to modify them in order to better reflect one's individual identity. Thus, it seems that third-generation family members do add different interpretations to the morals or ideas reflected in family stories, further confirming research on the task roles across different generations (Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Peterson & Langellier, 2006). Prior research has not identified how various levels within the family differ in their responses to family legacies. Though a legacy characterizes a family, the legacy does not necessarily represent the *entire* family. Plager (1999) postulates that family legacies are "re-shaped over time in a family's particular situation" (p. 52), which reflects individual and family identity.

Finally, third-generation family members primarily extend family legacies to people outside of the family in their daily interactions at college. Due to the age and status of these family members, it was difficult for them to talk about extending family legacies to the next generation within their family. Some participants specifically stated that they did not feel they could extend legacies because they did not yet have children to extend them to, which expands the argument that legacies are generational (Langellier & Peterson, 1993; Stone, 1988). Interestingly, the one participant who did have children to pass down legacies to within their family, responded decisively when explaining how they extend family legacies, while participants who had to extend legacies through their own actions to outside family members struggled far more with explaining the process of how they extend family legacies. However, because legacies are important to individual family members, they oftentimes communicate legacies to people they care about outside of the family. The fact that emerging adults wanted to assist others outside the family is consistent with Arnett's (2007) findings that individuals want to help others and begin considering larger communal needs. Indeed, many of our participants extended their legacies to friends and other people within their social network, refusing to limit their potential to extend legacies. As Stone (1988) argued, third-generation members take the meanings from their family stories and use them in their daily interactions with people outside of the family. This data provides some evidence that family legacies get extended out and narrowed down into strands of meaning so that people's daily interactions are affected outside the family.

Although this study provides insight into how individuals respond to family legacies, the results should be interpreted with caution, given the limitations of the research design. First, we only captured one generation's perspective, and thus, these data do not fully capture differences within and across different generations of the same family. Future researchers should incorporate participants in previous generations to see how the legacies affect their individual identity differently based on their life stage. Though third-generation family members represent an important population to study with regard to narrative identity, the participants were selected in part because of ease of access. The fact participants received credit for participating in the interview process also raises ethical concerns as students may have felt an obligation to manufacture family stories and to indicate that these stories have influenced their identities. Future research should select a more diverse group of participants from across generations. Second, as researchers taking a "small story" approach have argued (Bamberg, 2006; Watson, 2007) analysis of the content of "big stories" makes it more difficult to focus on how identity emerges in interactive process and to

demonstrate the fluid nature of identity. While we focused on certain aspects of the storytelling process, this was not our primary focus. Research focusing more specifically on the storytelling process, including how identity emerges in interaction, is warranted.

Despite the limitations, the findings in this study provide a more detailed picture of how third-generation family members embrace, extend, and reject family legacies. This research also speaks to the importance of context in the storytelling process. Family stories do help to create both family and individual identity across generations. While previous research has examined how family legacies affect individual identity, the present study shows that the manner in which participants respond to legacies is more complex as individuals react to legacies to different degrees and even in contradictory fashions. Narrative scholars can benefit from understanding the intricacies of how family members embrace, extend, or reject the legacies passed down through generations of their family. The intricacies demonstrate how family stories are powerful in both positive and negative ways in helping to construct individual and family identity.

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