Narrative Identity and Agency: Association Between Mood and Psychological Well-Being

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Abstract

Narrative research is an evolving methodology that has been utilized in research and clinical practice. This study seeks to understand how the structure of narratives predict psychological well-being and mood, and how processing information in narrative form immediately affects respondents. A survey was created on Qualtrics and through an all-student email and social media, a recruitment script was advertised for individuals 18 years or older and English-speaking. In this randomized, between-subject design, we gathered 289 complete datasets where one of three randomly assigned prompts asked the participant to write about a positive or negative event or list the foods they recently consumed. All narratives were coded for agency by the first author and 25% of narratives were also coded by one independent rater with an 86% agreement. Results indicated that participants who wrote about a positive life experience had higher levels of positive mood and agentic features. Further, higher levels of agency were associated with specific aspects of psychological well-being. The type of memory one recalls therefore may be beneficial for not only the self, but for relationships with others.

*Keywords***:** psychology, narrative research, well-being, agency, qualitative research, narrative identity, mood

Narrative Identity and Agency: Association Between Mood and Psychological Well-Being

Narrative research is an evolving methodology that has been gaining momentum and increased acknowledgement in the field of psychology. The exploration and conceptualization of the meaningful experiences one has benefit various professional disciplines, including but not limited to the social sciences, economics, history, linguistics, and medicine (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These research endeavors often encompass small sample sizes in order to gather ample text, which then constitutes an in-depth, comprehensive analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this approach to qualitative research, investigators are able to collect detailed data, often in the form of open-ended questions through interviews, but written texts are also analyzed (Butina, 2015). The individualized responses obtained from narrative data gives researchers a unique opportunity to better understand the lived experience of human beings.

Instead of placing individuals' identities and personalities into one of the reductionistic "grand theories" (i.e., Freud's focus on sex and violence, Adler's superiority emphasis, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, etc.), narrative researchers are given an unparalleled freedom to explore emergent themes and complex circumstances, influenced primarily (other than the writing instructions themselves) by the participant (Singer, 2004). Butina (2015) states that human nature allows for a certain accessibility to storytelling, and given the chance, research participants will usually elicit a plentiful narrative. Human identity and its many features have been shown to continuously manifest in narratives (Butina, 2015), allowing this methodology to remain in the forefront of psychological research. The purpose of the present study was to examine self-narratives of either positive, negative, or trivial memories to analyze both the structure of narratives and the immediate effects of writing in narrative form.

Narrative Identity

Narrative identity is a concept that first came to fruition in the 1980's (Butina, 2015) and is theorized to be an individual's ever-developing, expansive, and internalized self-story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). According to McAdams (1985), developing the ability to cohesively narrate about the self appears in late adolescents and early adulthood, supporting the social assumption that this developmental period is a time of identity formation and psychological and physiological maturation. Singer (2004) defines narrative identity as the reconstruction of an autobiographical past as well as an envisioned future in which one's life has some extent of unity, purpose, and meaning. Episodic autobiographical memory or one's ability to recall personal events that took place during one's lifetime is combined with the individual's prospective ambitions to produce a self-narration (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narrative identity can therefore express who one was in the past, who one is in present, what one hopes to be in the future, and how one creates meaningful connections between these life experiences. Researchers studying this paradigm can explore both internal and external (i.e., societal expectations) factors resonating within individual's writings (McAdams & McLean, 2013) by capturing specific memories from one's past.

Highpoint and Lowpoint

The stories that human beings habitually recall about their past have substantial implications for self-awareness and understanding, social relationships, and well-being (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008). Obtaining narratives containing various life story scenes provide researchers with data that incorporates the individuals' view of their own life and how they make sense of it (Alea, 2018). The Life Story Interview's (LSI) created by McAdams (2008) and Atkinson (1998) have been utilized in many studies and, provide a semi-structured approach that

reveals a person's narrative identity. The LSI includes prompts asking for participants to describe important life events such as high, low, and turning point events (most commonly studied), wisdom events, religious experiences, and several future-oriented topics. For the purpose of the present study, only highpoint and lowpoint events will be discussed.

McLean et al. (2020) defined high points as moments in a narrative that are particularly positive and low points as moments in a narrative that are particularly negative. The authors found that motivational and affective themes were associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion on the Big Five Inventory in high points. In low points, autobiographical reasoning was associated with openness and agreeableness (McLean et al., 2020). These data suggest that high levels of openness may be crucial when one is reasoning through a low point but not a high point.

McLean and Lilgendahl (2008) explain how positive memories often consist of continuity due to the fact the protagonist is describing an experience that can be positively assimilated into the present self-identity. Inversely, negative memories posit a challenge to one's present self-concept, prompting alteration in one's beliefs to support the negative experience(s) discussed. For example, self-insight is more likely to be expressed in low points than high points. Also, exploration and acceptance of low points is associated with cognitive and emotional maturity (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008). Studying low and highpoint narratives gives researchers an opportunity to better understand how people make sense of critical points in their lives. This specific approach to data analysis also allows for further insight into psychological functioning such as the extent to which an individual encompasses features of agency and communion (McLean et al., 2020).

Motivational Themes

For the scope of this paper, motivational themes (e.g., agency and communion) will be examined, however, narrative researchers may also explore affective themes (e.g., redemption and contamination), themes of integrative meaning (e.g., autobiographical reasoning), and structural elements (e.g., coherence) within narratives (McLean et al., 2020). Motivational themes are described as the individual differences in narratives that accentuate what the protagonist is presently searching for in life, has searched for in the past, or has already accomplished (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016).

This theme is categorized into agency, the concern of autonomy and the extent to which an individual can influence their life experiences, and communion, the extent to which the protagonist is seeking interpersonal connection (Adler et al., 2016). Motivational themes, in particular, hold the strongest incremental association between narrative identity and well-being. Moreover, Adler et al. (2016) found that agency and communion correlate with eudaimonic and hedonic well-being and psychological adjustment and, the association between well-being and motivational themes is captured no matter what one's dispositional personality traits are. Adler (2012) found that higher levels of agency and communion were associated the higher levels of psychological well-being. These findings support the classification of motivational themes, representing the two fundamental domains of the lived experience: autonomy and sociality (Adler et al., 2016).

Narratives that have high levels of agentic features will consist of the protagonist affecting their own life, holding the ability to change their own life, and having control over their own life circumstances (McLean et al., 2020). When a protagonist is highly concerned with their connection, intimacy, love, union, friendship, romantic relations, nurture, caretaking, and/or togetherness with others, the narrative would be considered highly communal (McLean et al.,

2020). McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan, & Machado (2004) found a significant positive correlation with conscientiousness and agency, age and agency, and a negative association between agency and neuroticism. Communion was positively correlated with agreeableness and extraversion. The prominent features of agency and communion that arise within one's narrative identity continues to provide fruitful data that can aid narrative researchers.

Psychological Well-Being

Along with the qualitative method to narrative analysis described above, researchers will execute a mixed-method approach, examining the associations between the features within a narrative and responses to validated assessments, measuring various constructs. According to McLean et al. (2020), the stories people tell about their life experiences can both demonstrate current well-being and predict future well-being. Moreover, the association between narrative identity and well-being has been highly replicated. Adler et al. (2016) explained that well-being is the most widely examined variable of narrative identity, contributing a unique explanation for analysis.

McLean & Lilgendahl (2008) examined high and low points in emerging (N=56) and older adults (N=55). In both groups, those who scored higher on well-being were more likely to have wrote about a high point. Further, the authors found that the psychological well-being subscale of positive relations with others was associated with high point narratives in both age groups, whereas the personal growth well-being subscale was associated with high points only in older adults. These data suggest that the sharing of high points in one's life, especially as one gets older, may increase well-being and self-development in general (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008).

Banks and Salmon (2013) provided data showing that self-insight but not self-reflection was associated with higher levels of well-being. Moreover, exploring and recalling positive experiences has shown a positive association with well-being however, evaluating such memories may force individuals to make sense of these experiences in unhelpful ways. One of Banks and Salmon's (2013) main findings was that endorsing low points as a central tenant to one's identity was associated with lower levels of well-being and higher levels of psychopathy. Based on these findings, the authors provided two interpretations: (1) honing-in on the positive traits and outcomes of oneself throughout low points in one's life is an individually adaptive approach to guide one through the arduous task of merging their narrative identity with these negative experiences and (2) in challenging life experiences, those who continue to function well may be more likely to reason about positive self-attainment concerning low points in life (Banks & Salmon, 2013).

Positive and Negative Affect

In addition to psychological well-being, positive and negative affect has been another area of inquiry, albeit examined less than the latter. According to Fink and Drake (2016), narratives discussing stressful and negative events can have beneficial implications over time, when one can interpret, process, and ultimately heal from those negative experiences. However, a single narrative task prompting the recollection of a particularly negative experience elicits an increase in negative affect immediately. Inversely, narratives encompassing positive events are associated with higher levels of positive affect (Fink and Drake, 2016). Affect is most frequently measured pre- and post-intervention (Fink and Drake, 2016; Fuentes, Kahn, and Lannin, 2018; Brewin and Lennard, 1999) in order to see if the narrative task influenced the writer's mood.

In Pennebaker's (1997) manuscript, he describes several advantageous outcomes of writing about emotional experiences in life. Among a healthy sample, people were less likely to visit their medical doctors after disclosing versus people who did not share their experiences. Benefits on immune function and lowering heart rate has also been found. Improvements in grades, job attainment, and less time taking off from work was also found (Pennebaker, 1997). Further, as recent research described (Fink and Drake, 2016), Pennebaker (1997) indicated the long-term benefits of writing about negative or traumatic events, improving mood and reducing stress. Writing, like psychotherapy, often encompasses concepts akin to narrative research; identify a problem or event, talk about the cause and consequence, and acknowledge and discuss it with another person (Pennebaker, 1997). Confronting personal and emotional experiences has been replicated time and time again, both in therapy and in narrative research. The ameliorating effects of mental and physical health aliments from the aforementioned interventions has guided our inquiry in specifically focusing on psychological well-being, positive affect, and negative affect.

Present Study

In the present study we employed a mixed method, randomized between-subject design. The aims of the study were three-fold. The first aim was to determine whether the type of story (i.e., high or lowpoint narratives) affected the extent to which agency was present in one's narrative. We hypothesized that highpoint narratives would have higher levels of agency compared to lowpoint point narratives. Our second aim was to determine if the type of story affected mood. We hypothesized that (1) lowpoint narratives would be associated with lower levels of positive affect compared to lowpoint narratives and the control condition and (2) negative affect will be higher in lowpoint conditions compared to highpoint conditions and the

control. Our final aim was to examine whether the extent of agency present in one's narrative was associated with mood and/or psychological wellbeing. We hypothesized that (1) higher levels of agency would be associated with higher levels of positive affect and (2) higher levels of wellbeing, specifically the positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and the personal growth subscales would be associated with higher levels of agency within narratives.

Method

The study was conducted following approval from the Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) at the State University of New York, New Paltz.

Participants

A total of 486 individuals participated in the online survey with 428 complete datasets. Participants identified as 61.1% (N=297) female, 21.8% (N=106) male, 3.5% (N=17) non-binary, and 0.6% (N=8) not listed/prefer not to say. Self-reported ethnicity was 59.3% (N=288) White, 13% (N=63) Latinx, 5.3% (N=26) Black, 3.7% (N=18) Asian, 0.4% (N=2) Native American, and 0.2% (N=1) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. 417 participants choose to indicate their age (M=22.8, SD=8.53). Highest level of education included 209 participants identifying with "some college credit, no degree," indicative of the procedural methods described below. 86 participants held an associate degree, 54 a bachelors, 51 a high school diploma or equivalent, 12 a masters, 6 prefer not to say, 3 a trade/technical/vocational certificate, 2 a doctorate or medical degree, and 1 some high school with no diploma.

Participants were recruited through social media platforms (i.e., Instagram and Facebook), a campus-wide email listserv generated by the State University of New York, New Paltz, and the schools subject pool system, SONA, granting one credit to psychology students for taking the survey. Psychology students were able to the leave survey at any point and still

receive credit. Besides the subject pool credit given, there were no other incentives offered. In order to participate, individuals must have been 18 years of age or older and fluent English-speakers/writers which was explicitly stated on the recruitment script/email. Non-English-speaking individuals would be unable to answer the questions in the survey therefore, they were excluded. The recruitment script included a direct link to the survey where participants could immediately begin. However, SUNY New Paltz psychology students were told to enter the survey through the subject pool website in order to receive credit.

Procedures

In order to begin the online survey, participants were first shown a consent form including the purpose, expected procedures, qualifying criteria, risks and benefits, a confidentiality statement, the principal investigator's information, and contact information for the Human Research Ethics Board. The survey could only be completed online one time, in one sitting, at the participants' chosen time. Data collection took place between the dates of November 10th, 2020 and December 10th, 2020. General instructions were also included on this first page, stating that 20-30 minutes should be set aside before starting in order to have ample time to complete the survey in its entirety, participation is voluntary, and one may choose to skip a question and exit at any point, and we also recommended that one should find a quiet, safe, and comfortable environment with little to no distractions. Participants then had the option to consent and begin the survey or decline and exit.

If the participant consented, they would first be asked demographic questions including gender, age, race, and highest level of education. Next, each participant was randomized to one of three prompts using Qualtrics' "Advanced Randomization > Random Subset" tool which allowed each prompt to be displayed evenly. When the participants read the prompt and recalled

their answer, they were instructed to click the "next" button to begin writing. We repeated the prompt again, this time including a large text box where participants could begin writing their responses. Eight minutes (a timer was visible to participants) were allotted for the task before being directed to the next set of questions. We then had participants answer numerous questions relating to psychological well-being and mood. The mean time to completion was 24.55 minutes wherein participants were shown a debriefing message. The debrief included the authors appreciation for participation, a more detailed description of the purpose for the survey, the authors contact information, support hotlines/phone numbers for anyone in distress as a result of participation, and a message to SUNY New Paltz psychology students directing them to the subject pool website.

Materials and Measures

An online survey was created using the web-based software, Qualtrics (Smith, 2002). Besides the recruitment postings, this platform was used to display all procedures included in this study including general instructions, consent forms, experimental prompts, survey questions, and the debriefing. As described above, participants were randomized to one of three prompts using the "Advanced Randomization" tool. The two prompts included in the experimental condition asked participants to write a narrative. One focused on particularly negative or low-points and the other on high-points in one's life. The low-point prompt stated:

> *Please ensure that you are in a quiet, safe, and comfortable place. Thinking back over your life, I would like you to focus on an event, moment, or time period that immediately stands out to you as a particularly negative experience or low point. Please write as much detail as you can including, what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, what you were thinking and feeling in the moment, why this event is significant in your life, why this moment was such a low point, and how you view this event now? Feel free to substitute peoples' names with pseudonyms. You will have 8 minutes to complete this task. When you are ready and have recalled the event you will be describing, begin writing.*

High and low-point prompts were derived from Atkinson's (1998) and McAdams' (2008) Life

Story Interview. Prompt instructions between the two experimental groups were nearly identical

except for the interchanging high/positive versus low/negative-point phrase. The control

condition stated:

> *Please ensure that you are in a quiet, safe, and comfortable place. Thinking back over the past two days, I would like you to list the foods and drinks you have consumed. You will have 8 minutes to complete this task. When you are ready, begin listing.*

The aim of the control condition was to ask participants to take part in a seemingly unemotional

task.

The Life Story Interview has been used for decades, primarily in the form of a semi-

structured interview, as described in the introduction (Atkinson, 1998; McAdams, 2008). For

both research and clinical purposes, high and lowpoint narratives that are produced using this

method have given the field greater insight on how the structure of narratives predicts certain

psychological constructs.

Coding of Agency

A deductive-coding approach was used to examine the motivational theme of agency

within narratives obtained by participants. All narratives were coded for agency by the first

author. 25% of narratives were coded by an independent rater who was blind to the hypotheses

of the study. Inter-rater agreement scores for agency were 86%.

McAdams' (2002) coding system for agency was used. Scores range from 0 (completely

powerless, at mercy of circumstances, all action is motivated by external powers, or narrative is

written in first person) to 4 (struggled to overcome an agency threatening experience wherein he

or she was disempowered and has emerged empowered and victorious (often through self-

insight, gaining control of the situation, or increased power)). Participant narrative examples are

provided for each agency score in Table 1.

Table 1

Writing Samples of High and Low Scores of Agency

Participant Narrative	Agency Score
"Coronavirus ruined my life, took all of my friends, completely isolated me from my family, broke my relationship, and everything is awful."	0
"When I was diagnosed with cancer. I went in to my doctors office because he said he wanted to talk to me about something important. I had spent a long time getting tests done because I was really sick and no one knew what was wrong with me. I walked in with my mom and he held my hands and told me I had cancer. In that moment I felt absolutely nothing. I was confused and in denial. It was a low point because I had to go through treatments and I was really tired and stressed. It was the worst time of my life and continues to stress me. I view this event as a constant stressor and reminder that just because I'm young doesn't mean I'm entitled to good health."	1

"My first date after exiting a horrible relationship months earlier and being able to rediscover feelings and learn to love again without feeling lesser is something I will never forget. It got me out of my slump and made me feel like I was okay again, ready to move on and recover and start a new chapter of my life. I owe everything to my girlfriend who was incredibly patient and loving in a way I didn't know your significant others are supposed to be. She really is the best thing to ever happen to me, and she got me back on track, caring about classes and my future again, romanticizing a future apartment and cats." 2

"When I was accepted to SUNY New Paltz, I was at my highest point. I worked hard and was accepted into my dream college, I had a car of my own, I had a supportive boyfriend, and I was the first in my family to go straight to a 4 year university. I remember hugging my boyfriend and family and I started to cry tears of joy when I got the letter. My parent are immigrants who came from Peru and to the United States in 2001 with my two older brothers. We are 13 and 10 years apart and they are now an immigration lawyer and a tax accountant, respectively. When I saw that I got accepted into my dream school, I finally felt as if I am on the path to complete my parent's wish. Their wish was to give their children the best education they could have. I was also happy because my career goal is to become a doctor. Being accepted into college is already one step closer to accomplishing that goal." 3

"When I was 11 years old, I was in the library and I couldn't   4
read yet. We did not yet know that I have dyslexia and could
not learn how to read without special instructions. Someone
came up to me and asked me what kind of books I like to read,
and I said I like to read short books. She came back with a
stack of very short books and asked me which ones I liked the
most, and after many back-and-forth's of me saying not this
one not that one that one's closer but I still don't like it, I
confess that I could not read. After that I realize that reading
with something important that I need to learn how to do I will
stop at nothing until I pick it out how to read and write. And I
feel like that's why I am where I am today."

Note: Table 1 provides examples from narratives obtained from participants who were asked to either describe a particularly negative or positive event in their life that were scored for the motivational theme of agency. Participant narratives were copied and pasted directly from the survey, with no grammatical or spelling errors changed/corrected.

Psychological Well-Being

The Psychological Well-Being (PWB) scale is a self-report questionnaire comprised of 18 items measuring six dimensions of eudaimonic psychological well-being including autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Each subscale consists of three items. The 18-item PWB is the shortest of Ryff scales, chosen to minimize attrition. Participants were instructed to indicate how much they agree or disagree using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The sum of each of the six subscales were calculated upon analysis, with negatively phrased items reversed coded prior to analysis. In the current sample, internal consistency calculated using Cronbach's alpha for the composite wellbeing score was .79.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Short Form

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Short Form is a self-report questionnaire consisting of two 10-item mood scales (Watson and Clark, 1988). The two mood scales comprise positive (i.e., proud, determined, inspired) and negative items (i.e., hostile, irritable, jittery). Participants were asked to read each item and gauge to what extent they felt that emotion at present, using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (Extremely). Positive Affect items were added, ranging from 10-50 where higher scores represent higher levels of positive mood. Negative Affect scores were added, ranging from 10-50 where lower scores represent lower levels of negative affect. In the current sample, internal consistency calculated using Cronbach's alpha for positive affect was .92 and negative affect was .89.

Results

Descriptive and Preliminary Analyses

The independent means t-test indicated the highpoint condition had significantly higher ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 0.93$) scores on agency than the lowpoint condition ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(164) = -3.66$, $p < .05$. Cohen's $d = 0.57$, indicated a medium effect size. Figure 1 demonstrates the mean differences in agency between highpoint and lowpoint conditions.

Figure 1

Mean of Agency by Condition

Error Bars: 95% CI
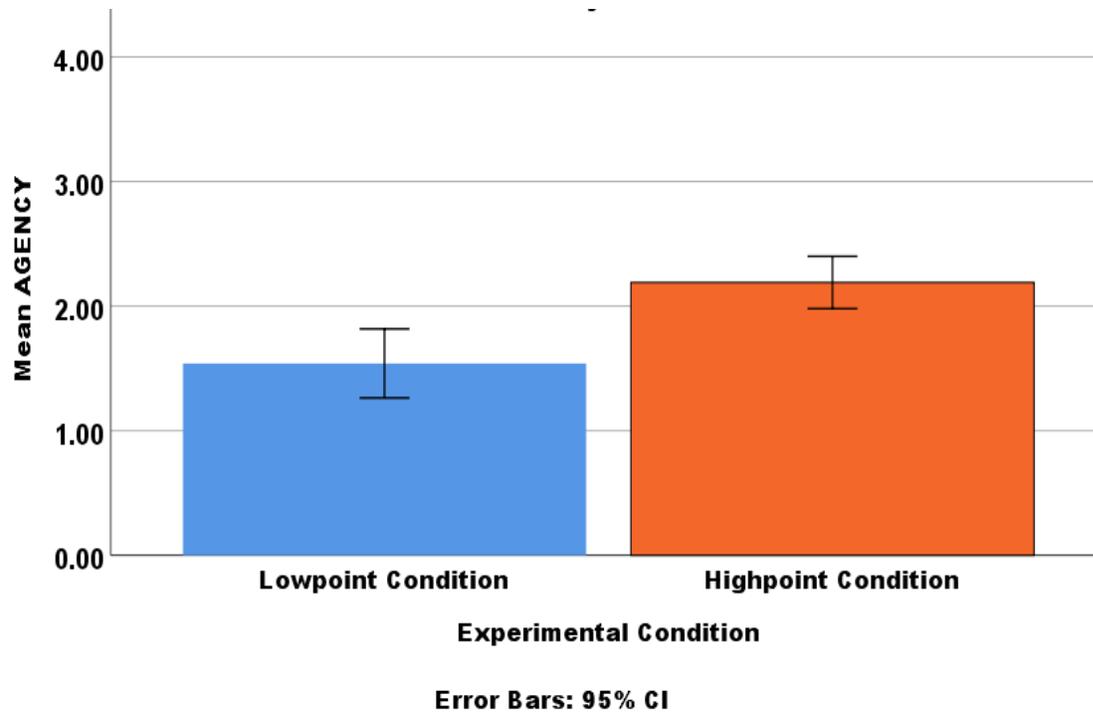
Highpoint, Lowpoint, Control, and Affect

The one-way ANOVA revealed positive affect ($F(2,272) = 10.941$, $p < .001$) and negative affect ($F(2,274) = 4.036$, $p = .019$) significantly differed as a function of condition. The Tukey post-hoc test revealed positive affect scores were significantly lower in the lowpoint condition ($M = 32.3$, $SD = 8.76$, $p < .001$) and the control condition ($M = 34.93$, $SD = 9.22$, $p = .007$) compared to the highpoint condition ($M = 39.21$, $SD = 10.52$). Negative affect scores were significantly higher in the lowpoint condition ($M = 31.8$, $SD = 8.35$, $p = .017$) compared to the highpoint condition ($M = 28.1$, $SD = 8.73$). No other post-hoc contrasts, including demographics between groups were statistically significant.

Affect and Agency

A significant positive correlation was observed between positive affect and agency ($r(161) = .299$, $p < .001$, two-tailed) and a significant negative correlation was observed between negative affect and agency ($r(162) = -.174$, $p = .027$, two-tailed) and negative affect and positive

affect ($r(276) = -.149$, $p = .013$, two-tailed). The Pearson correlation that was computed between

agency, positive affect, and negative affect is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Pearson Correlations Among Agency and Affect

	1	2	3
1.Agency	—	—	—
2.Positive Affect	.299**	—	—
3.Negative Affect	-.174*	-.149*	—

**. significant at the 0.01 level; *. significant at the 0.05 level

Psychological Well-Being and Agency

Statistically significant, weak, positive correlations were observed between agency and

three well-being subscales: environmental mastery ($r(158) = .198$, $p = .013$, two-tailed), positive

relations ($r(157) = .166$, $p = .037$, two-tailed), and self-acceptance ($r(158) = .158$, $p = .048$, two-

tailed). Correlations of agency and all other well-being subscales were not significant. Table 3

shows the Pearson correlation computed between agency and the six subscales of the

Psychological Well-Being (PWB) measure.

Table 3

Pearson Correlations Among Agency and Well-Being

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Agency	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2.Autonomy	.129	—	—	—	—	—	—
3.Environ Mastery	.198*	.274**	—	—	—	—	—
4.Pers Growth	.128	.142*	.274**	—	—	—	—

5.Positive Relations	.166*	.134*	.381**	.250**	—	—	—
6.Life Purpose	.137	.064	.204**	.309**	.267**	—	—
7.Self-Accept	.158*	.276**	.579**	.417**	.445**	.313**	—

**. significant at the 0.01 level; *. significant at the 0.05 level

Discussion

The aims of the current study were three-fold. First, we aimed to examine if the type of story narrated influenced the levels of agentic features present in the text. Second, we investigated whether the type of story affected mood. Third, we explored if there were meaningful associations between agency and mood and agency and psychological wellbeing.

Agency and Positive Memories

Regarding the first aim, our hypothesis was supported in that agency scores were significantly higher in the highpoint condition compared to the lowpoint condition. As described in past research (McLean et al., 2020), motivational themes are fundamental components of human functioning and are greatly valued. Agency or the autonomy one seeks in life are considered positive and ideal states of being, as seen in the stories people have shared about their lives. McLean & Lilgendahl (2008) described narrating positive memories as an easier process compared to negative memories because the latter allows for a positive assimilation into the present self-identity. Negative recollections often challenge one's current self-identity, causing agency to therefore remain at lower levels. Data gathered from the present study supports these past findings. One possibility is that writing about positive memories allows the protagonist immediate power and control over his or her thoughts prompting a confidence not encountered when one recalls a negative experience, especially when that negative experience has not been mended or rectified.

Affect Across Condition

Our second aim examined how affect differed across all three conditions. The first hypothesis was fully supported in that positive affect was significantly lower in lowpoint conditions and control conditions compared to the highpoint condition. Our second hypothesis was partially supported where negative affect scores were significantly higher in the lowpoint condition compared to the highpoint condition. However, negative affect scores were not significantly higher in the lowpoint condition compared to the control condition. Our findings support Pennebaker's (1997) explanation where single-session writing tasks similar to those in the present study often reflect immediate negative affect whereas multi-session expressive writing tasks allow individuals the time to interpret, process, and ultimately heal from those negative experiences. Narrative research is often related to psychotherapy processes (Pennebaker, 1997) in terms of the commonalities of identifying a problem and talking about the reasons and consequences behind said problem. Discussing positive, negative, or unemotional, otherwise trivial daily activities is a powerful therapeutic process.

Associations Between Agency and Affect

Affect has been shown to have a strong dispositional component as seen through the level of stability the PANAS scale reflects. In turn, the immediate mood one recalls may be a reflection of general affective levels (Watson et al., 1988). The final aim of our study was two-fold. The first hypothesis was supported by the significant positive correlation between positive affect and agency. In other words, participants who scored high in agency were more likely to score high in positive affect. Inversely, participants who scored lower in agency reported higher negative affect. Negative affect and positive affect were also negatively correlated, albeit moderately, as shown in past research (Watson et al, 1988). Although past literature has not

addressed the direct association between agency and affect, studies have examined changes in affect throughout the course of psychotherapy (Adler, 2012) and affective changes between writing to distract or to express (Fink and Drake, 2016).

Adler (2012) found that agency was significantly associated with improvements in mental health over the course of a longitudinal study. Some participants wrote about their subjective mood states within their narratives as improving throughout the course of therapy. Although these authors did not objectively measure mood, we purpose that as participants improved in their mental health, their ability to influence their life circumstances increased, in turn, elevating positive mood. When participants first wrote their narratives before beginning psychotherapy, however, agency was notably lower than subsequent narratives. Individuals seeking therapy are often facing an agency threatening event, to some extent, diminishing the control one has over their life course. The act of therapy, with repeated writing tasks, allows individuals to experience a successful change or shift in thought processes, therefore, potentially increasing both agency and mood.

Fink and Drake (2016) examined changes in mood before and after a writing task. They found that writing to distract, after being told to think of the saddest event in their lives, immediately improved participant mood. While our present study did not account for the "write to distract" and "write to express" design, the author's findings informed our thinking. Because our writing task would be considered expressive, the increase in negative affect when agency was not present may be linked to unsuccessful regulatory attempts and/or increased rumination toward the negative experience in question. Those scoring low on agency are still powerless to external forces, and when discussing a negative event in life that has not been mended, negative affect increases. Nonetheless, the way in which an individual reacts to a narrative task, whether it

be a positive or negative prompt, depends on the individual's mood regulation, attention,

perception, and potentially more variables that have been undiscovered (Lischetzke and Eid,

2003).

Association Between Agency and Psychological Wellbeing

McLean et al. (2020) found motivational themes (i.e., agency and communion) to be

highly indicative and predictive of psychological well-being. Adler et al. (2016) explain the

incremental validity of motivational themes and agency having the strongest supporting evidence

compared with other structural and thematic components of narratives.

Our final hypothesis was partially supported in that agency was significantly, albeit

weakly, associated with self-acceptance and positive relations with others on the PWB scale. We

did not find an association between agency and personal growth but did find a significant, weak

association between agency and environmental mastery.

Self-acceptance was defined by Ryff (1989) as the positive assessment of oneself and

one's past experiences. We posit that these protagonists had comprehensively processed the

written experience and were more likely to have connected this event with their self-identity,

accepting it for the positive or the negative consequence the experience embodied. Further, the

correlation between positive relations with others and agency was replicated. Ryff (1989)

explained that a high score of positive relations would indicate trusting and satisfying

relationships with others. McLean and Lilgendahl (2008) found that sharing positive memories

compared to negative memories in conversation was associated with the positive relations

subscale. Our data shows that higher levels of agency was present in positive memories

compared to negative memories, therefore, future investigation should explore why social

functioning is associated with positive memories more so than negative. McLean and Lilgendahl

(2008) found that the personal growth subscale was associated only with older adults, age 59-83 years old compared to younger, emerging adults. We found a similar finding in that our younger sample did not replicate finding. Lastly, environmental mastery is the ability to use physical or mental action to control or change life circumstance (Ryff, 1989), a definition that clearly mimics the fundamental component of agency: ability to take control over one's life (McAdams, 2002). These results suggest that the type of memory recalled has important implications for not only the self, but for relationships with others.

Limitations and Conclusions

The present study had several limitations. First, the sample consisted primarily of college-age, white, female participants, recruited from the State University of New York, New Paltz. The data may not be generalizable to underrepresented cultures and communities or middle aged or older adults. Further, the mood scale, the PANAS-SF, was only given to participants after they wrote their narrative. As this may not be a limitation, we propose that having participants answer this measure pre- and post- narration could prove useful when delineating the associations between mood and structural components of narratives. The present study sheds light on the evidence supporting narrative identity theory and the powerful data gained from narrative research. In terms of psychological functioning, our results suggest that the amount of agency found within a narrative depends on the type of story one is recalling. Further, agency was shown to be indicative of positive mood and certain features of well-being. How these benefits are sustained are beyond the scope of this study. Narrative processes, described above as similar to psychotherapy, has therefore maintained its known benefit to individuals. The data shown above was collected within a larger study, to be analyzed and discussed in our next manuscript. We plan to analyze the extent to which each narrative contains communion and

share our findings from three additional measures: satisfaction with life, self-compassion, and

personality.

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