

FRAGMENTED WHOLE: A THEORY
OF NARRATIVE AND IDENTITY

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Dedication Page

This journey is dedicated to those who gave me wings:

Ret. Sgt. James W. Mobley, my best friend and father

Blanche M. Johnson, my greatest encouragement and mother

and

Sibree Mitchem, my inspiration and greatest grandmother

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Abstract

The act of storytelling is one way to understand the complex nature of identity. Through the act of storytelling, human communication is enacted in the world, and the performance of the story is an act of identification of the self. Like a kaleidoscope image that changes depending on the way it is turned and the amount of light it absorbs, so too, do narratives of identity change depending on the stories being assimilated and the context within which the assimilation takes place. The purpose of this study is to conceptualize identity with narration as a central component of identity formation and performance, leading to a new theory called narrative of identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Justification.....	2
<i>Motivation One</i>	2
<i>Motivation Two</i>	4
<i>Motivation Three</i>	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
Narrative: A Paradigmatic Shift	10
Identity.....	12
Foundational Theories	12
<i>Erikson: Psychosocial Theory of Development</i>	12
<i>Mead: Identity and Symbolic Interaction</i>	14
<i>Tajfel and Turner: Social Identity Theory</i>	16
<i>Stryker: Identity Theory</i>	18
<i>Gergen: Postmodern Identity</i>	19
Communication Theories of Identity	22
<i>Ting-Toomey: Identity Negotiation Theory</i>	22
<i>Hecht and Colleagues: Communication Theory of Identity</i>	25
<i>Eisenberg: Theory of Communication and Identity</i>	26
Narrative of Identity.....	28
<i>Ricouer</i>	31
<i>Bahktin</i>	31
<i>Holstein and Gubrium</i>	32
<i>Eisenberg</i>	33
<i>Somers</i>	33
<i>Summary</i>	35
Identity, Narrative and Communication.....	36
<i>A Space to Fill</i>	37
<i>Towards a New Theory</i>	38
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	40
Methodology: Grounded Theory.....	40
Methods	41
<i>Textual Data Analysis</i>	42
<i>Data Collection</i>	43

<i>StoryCorps: The Conversation of a Lifetime</i>	43
<i>Sampling</i>	47
<i>Data Analysis</i>	49
<i>Initial Coding</i>	49
<i>Focused Coding</i>	52
<i>Theoretical Coding</i>	53
<i>Memo-writing</i>	53
<i>Theoretical Saturation</i>	55
<i>Validation</i>	55
Summary	58
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	60
Narrative and Identity Construction	60
<i>Connection/Relationship: Markers Along the Narrative Road</i>	62
<i>Sub-theme 1: Life Circumstances/Legacies</i>	64
<i>Sub-theme 2: Influence of Others</i>	71
<i>Transitions: The Turning Points We Live By</i>	74
<i>Sub-theme 1: Challenges/Struggles</i>	75
<i>Sub-theme 2: Redemption Events</i>	78
<i>Influences and Themes: A Conceptual Dance</i>	81
A Theory of Narrative of Identity.....	84
<i>Part One: Separation</i>	87
<i>Part Two: Influences</i>	94
<i>Part Three: Re-assimilation</i>	96
Theory of Narrative of Identity: An Extended Example.....	106
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION	115
Research Question One: Concepts Fundamental to Narration of Identity	115
Research Question Two: An Interpretive Process of Narrative of Identity.....	117
Research Question Three: A Theory of Narrative of Identity	118
Theoretical Implications	120
<i>Implications for Narrative Literature</i>	120
<i>Implications for Identity Literature</i>	122
Applications and Implications for Theory/Model.....	124
Strengths and Limitations	127
<i>Strengths</i>	127
<i>Limitations</i>	129
Conclusion	130
References	131
Appendix A	143
Footnotes	144

VITA	145
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Psychologist Dan McAdams (1996) argued:

If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if *I* want to know *myself*, to gain insight into the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story. I must come to see in all its particulars the narrative of the self—the personal myth—that I have tacitly, even unconsciously, composed over the course of the years. It is a story I continue to revise, and to tell to myself (and sometimes others) as I go on living. (p. 11, *emphasis in the original*)

McAdams was dealing with a particular truth of human nature: we are all tellers of tales (McAdams, 1996) or, as Walter Fisher (1984) put it, storytelling animals. Identity is an amalgamation of how we see ourselves; of how we define our existence internally and of how we interact with others. As Josselson (1995) stated, “[W]e take whatever observations we have made of the external world and, making them part of ourselves, interpret them and tell a story about what we believe we know” (p. 29). In this way, human beings understand, or make sense of, self and their place in the world through the stories encountered and experienced throughout life.

The act of storytelling is one way to understand the complex nature of identity. Through the act of storytelling, human communication is enacted in the world, and the performance of the story is an act of identification of the self. According to Young (1989):

There is an implication...for the use of narrativity in the social sciences...social scientists have misunderstood the shape of experience: a life is not always grasped in a linear pattern. Serious attention to narrativity in stories of the self will not force the sense of self into the pattern of narrative, but will deploy narrative to discover the sense of self. (p. 163)

McAdams (1996), Josselson (1995), and Young (1989) were all alluding to an idea called narrative of identity. For the purpose of this research, I define narrative of identity as follows: a composite of assimilated stories pieced together to form a salient, and particular, sense of self. Like a kaleidoscope image that changes depending on the way it is turned and the amount of light it absorbs, so too, do narratives of identity change depending on the stories being assimilated and the context within which the assimilation takes place. The purpose of this study is to re-conceptualize identity, in a way that is different from McAdams, Josselson and others, with narrative as a central component. By looking at the process of performance of identity, a new theory of identity through narrative is put forth.

Justification

In this section, three motivations for pursuing a line of research on narrative of identity are explored. The first motivation looks at the reasons to study process; the second motivation looks at narrative as a foundational concept of identity; the final motivation looks at the need for a new communication theory.

Motivation one. The first motivation for researching narratives of identity is to theorize this important process of identity for the first time. Identity research and

narrative research are prolific across disciplines (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000); however, these concepts have not been clearly linked together in an empirical way that can add to our understanding of narrative or identity, even though they are sometimes tied together to explain nuances of communication behavior. This link needs exploration. I believe that story and identity are central components to understanding human communicative behavior. This point is important because, “subjects do not have to be taught how to tell stories; it is part of their cognitive repertoire” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). Though identity performed through story makes sense on an intuitive level (Polkinghorne, 1995), what is required is an understanding of why a narrative way of thinking and making sense of the world is central to, and not merely a subset of, identity. Polkinghorne alluded to a way into this understanding in the above quote but the link between narrative and identity needs exploration.

Our perception of our self is commonly thought of as our identity (Marcia, Matteson, Orlofsky, Waterman, & Archer, 1993). This identity is a concept or construct that encompasses the cognitive, social, sociological, linguistic and psychological, but, as I will argue, begins and ends with the stories we assimilate through cultural influence and socialization. Our identity is formed through the act of narrative and is reconfigured throughout our lifetime within narrative. This discussion is not about the linear narrative of current narrative theory but the abstract pieces of story brought into everyday interactions. For example, when we ask the question, “Who am I?” we are asking our self to give an account, or a coherent story, of our own identity. In order to give this account, the respondent must weave together fragments of story gleaned from multiple sources

(family outlook, peers, friends, lovers, her own perception of self, etc.). The response may change over time but the weaving process, the sense-making, is continuous. How the question is answered will depend upon the sense one makes internally of those fragments and the answer will reflect an internal ordering of those stories into an account that suits the narrator. According to Young (1989), individuals use narratives to reflexively reconstruct a sense of self. In this position, there is the acknowledgment of an identity that is narrative in both nature and process. The goal of this research project is to understand this narrative nature and process.

As communication scholars, we seek to explain the processes and impacts of human communication at multiple levels. To this end, we may explore particular communication activities such as: 1) how humans make sense of an overwhelming amount of internal and external information (process), and 2) how that sense-making translates into communicative behaviors (outcome). Exploring our identity or, answering the question, “Who am I?” is one such communicative process we can study. This line of inquiry is important because narratives exist to help us understand ourselves, interact with each other, and make sense out of our place in the world.

Motivation two. The second motivation for this line of research is to position the ideas of story and narrative as central components to the concept of identity. It is important to make clear the definition of story that drives this research. Boje (2001) provided the impetus when he wrote, “antenarrative is the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted and pre-narrative speculation” (p. 1). That unplotted and fragmented account is story which, according to Boje, occurs before a traditional

narrative structure is imposed (Boje, 2001, p. 1-2). By looking at story in this way, Boje posited a deconstructed, or postmodern, view of story intended to liberate story from linearity. By looking at stories in this way, the researcher will be required to suspend judgment on the relative worth of a story to be accurate or truthful based on preconceived ideas, suspend the bias, and allow story to simply unfold.

Stories and storytelling are prolific and, as Langellier and Peterson (2004) remind us, “embedded in the daily lives of ordinary and extraordinary people, storytelling flourishes” (p. 1). Weaving its way through these stories is sense-making. Stories color our internal and external views of life, self, and others; thus, narratives of identity are, by their very nature, extensions of internal sense-making. This sense-making relies on constructs that we agree upon collectively in order to function in the broader community. In this way, we “get a life” (Smith & Watson, 1996, p. 2) or perform our lived experiences by consumption of narratives while, simultaneously, we construct an identity based on those narratives. In the retelling of stories, an identity emerges which finds coherence and cohesion within narratives. Stories exist because of the identities we construct and the identities exist because of the stories we assimilate.

Within current identity studies, McAdams’s (1996) concept of the personal myth comes closest to a working definition of narratives of identity, but it remains incomplete. McAdams looked at how we construct a heroic tale (the personal myth) from different parts of our self in order to tell a holistic and convincing narrative of who we are. The personal myth is fluid and ever changing and influenced by experiences from the past, present, and anticipated future (McAdams, 1996). In exploring a central identity question,

“What do you do?” we can begin to see what McAdams might have meant. Children are taught a certain definition of work. This definition comes from family and community, through personal accounts of life at work, from tales of people who struggled through hard times, from laments about those deemed not industrious enough to find employment, and from many others’ narratives surrounding the issue of work. These narratives are assimilated, and a fragmented definition of work permeates our identity and makes meaningful descriptions of work such as “hard-working,” “lazy,” “blue-collar,” or “white-collar.” Thus, when this question is posed, individuals speak from this assimilated definition of work. This definition places a premium on some performances of work while negating others and, possibly through internal sense-making, we find an answer that fits with the narrative we tell about ourselves in relation to work. This answer is what McAdams’s calls the personal myth.

Though McAdams (1996) argues that this personal myth or, more appropriately labeled for my purposes here, narrative of identity, is linearly defined with a beginning, middle, and end as played out through life’s stages, he allows that there is a continual development of this personal myth at the conscious and subconscious levels. As we move through various iterations of professions and life circumstances, we redefine work to suit our current identity whether that identity is “I am a graduate student” or “I am a housewife.” It is essential that we weave narratives that allow us to embody definitions we are comfortable with, though the road to that definition can be contradictory and unfocused.

The question, then, turns to, how we use the stories of everyday life to construct identity. By what narrative mechanisms do we come to know who we are in relation to the fragmentary nature of life? A theory of narrative of identity, focusing on the process of construction, can provide a way to answer this question and, hopefully, allow for identity narratives to be useful in understanding why we undertake certain behaviors, hold certain viewpoints, and/or value certain ideologies. By understanding how we come to narratives of self, individuals might find common ground with others in re-writing destructive narratives on large and small scales.

A personal, narratable self is unique in that it requires both self and other for its construction. For example, the story of our birth and formative years is crucial to the identity we hold, but this narrative can only come to us through the narratives of others. It is biography that is crucial to how we narrate our autobiography. The telling of our birth-story is incomplete without snapshots given to us through the narratives of others, pictures, hospital records, cultural happenings, etc. A child born in the summer of 1973 might find her birth narrative infused not only with the perspective of the new mother and father having their first child, but also with the cultural scandal of that time. Hence her narrative of identity might begin with the thread, “I was born during the summer of Watergate,” and this thread is a fragment tied into others in the formation and performance of her identity and will influence how she chooses to communicate her identity to others.

In order to fully explore this question of identity construction, we must broaden currently held views of narrative and identity to include less structured and more fluid

explanations. In discussions of narrative as a paradigmatic shift, as articulated by Fisher (1984, 1985), Bochner (1992, 1997, 2001, 2002), Rowland (1987, 1989) and others (e.g. Kirkwood, 1992; Roberts, 2004), there is an implicit understanding that humans use narrative to make sense of life. Thus, we need to take narratives into account when we are studying lives and processes of identity construction within those lives. In the current scholarly discussion, however, there is a gap. This gap is an understanding of how narratives are used in the process of identity formation. How do we answer the question, “Who am I?” By building a theory of narrative of identity, I argue that this answer is an assimilated composite that is fluid and encompasses what we know of narrative and what we know of identity.

Motivation three. The third and final motivation for this line of research is to introduce a new theory to the field of communication. Often, identity theories are created in other disciplines and are co-opted into communication by extension. Narrative of identity is, more precisely, an idea that may be present across several disciplines but has not been articulated into a concrete and usable theory within current scholarship. The need for a new theory that combines narrative and identity is evident when we think of how crucial story is to the formation of self and the articulation of that self to others. As Cavarero (1997) writes, “Put simply, through the unreflecting knowledge of my sense of self [*dell’assaporarmi*], I know that I have a story and that I exist in this story” (p. xvi). By providing a theoretical framework through which to understand and study this story, scholars in communication who use narrative analysis to look at the lived experiences,

and the communicative behaviors within those experiences, of others might well find useful a theoretical grounding upon which to base that analysis.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to generate a theory of narrative of identity. Therefore, this study asked: What is the process through which individuals narrate self through story? By finding a way in which self is explicated through story, I hoped to add to the literature on understanding identity construction and performance that I review in the next section.

Before presenting the results of the current project and explaining explicitly how those results contribute to the extant narrative and identity literature, an overview of classic identity theories and an overview of narrative theories is followed by an explication of the research questions guiding the analysis, a detailed explanation of grounded theory by Charmaz (2006), and an analysis of the StoryCorps texts that produced thematic categories and influential factors salient in the process of narrating identity. These categories and influential factors were then incorporated into a model of narrative of identity. Finally, a discussion of how the model works and its contribution to the literature on identity and narrative is presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Though the concept of narrative of identity finds some purchase within sociological and psychological discussions, there is a dearth of research or discourse originating within the field of communication. For this reason, conceptual definitions of narratives of identity already explicated in other traditions are used as the basis for research within communication. This usage can be a problem because definitions of narrative and identity vary across fields and those definitions are, to some degree, marked by fragmentation (Kraus, 2006). Thus, conceptions of narrative of identity are also bound to be marked by that same fragmentation. Borrowing from different positions to formulate an operational definition of narratives of identity, researchers have to have a familiarity with disparate conceptions of narrative and identity.

In order to justify a need for a theory of narrative of identity, I will first look at what has been written about narrative, review foundational theories of identity, explore where narrative of identity resides in current theorizing, and discuss the gap left in the research, thereby justifying the need for the present study.

Narrative: A Paradigmatic Shift

Arthur Bochner (2001) reminds us that life both anticipates telling and draws meaning from it and that narratives are both about living and being a part of life. Although life stories may be based in facts (reliable and externally valid), they are not determined by them (Bochner, 2001). This is very important, as this lack of factual determination for life stories is the basis for the arguments put forth by Walter Fisher in

1984. Though he was looking at the problem of argumentation and reasoning, Fisher understood that there was an elemental part of the equation missing in the studies of rhetoric and, by extension, other social science discourses. The human voice was gone from human communication (Fisher, 1984, 1985). Fisher broke new ground with the notion of the narrative paradigm. He posited a new way of looking at reasoning that moved away from the idea of reasoning needing to be “expressed in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures” (p. 1) and from the belief that discourse about the human condition needed to be confined to rational standards of study. To put it another way, as Mumby (1993) states, the concept of narrative knowing functioned as a challenge to the positivist claims about knowledge and knowing. To that end, Fisher introduced the narrative paradigm and the concept of homo narrans. According to Fisher (1984), “the homo narrans metaphor is an incorporation and extension of Kenneth Burke’s definition of man as the symbol using animal” with homo narrans being translated as human storyteller (p. 6).

The narrative paradigm, positioned by Fisher as a paradigm for further study of human communication, places narratives in the service of an objective that is different from the analysis of social facts. Some scholars attempt to force narratives to fit existing paradigms. For example, the rational world paradigm (Rowland, 1987, 1989), within which many identity theories are based, see human communication as the result of logical puzzles that are solved through reasoned discourse and evidence. This positions narrative as pieces of evidence gleaned from logical deduction and rational explanation. This position runs the risk of erasing what makes stories important to the process of

communication research: that humans apprehend, organize and make sense of the phenomenal world as stories (Banks, 2004). These stories are told throughout life by all people in varying contexts, thus the stories are an important part of the study of everyday interactions (Langellier, 1989). The pervasiveness of narrative in everyday communication suggests that narrative is important for understanding how “personal identity, the answer to the riddle of 'who' people are, takes shape in the stories we tell about ourselves” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xvii). Thus, it is important to more fully explicate the idea of narrative of identity. This explication must encompass an understanding of the idea of identity.

Identity

Theories are designed to show how identity affects socialization, psychological processes and communication behaviors. This body of literature is a grand extension of a few critical identity theories postulated to look not at the effects of identity but at the process of identity formation itself. For this section of the literature review, the focus will be on a select set of foundational theories of identity formation and communication identity theories that have come from them. By looking at these few theories of identity, theories which inform how we talk about identity and how others theories study identity, we can garner a clearer understanding of the nature of identity theories, why they are important for study, and how they need to be extended to capture the role of narrative in identity formation.

Foundational Theories

Erikson: Psychosocial theory of development.

Central to identity research is Erikson's (1959) work on the Psychosocial Theory of Development, which originates in the discipline of developmental psychology. In this theory, Erikson conceptualized eight stages (infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood and old age) through which humans develop. Within those stages, identity is formed and reformed as the life progresses. Beginning with infancy and progressing linearly through to old age, individuals engage in a never-ending process of development and are constantly in a state of identity fluctuation that is never fully resolved within the human personality. Within each phase of Erikson's model, the ego (or self) goes through a crisis that must be resolved satisfactorily before movement into the next phase. For example, in infancy, Erikson (1959) says we have to resolve whether we will be a trusting or untrusting individual. The resolution to that decision becomes part of our identity as we shift into early childhood. In adolescence (stage five of the theory), identity takes center stage as individuals grapple with developing a coherent sense of self (Marcia, 1994). Crucial in Erikson's process of identity development is feedback from significant others as a source of validation for the person's chosen identity (Vera & de los Santos, 2005). This identity "becomes the overlap between who I think I am and what others perceive me to be" (Vera & de los Santos, 2005, p. 103).

The final point to identity that Erikson (1959) explicates is that of a healthy identity formation. When a healthy identity is achieved, individuals "experience a sense of psychological well-being characterized by physical self-acceptance, a sense of general direction in life and trust that significant others will recognize and accept us" (Vera & de

los Santos, 2005, p. 103). Erikson's theory looks at identity as something that changes over the lifespan and offers social scientists a way to study this change through the eight stages. Erikson's stages are still used and referred to in the literature on identity formation and maintenance from a post-positivist perspective (Franz, 1995; Freilino & Hummel, 1985; Marcia, 1988; McAdams, 2006; Peterson & Stewart, 1990; Slater, 2003).

Mead: Identity and symbolic interactionism.

Bridging social psychology to sociology through philosophy, the most dominant framework within which sociologists theorize about identity can be found in symbolic interaction (Callero, 2003). Symbolic interactionism, hereafter known as SI, has been a foundation of sociological theory beginning arguably with Mead's (1922) lecture entitled, "A Behavioristic Account of the Significant Symbol." According to SI, human behavior is determined not by the objective facts of a situation, but by the meanings people ascribe to a situation. These meanings are subjective and influential. Humans' definition of "reality" is actually a set of social constructs consisting of symbols that are assigned meaning and acted upon in accordance with those meanings. These symbols become language, and it is language that humans use to construct reality. This is the heart of SI and places it within the social construction worldview that holds that language is important to the analysis of everyday lived experiences (Berger and Luckman, 1966). How we think about the world, including ourselves, is created in everyday talk. (Domenici and Littlejohn, 2006)

Central to understanding SI and identity is the notion of the self that is considered both a social process and social force (Rosenberg, 1981). Mead (1934) defines it this way, "the self is not so much a substance as a process in which the conversation of gestures

has been internalized within an organic form” (p. 1). Mead’s perspective stresses that the self is never fixed or stable; it is subject to continual redefinition and revision through social interaction with what Mead calls the generalized other: the perspective of the larger society that an individual tries to embody when determining a course of action for the self (1934). The self is socially constructed within everyday life. Mead’s work provides important perspective on how self is created, although he does not offer a definition of identity, per se, his ideas serve as a springboard for developing a theory of identity that captures, more specifically, the process of constructing self.

Following classic Symbolic Interactionism, most research in the tradition of SI has focused on the social production of the personal self or our identity. This social production takes place in a variety of contexts and circumstances (Butt, 2008; Clausen, 1968; Johnson, 1992; Stryker & Serpe, 1983; Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963). From the social production of personal self or identity, scholars have looked at social products such as the production of self-understandings (i.e. how we understand the our self in relation to others we interact with) and self-meanings (i.e. how we view self based on those understandings gleaned from interactions) (Blumer, 1962; Kuhn, 1964; LoConto & Jones-Pruitt, 2008; O’Toole & Dubin, 1968) as well as self-concepts (i.e. the mental images of our self we take from those understandings or how we perform meanings of self) (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Cressey, 1953; Denzin, 1972, 1975; Mutran & Reitzes, 1984; Reckless, Dinitz & Murray, 1958; Reitzes, 1980).

Tajfel and Turner: Social identity theory.

A third foundational theory of identity is Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory or SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) introduced some fundamental beliefs about identity formation and maintenance. The main tenet of SIT is that individuals identify with others and embody a certain self-identity because of a desire to belong to a certain social community. The degree to which individuals wish to belong to certain social communities depends, in large part, upon the status of those communities in relation to other communities. Individuals seek to belong to groups that are comparatively superior to other similarly constituted groups as this is seen as a way to enhance personal self-esteem and self-worth (Nesdale & Flessner, 2001).

Identity tied to the need to belong is called the social identity and, as Tajfel (1981) elaborates, “part of the individuals’ self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance of that membership” (p. 255). In this case, identity is an outwardly focused concept dependent on others for formation and maintenance.

Key to SIT are the concepts of self-categorization and social comparison, and each are thought to produce a different consequence for self-identity formation. Self-categorization allows individuals to see themselves as part of larger social identities. The consequence of self-categorization is an accentuation of perceived similarities with in-group members and an accentuation of perceived differences with out-group members (Stets & Burke, 1996). Social comparison allows individuals to place self into a role (e.g. ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, etc.) that, in turn, allows for an identity to be

formed based on that role. This comparison also allows the self to be viewed from positions of power over others within society. The power comes from social structures in place within society into which individuals can ascend or descend. Through social comparison, social identity is formed and through self-categorization, the social identity formed in social comparison is enacted.

SIT has enjoyed a depth and breadth of use in many studies with the central focus being how SIT influences group behavior. In this vein, scholars have looked at issues of bullying within and between groups (Boulton, 1995; Ojala & Nesdale, 2004), group status (in-group) in comparison to other groups (out-group)(Puddifoot, 1997), conflict between groups (Esler, 2000), acquisition of group attitudes (Nesdale & Flessner, 2001), formation of positive peer evaluations within groups (Tarrant, 2002), the use of music to foster membership with groups (Tarrant, North & Hargreaves, 2001), the effects of in-group bias on self-esteem (Peterson & Blank, 2003), and issues of prejudice within groups (Krumm & Corning, 2000, Zarate & Garza, 2002). Other scholars have used SIT to look at identity on a national scale (Huddy & Khatib, 2007), to study childhood aggression (Nesdale & Pickering, 2006), to help understand the effect on in-group membership after the disclosure of a serious illness (Kundrat & Nussbaum, 2003), to understand conflicts in bicultural identity negotiation (Stroink & LaLonde, 2009) and to look at identity formation and maintenance within an organizational context (Ward & Winstanley, 2004). Many other scholars use the tenets of SIT in explicating social identity within research.

SIT has shown itself to be a versatile and relevant theory for understanding identity in groups. In this theory, again, there is a foundation to build a process of identity and for theorizing how self is performed in that process.

Stryker: Identity theory.

The fourth foundational theory also bridges the social and the psychological in discussing identity from the social constructionist worldview. Identity Theory (Stryker, 1968, 1987), hereafter known as IT, is a grouping of theoretical premises that follows a common set of principles. These principles are that actors in a social structure name one another (or categorize each other) as well as themselves and this naming brings expectations to the identity named (role enactment). Similar to scholarship in the symbolic interactionism tradition (Stryker, 1968) and in Social Identity Theory (Stryker, 1987), the core of IT is that the self emerges within the context of social interaction, and we receive instruction for how the self is to interact through this socialization. Identity is defined as a set of meanings that are tied to and sustain the self (Stets & Burke, 2000). How that self comes into being is through naming, again, focusing extensively on the role of external processes and others in identity formation.

Relevant to understanding IT are the concepts of prominence hierarchy and salience hierarchy. Prominence hierarchy or hierarchy of prominence (McCall & Simmons, 1978) stems from the belief that the self is comprised of multiple identities that allow us to play social roles within society. This hierarchy brings an ideal identity to the top based on the social support and social rewards received for enactment of that identity. For example, the identity of mother may be a role that receives a high level of support

and reward over other roles (such as daughter, business woman, or activist) that are played by the same person. Thus, the mother role in this example would be the most prominent role in the hierarchy of roles performed by this woman.

Stryker (1980) determined that identities were in a hierarchy as well but that it was a hierarchy attached to salience as opposed to prominence. When we hold an identity as salient, we look to enact it across situations regardless of the rewards that may be associated with the identity. For example, the woman in the above example might choose to place more emphasis on her identity as activist even though that role may, in fact, decrease rewards and social support in certain situations. The need to enact the identity is the driving force. Like prominence identity, salience identity relies on a level of commitment to the constructed identity. We must be invested in the identity in order for it to be relevant to us.

Identity theory has two lines of theorizing in empirical research. The first looks at how social structure influences one's identity and, by extension, behavior (Serpe & Stryker, 1987; Stryker & Serpe, 1982, 1994) and the second looks at which internal dynamics within the self work to influence behavior (Burke & Cast, 1997; Burke & Reitzes, 1981, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999; Cast & Burke, 2002; Stets & Burke, 1996, 2000; Tsushima & Burke, 1999).

Gergen: Postmodern identity.

In looking at foundational identity theories and ideas, it is important to look at both ends of the philosophical paradigm. Gergen (1991) and the idea of the saturated self represents the, current, furthest point on the paradigm: the postmodern perspective. In his

book, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*, Gergen (1991) outlined the major components of the postmodern perspective on self and identity performance and in *An Invitation to Social Construction* (1998), he continued to flesh out the ideas.

According to Gergen (1991), social contemporary life, with all its attendant technological advances, has rendered the self saturated by media and fragmented in nature. This fragmentation is leading to a “multiphrenic condition” (Gergen, 1991, p. 49) that is a precursor to postmodern consciousness. This condition is best understood as a multiplicity of selves such that the idea of a Self is no longer logical or rational and we have the potential to be any self given the right circumstances or stimulus. As he states,

We appear to each other as single identities, unified, of whole cloth. However, with social saturation, each of us comes to harbor a vast population of hidden potentials – to be a blues singer, a gypsy, an aristocrat, and/or a criminal. All the selves lie latent, and under the right conditions may spring to life. (Gergen, 1991, p. 71)

These selves are relational in nature and constructed within relationships to such an extent that the self (though thought to have its own emotions, beliefs, etc) only exists within relationships (Gergen, 1991). From this perspective, self is co-constructed with others and dependent upon relationship for constitution, deconstruction and reconstitution. In contrast to other foundational theorists, Gergen posits that self does not hold to a sense of “sameness” that allows for a sense of continuity over time (1991, p. 184), thus changing from moment to moment. For postmodern theorists, the self is a fabled

construct that does not exist in any way that can be qualified or quantified for study and only exists as an illusory construct of competing potentials waiting for a relationship to spring into being. Gergen and other postmodern theorists have their detractors (Shalin, 1993; McGerr, 1993; Gubrium & Holstein, 1995), but the ideas of postmodern identity are appearing in scholarship on identity in organizations (Czarniawska, 1997), in therapy (Freedman & Combs, 1996), in public policy (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997), and life stories (McAdams, 2001, 2006).

In sum, social psychology, psychology, and sociology have produced pivotal theories on identity. These theories seek to explain a complicated internal dynamic. Some are based in the post-positivist paradigm, others incorporate a social constructionist paradigm and still others move beyond to postmodernism. All offer ways to understand formation and maintenance of an identity construct. Though most of these theories look to socialization to help understand and explain identity, they focus almost exclusively on the behavioral performance of identity with the communication component being in addition to that performance but not a central component. Erikson, arguably the father of modern identity theory, does not deal directly with the discursive process within the stage model of identity. Tajfel and Turner, Stryker and Gergen are all most concerned with how relationships impact the formation and performance of identity, but, again, do not look deeply at the discursive element. Mead gets closest to unpacking communication with his treatise about symbolic interactionism; however, he does not explain how the self is formed in the process of that symbolic interaction. All of these theories are important to

the evolution of identity, and all left important questions about identity formation and performance open for the next generations.

Communication Theories of Identity

Communication research tends to look at issues of identity through a social psychological framework because this framework provides a useful guide for communication research and partners well with human communication research projects. Communication scholars argue that communication is highly salient to the performance of identity, and are adding theories to bring this element to the forefront in identity research. Communication scholars are positioned to look at identity from a different sense-making perspective and to add another dimension to understanding identity. These scholars can see how the element of communication changes the behavioral, socially constructed, and enacted identities upon which traditional theories focus. Though there are not many theories of identity present in communication, it is important to highlight those making important contributions to the research literature.

Ting-Toomey: Identity negotiation theory.

Developed by Stella Ting-Toomey in 1998, Identity Negotiation Theory, hereafter known as INT, is a theory of intercultural communication competence that attempts to look at the effectiveness of identity negotiation when conflicting definitions of self or identities are present. Similar to Social Identity Theory, INT is based on the premise that people have two types of identity, group-based and person-based, and these identities are formed by the viewpoints of others. It is through communication (e.g. casual

conversations, sharing stories, communal narratives) that we acquire a particular way of seeing others and ourselves from situation to situation (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

INT theorizes that there are identity domains that influence each other. Primary domains are cultural, ethnic, gender and personal. These exert a sustained and on-going influence on our lives. Situational domains are role specific, relational, and include facework. These two domains work together to help us negotiate our identities (Ting-Toomey, 1999). The term identity, in this theory, means “the reflective self-conception or self-image we each derive from our cultural, ethnic, and gender socialization process” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 28).

The primary domain refers to how we see ourselves and may not be a completely conscious activity; however, this domain is present and influences behavior in many ways. This primary identity (derived from our self-image based on socialization - cultural, gender, ethnic, etc.) is rooted in both our linguistic and non-linguistic behavior and influences the situational identity (informed by the context we are placed within - roles, facework, etc.) within interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1999). To look at an example, cultural identity refers to the larger culture individuals are socialized into. This could include a nation (American), religion (Jewish), language use (Spanglish) or gender (woman). There is overlap within the domains as can be seen in the fact that woman could be a cultural identity as well as a stand-alone gender identity. This socialization begins in the primary family and is heavily influenced by the underlying value system of the culture. For instance, the American Jewish value system may promote community over individuality;

thus, a person in this culture may seek close familial and community ties over an autonomous lifestyle.

Whereas primary identity is formed within our socialization matrix, according to INT, the situational identity is driven by the context. These identities are much less stable than the primary ones and are driven by external situational features that compel us to combine different domains to contend with different definitions of situations. We can embody multiple situational identities at any given time, depending on circumstance, and can react to the same situation in multiple ways. Role situational identity is tied to the cultural primary domain in that “a role is a set of expected behaviors and the values associated with them that a culture or ethnic group defines as proper or acceptable” (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 36). In this way, the cultural community prescribes what are acceptable social role behaviors within a given role and context. This role is always in flux and is tied to situational factors. For instance, though students in a graduate program are always graduate students, the expectations and behaviors of that role vary from classroom to classroom and professor to professor. Through communication and communicative acts, or interaction, we continually learn which roles to play (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 2005).

INT builds on Stryker’s work in Identity Theory, thus showing how identity research is continuing to evolve. By looking at how communicative acts inform identity, INT also builds upon Mead’s work in looking at the discursive elements present within

identity formation and performance. The missing piece in INT, as in other theories, is a look at the process of identity construction instead of only the product.

Hecht and Colleagues: Communication theory of identity.

The next theory focuses on the influence of identity and communication on each other. Hecht (1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004) theorized that social behavior was a function of identity through communication. Further, Jung and Hecht (2004) defined identity as, “social relations and roles...internalized by individuals as identities through communication. Individuals' identities, in turn, are acted out as social behavior through communication” (p. 266). Similarly to Ting-Toomey and other identity scholars, Jung and Hecht view identity as an internal construction formed, primarily, by outside influence. Identity is a role performed through communication with others.

Communication Theory of Identity, hereafter known as CTI, premises four loci of identity based on the above noted perspective. First, personal identity is the self-concept we hold about our self. This is a characteristic of the self and is performed at the individual level. Second, enacted identity is the performance of that self-concept formed at the personal identity level. These enacted identities are exchanged with others during the course of communication and are, themselves, identities and not simply expressions of the personal identity. Third, relational identity is multi-leveled and deals with how identities are formed in relation to others in a social network. This identity encompasses four levels: an individual's internalized view of self through interaction with others; a view of the self defined by relationships; a multiplicity of selves found in relation to each other; and an understanding that relationship is itself, an identity. Finally, communal

identity is identity based in the collective identity of a group and is very similar to the concepts found in Social Identity Theory. CTI seeks to incorporate both the individual and social aspects of identity and is concerned with how the four loci interact (interpenetration of the loci) with each other.

The four frames of identity may be considered independently but are not really separate from each other. Personal identity is infused into one's enacted and relational identities, as well as communal identities, just as the communal identities are a part of personal, enacted, and relational identities. For example, one cannot examine a person's gender identity (personal identity) without considering how society defines gender roles (communal identity) or how others view a person as a man or woman (relational identity). CTI refers to this as the interpenetration of the frames. These relationships can also be conceptualized as juxtapositions or mutual interdependence, and from a quantitative perspective, as statistical interactivity. The frames are perspectives on a whole (and holistic), integrated identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004) that is formed and enacted through the process of communication.

Eisenberg: Theory of communication and identity.

The final look into identity and communication comes from Eisenberg (2001) and his Theory of Communication and Identity. In his theory, Eisenberg proposes,

A theory of communication and identity that connects a person's communicative choices with their personal narratives, their personal narratives with their --bodily experiences of emotionality and mood, and each of the above with the

environmental resources available for the creation and sustenance of particular identities (p. 542).

The theory postulates that there is a cyclical relationship among communication, personal narrative and mood. This is the foundation of the theory. These elements work together to build identity and manage uncertainty within interactions through multiple dimensions including the environment, the body, economic forces, machines, etc (Eisenberg, 2001).

For Eisenberg (2001), the self is born into a world with what is called a “surround of force” that actively shapes an individual's “moods, life stories, and communication” (p.543). This surround is comprised of the biological, spiritual, cultural, interpersonal, and economic influences that impact sub processes of mood, personal narrative and communication. These influences have rules and lists that individuals draw from to “make sense of their lives and in doing so construct their identities” (p. 544).

The sub processes within the surround are where the process of identity formation occurs. The first sub process is biological and deals with emotions, brain chemistry and mood. This process is oriented towards time and emotionality, whether a person is “hopeful or anxious, happy or depressed about their possible futures” (Eisenberg, 2001, p. 544). The second sub process is the personal narrative. This concept is explained in a later section of the literature review. Though Eisenberg does not offer a concrete definition of this personal narrative, the important concepts to note here are that personal narratives, according to this theory, are highly resistant to changes and are the primary tool used for sense-making. The final sub process is communication or an individual's approach to communicating with others. In this process, the important components of

communication are how individuals handle disagreement or how open s/he is to another individual's worldview (Eisenberg, 2001). Viewed through the lens of this process, identity is theorized as “ a complex process of drawing lists and stories from the surround that complement or otherwise inform one's mood, personal narrative, and communicative style” (p. 544). The only way to change identity is to disrupt the surround from any angle and introduce a new behavior that can work in harmony with the sub processes occurring underneath.

The preceding theories of identity based within the communication discipline have begun to add to the space opened by the foundational theorists in identity. By building on these foundation theories, communication scholars are continuing to evolve concepts of identity and communication for further understanding of how the two, directly, inform each other. Next, I turn to a discussion of how literature on narrative identity contributes to the theoretical construction of identity.

Narrative of Identity

To begin a discussion of narrative of identity, an explanation of terminology is in order. I define narratives of identity as composites of assimilated stories pieced together to form a salient, and particular, sense of self. These types of personal narratives are reinforced and “occur in an on-going stream of naturally occurring talk” (Langellier, 1989, p. 256). I argue, for example, the narrative of fatherhood and the narrative of motherhood are stories we tell through speech acts and behavior that help to constitute a role we are performing. It is a story where self is “an active, interpretive human agent, with others and with the world (Sclater, 2003, p. 321). These everyday narratives of

identity are hybrid stories held together by a number of “distinct strands” (Redman, 2005, p. 35), originating in narratives of the past and narratives of the present.

Although narrative identity has been the focus of theorizing, only one researcher with whom I am familiar, Paul Ricoeur, has defined the concept of narrative identity. But none have captured the discursive process through which it is created. To follow are some key pieces of scholarship that have struggled with defining narrative identity. The review is not meant to be exhaustive but, instead, is presented as a foundation for ideas guiding the current project. To begin, Bayless (2003) defines “narrative of identity” as the product of stories constructed, everyday, within interaction and within intrapersonal space. One can see from this definition a focus on the “product” as oppose to the process of how narratives are formed. Crowley (2003), further examines the idea of “narrative identity” with his look at the work of Paul Ricoeur. Within these writings, Ricoeurs’s thoughts about narrative are tied to the accounts given of a life by individuals but are not connected to the concept of the autobiography. Crowley, in opposition to Ricoeur, argues that autobiography **is** narrative identity and that narrative is central to understanding life. The argument is based on the movement of time and trope within literature and not on, necessarily, on the process of building the identity through discourse, though this definition is close to the perception of narrative **of** identity embraced in this research project. Erdinast-Vulcan (2008) also explores the relationship between autobiography and narrative identity but does not fully explicate a definition of narrative identity. Instead she looks at the literary influence on conceptions of narrative and identity. Finally, Loyttyniemi (2006) comes closest to a definition of narrative identity as a process. He

says that the mere act of being a person encapsulates stories from others as well past stories of our self. It is this definition more, than any other, that influenced the idea that a potential process of narrative through identity that could be found and explained

For the purpose of this project, I define “narrative of identity” as a/the composite/s of assimilated stories pieced together from past and present narratives to form a present narrative of self. Differing from narrative identity, which is an embodied identity that can be possessed, narratives of identity are the process of achieving an embodied state through the stories we tell. It is within these assimilated stories that self is formulated and re-formulated to develop narratives of identity. The connection between narrative of identity and narrative identity is simple: the present narrative of self is an embodied narrative thus; narratives of identity are the process to achieving a current narrative identity.

As Freeman (2001) states, “What we also see is that, on some level, narrative is itself the source of the self’s identity” (p. 296). This statement is at the heart of the process of narrating identity. If self is constituted in narrative, then narrative of identity is a logical formulation of the self. To extend this argument further, just as the self forms and reforms within narratives of identity so, too, do narratives of identity form and reform the self. There is a symbiotic relationship between the two. The process of identity formation and performance takes place within narratives of identity.

As noted, scholarship exists looking at a concept of narrative identity. Though there are no theories outlining narrative identity, there are scholars who have attempted to tackle the concept.

Ricoeur

Paul Ricoeur looked at the concept of narrative identity in volume three of *Time and Narrative (Le Cultures et el Temps)* published in 1975 and, again, in *One as Another (Soi-meme comme un autre)* in 1990. Ricoeur, as translated by others (Crowley, 2003), theorized narrative identity as “the telling and reading of a life-story, whether factual or fiction, such that the figure of identity that emerges offers a new insight into the self” (Crowley, 2003, p. 2). Though Ricoeur calls this definition “narrative identity”, I argue this concept falls in line with narrative of identity: stories we tell about a particular strand of our life (daughter, graduate student, philosopher, etc.) that offer insight into the self.

Bakhtin

Erdinast-Vulcan (2008) also explores a possible concept of narrative identity via the works of M. M. Bakhtin. More specifically, Erdinast-Vulcan asserts, “If human subjects are like characters in novels in their perceptual and axiological non-self-sufficiency and their need for an other/author...,our lives are indeed analogous to narratives” (p. 6). For Bakhtin, a possible foundation of narrative identity lies in the concept of emplotment where we require a plot-line for successful understanding of self. As Erdinast-Vulcan (2008) states (summarizing Bakhtin), by looking for a successful plotline for a narrative, individual’s give coherence and wholeness to the many identity threads within daily life. This narrative as emplotment, the stringing together of stories for coherence, concept has been further explored by scholars looking at narrative and identity construction (see Somers, 1994). For Bakhtin, humans are driven by the need for

some coherent sense of self; thus, employ narrative as a device to bring that sense of coherence.

Holstein and Gubrium

In 2000, Holstein and Gubrium tackled the concept of narrative identity in *The Self We Live By: Narrative Identity in a Postmodern World*. In line with the thoughts of Ricoeur and Bakhtin, Holstein and Gubrium tackle the idea of narrative identity in the abstract but, in reality, spend the book looking at the construction of narratives of identity providing another path for conceptualizing narrative of identity as process. As the authors note, “Currently, we actively engage in structuring our lives so they appear individually meaningful, organized, coherent, and responsible” (p. 12). This structuring of self through narrative gives coherence and meaning to everyday life, thus fulfilling Bochner's (2001) contention that stories are central to everyday self and reinforcing Bahktin’s idea of emplotment.

Holstein and Gubrium (2000) provide some important groundwork for theorizing a process of narrative of identity. The authors acknowledge there is a self behind the everyday interactional selves that cannot be easily defined but is present. What they term “narrative or interpretive practice” speaks to this underlying reality and a potential process happening in identity formation. They state,

Narrative practice lies at the heart of self construction. It is a form of *interpretive practice*, a term we use to simultaneously characterize the activities of storytelling, the resources used to tell stories, and the auspices under which stories are told. (p. 104)

The idea of storytelling as a part of self construction is clearly an argument for narratives of identity and supports the idea of a potential holistic process needed for a coherent sense of self.

Eisenberg

Another look at narratives and identity comes from Eisenberg (2001). In his theory of Communication and Identity (Eisenberg, 2001), which was explicated in the previous section, the author introduced the concept of the personal narrative. Though he does not define what constitutes the personal narrative, he makes the point that, “Studies of social life reveal that people live according to stories and that we are guided more by narrative rationality than by formal logic” (p. 546). Moreover, according to Eisenberg, people make sense out of life by using personal narrative. He calls this sense-making a process of identity and, though his model incorporates this element, it is not the focus of the model. This opens the door for theorizing about the fundamentals of a process of narrating identity.

Somers

Another important contribution to the discussion of narratives of identity comes from Somers (1994) who looks at the concept of narrative identity and its position within social science discourse. In her critical treatise, *The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach*, the author talks about the idea of the ontological narrative and narrative identity and asks social science to reject the essentialism prevalent in social science identity research (Somers, 1994). The ontological narrative closely

aligns with the idea of narrative identity as espoused by Ricoeur and by Bakhtin in that it is the narrative we use to make sense of the world and determines how we act upon that understanding. According to Somers, “people act, or do not act, in part according to how they understand their place in any number of given narratives – however fragmentary, contradictory or partial” (p. 618). This action is based, in part, on what kind of story they are telling.

In moving from ontological narratives (stories about ourselves) into the concept of narrative identity, Somers (1994) says, “While a social identity or categorical approach presumes internally stable concepts, such that under normal conditions entities within that category will act uniformly and predictably, the narrative identity approach embeds the actor within relationships and stories” (p. 621). The narrative of identity (ontological narrative) is a both a process and relationship that individuals undertake, with others, in a process of becoming that spans across the lifetime (Somers, 1994). It speaks to the co-constructed heart of identity by earlier identity scholars.

This ontological query gets at the heart of narrative of identity and asks researchers to resist the essentialist nature of identity theorizing prevalent for many years in the social sciences. This idea is that identity will have certain core characteristics regardless of how it is studied. Somers leads the charge against that essentialism by asking, “But where do ontological narratives come from? How are people's stories constructed?” (p. 618). This treatise is one of eminent importance to explication of the critical perspective on narrative and identity.

Summary

Ricoeur, Bakhtin, Holstein and Gubrium, Eisenberg, and Somers are all arguing that narratives are highly salient and very important to understanding formation and performance of identity. What is missing is an understanding of the process by which we perform those narratives and thereby construct self. As noted by Sclater (2003), our stories are “the very cornerstone of our identity” (p. 317). In order to understand how these stories interact and form the cornerstones of identity, there must be an explanation of how individuals create the self within story. This leads to the first research question which this project seeks to answer,

RQ1: What concepts are fundamental (are the cornerstones) in narratives of identity?

As previously stated, theorists, who have looked at narrative of identity have not given us a clear idea of how narrative of identity lays the foundation for identity and enables the performance of identity. The work by Somers (1994) postulates that there is a process to narrating identity that cannot be ignored and leaves some relevant questions about this process for researchers to grapple with.

There is, also, a lack of understanding about how multiple narratives of identity link together in the performance of identity. This linkage, I believe, is an interpretive process of identity formation and performance, and leads to the second question which this project seeks to answer,

RQ2: How do the concepts of narrative link together to reveal a process of identity construction?

By looking at the above concepts of narrative, identity, and narrative of identity, the need for a process becomes more apparent. Theorists have contemplated the concept of narrative of identity but have not positioned narrative of identity as a theory through which to understand identity formation and performance, thus leaving a potential space for a new theory of identity. Some current scholars hint at this space within extant literature and under study across disciplines. Identity theories offer a rich history for understanding how the self comes into being and, in order to position a new theory within this history, it is important to understand where the field has been and where it is currently going.

Identity, Narrative and Communication

The preceding identity theories (some foundational, some breaking new ground) have been influential across disciplines as evidenced by the depth and breadth of studies associated with them. From psychology to communication, we can see how these theories attempt to explain a very complex social process: the construction of identity. The major theories, Psychosocial Theory of Development, Symbolic Interaction, Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory, have been springboards for many other theories on identity (e.g. Identity Negotiation Theory, Communication Theory of Identity and Theory of Communication and Identity) and continue to influence new generations of theorists (Katila & Merilainen, 1999; Peter Burke 1980, 1989, 1991, 2003, 2006). Though there is work in the conceptualization of narrative of identity, as shown above, there is still a place to fill.

A Space To Fill

The preceding theories and ideas about identity offer a wealth of insight for scholarship, however; there is room for another theory of identity – narrative of identity. Though the theories discussed here theorize about the personal story or a narrative of identity, they do not address its complexities or look at the interpretive process that may be present. Eisenberg's (2001) *Theory of Communication and Identity* comes closest but falls into the same conundrum expressed earlier in the introduction: conflating narratives of identity (his definition of personal narratives) with narrative identity (the deeper process under those narratives). Though Eisenberg is not, necessarily concerned with processes under the narratives, what Eisenberg does offer is the beginning of a process by which communication scholars can begin incorporating communication and identity together to understand the sense-making process involved in identity formation and performance. As he suggests,

If the main challenge of living is sense making – developing a workable narrative about the self and the world for use in dealing with existential/ontological uncertainty- it is crucial to ask where people find both their motivations and the needed resources to construct such a narrative (p. 536).

By asking about motivations and resources, an understanding of how narrative and sense-making work together to form is revealed.

The reality is that selves are constantly in flux and the core of individual identity is fluid; thus, the contention that there are multiple narratives of identity that allow for the formulation of a narrative of identity appears valid. John-Paul Sartre (1970) once said, to

paraphrase, that a man is always a teller of tales who lives surrounded by stories and who sees his self through those stories. This idea of life through stories brings identity within the realm of the narrative and allows for conceptualization of a new theory of identity. By recognizing that individual understanding or sense-making comes not only from self narratives but also from the narratives of those with whom we orchestrate life, we can see the fluidity of identity construction - through the story of the one and the story of the many we come to understand who we are. In this way, as Hole (2007) says, “identities are meaning-making activities where subjects construct identities in the narrative they tell to themselves and to others” (p. 261), thus the search for identity begins and ends with the narratives told about and through our lives.

Towards a New Theory

Hayden White (1987) opined, “to raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself” (p. 1). Narrative is the way humans understand life and their place within life. Communication is situated to understand the critical and complex nature of narratives and how they are the fundamental basis for exploring and explaining the nature of identity. As Bochner (1992) reminds us, “the goal of understanding and coping with lived experience should be valued as highly as predicting and controlling it” (p. 167) and sums up well why we need to continue the conversation and the charge towards more inclusive paradigms of research and theory building and why narrative can be among those paradigms available for choosing.

To understand the identity formation process is to understand how individuals craft narratives from experiences, tell these stories internally and to others, and ultimately apply these stories to knowledge of self, other and the world in general (Singer, 2004). The narrative paradigm gives a traditional frame for analysis of narratives but does not look at narrative identity and how it is constructed at the micro levels of interactions. The traditional narrative frame looks at stories as one way to see identity. This research argues, rather than seeing a life as simply one never-ending story, narrative of identity allows the creation of coherence and the possibility of “linking diverse life events into unified and meaningful wholes” (Polkinghorne 1988, p. 136) through multiple coherent stories, and offers the ability to integrate a “reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated futures in terms of beginnings, middles, and endings” (McAdams 1996, p. 298). The key here is the notion of multiple and meaningful wholes not singular constructions. Thus, the goal of this grounded theory project is to define the theory of narrative of identity and examine the process of its performance. Based on the explication of narrative identity, the review of extant literature presented and the argument for a new theory, the final research question this research project seeks to answer is:

RQ3: How can a theory explain the process of narrative of identity?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Methodology: Grounded Theory

Methodology is the framework that a researcher uses to examine a particular human phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1983). It offers various possibilities for collecting data from participants, including survey, focus group, interview, and written narratives. The following section outlines the methodological grounding as well as the chosen framework for this research: grounded theory. Through this methodology, it was possible to propose a theory that explained a process of narrative of identity.

Grounded theory is a guided way of collecting and analyzing data that helps the researcher to construct a theory based in the data and to focus on interpretive portrayals of the data, as opposed to looking for exact replications within them (Charmaz, 2006).

Two common approaches to grounded theory exist. The first is the traditional, systematic approach originally conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and re-conceptualized and extended by Corbin and Strauss (1990) and Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). The second is a more constructivist approach posited by Charmaz (2006). Charmaz moves grounded theory away from the more positivist explanations in theory building and toward more interpretive explanations, by using traditional grounded theory methods (coding, memo-writing, etc.) as guidelines rather than rules. In this way, these methods themselves are assumed neutral to the process of analysis and can be used in ways that are pertinent to the research questions posed. Because this project was

conceived from an interpretive perspective of identity, this approach to grounded theory was more salient since it allows for an in-depth understanding of narrated experiences.

Though Charmaz's (2006) approach to grounded theory research allows for flexibility in the analysis, there is still a structure in place to facilitate that analysis. Grounded theory focuses on a way to learn about the worlds we study and provides a method for developing theory. Unlike Glaser and Strauss (1967) who hold that grounded theory is a process of discovery, Charmaz (2006) argues that we construct theories through our interactions with people, alternative perspectives, and extant research. We interpret theory instead of construct it. This perspective is what marks the departure point between the two schools of thought; however, the structure of grounded theory analysis remains, essentially, the same. Both perspectives provide a procedure "for developing categories, connecting those categories, building a 'story' that connects those categories and ending with a set of theoretical propositions" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). The difference comes in how the two perspectives approach the theory unfolding within the data.

Methods

"Through our methods, we first aim to see the world as our research participants do—from the inside" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Methods are tools designed to help researchers explore the experiences of their participants, and when used correctly, they help generate solutions to a problem (Polkinghorne, 1983). In the case of grounded theory, methods can offer "sharp tools" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15) for making sense of data while allowing flexibility in the process of analysis. The method utilized for this study was analysis of textual data.

Textual Data Analysis

According to Charmaz (2006), all qualitative research involves some manner of textual analysis, so the use of text as the primary source of data collection for this project was salient. There are two types of texts, elicited and extant, and it is up to the researcher to determine which type of text is best suited for her research question. Elicited texts are those that involve research participants producing written data at a researcher's request (Charmaz, 2006), such as keeping a pregnancy journal for use in a research project on mothers and parenting. Extant texts, which are the focus of this research project, involve written data produced independently of a request by the researcher. These texts may be produced for reasons other than the research project for which they are utilized (e.g., using media transcripts to study debates for a political communication study) (Charmaz, 2006).

The use of extant texts to look at narrative and identity was compelling because extant texts are reflections of a reality not necessarily influenced by a researcher. By allowing a written text to stand in as a snapshot of a given reality, the researcher is able to situate a text within context and use a text produced for one purpose to shed light on other, salient purposes (Charmaz, 2006). For example, medical records produced to help medical staff treat a patient may also be used in a classroom setting to teach medical students about certain issues using those records as a case history. Thus, a major way to use text is as objects for actual analysis as well as for corroborating evidence of another phenomenon. According to Charmaz (2006), “grounded theories of textual material can address form as well as content, audience as well as authors, and production of the text as

well as presentation of it” (p. 40). This multi-layered approach made extant written data valuable for this particular application of grounded theory. For the purposes of this research, narratives gathered during a national oral history project were used for analysis.

Data Collection

In order to construct strong, grounded theories, researchers must collect rich data (Charmaz, 2006). The versatility of the grounded theory method allows for analysis to be built upon various kinds of data—from field notes to interviews. Central to grounded theory is an active participation in the process. According to Creswell (2007), in a grounded theory study, the data must be collected from individuals who have participated in a process or action that is central to the researcher’s purpose. Charmaz (2006) expands participation to include various sites for interaction.

For this study the central purpose was looking at identity through narrative, thus; the extant text analyzed involved participants telling stories about their lives. These stories were told in cities all over the United States and were collected during an interview process. Many were then aired on the show *Morning Edition*, each Friday on National Public Radio (NPR). The following is further explanation of the texts utilized in this analysis.

StoryCorps: The Conversation of a Lifetime. In October 2003, the StoryCorps Project opened its first interview booth in New York City’s Grand Central Terminal in order to record the living histories of everyday people and create “growing portrait of who we are as Americans” (<http://www.storycorps.net/about>). The StoryCorps mission is to honor and celebrate personal stories and allow others to learn from those lives. The

largest project of its kind, it hopes to create a “kinder, more thoughtful and compassionate nation” (<http://www.storycorps.net/about/mission-and-principles>). In addition, the organizers of the project view it as a public service: capturing the diverse oral life stories of Americans and saving them for future generations.

Since 2003, the StoryCorp project has collected more than 10,000 stories from over 35,000 people (<http://www.storycorps.net/about>) and has recorded in more than 100 cities in 48 states. In July 2005, they launched a second recording booth in New York City specifically designated to capture the narratives of people affected by the September 11 tragedy. Then in July 2006, they began a project to capture the stories of people suffering from various forms of memory loss. In February 2007, StoryCorps Griot started to assemble stories from African-Americans—the largest initiative of its kind since the Works Progress Administration gathered slave narratives in the 1930s. In October 2008, a recording booth was set up at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco to capture stories from Jewish Americans. Meanwhile, StoryCorps Alaska was also launched. These initiatives, as well as the original StoryCorps project, aim to bring Americans closer together by revealing our shared humanity across ethnic, religious, or social boundaries (<http://www.storycorps.net/about>).

At its heart, StoryCorps is a project of interview collection. Through the use of the story booth for recording, a structured interview is conducted between people who know each other (or between one person and a facilitator). Participants decide whom they want to interview (family, friend, or they may tell their own story) and make a reservation with the story booth located in their area. Once the reservation is made, there are six basic

steps to the actual interview process, as outlined on the StoryCorps website under “What to Expect.” Those steps are as follows:

1. Welcome (2 minutes): The Facilitator will provide some background information about StoryCorps, explain his or her role in the interview process, and answer any questions you might have.

2. Prep (8 minutes): The Facilitator will walk you through the paperwork, which asks for basic personal information such as name, address, and ethnic background.

3. Sound check (5 minutes): Once you and your interview partner are ready to proceed, the Facilitator will make sure you are positioned well for recording and check the audio levels.

4. Interview (40 minutes): Use your question list, but remember they are just suggestions to get you started. Trust your instincts. When you hear something that moves you, ask more questions. Sometimes your storyteller will need permission to explore a certain topic; you can simply say, “Tell me more.” Feel free to ask questions in whatever order feels right, and don’t let them constrain the conversation. Real moments are the best moments. While you and your partner are talking, the Facilitator will take notes, keep time, and monitor audio.

Facilitators are not interviewers, though they may ask a question during the recording.

5. CD (4 minutes): When the interview is over, the Facilitator will give you a copy of the interview on CD. He or she will also explain the release form, which

allows StoryCorps to keep one copy and send another to the archive at the Library of Congress.

6. Photos (6 minutes): Finally, the Facilitator will take photos of you and your interview partner, both together and separately. These photos will be included in the archive at the Library of Congress. (<http://www.storycorps.net/record-your-story/what-to-expect>)

This section of the website also leads to a question generator for people who need help in thinking of questions to ask during the interview.

Samples of the collected stories can be heard online either on the StoryCorps website or every other Friday on the *Morning Edition* show on NPR. Stories chosen for air on NPR are pulled from across the various StoryCorps initiatives (the criteria for selecting stories to appear on the air was not explicated on the StoryCorps Project website or the website for *Morning Edition*). Because of the large number of the stories available, this research project focused only on those stories aired on NPR between 2003 (the year the project began) and 2008 (most current complete year of recordings), though the stories are continuing to air.

Finally, some of the narratives used for the current project were chosen from the anthology *Listening Is an Act of Love* published in 2007. This book was comprised of certain StoryCorps narratives selected to fit certain categories, such as work, journeys, fire, water, and others. Most importantly, these narratives were the most complete transcriptions available and were appropriate for use in this project because they fit the criteria of extant text explained by Charmaz (2006). These texts are reflections of a given

reality for the participants, and the collection of them in one project provided a unique opportunity to look at the process of narration of identity.

Sampling. Within grounded theory research, initial sampling should be directed by the initial research questions and should fit a logical criteria based on those research questions (Charmaz, 2006). Once this first sample has been examined, theoretical sampling may need to occur to help explain the categories that emerged from analysis of the initial sampling (Charmaz, 2006). For this project, the initial sample was collected from the interviews recorded and transcribed by StoryCorps and aired on *Morning Edition* from 2003–2008 as well as from the interviews compiled in the anthology *Listening Is an Act of Love*. It must be noted that these texts, both on-air and collected within the anthology, are mediated and have been subjected to editing by a third party. Though the anthology offers a more accurate representation of the original interviews, the structure was changed to facilitate cohesion; thus, these texts are constructed by the original interviewee then restructured by the editors of StoryCorps. However, StoryCorps editors did check with interviewees to ensure that the edited story offered an accurate reflection of their original reality.

By using the above criteria, the initial sample was 80 on-air stories and 55 stories collected from the anthology. This initial grouping of 135 stories included transcripts of narratives downloaded directly from NPR as well as stories copied from the anthology. Of that group, further refining was done to include only stories that dealt with issues of self and identity. For that reason, the 135 stories were read at least two times, looking for these markers. The use of personal pronouns in the interview (e.g. I, we, me, us) was one

marker for selection of a story. The other selection criterion was that those pronouns were embedded in a story clearly about self (either self-constructed or co-constructed). From this initial reading of the selected texts, 80 stories were chosen for the final analysis (producing 205 double-spaced pages of written transcripts).

Within these stories were the narrations of 58 women and 45 men (given that some stories had more than one narrator, the figure is larger than the total of the stories). Because the NPR texts did not always provide age or an indication of ethnicity, I was unable to gather a complete picture of the overall age and ethnicity demographic; however, the narratives located in the anthology provided a picture and the ages for each narrative, so some information was obtained. Of the ages given in both data sets that I used, the median age of participants was 48.2, with ages ranging from 12 to 91. Judging by their photos, the participants chosen from the anthology were, at a glance, predominately of European-American descent; however, their surnames indicate a multitude of potential ethnic heritages subsumed within that ethnic designation. Twenty appeared to be African-American and five appeared to be of Latin/Hispanic descent. Again, surnames would indicate that other potential ethnic heritages are subsumed under these ethnic designations. Socioeconomic status was not indicated in the data or assumed by the researcher.

As Charmaz (2006) notes, the purpose of sampling in grounded theory is not to reach population representation but for the use of theory construction. Since I was not using my data to make generalizations about larger populations, I was not concerned with

the diversity of my sample; however, the nature of the project did lend itself to producing a quite a diverse sample under the above conditions.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, analysis began. Qualitative analysis consists of organizing the data, reducing the data through coding (and condensing those codes through more coding) and representing the analyzed data through discussion (Creswell, 2007). In grounded theory, coding consists of at least three phases: initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006). Let's look at each phase of coding and what it brings to the analytical process.

Initial coding. The codes used in research show how selection, separation, and sorting of data occurred. During initial coding, the researcher sticks closely to the data, seeking to understand the actions that are taking place while making sure to curb the tendency to draw any premature conceptual conclusions (Charmaz, 2006). The important idea to remember about initial coding in grounded theory is that the "codes are provisional, comparative, and grounded in the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 48). Initial coding was driven by loosely formed ideas (e.g. how will someone describe herself in a narrative or who seems influential in the story) that lead to provisional codes and categories. Some examples of provisional codes interpreted and recorded during the initial coding phase are:

Family connection, who am I?, son of non-alcoholic, father's son, proud son, son of privilege, freedom, elation of new self, outcast, misfit, in the shadow of father, shame, seeking acceptance, control, seeking control, losing control, looking for

approval, embodiment of the story, location is important, raised in Texas, working class, in the closet, status, non-status, dealing with anger, sadness, deep depression, and suicide.

By recognizing that initial codes are provisional, researchers remain open to create any code that best fits the data in the moment. Through constant comparison during analysis, the researcher searches for similarities and differences across the data, and distinctions between codes begin to emerge (Charmaz, 2006). The following codes are examples that emerged when I began looking to consolidate categories. The blocks of code were looked at for overlap that is indicated in the parenthesis.

From narrative #14:

Imagine a big white man telling you this and you're ten years old! I started running, and I ran home to my mother. She saw me coming, and she just opened her arms. I just fell up in her arms, and I was crying because no one had ever spoken to me in that tone before, and it hurt me so bad. (coded as fear, **shame**, and **life event**)

From narrative # 18:

And on opening night, I came on the stage with this kind of fake beard and this big, floppy mushroom hat made out of upholstery fabric that the director's wife had made and everybody burst into laughter. And what could have been a crushing moment in my life was just something completely different. (coded as **shame**, perseverance, **life event**)

From narrative # 29:

I knew the minute I opened the car door and put my feet on the ground I knew it was Rich. And I got out of the car and I just started running. A guy had been hot-rodding through our neighborhood, the car flipped over, and it landed on Rich.
(coded as tragedy, **life event**, loss of family)

From narrative # 22:

I got pregnant when I was seventeen years old. It was my first year at Columbia University. I thought this child should be a part of a complete family instead of just a mother with no father and someone who really wasn't old enough to have a baby. (life circumstance, change event, choice, separating event)

During the course of coding, research notes were introduced to help process through the analysis. In this way, the codes were looked at holistically and connections were able to be made. An example of a research note:

The issue of life delivering an unforeseen circumstance is a recurring theme across most of the narratives even within those in the negative case analysis pool. Given this prevalence, I have to ask – how much of our identity is formed within life circumstance and how much of the telling of these circumstances is influenced by the desire to present a certain identity? This seems like a key theme that is supported across stories.

There are several ways to practice the initial coding process: word-by-word, line-by-line, or incident-by-incident (Charmaz, 2006). In word-by-word coding, the theorist can give a much nuanced interpretation of the data; it is especially useful when dealing with Internet documents which tend to be shorter in length and embedded within a

website. By looking at the word as a unit—its structure, how it flows in the sentence, and its attending imagery—the word becomes more salient in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Line-by-line coding is the type of initial coding most commonly used by grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2006). Here every line is coded, including lines that are incomplete thoughts or sentences. This type of coding works well when looking for processes or at problems (Charmaz, 2006). Line-by-line coding keeps the researcher from becoming overwhelmed with the worldview of the participant and allows for a more critical look at the data. Finally, incident-by-incident coding is best used by grounded theorists when coding observational data where the comparison of incidents is most salient to the analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

For this research project, a combination of line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding was found to be most effective for analysis of the data. By coding per line, initial codes were gleaned, but a clear picture of the narrative was hard to access. Moving to incident coding allowed a clearer and more accurate description of the narrative process to emerge from the text.

Careful initial coding, whether by word, line, or incident, brings us closer to fulfilling the purpose of doing grounded theory analysis: finding fit and relevance for our theory (Charmaz, 2006). As she states, “your work fits the empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystallize participants’ experience. It has relevance when you offer an incisive analytic framework.” (p. 54).

Focused coding. This is the second major phase of coding data for grounded theory according to Charmaz (2006). The purpose of focused coding is to pick up the

thread from a strong initial coding and begin to weave these threads into larger segments. By focusing on some initial codes over others, this type of coding allows the researcher to make decisions about which analytic categories make sense to pursue and which do not (Charmaz, 2006). Constantly comparing the data allows the focusing of the data into categories, helps to shed light on whether the initial codes are relevant, and shows where there needs to be more data collection (Charmaz, 2006). In this phase of the project, I identified larger themes from the initially coded narratives, including: self defined by outside forces, self in transition, self through turning points, and self as connected to others.

Theoretical coding. Whereas initial and focused coding work to break the data apart, theoretical coding allows the data to be stitched back together after saturation. This is a process of returning over and over to the initial and focused codes until possible substantive relationships between categories are found. By engaging in theoretical coding, those relationships between the categories form the grounding for intuiting an integrated theory (Charmaz, 2006). For this project, this phase of coding resulted in the phases of the model of a Theory of Narrative of Identity (Appendix A): connections, influences, re-assimilation along with time and space. These are further explored in Chapter Four.

Memo-writing. An intermediate step between collecting data and writing drafts of the results section is the crafting of memos to aid in data analysis. This step is crucial in grounded theory because it allows for coding and analysis to begin very early in the research process (Charmaz, 2006). Memo-writing is designed to allow a space for

constant comparison between data and for making conjectures about those comparisons (Charmaz, 2006). The following is an example of an early memo from initial coding,

#6 – The family. Whether through direct action or through absence, the family influence is central to the narration of self. This sense of familial heritage/familial curse is interesting in the way we see ourselves.

**Additional thought: Are we so bound by what happens to us as a child that we cannot help but use that story to explain who we are or are not?

Even when the family tale is buried beneath the layers, it still creeps up in the “why” of identity.

As the analysis grew more intensive and traveled back and forth through the coding phases, the memos grew longer and more in-depth. The following is an example of this more intensive processing,

19 – Can’t overlook how time plays a role in the story of self. What is time and how do we express its importance? These stories have a distinctive pattern of a narrative (beginning, middle, and open end) but the time element allows the weaving of the cohesive story. We can bring our fragmented wholes into an alignment that makes sense to us by virtue of the time identity structure (see note 15). This fits the idea of the palimpsest as well. The fluidity of time mirrors the fluidity of the self. We are not bound by one form of time just as we are not bound by one narrative of identity. **We are only bound to the fragments and those are as disparate and necessary as the grains of sand on the beach. It takes them all, occurring across the span of our lives to make up the whole that we struggle to

express through our thoughts, actions, and stories. That is the difference between narratives of identity and narrative identity, narratives of identity capture a moment in time (could be a long moment, short moment—length is of no consequence) whereas narrative identity captures the intangibles of our self into story and uses them to support the narratives of that we tell about our self.

Memo-writing methods should be spontaneous and are unique to the researcher. The important point is to begin to get ideas down on paper as soon as they occur in the research process. Grounded theorists are looking for patterns in the data and illustrations from the data to support emerging patterns. Memos allow these illustrations to be preserved and begin to allow a “grounding” of the abstract ideas emerging from the analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 82).

Theoretical saturation. The decision to stop data analysis is just as important as deciding which data to collect. Saturation is the point at which, through constant comparison (Creswell, 2007), no new theoretical insight is gained from fresh data (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory researchers are concerned, first and foremost, with theoretical saturation. Issues of saturation supersede issues of sample size. In this project, categories were saturated with a small sample size, which is permissible as long as the claims made about the study are appropriately reflected in the sample size used (Charmaz, 2006). The sample size used for this project was sufficient for an explication of the theory and was determined when no new codes emerged from reading the data.

Validation. Once data are collected and analyzed, validation needs to occur. Validation in narrative research is a process designed to “convince readers of the

likelihood that the support for the claims is strong enough that the claim can serve as a basis for understanding of and action in the human realm” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 476). Though validation can take many forms, Creswell (2007) postulated eight for qualitative researchers: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review or debriefing; negative case analysis; clarification of researcher bias; member checking, rich, thick description; and external audits. For the purpose of this grounded theory research project, I used clarification of researcher bias; rich, thick description; and negative case analysis as validation techniques. The initial collectors of the anthology also member-checked their revisions for accuracy lending validation to the original data set.

In clarification of researcher bias (Creswell, 2007); the researcher must acknowledge her position and her assumptions as they impact the research inquiry. This validation technique is salient for a grounded theory research process looking at identity. The researcher is bound to bring preconceived ideas and fundamental assumptions to the project because of the immersion in the literature grounding the research project and because of life experiences.

I came to this project with a set of assumptions about identity and the process of self-understanding. Through my immersion in the extant literature, I expected to find some process of identity and my study of psychology and sociology predisposed me to see this process both cognitively and behaviorally. Through exposure to these narratives before I began this research project, I came to the project believing that life stories were, in fact, narrative of identity stories. Despite other elements present in the narrative, at the

core I believed life stories were identity narratives that could be used to chart the path of a narrative of identity. Though this bias did lead me to find a process of identity through narrative and to theorize a process of narrative of identity, it also required me to look at places where my assumptions were not true. For example, not every story produced a narrative as I have defined it, thus, those stories were more literary than autobiographical. This is further explained under negative case analysis. Through clarification of bias, Polkinghorne (2007) indicated the “researcher can describe ways in which his or her own background experiences produced understandings through interaction with the text” (p. 478).

Rich, thick description was another validation technique this research project utilized. It allows for claims of transferability in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This technique is also very salient for a project looking at identity construction through narrative. The use of the narrative descriptions to inform the analysis is required to explain the emerging themes and in the construction of the final theory. For this validation technique, large sections of the analyzed narratives were included within themes, so that the reader may validate for herself the theme being described. Additional interpretations were included with the narrative segments to provide readers with a full picture of the narration of self.

The final validation technique this research utilized was negative case analysis. Per Creswell (2007), the negative case analysis should be used to refine working research questions in light of cases that do not conform to those questions, thus aiding with clarification of researcher bias. By looking at narratives that did not conform to my

presumptions, I was better able to understand how my theorized process could work. For example, cases that were stories but not narratives of identity helped me reformulate my research questions by highlighting the processes that took place within a story that was a true identity narrative. By using this validation technique, I was able to refine my research questions and focus more clearly on the process of narrating self. This was found in stories about events that were not narrating self, such as a soldier describing the Washington monument or a cab driver recounting the different kinds of people who have ridden in his taxi. As noted earlier, stories were refined using pronouns indicating a self-focused perspective, but not all of those stories were a narrative of self.

Summary

In this chapter I outlined the methodology and method that guided this research project and that I used to answer the research questions put forth in Chapter Two. By using this methodology and methods, I built an interpretive theory of narrative identity using the personal stories of individuals participating in the StoryCorps project as the grounding data.

The use of these narratives was appropriate for a number of reasons. First and foremost, they were narratives from ordinary people not collected for the purpose of this project, thus fulfilling the requirements of extant text (Charmaz, 2006). Second, these particular stories were from a variety of sources (Jewish Americans, African-Americans, 9/11 survivors); therefore they provided a unique opportunity to construct a theory that could be used to represent a diversity of experience. Finally, as argued much earlier in the paper, the use of narratives to understand identity was at the heart of this project, and the

availability of the StoryCorps project narratives (with their depth and breadth) provided a unique opportunity for research. In the following section, an explanation of the emergent categories interpreted from those narratives was offered, a theory of narratives of identity was described, and research questions were answered.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this research project was to explore a possible new theory of identity: identity constructed through narrative. To that end, three research questions were posited and refined throughout the project, a common process in a grounded theory research study (Charmaz, 2006). These research questions were the following: What are the fundamental concepts of narrating self (RQ1)? How do those fundamentals concepts link in the interpretive process of narrative construction (RQ2)? How can a theory explain narratives of identity (RQ3)?

A process of constructing selves within narrative emerged from the analysis of the relationship between themes (underlying constructs found within narratives) and influences (constructs that were at play within the narratives). A Theory of Identity through Narrative, visually depicted in Appendix A, is the result of my interpretations of the process of identity constructed through narrative and identified in this analysis. This model represents and explains the main components of the theory. In this section, I explain the themes that emerged through coding, the play of influences within those themes, and the model through which the relationship of the themes (the process of narration of self) can best be understood. For the sake of explanation, some examples are lengthy.

Narrative Construction of Self

Emergent themes are the larger relational categories that became clear when initial codes were collapsed (Creswell, 2007). To classify as an emergent theme, the

category needed to bring a clearer understanding, and perhaps definition, to disparate themes and form a relationship between those themes. The first theme, connection/relationship, was apparent when the narrator told identity stories tied to her connection/relationship to others. This connection/relationship could be formed through a single event or pattern of behavior that caused a shift in how the person defines herself. The following excerpt from Tom Domingue was an example of the connection/relationship theme.

My mother, of course, spoiled me. I was a cute, little, curly-haired kid and could do no wrong, so she doted on me all the time –anything I wanted. If I didn't like my lettuce because it didn't taste good, she would put sugar on it –things like that. And she wouldn't let me walk. She would carry me everywhere. (NPR-M, lines 4-8)

In this short fragment, the connection/relationship between a son and his mother was important to the further narration of identity that followed. In addition to this major theme, sub-themes were employed for additional clarity to the theme. Under connection/relationship, I discovered two sub-themes: life circumstances/legacies and influence of others.

The transitions theme was the second fundamental concept related to how individuals narrated self. These transitions were tied to a connection/relationship, an event, a person, a place, etc. and caused a shift in how the person defined herself. The following excerpt, continued from above, was an example of the transition theme.

And the first time she left, as soon as the car disappeared, my stepfather –a great big longshoreman –he grabbed me. And here I am with my back brace, which is killing me, my leg braces; and he plunks me up and walks over and puts me in the middle of the floor of the living room with no furniture around –and said okay, damn it, walk or fall. (NPR-M, lines 10-13)

In this short fragment, the transition event was narrated by the same son who was recalling how he learned the feeling of independence though stricken with polio. In addition to this major theme, sub-themes were, also, employed for additional clarity to the theme. Under transitions, I discovered two sub-themes: challenges/struggles and redemption.

The above themes, connection/relationship and transition, were the two main categories to emerge within analysis and were the concepts that appeared most fundamental to the narration of self (RQ1). I propose that the connections/relationships made by the narrators served as pivotal connections to help ground a narrative of self. Further, I proposed transitions were key turning points in the story that helped move identity through a narrative of self. In the next section, the relationship between themes, sub-themes and the process of narrating identity are more fully explained.

Connection/relationship: Markers along the Narrative Road

Through initial coding and more focused coding, I found narratives were replete with storylines where certain people seemed necessary in shaping the version of self being narrated. These connections with others seemed fundamental to how the narrated self unfolded (queried in RQ1) in that the person seemed formed by the

connection/relationship presented in the text. A turning point tied to a particular person and/or a specific piece of advice, particular action, etc., often triggered an evolution of the self. These connections appeared at crucial points in the narrative (usually at the shift from iteration of self to another iteration of self). The following is an example of one such connection/relationship. Sam Harmonⁱ was in the Navy during World War II when the fate of black sailors was driven by a segregated armed forces and the discrimination of the times. A brief connection with a man he barely knew changed the trajectory of his life. Here is the narrative of that moment:

During all of World War II, black sailors in the Navy had only one job: to act as servants to the white officers—clean their beds, wash their clothes, cook them food, and serve them. Just purely servants. I resisted. I said, “You can’t draft me to fight for my country and then discriminate.” So I spent the first few months of my Navy career in the brig. One day I found myself hallucinating. I was in isolation, sitting on this bench, flying the bench as though it was an airplane....and I realized that the hallucinations was worse for me than it was for the Navy. So I decided to capitulate and went to work in the kitchen. After three weeks they abruptly transferred me to a job that no other black guy in the Navy had ever been considered for: training as an electronic technician. That came about because the personnel man looked at my IQ scores and said, “It’s a shame that you have to work in the kitchen.” It turned out he simply went into the files and classified me as a Caucasian, and nobody knew the difference or cared. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 183-184, lines: 22- 40) ⁱⁱ

For Sam, this connection/relationship with the personnel person redefined his self, the self that had existed in a segregated society. This man (connection) not only "changed" Sam's skin color, he changed the course of his life. Though his act did not change the fact of discrimination in the Navy, it afforded Sam opportunities that he would not have otherwise had during this time period. This is an example of how a connection/relationship is a foundational concept for a narration of identity.

This type of connection/relationship was like a discursive signpost or marker guiding the reader through selves gained and lost along the way. Within these narratives, two core sub-themes emerged: life circumstances/legacies and influence of others. Though I will explain these two themes separately, they sometimes exist within the same story fragments across narratives and, thus, are subsumed under the major category.

Sub-theme 1: Life circumstances/legacies.

Connection/relationships situated within life circumstances were fairly easy to discern. Life circumstances were events that happened during the normal course of life that were explicated by the narrator as important to a narrative of self. These life circumstances aided in understanding how the connection/relationship shaped the narrative of self being exposed and were crucial to understanding the process of how individuals constructed a self within the story. Though these circumstances sometimes stood alone, they were more often than not attached to a family legacy or history bringing the connection/relationship theme into focus.

As with most traditional narratives, life circumstances were generally used to situate the listener/reader in a physical space and time and highlight dramatic events.

These circumstances were directly linked to a present connection/relationship or were shaped by the absence of a connection/relationship. In this first example, Curtis Cates narrates his life as a son influenced by his father, a drug using, over-the-road truck driver,

My father was a truck driver, so we tended to move around Texas quite a bit. I adored my father. He was a classic cowboy. It was like growing up around a TV star...my dad would take speed, so he sang a lot and he talked a lot, and he would always fool around with the waitresses in all the truck stops that we stopped at. We hauled everything from grain to dynamite to a lot of cotton. Maybe we'd be in twenty states in the summer, so when I'd get back to school, it's be like, "What did you do on your summer vacation?" It was a joke, because I'd just spent two months in a truck going all over the country...My father and I would buy exactly the same clothes down to a hat—you know, a Western hat and boots and Levi's and the whole bit. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 135-136, lines: 2-4, 11-18, and 23)

Curtis goes on to explain how these experiences with his father shaped his life as a child and as an adult. His narrative is, at its core, that of a recovering heroin addict who struggled to find normalcy in his life after living an uprooted childhood with a father who abused drugs. These life circumstances impacted his narrated self greatly and were foundational to his identity as a recovering addict and husband.

In a similar way, George Caywood's life circumstances were shaped by a connection/relationship to his father—or rather, a lack thereof. Like Curtis Cates, George had a father who was possibly emotionally absent, which affected the kind of person he

later became, and the way he narrated that person. In this narrative of life circumstance, George narrates connection/relationships of absence,

My dad was raised on a farm in Oklahoma and could do just about anything, but he couldn't do any specific thing well enough to be a real professional. So we were desperately poor and frequently hungry. There was often no money to buy laundry soap to wash my clothes, and my clothes were always dirty...My role in the family was to keep everything sane enough that everyone could grow up...He [referencing his father] was bipolar, and he went into an episode, a really severe down episode. I was fifteen. And he came to me one day and asked where I kept my gun...I thought he was worried about my little sister getting a hold of the gun. I was really encouraged. I thought that meant he was coming out of his depression. I went to Tucson to my uncle's wedding, and while I was gone, he took my gun and shot himself through the head. My job was to take care of other people, so what I was feeling; I didn't pay attention to it. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 139-140, lines: 1-9, 13- 23)

By using this life circumstance and this connection/relationship to anchor the rest of his narrative, George engaged in a process of narrating self and also made sense of his own struggle with depression and loss. Later, he narrated his continued battle with a low sense of self-esteem through his decision to leave the mission where he volunteered and through the divorce from his wife.

In the Mary Lou Maher story, the narrated self is connected to a relationship that was over before it began. As she explained the decision to give her son up for adoption,

Mary Lou's process of narrating self also began with an unfortunate life circumstance and a tough decision.

I got pregnant when I was seventeen years old. It was my first semester at Columbia University. I thought this child should be part of a complete family instead of just a mother with no father and someone who wasn't old enough to have a baby...I told Conrad immediately, as soon as I heard from the doctor, so he knew from the beginning. He never talked about it even though we stayed together as boyfriend and girlfriend until I left for California in May. He just pretended I was away for the summer. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 33-34, lines: 1-5, 28-32)

Mary Lou told this story to that child twenty years later. Her narrative of identity began with this life circumstance and her lack of connection/relationship with her son.

Life circumstances allowed an individual to ground self in a logical place and were the catalyst for a particular kind of narrative of identity. They were like the communicative breadcrumbs (markers) on the trail of narrative self, allowing the narrator to develop the story in a more linear fashion. Life circumstances led the way for both teller and listener to the tale, and they provided clear plot points upon which the narrator could build the narrative of self.

Family legacies were also an important part of the life circumstances larger category and were a frequent thread within the narratives. Family legacy storylines tied an identity to a particular piece of family history or to the influence of a family member. In the first narrative, Carolyn Schlam used family legacy to begin her narration of self. That self was formed in a poor family with strong female presences,

When our family came from Europe, they were poor. There were six children, three boys and three girls. And they moved into a one-bedroom apartment in the Bronx... They had just one comfortable chair. That's it—just one comfortable chair. And they would fight over this chair. So these were our humble beginnings. We came from people who fought over a chair. We lived in a very chaotic environment, and the apartment seemed very small... I don't remember any music playing in the background because the music of our lives was the voices. The conversation, the constant conversation. And most of those voices were female... Even though they were common people, the thing that was most amazing about them was that they had personality plus! That's what they had, and that's what they transmitted to us. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 48-49, lines: 4-12, 24-27, 38-42)

Carolyn's connection/relationships with family were poignant. She was shaped by life circumstances, and a core of the narrative of self revolved around interactions with her immigrant family living in the Bronx. According to her, these family interactions were overwhelming and lively and deeply affected who she became as she grew older. The last line cited above directly links her history to her present: the legacy was an amazing personality even though the life circumstances were common and humble.

In the next narrative, family legacy again left a lasting impression. This time Sulochana Konur, a mother-in-law, explains to her daughter-in-law about being married under the caste system in India,

I was doing a dissection of a frog or some such thing, and my father sent for me.

When I went home, there were lots of people around the house... After they left, I

argued with my parents and I cried, and I said I wanted to go to college, I want to be a doctor, I don't want to get married. And my father said, "They can always say no, so don't worry. I had to do this because a friend of mine suggested it. This was just a last-minute thing. The next time I won't agree to this." And so I said, "Okay!" I did not even think about it the second day. But about a week later my father got a letter saying that family was interested. He didn't tell me that, but I heard my dad talking to my mom. So they went and visited the family, and they came back that night, and I was awake. I remember hearing my father say to my mother that it's a good family. So I knew after that, that it was going to be the marriage. There was nothing I could do. I was fifteen and eight months when I got married. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 24-25, lines: 2-4, 21-35)

This narrative of a traditional Indian family highlights an important part of the process in narrating self: family legacies/histories have an inexorable pull on past and present narratives of self. Though Sulochana did not like the arranged marriage system, she was not given a choice and fell in line with her expected duty as a daughter. The connection to family and legacy was too strong to resist. In the end, those connection/relationships, for good or for ill, had a powerful impact on herself and her story.

In the final example for this sub-theme, we turn to a coming-out narrative. John Brown used family history to narrate the trajectory of his coming-out story and the impact the familial relationships had on that story. As with the other two examples, the interplay of connections and life circumstances within family was a key marker to understanding how Brown narrated self as he spoke to his brother for StoryCorps.

I don't remember ever coming out to Dad. I remember when I came out to you, you just said, "Oh, I've known since you were nine. What took you so long?" You were very flippant about it, in a very reassuring way. It was okay. And that was really good for me that it was no-nonsense. When I came out to Danny, it was very different. We're driving down Court Street in Charleston, and I said, "Danny, I need to tell you something." And he's like, "Okay", and I said, "You're going to hear it from someone eventually, and I want you to hear it from me. I'm gay." And he just starts bawling and crying. I mean just these great big, old, big crocodile tears. And I said, "What is it, man? It's not that bad honestly." (Laughter)... And he said, "It's all my fault! It's all my fault! It's all my fault!" I said, "How in the world can it be your fault?" And just in this incredible moment of clarity he looks at me, and he wipes the big tears out of his eyes and he says, "I've called you cocksucker all these years!" And I said, "Oh, Danny, if that's all it took, half the people in town would have been gay." (Laughter.) (LIAOL, 2007, p. 126 lines: 4-23)

John goes on to narrate how he finds the strength to speak out on gay issues and ties that strength back to the acceptance in his family story. His story, and the family history it reveals, gives us a glimpse at the people from whom he drew his strength for subsequent encounters.

Family legacies are markers that tell listeners where an identity placed its roots. These connections/relationships are important for either understanding the movement of self across time by using an origins story or by directly supporting explication of current

self. Though not all identity narratives dealt with family, almost all the storytellers give credit to the influence of others in the development of the self.

Sub-theme 2: Influence of others.

The influence of others is the last sub-theme under the larger theme of connection/relationship. Though this theme could be classified under life circumstances, it could not be included under family legacies because some narratives enlisted others who were not biological family members. Like life circumstances/family legacy, influences of others served as markers in the narration of identity. As in the first sub-theme, these markers were pieces of narrative that described an action or words by someone influential to the narrator. These influences were a part of the process of narrative identity that narrators engaged in to explain who they were and/or how they came to be. In this first narrative, Eddie Lanier explains how his interaction with a man named David Wright influenced his life.

Every time you [Wright] came by you'd stick out a two-dollar bill and a can of tuna fish. So I'd say, "Oh, boy. The two-dollar-bill man." I think it was probably obvious to you that I wasn't drinking with the money. Anyway, that's how we met. One New Year's Eve I had no family, nowhere to go. And you walked over and said, "Remember me?" I said, "Yeah—you're the two-dollar-bill man." You said, "I'm going to take you home with me for New Year's Eve. How would you like that?" ...I was skeptical but I went to your home and had a shower, and you gave me some clean clothes... We had a wonderful time... Without you, the kindness of your family, letting me come home with you with a smile – I don't know. I

wouldn't say I'd have gone back to drinking again, but I'd say it would have been rough. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 117-118, lines: 102-110, 117-122, and 126-130)

Eddie was a man whose identity was shaped by family legacies (a history of alcoholism) and life circumstances (prison), but David was the most critical influence on who he became. In his process of narrating his current self, he tried to show the listener how he had been left alone in the world (all his family was gone through either death or abandonment) but someone still cared for him. Again, the actions of someone else allowed him to refashion a new narrative of identity.

In the next example, Sean Plasse narrates the isolation he felt as a result of an undiagnosed learning disability. Sean's narration was painful to read as he went through many narratives of self quickly, always giving a glimpse of the struggle to understand what was going on within him. The simple act of discovery profoundly affected Sean's narrative self.

I developed a lot of coping skills in high school. If it was my time to read aloud in class, I might pretend I didn't feel well...Even in college, I continued to struggle. I really hit a wall with the amount of reading involved. I used to convert words into pictures...I used to convert about 10,000 words into these pictures every semester. So I always live in fear my whole life that somebody would discover that I couldn't keep up...I ran into the same challenges as I worked in marketing and advertising. I'd be there late at night or I come in on Sundays and print out emails so I could underline and circle words as I read them...I got laid off because they said I couldn't keep up. So I became carpenter...But I was still struggling as

a carpenter...I didn't know what to change...But I came across an article in *Fortune* magazine, which said "The Dyslexic CEO"[sic]. It talked about this very intelligent, successful CEO who'd made it in life with severe learning disorders. I looked up learning disorders in the phone book. And I went for this full day of evaluation. At the end of the day, the evaluators came in and they said we want you to know before you leave today that your IQ is in the 99th percentile, but your ability to read and decode words is in the 14th percentile. It's the first time my entire life had ever been explained that way. I got in my pickup truck and cried all the way home. It was just a—it was a changing point, a turning point. (NPR-I, 2006, lines: 5-16, 19-29)ⁱⁱⁱ

Sean's influential other came through contact facilitated by a chance reading of a magazine that led him to discover a part of himself that had been present his entire life but he was entirely unaware of.

In this final example, Vicki Page narrates her adolescence after a diagnosis of cerebral palsy. In this case, the influence of others had a negative effect on the narrative self and the othering that took place in the initial interactions was still very evident in the re-created story.

I had a few friends who I formed tight relationships with, who all of a sudden wouldn't sit next to me anymore at the lunch table, decided I wasn't cool enough, would stop calling me after I called them, wouldn't speak to me when I spoke to them. I was kind of on my own...So intimacy is a difficult thing...I've never been kissed. So I have no idea what the rules are of a relationship, and I have to be

honest: I don't see myself in a romantic relationship at all...I would just like to fully accept where I am. And I am on the road, but I'm not there yet. (NPR-J, 2005, lines: 1- 11)

Though her narrative was brief, her self-image was clear. The influential others, of which there were probably many, had a negative impact on how she viewed her self and her place in the non-cerebral palsy world.

In these fragments, those who are not family members can be just as influential in helping to shape the narrative self as biological others. For good or for ill, these connection/relationships allowed the narrator to make sense out of identity by highlighting key markers of connection. They also provided a foundation upon which the storyteller could build a process of identity. Whether through direct presence or glaring absence, others leave markers upon our story that we must make sense of in order to create a whole self. As we'll see in the next section, these markers (or fragments) were strung together by transitional narratives in the stories, places where individuals reached a turning point along the road of evolution and had to make choices between which narratives of self to keep and which to discard.

Transitions: The Turning Points We Live By

The StoryCorps narratives demonstrate the importance of transitions. In these moments, a decision to change was made, and it was narrated in a way to show that the self was, potentially, transformed into someone else, even if that new self was not immediately noticeable to outsiders. These narratives differ from the connection/relationship narratives in that a connection was not always a transitional point

in the narrated self, thus a separate analytical category emerged. The transition narratives seem to lend themselves, in turn, to sub-themes, and like the connection/relationship category, those sub-themes are closely related to each other with fragments sometimes encompassing both themes at once. The two sub-themes for transitions in the narratives were challenges/struggles and redemption events.

Sub-theme 1: Challenges/struggles.

Challenges/struggles were a hallmark of nearly every narrative used in this analysis and, given the nature of the narratives collected, this was not entirely surprising. Very early in coding, struggle and challenge appeared and kept appearing through successive readings. For example, this fragment from Richard Pecorella was coded as a struggle and takes place in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack in New York. Pecorella lost his fiancée in when the 2nd tower of the World Trade Center collapsed:

I think it took about thirty-six hours before I said there's no sense in going to the hospital and the morgues anymore. When the city announced that it was on a recovery mission, we said, "There's no more searching. Where are we going to go?" (Crying). (LIAOL, 2007, p. 214, lines: 323-326)

This fragment takes place in his narrative as he details the search for her in the aftermath of the attacks. This was coded as struggle given then sense of helplessness and frustration that seemed to permeate the decision to discontinue the search for his fiancée.

The next fragment, from Cindy White, was also coded as a challenge/struggle. White contracted HIV from a former relationship and her narrative incorporates her infection of her new lover, Dan.

I started shaking the minute she said the words to me. In fact, she came over and held onto me for about five minutes because I was crying so hard. Then the next thought was I got to tell Dan. When he got diagnosed HIV positive, he told me to knock off the guilt think. And that's hard to take when you're the one who's dealt out the disease. (NPR-C, 2007, lines: 8-11)

This was coded as struggle because of the trauma of finding not only herself infected but, in turn, infecting her loved one.

Through challenges/struggles, individuals could show the self as it had been before a transition. These narratives were salient for each person from the smallest (autistic children interviewing parents) to the most fragile (individuals losing identity through mental illness). The challenges/struggles seemed to be the necessary link that made all the identity stories work by allowing the narrator a skeleton upon which to overlay whatever identity was being constructed. By overcoming challenges/struggles, the narrativized self could reconfigure life into a version she or he could live with and, in many cases, be proud to embody.

For cohesion in the explanation, the same individuals we were introduced to while discussing the influence of others theme, Vicki Page and Sean Plasse, also shared experiences that were captured within struggle/challenge theme. Vicki's story resumes with her struggle to accept herself,

I think that I'm – gotten to this place where a wall is up so much that I don't even want to go in that direction...I would just like to fully accept where I am. And I'm on the road, but I'm not there yet. (NPR-J, 2005, lines: 9-11)

Vicki's struggle for self-acceptance, her challenge/struggle, was as clear as the influence of significant others in her past. The process of narrating this version of self required the interplay of multiple thematic categories (connection/relationships and turning points) for understanding her process of sense-making. Her admonition that she is "on the road" was a narrated turning point in her life. Though this phrase could be interpreted as not an actual turning point but a precursor, the fact that she chose to disclose this very private challenge in a very public format was indicative of a turning point in her narration of self.

In returning to Sean Plasse's narrated self, turning points noted above come after a narrated struggle to comprehend his own difference. Plasse struggled for many years with undiagnosed dyslexia. Though a genius, his inability to communicate using words hindered his life dramatically, costing him jobs and robbing him of a sense of identity.

So, I used to live in fear my whole life that somebody would discover I couldn't keep up with the pace of work in school... And I got laid off because they said I could not keep up. So I became a carpenter, which is a visual field. But I was still struggling as a carpenter...I didn't know what to change. (NPR-I, 2006, lines: 13-14, 20-22)

Sean's struggles with the challenges brought on by dyslexia are central to his identity story and wrestling with those struggles was an extended turning point in this narrative. In the process of narrating self, these challenge/struggle events were important for understanding his identity and the sense-making that occurred during the process of constructing the narration. This sub-theme moved us in and out of narratives of identity and showed us the growth and change from one identity to the next.

Sub-theme 2: Redemption event.

Most of the narratives of challenge and struggles seem to include a pattern of redemptive events. I chose redemption as opposed to "overcoming" because this term more fully embraced the structures of the tales. Though overcoming the challenge/struggle was very important, finding a way to make sense of hard times seemed to only come if some redemptive behavior was identified. These events, generally, seem to represent a turning point in the narrated self much like the challenge/struggle turning point. Redemption could be from another person not connected directly to the challenge/struggles or from the person actually narrating (redemption of self). Either way, the narrated redemption moved the self into the present and away from the past.

In Sean Plasse's narrative, we see his redemption event when the evaluators finally explained to him the root of his difficulties. A diagnosis of a learning disorder brought a sense of freedom and relief to his narrative and, as he indicated, became a turning point for his life. For Vicki Page, the redemptive event has not yet come. She still struggles with living in a world not designed for people with severe physical impairments, and she has not had that moment when the pains inflicted upon a past self have been transformed; thus, she does not narrate a redemptive event in her story and we cannot be sure that one will come. In my analysis of these stories, Sean is the rule and Vicki is the exception.

The following narrative is a longer illustration of a redemption event. Scott and Catherine Kohanek met when she was an elementary schoolteacher and he was a janitor

working in the same school. Through their narrative, we hear how redemption for Scott came through meeting Catherine.

Catherine: I watched you with your guitar, getting in the classrooms and singing, and getting involved with the kids. And I said to myself, “Why is this guy a custodian?” I mean, we need custodians...but you seemed destined for something else...and then I found out that you graduated from high school when you were seventeen...and maybe you didn’t think college was meant for you or you couldn’t cut it. You would talk to me when you came into my classroom and emptied my trash.

Scott: I was always ready for a conversation with you because every time we got past certain point of riding the surface-type questions, we got kind of deep kind of fast...one of the greatest memories that I have is when we were sitting outside school. It was after my grandfather had died...we had a rather humorous time commenting on what the ashes looked like, and yet showing great respect...and that kind of brought us together. I kept sensing that here’s a person who has enormous insight. I used to often say you talked like I think...that’s when I realized that my path was seriously going to change. When I was in my mid-thirties, after eighteen and a half years as a custodian, I stepped into a college classroom for the first time.

Catherine: You came up to me really, really excited. You had just started school—maybe you had been in school a month—and you had written your first paper. And I remember you being really nervous about your writing skills and then you

got an “A.” You were so happy about that “A,” because you didn’t have a history of feeling a successful student.

Scott: It was a big deal to get that first “A.” And when I finished school, it came time to get a job...it was really strange to find out that there were three openings at Kenwood Elementary [researcher's note: both worked the school]. And it just seemed like the thing to do. Fate plays a certain hand. And I came back as a second-grade teacher, and that’s where I’ve been ever since. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 93-94, lines: 13-25, 38-42, 59-76, and 81-94)

Scott’s journey from custodian to teacher is directly linked to his feelings of worth that came from his relationship with Catherine making the relationship the catalyst for the story of redemption above. They co-construct a narrative of turning points beginning with casual conversations and friendship through major life changes and into marriage: a myriad of events all of the playing a role in the redemption of Scott. Through this process, Scott and Catherine allowed the reader to see how previous identities are re-written within relationships with influential others.

Through narration of redemption events, individuals told us of the turning points that allowed old selves to be erased and new selves to be written. We caught a glimpse of the palimpsest process of self identity. These events gave the narrated self the opportunity to leave behind past identity or identities and create new identities in their place; generally more challenging and complex identities, supporting the above contention that redemption events are necessary to a narrative self and are found in most narratives of identity.

Influences and Themes: A Conceptual Dance

Thus far, the emergent categories (connection/relationships and transitions) have laid the groundwork (queried in RQ1) for understanding how self is constituted within and by narratives. The theorized sub-themes allowed for a further refinement and explication of those categories and how they worked together (queried in RQ2).

Though emergent categories were foundational concepts in the narrative of self (queried in RQ1), I uncovered another key concept: influences of time and space in the narrative. In order to fully understand the relationships between emergent categories, an explanation of what I mean by "influences" is order. Influences were movements of time and/or space that seem to carry each narrative along, such as when a narrator referenced a particular location (geographic or spatial) or year of an event (birthday, divorce, etc.). Though these concepts could be tied to certain narrative fragments, their influence appeared more holistic and far-reaching. Each narrative used some aspect of time and space in the sense-making process. I would argue these two influences are required in explication of a process of narrating self through story because all the narratives seemed to need a temporal and/or spatial location for re-telling. This may be true of all stories in general, but it was observed to be true for these stories in particular.

Whereas the main themes and sub-themes allowed a glimpse at the narrators' sense-making at a surface level, temporal and spatial influences deepened my understanding of how themes worked together to create a whole narrative of identity. Time and space are transcendent concepts that individuals have to make concrete in order to help them understand the "why" of life. Many of the narratives began with a time

element, such as “I like to remember back to when I was three years old,” narrated by Tyondra Newton (NPR-G, 2005, line: 1), or “I was a chubette in high school,” narrated by Helen Regan (NPR-H, 2005, line: 1), that created an expectation for the story to come. Occasionally, those time elements were linear and moved the narratives of identity along a sequential path. For example, Tyondra's story proceeded with a discussion about life after being taken from her mother at the age of three, while Helen discussed overcoming fears and doubts while in high school many years prior. Sometimes those time elements were non-linear, jumping back and forth between the present and the past, such as when Ken Kobus narrated life in the steel mill: “I remember it like yesterday, although it’s now forty-two years later” (LIAOL, 2007, p. 61: 27-28). This non-linearity element was most prevalent in narratives dealing with memory loss and the events of 9/11, where past and present seemed to collide. I speculate this happens because past events and present reality are inextricably intertwined in the current version of self being articulated. Though time (or the temporal movement) was important to the process of narrating self, what I call "space" was equally salient.

I theorized space into four elements: physical, mental, corporeal, and emotional. To begin, all narratives of identity within this study situated themselves in some kind of space. Physical space was characterized by narrating concrete surroundings, such as a state, a prison, a wheelchair, etc., but always a tangible place that could be seen or touched. Indicators of the state of the mind characterized mental space in fragments like this one from August Faustino, “And then I remember, like, at bedtime, like, just wishing that I would wake up a boy. That was like my big wish. For some reason everything

would just fit then” (NPR-F, 2006, lines: 5-6). Wanting, longing, believing, fearing, obsessing are just some of the markers that indicated the mental space of the narrative self. Corporeal space or bodily space dealt with issues of physicality or the spiritual. These elements were interwoven, again, throughout most of the narratives. Issues of body image, body work, sexuality, religion, and many others cropped up within this space. In corporeal space, we found self at its most vulnerable because the body is such a fragile and contested site for identity. For example, in the Faustino narrative, a sex and gender transformation embodied the fragile and contested nature of the corporeal space,

When people call me sir, it’s just great, that recognition all the time, ‘cause there was that time when I was, you know, really in between and it could go either way. So someone would call me ma’am or miss or someone would call me sir, you know, and that was a really awkward time for me. (NPR-F, 2006, lines: 15-18)

Finally, emotional space was the last area of space that required analysis. Though some could argue that the emotional and mental spaces could be collapsed into one, I saw the emotional state as being another dimension of space linked to the others but able to stand on its own. Emotional space was characterized by active emotive displays such as anger at something, fear around someone or the feeling of sorrow. For this analysis, I was lucky enough to have emotional markers like "laughter" or "crying" situated in the transcription; thus, while reading, I could imagine the emotional reactions of the narrators.

When I got my period, I didn’t tell anybody. I didn’t realize this would be something that would go on for, like, years. (laughter) Because I thought if I wish hard enough, it’ll go away. (NPR-K, 2006, line: 7-10)

I know one of the things that was extremely difficult for you was when your father committed suicide. So can you tell me about that? (Crying) (LIAOL, 2007, p. 137)

Markers of laughter, tears, anger, and other emotions helped to place fragments of story in the context of the emerging identity and allowed for a richer reading of the narrated selves.

Influences of time and space were crucial to understanding how identity can be formulated through narrative. Though the emergent themes were important, these influences were just as significant to understanding the how and the why of this process and in reading these narratives for a deeper level of understanding. These two facets, categories and influences, serve as the cornerstone for a grounded theory model of narrative of identity.

A Theory of Narrative of Identity

My analysis of these texts suggested that identity could be performed through narrative. Through initial and focused coding, categories emerged. Evidence suggested that these categories, along with their sub-themes, were foundational to the process of narrating self.

Two influences in the process of narrating self were also identified through the coding process. These influences worked with the themes to create a coherent version of a self for the individual to narrate. The “space” influence encompassed the parts of the narratives that move self through a physical, corporeal, mental and/or emotional plane

from one narrative of self to another. The “temporal” influence encompassed the parts of the narratives that needed a time structure upon which to frame narratives of self.

The themes and influences allowed for a grounding upon which a model of narration of identities was built upon. After extensively reading the narratives and working through many possible theoretical structures, I turned to Van Gennep's (1909) three stages in rites of passage to help explicate a process of narrative of identity.

For Van Gennep, individuals moving from one status to another within a society go through a rite of passage. For example, a woman getting married would be involved in a rite of passage and would engage in these three phases. The person undergoing the ritual is first stripped of the social status that she possessed before the ritual (single woman), moved into the liminal period of transition (the time of wedding planning and acquiring the necessary structures for a new, married life), and finally given her new status (married) and re-assimilated into society (as a married woman). Individuals experience these three phases anytime a change to social status occurs (Van Gennep, 1909). Van Gennep did not deal with the inner workings of each phase, and his phases were limited to transitions in social status; however, I believe his phases charted a basic movement of social identity.

In 1977, Victor Turner tried to broaden the understanding of Van Gennep's process by positing the idea of liminal space (expanding upon Van Gennep's liminal period), where the person waited between social identities until society conferred the new identity upon them. Both of these scholars held that these phases were other-directed, by the

outward society, and did not engage with the underlying process of identity and self. Both of the initial explications were limited in scope and application.

Though Van Genneps and Turner's works were designed to explain specific rites of passage, there is a salience in the process that I believe can be applied to the concept of identity formed and expressed through narration. If we reconfigure separation, liminal space, and re-assimilation to reflect a larger process of shaping identity, these phases provide a useful starting point from which to theorize narratives of self. The intrapersonal processes of identity formation through narration are ones that, I believe, would occur during the liminal space. Given the nature of the current research project, however; this contention is one that must remain an untestable hypothesis.

In the Theory of Narrative of Identity (see model in Appendix A for visual depiction), three parts of narrative of self (connection, influences, and re-assimilated identity) work with two movements (temporal and spatial) to explicate a process of narrating of identity. Unlike Van Genneps's theory, in which three steps were tied to specific transitions in social identity, my model depicted a broader narrative of identity structure that moved across space and through time. In other words, more than the moment of retelling bound the narratives; the passage of time and the movement of people through different spaces also bound them.

The parts of the model were so named to reflect what the narrator experienced in each part of the story and to reflect the themes produced from my analysis. By looking at the interplay of each part with the movements of space and time, a model of narrative of identity emerged.

Part One: Separation.

In the model, I theorized that a separation occurred anytime an individual moved from one version of reality to another (i.e. when a mother left her son alone for a moment and he is hit by a reckless driver the next moment thereby changing her definition of mother). Separation was also the process of placing crucial life fragments in a past trajectory away from a current narrated identity or the act of narrating a connecting point for departure into the narrative. This point of departure was seen when looking at how individuals narrated identity and, most particularly, how they narrated identity within the themes of connection/relationships and transitions (hereafter referred to as the "connection narratives"). The key in these narratives was that a connection to someone or something was necessary for the narrative to begin.

The connection narratives distanced the self from someone, some place, or some object through a separation of either time or space or some combination of both, thus; situating them at the beginning of the narrative process. By using time, individuals moved self chronologically and positioned the current narrative self as a progressive growth from one narrative of identity to the next narrative of identity. By using space, individuals relocated self from one realm of enactment to another realm of enactment, thus showing again, growth from one narrative of identity to the next narrative of identity. These realms seemed to range from physical locations to corporeal embodiments and were fluid in their representation. For instance, childhood is a clear physical realm that individuals depart to move into adulthood, yet the ramifications of childhood echo within the narratives of the adults in this study. Though there is typically a firm demarcation that

signals the end of childhood (usually this marker is physical – entering puberty, leaving home for college, etc.) the corporeal nature of childhood lingers long into adulthood and appears when we narrate current versions of self. Events, people, places, things, concepts, culture, and society, are just a few reasons why individuals need to reconfigure narratives of identity.

In the following connection narratives, an individual's echoes of the past were incorporated into the present narrative of self. These narratives gave us a glimpse into events, ideas, people, etc., that moved a person into a separation phase. In the first narrative, Tia Smallwood brought us into her life during the 1960s.

All the girls I went to high school with would talk about being teachers. And when I went to college, I started studying things I really loved, and that's when I started taking finance and accounting courses. And this miserable old man—I had him for second year accounting and business law—he said to me, Ms. Casio [maiden name], you are the only woman that has ever gotten this far in my class and I will make sure every day is a living hell for you. (NPR-E, 2008, lines: 1-5)

The sexism of the 1960s forced Tia and women like her to make hard decisions about gender identity. The above excerpt gave us an idea of what she went through to achieve a goal that would have been quite ordinary for her male counterparts. Her very presence at Rutgers University was a departure for the cultural script for women in this era; thus her identity as woman was challenged and called into question. As she narrated one sexist event after another, we witnessed an identity struggle that was shaped by a society in the

throes of a cultural revolution and the feminist movement. In this next fragment, Tia brought the tension of that time into focus.

And when I went in for an interview, and this is like a vivid memory, I owned one dress; it was shades of red and pink, and these big block geometric squares. It had short sleeves and it was – I – it was a mini-dress. And I had tights and heels on.

(NPR-E, 2008, lines: 11- 14)

This part of her narrative connected her to several points in time and space. She situated us in her current physical space in the 1960s when a mini-dress would not be considered appropriate attire for a business interview, while simultaneously demonstrating that society was in flux as women were exploring forms of dress that broke the traditional mode.

And I walked in and this guy—he interviewed me for 15 minutes and then he said—you need to stand up and turn around. And I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Stand up and turn around." And I stood up and I leaned over his desk and I said, "I don't need this job this much." And that's when he said, "You're hired." That's the way it was. (NPR-E, 2008, lines: 14-18)

As she continued, a narrative of identity emerged and the connections between past and present become more apparent. The final excerpt illustrates, again, a connection:

I really had this idea that I could do everything 100 percent. You know, like you can be 100 percent worker, 100 percent mother, 100 percent wife, and you can't. It's impossible. And you had these terrible decisions to make...It's complicated.

(NPR-E, 2008, lines: 21-23, 26)

In the final part of her narrative, we heard the struggle for identity in a time of cultural upheaval and gender revolution. Tia's narrative embodies a connection/separation from the ideals and expectations of the times. The desire to be all things to all people came with the first wave of feminism, and many women struggled with what it meant to be a woman. What kind of woman could—or would—she become? In these excerpts, we began to see how through connection/separation to and from ideas, events, ideals, people, etc., allows us to re-examine how we view our self and how we tell our story. Tia's narratives of life as graduate student, potential employee as well as her struggles as a woman brimming with the ideals of the 1960s all seemed to indicate an identity with strength as a major component of its core. She survived many challenges, and in her narratives of various identities she narrated that strength and spirit of survival.

Sometimes, separation was happening in present time, and the drama or trauma of the current phase could only be understood later in retrospect. Time and space, again, allow a narrative to unfold and a current narrative of identity to show how it came to be even as it is fading away. Narratives of people suffering from memory loss or struggling with Alzheimer's are a prime example of this process. One such narrative was that of Jo Ann and Bob Chew. Jo Ann was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's disease.

My father said if he sent me to college, then I could choose one of two things. He said, you can choose home-ec because I know you'll be somebody's wife. You're too cute not to be somebody's wife. Or number two, I could take up a secretarial course, because, you know, at that time there weren't a lot of things that women

did. So I decided home-ec was the way to go. I wanted to be somebody's wife.

(NPR-D, 2007, lines: 1-5)

Jo Ann Chew was born in the late 1940's, a time when women's roles were prescribed for them by society. Women were dependent on men for support and validation, and Jo Ann's career choices were limited. Her only identity narrative was of being someone's daughter followed by becoming someone's wife. In her narrative of illness, we heard the markers of cultural conventions as she struggled to retain parts of her fading identity,

Oh, I've got to think. How old was I? How old was I when we got married?

Seventy. And I kept trying to dissuade you from marrying me because I was older than you were. And I knew that there would come a time when I would be a little old lady and you would still have all the marks of 10-year younger man. (NPR-D, 2007, lines: 25-28)

Chew's husband, Bob, walks her through an important milestone, their meeting and marriage. He helps her construct the memories that she is losing while allowing her to wrestle with an identity in transition,

J. Chew: So, here we are, still together and still 10 years older.

B. Chew: Does that bother you?

J. Chew: No. It bothers me that I'm as I am because I don't want to be a burden.

B. Chew: You think you're a burden?

J. Chew: Not really. Because you need someone to take of, don't you?

B. Chew: That's what I tell you.

J. Chew: I know. (NPR-D, 2007, lines: 28-34)

It is important here to recognize that, though this may not feel like a separation, this was a narrative of identity unfolding through slippage between past and present. With her deteriorating health, Jo Ann was at once connecting and separating, simultaneously, from her husband and attempting to find some comfort in that uncomfortable reality.

Jo Ann was succumbing to Alzheimer's and was being forcefully separated from identity as she had embodied it up to this point. Her narrative showed the hesitancy and uncertainty of a woman slowly losing her familiarity with her memories, her husband, and her surroundings. As referenced earlier in this section, time and space were at play in this narrative. Jo Ann began by looking backwards to situate her current identity while also narrating the change her corporeal space was undergoing. What was offered here was a glimpse into a theorized liminal space of identity work that is briefly theorized in the next section.

In this final example, Larry Young narrated separation from a central connection/relationship (family) and the transition to a new identity (college student). In this narrative were the convergence of the emergent categories and the model of narrative identity.

My dad, he wanted me to be a farmer. I didn't want to be a farmer, so he wouldn't help me in school. So I put myself through school. I had \$10, and I walked up to the bursar's office, threw my two \$5 bills up there on the counter, and I never shall forget [what] the bursar said, "What are you planning to do?" I said, "Well, I plan to make something out of myself." (NPR-C, 2007, lines: 1-4)

The desire to move from the family farm to an educational setting was a critical point of separation. This ruptured the identity not only of the son but, also, the father whose identity was tied to the land. Here, family and desire have forced separation from one identity construction into another.

He saw this country boy, took me over to the side; he didn't want to embarrass me.

He said, "But you can't go to school with \$10." I said, "But I've got to go to school." So he took me to the dean, and he said, "Here's a young man trying to go to school with \$10. What can we do for him?" He said, "Can you drive a truck?"

And I said yes. I couldn't drive a truck. Never drove. Heck, I couldn't even drive a car, let alone a truck...I didn't know what I was doing but by the grace of God, I did it. (NPR-C, 2007, lines: 4-10)

In order to move from one identity to the next, Larry narrated the moment when he departed from a narrative of boy-from-the-farm to the narrative of potential college graduate. It was an act of separation made possible only by the split second decision to tell a lie that might clear the way for a future. In the final part of his narrative, Larry returned to this time and previewed a future narrative of identity to come,

That took care of my tuition, but they didn't know that I didn't have a place to stay.

I went up on the third floor in the dormitory and slept between two mattresses.

And one morning the matron of the dormitory came up and saw me, and it scared her. She took me before the discipline committee—two women. I shall never forget, both of them broke down and cried when I told them my story. And from that day forward, I never looked back. They gave me everything that I needed.

And that's why I've always felt that as long as I live, I was going to use my life to reach out and touch another life with hope. (NPR-C, 2007, lines: 11-17)

These narratives allowed us a glimpse at the sense-making used by Larry as he moved through life and incorporated turning points in the separation as well as redemption events that pushed the narrative forward. The core for this identity seems to rest on an identity structure of struggle/strength as seen in a previous exemplar.

These narratives showed the beginning part of A Theory of Narrative of Identity. In the first phase, separation, individuals narrate self over space and time and through connection/relationships and transitions. In this phase, self departs one current narrative of identity in favor of another one. Within the narrative, a shift from one narrative of identity to another narrative of identity seemed to begin with a moment of what I have termed the separation by way of a connection narrative. As a narrative moves through the identity process, separations are continually repeated but, I believe, are always present when a new narrative begins. Whether by choice or circumstance, narratives of identity require movement and separation events (those events that take place in the separation part) provide a catalyst for that movement. From separation, we turn to the influence of sense-making.

Part Two: Influences (theoretical sense-making).

In this phase, analysis of the identity processes gets a little more difficult because it is an intrapersonal communicative phase that supports the outward discursiveness of separation and re-assimilation. At its core, sense-making (the internal process of organizing inner and outer worlds) is an intuitive part of narrating identity (Weick, 1988).

We understand that a sense-making process is taking place in narratives of identity, but it is not easy to uncover that intuitive process through simply the reading of re-assimilation stories. However, separation and re-assimilation can give us a glimpse of that intuitive process and provide an avenue for understanding how influences of time and space are interacting beneath the narratives.

Once we move out of the separation part of the model, we, as narrator, are subjected to the ambiguities of identity, the fluidity of self, and the nonlinear nature of the identity story. A process of sense-making transpires for the narrator, and we can only hear its echoes once the narrator re-assimilates into a new identity on the other side of the influences of time and space. For example, when individuals narrate separation from family influence (whether through deliberate act or unexplained absence), there is, I believe, a moment when the underlying identity structure of the narrative, a place in the re-telling of separation, that helps us understand the influences of fragments left behind from a previous period of time. Take the following examples from Shawn Fox, a prisoner at Oregon State Penitentiary.

Fox: I was born and raised right here in Salem, Oregon. A large family – eight kids, five sisters and two brothers. I'm second to the youngest. My baby sister died in 2002 of cancer. The rest of the kids are still living. *Most of them are drug addicts. Their lives are pretty shot. (emphasis added)*(LAAOL, 2007, p. 120:5-8)

In this segment, the interpreted influences were indicated in italics.

Intuitively, I believe we understand, there is some internal formation from the intrapersonal understanding made of the narrative fragments left after a separation occurs

and, to some degree, that formation is the foundation for a re-assimilation narrative.

Though the scope of this project was limited to analysis of the outward manifestation of identity processes, the concept of an internal sense-making part (an internal, liminal space according to Turner) has resonance and should be studied in greater depth.

Part Three: Re-assimilated Identity.

Through separation, narratives of identity move, theoretically, into sense-making and come full-circle into re-assimilated identity stories. This is the difficult work of narrators in constructing a fragmented, storied whole. I believe we can see this happening in the identity structures used in the StoryCorps re-assimilation narratives. For example, when individuals discussed separation from family (whether through a deliberate act or unexplained absence), there is a moment when the underlying identity structure of the narrative is revealed—that place in the re-telling of the family separation story that helps us hone in on the fragment left behind from that period of time. Take the following examples, again, from Shawn Fox and with the addition of Paul Mortimer, prisoners at Oregon State Penitentiary.

Fox: I was born and raised right here in Salem, Oregon. A large family—eight kids, five sisters and two brothers. I'm second to the youngest. My baby sister died in 2002 of cancer. The rest of the kids are still living. Most of them are drug addicts. Their lives are pretty shot. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 120:5-8)

Mortimer: I was born in Detroit, Michigan. My parents moved to California before I was a year old, and I grew up in a middle-class family. There were six of us kids. And I had an average middle-class upbringing till my parents separated.

Then things just went real sour. As soon as my father left, it was on. My mom worked as a registered nurse trying to make all the house payments. She didn't have time to keep an eye on us, so we took advantage of that.(LIAOL, 2007, p. 122:73-80)

In these two segments, the challenges/struggles and family legacies/histories (separation events) are used to make sense of their lives in retrospect and to offer the reader an understanding of the current narratives of identity.

In the first example, Fox's introduced us to his family legacy/history: drug addiction. Though we were not privy to the inner workings of his sense-making, the narrative offers some insight into how he made sense of his current life. None of the siblings managed to make it through life without becoming a victim of something; thus he narrates an identity of victim-hood. Fox's narrative of identity may still be unfolding as he comes to terms with his many prior narratives of identity.

In the second example, Mortimer also introduced us to his family legacy/history (separation event): abandonment. He and his siblings had an absent father, an overworked mother, and only themselves to provide structure and guidance to each other. Again, as with Fox, the narrative offers some insight into how Mortimer made sense of his current life. Mortimer is the abandoned child, an identity that echoes throughout this story. This identity is clearly articulated within the story and is constituted by the story, hence the glimpse at the intrapersonal sense-making that might be occurring.

As these two narratives unfolded, these identities anchored other narrations of identity. For example, Fox's struggle against life circumstances showed up again and

again as he narrated his life leading to prison. In his tale, he is placed in circumstances where he does not intend for bad things to happen, but they do each time,

I would hang out with my older brother from the time I was probably five or six. I wanted to be with him all the time.... He could push me through the window of the neighbor's house. I'd go in, unlock the door for him. "Come here. Smoke a little weed with me. Don't tell Momma." *So that probably started it...* I broke into the neighbor's house—they were weed dealers. I'd watch 'em out the window and see where their key was, get in their house, and steal a little weed. [researcher's note: in his words there is an implied innocence but life throws him a curve ball]. I ended up taking somebody with me, and he was older, and *he wanted* to steal the whiskey and guns, and *they reported it*. They sent me to the boys' home for a year. Saint Mary's Boys' Home in Beaverton, Oregon. *That's where it all went downhill.* (*emphasis added*)(LIAOL, 2007, p. 120-121: 11-16, 20-27)

Again, the italicized segments present a storyline of victim-hood that, I believe, anchors Fox's narrative of identity. As indicated by the highlighted segments, for him, life circumstances led to his criminal behavior and others were directly implicated in his life of crime. His sense-making may have come through believing that others made decisions he was not able to control, thus setting him up for punishment. It would appear that a part of his narrative of identity deals with how life circumstances are the reason for his current path, not his bad choices. The fragmented stories of his life were strung together like pearls on a necklace: each criminal event being a pearl in a life ultimately leading to the

penitentiary. The thread holding those events together is a narrative of identity as victimhood.

In the following re-assimilation narrative, the development from connection (separation) over time and through space into re-assimilation is apparent. Though some speculation about the sense-making could be made, what is most important is that this narrative of identity incorporates multiple narratives, and the tale reveals a new narrative as it is forming.

Kim and Amy Schumer narrated identity during and after an addiction to self-mutilation. Kim, the younger sister, had a problem with cutting. Through this co-constructed narrative, the two sisters helped to illustrate what they both underwent and to highlight a narrative of identity that is used to build and reveal self simultaneously.

Amy: Kim, what's your first memory of me?

Kim: My first memory of you is us dancing in the living room, probably to "Footloose." I remember dancing and jumping on the couch and thinking we were the greatest dancers alive, which we probably were.

Amy: Who first noticed it and said something to you about your arms being cut?

Kim: Oh, God—my volleyball coach...I had a Band-Aid over my wrist, because I used to get up in the morning, go to school, leave after an hour of school, come home and cut myself, sleep for a few hours, and then go back to volleyball practice because I love volleyball...I was sweating, and it slipped off...she said, "Kim, what are you doing to yourself?" And I lost it...that's when I told Mom. She flipped out. And I was like, "Note to self: Don't tell Mom again." But after

you do it a few times, it feels so good, and it's just easy to keep doing it. So that's when people started noticing. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 130-131: 7-11, 31-47)

Kim was addicted to cutting. From the discursive way she constructs the narrative, we can see that it made more sense to her to hide the cutting rather than to seek help; her identity seemed to revolve around it. We may not understand this sort of narrative, but we can see that some internal sense-making had to occur for this identity, that of cutter, to be born. We are not privileged to know Kim's whole story, but we can see that somewhere in those fragments she went from being a carefree little girl to a young woman who cuts her skin.

Kim: It wasn't until the first time I tried to stop that I realized how addicted to it I was, because I was in the shower and I would get an urge to do it and I would be like, "Okay, I'm not going to do it." And I would get sick and throw up. And my arm would start tingling, and like—I would go into physical withdrawal from it. That's how I knew that it was a problem, because when I tried to stop, I physically couldn't. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 131: 48-51)

Kim had to, at some point in her reconfiguration of self; untether herself from the identity structure of pain equaling pleasure. This, I believe, is the reason she narrated her desire to quit and the effect it had upon her. In this co-construction, Amy's struggle with Kim's addiction is equally important to understanding the process of identity formation and performance.

Amy: I didn't understand the severity of it until one time we went to Florida to visit our grandmother. And you were trying to not cut yourself anymore, and you

got an urge to. You got up from watching *Saturday Night Live* and went upstairs to take a hot shower. And I said, "Mom, what's wrong with Kim?" She said, "She just has an urge. She wants to cut herself." And then I heard the noises upstairs. I didn't understand that your body gets addicted to cutting itself, like worse than heroin. And I walked towards the stairs, and I saw my mom going upstairs with a razor. And I said, "What the hell are you doing, Mom?" And she said, "You don't understand. You have to let me by." And I was like, "There is no way I'm letting you bring a razor to my little sister." And she said I didn't understand. The psychologist said you have to give it to her because she will use something else. She'll break her head on a mirror and use the pieces of the mirror. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 132: 63-72)

This narrative of identity story was as much about Amy's sense-making about Kim's addiction as it was about Kim's sense-making of her own addiction. Amy had to reconcile Kim's behavior with the sister she thought she knew. Where was the baby sister who danced to "Footloose"? Central in this moment and in this question is the peek the story offers of identity formation through narrative process. This moment, among many, represents the co-constructed nature of narratives of identity and the reconciling of multiple views of self. Kim was at once an innocent little girl and an addict. Amy was left to make sense of this seemingly contradictory identity. This addiction narrative is one that touched two people, and we see the story unfold from two perspectives though the narrative is about one self.

Amy: I went up to you. You were in the shower and just beside yourself. I said, “Kim, you don’t have to do this.” And you were just cursing at me and screaming, “You have no idea what it’s like!” And it was like another person. It was like *The Exorcist*. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 132: 73-76)

As Amy reconciles the dancing little girl with the addicted woman upstairs in the shower, she helps to discursively construct a new narrative of identity for Kim. The force of the addiction identity came into sharp relief for Amy and for the reader. This forced a new narrative on Amy as well; she was no longer big sister to a normal young adult; she was now a part of the support structure around an addicted individual. How did she make sense of that new reality? I believe she had to untether her identity from one narrative of big sister to another.

Not all narratives of identity were fully formed within the re-assimilated identity. Identity's fluid nature means an individual is constantly reconstructing and re-imagining self within story even as the story itself is still being constructed. This leads to ambiguous moments in re-assimilation where one narrative is commingling with another, and the narrator is wrestling with that reality. Kim’s transition from addict to recovering addict was one of those ambiguous moments.

Amy: What made you stop cutting yourself?

Kim: I don’t know. I did a lot of reading on it. And therapy— My therapist is the best, and she has helped me so much...I kind of realized that I’m not going to be able to keep cutting myself. Like physically, I am not going to be able to. It’ll just get worse and worse, because every time I cut, I would have to cut deeper. So I

would either have to stop cutting myself or kill myself. (LIAOL, 2007, p. 133: 92-100)

In this narrative, we cannot know yet what identity structure Kim used to shift from self as cutter/addict to self as recovering addict. Her new narrative of identity could tether to an identity structure of hope for life or fear of death or both or neither. What is clear is she is trying to separate from one identity and moved forward into a new narrative of identity.

In its outward manifestation, re-assimilation is the story of a new self being born. It is a new narrative of identity built on new narrative identity structures. Through re-assimilation, we begin to understand the process of narrating identity. I believe the analysis reveals that Kim's story, this narrative of new self, is the product of the linear and non-linear fragments of the separation woven back together with narratives that fit in a current space and time. This narrative identity is new and old at the same time in that the echoes from past identities were still present in the newly formed identity. In fact, the narratives collected in this project were all re-assimilation narratives and had the old and new quality in them. Most importantly, because of this old and new quality present in the re-telling, the re-assimilation narrative radiates a truth for the teller and provides identity structures upon which to hang new narratives of identity to come. For example, Lyle Link narrated his struggle with self as a young boy, who was considered a black sheep,

My father believed that any man that needed a vacation should get a different job because, for him, those 110 acres were the whole world and he needed nothing else. But farming wasn't for me. I wasn't happy picking corn or shoveling manure,

although milking cows was good because I could sing opera while milking cows and that was great. (NPR-B, 2008, lines: 1-4)

Lyle's re-assimilation story encompassed several narratives of identity: farm boy, outcast, father's "other" son. Where did these identities come from? I believe these narratives of identity are built on the discursive representations of underlying the narrative identity structures interpreted by Lyle through the intrapersonal sense-making process; however what this narrative illustrates best is a process of identity formation through narrative. Across time and within multiple spaces, Lyle's narrative identity seemed, at a core, to be one of "being different" and the way he chose to narrate his life reflected that internal belief.

I drove my poor father nuts. He couldn't understand me. I remember his saying one day, you cannot think the thoughts you think. My brother was totally a farmer. He never made another foot step that my father hadn't made before, and I couldn't walk in my father's footsteps to save my soul. So I've – the day came, I left. (NPR-B, 2008, lines: 6-9)

Lyle's life intersected with his wife and, together, they "had so many adventures," (NPR-B, 2008, line 13), one of which illustrated again this identity of being different from his family and from others, and which underscored the narrative of newlywed.

I had a '36 Chevy and I was able to lay a mattress in the backseat and we spent our first night in that car on a bluff over the Mississippi River. My father, by the way, did not approve of that kind of outrageous living, but I was willing to break

new ground and your grandma really was ready to break new ground. (NPR-B, 2008, lines: 16-19)

This narrative of identity based on being different from his family's traditional values is a core of this re-assimilation narrative. For Lyle, it seemed to be the most important part of his identity as a person. As he said, “we made all new tracks and we never stepped in any old tracks” (NPR-B, 2008, lines: 33-34) and that was crucial to his sense of self: to be with someone who saw being different as good and not bad, as his father saw it.

In this next re-assimilation narrative, Charles Jackson narrated the effect of illness. In this story, the narrative of identity seemed based in uncertainty. At a young age, Charles learned of the family legacy awaiting him: Alzheimer’s.

My brother Stanley and I came home from school, and Mom told us that our aunt wanted to talk to us...And my aunt started telling us that my mom had this disease that my Aunt Pearl had had, and my Uncle Fred, and so forth down the line. It was the first day I head [sic] the word Alzheimer’s. (NPR-A, 2007, lines: 1-5)

In this moment in his narrative, Charles narrated the change that would overtake his life from that moment forward. Alzheimer’s steals the mind slowly, and Charles soon began to assimilate the reality of living with Alzheimer’s.

I was the one that became the care person for my mother at that time. I was 13. I got to high school. I was in my senior year, and by this time, mom was sitting in the rocking chair with a blanket wrapped around her and all the blinds pulled down. That year she asked me if I could help her die, and I told her I couldn’t. And after that she started trying to run away. (NPR-A, 2007, lines: 9-12)

Charles narrated an identity in turmoil: here was a young man poised to go off into adulthood, yet was stuck caring for a parent who was locked inside her own, deteriorating mind. How, again, did he make sense of that narrative of identity and what did he take from that time that informs his current narrative identity? In the re-assimilation story, Charles narrated an identity of uncertainty based in understanding that, like his relatives before him, he would not be able to escape Alzheimer's. Coming to terms with that knowledge required sense-making of some kind.

I was diagnosed in 2004 with Alzheimer's. I was 50...I wish they [family] would try to understand that I may be a little different. There's a time there where I will forget everybody's name, but inside I'm still here. I'm still me. Inside, I'm thinking how much fun I'm having with them. And I, as much as possible, would like to be treated as [I] had been treated before. (NPR-A, 2007, lines: 14, 18-20)

Charles has narrated several identities in his story. His narrative as a son of an ill mother and his narrative of adult with illness both embody an identity structure of uncertainty about who he will become based on where he has been and what he understands about a future with Alzheimer's.

The re-assimilation story is a narrative of one identity that becomes one of many cornerstones by which individuals will narrate the rest of their identities.

Theory of Narrative of Identity: An Extended Example

To better explicate the vision for a theory of narrative of identity, I believed an extended application was in order. The movement through this theory is best understood as a fluid concept where the parts of the model are occupied for varying lengths of time

and, sometimes, occur simultaneously. The separation part is characterized by events that happen that alter some aspect of our identity (these events are classified within the emergent themes explained earlier in the paper). Once this event occurs, there is a theorized time spent intrapersonally in sense-making. After this sense-making, I believe we move into crafting a new story that reconciles the old version of self with the altered version of self. This identity is then narrated within re-assimilation in the form of new narratives of identity. These narratives of identity coalesce around narrative identity structures that anchor those narratives. This cycle repeats throughout our life.

In order to show how this theory works, the following narrative is offered as an extended example. This narrative was taken from the anthology, *Listening Is an Act of Love* and is offered in its entirety. This is the narrative of Richard Pecorella as told to facilitator Jackie Goodrich.

Richard Pecorella: Karen Juday is my fiancée's name. We met four and half years prior to 9/11 [researcher's note: Karen was killed during the 9/11 attacks] at a car race in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. A friend of mine gave me tickets. He says, "Why don't you go to an Indy car race?" He says, "Get out of New York. This divorce is killing you. Just go. Have a good time."

I went to the race and sat down and I am looking around. And all of a sudden Karen comes in and sits down next to me. She had a dungaree dress on, blond, curly hair, big smile. Sits down next to me, and she says, "Hello." I said, "How ya doing?" She said, "How'd you get these tickets?" Because it was the owner of the racetrack's seats. So I says, "Oh, a friend of mine in Wall Street gave them to me."

She says, “Oh, you work on Wall Street?” I say, “Yeah. It's my first car race.” “Oh, I'll tell you all about it.” So she explained the whole thing. Then she told me about her brother being Al Unser, Jr.'s mechanic, and he was down working in the pits, and that's why she was in Pennsylvania. She was from Elkhart, Indiana. She was telling me about her life, how she was born on a farm and she had a pet calf. And she's been there all her life and she was the supervisor in an assembly line making amplifiers for rock groups. I said, “Oh, that's interesting.” She says, “It's a life. I'm in the middle of a separation from my second husband.” I say, “Oh, I'm in the middle of a divorce. Maybe you'd like to go to dinner after the race?” She looks at me, she goes, and “You know what? Maybe I will.”

The bridges of time and space are crossed in the opening segment of this narrative. From the beginning, there is a separation event, in this case the life circumstance of divorce, that has lead Richard to Karen in this particular place and time. This meeting is pivotal to Richards's narrative of identity and embodies the looking forward and looking back constructive element found in these narratives of identity. This meeting (at the track) and this circumstance (the pending divorces) are important frameworks on which to build this narrative.

Richard: So she found a steakhouse and for the life of me I can't remember the name of the place. And I should. We went to the restaurant, and on the way I saw a gas station that sold roses. So, I pulled in to the gas station and say, “Wait here a minute.” I ran in and got a dozen roses, brought them back to the car, I said, “Here, these are for you.” And her eyes just lit up. “Nobody ever gave me flowers before!”

And she had tears in her eyes. I said, “You got to be kidding me.” She goes, “I’m telling you the truth—nobody ever gave me flowers.” I said, “Well, that’s a mistake on their part.”

We went to the restaurant, and almost through the whole meal I don’t think I ate a bite—and I’m not shy from eating. I had my hands holding her hands across the table the whole time. I mean, I just can’t describe it—clasped together across the middle of the table. We exchanged telephone numbers, and the next morning she was going back to Indiana, and that evening I was going back to Brooklyn. And I’m saying to myself, “What am I going to do here? This is the love of my life I’m letting go!” I knew it that day that we met. I knew as soon as I looked at her that she was the one. It was magical. I can’t describe it. I couldn’t tell her, but I was like a fifteen-year-old again. I got all google-eyed and didn’t know what to do or say, and stumbling. It wasn’t like me at all. Wasn’t the typical macho Italian guy from Brooklyn. (*Laughs*). I could see she was a little goo-goo also. Her eyes were sparkling. She didn’t want to leave; she didn’t want to go home to Indiana.

In this opening section, several key events have occurred for Richard. He introduced the most influential person in his life, his fiancée. Though going through an intense separation event (the divorce), Richard chose to narrate the meeting of this influential other and her immediate effect on his perception of his identity (falling head over heels was not the purview of a macho guy from Brooklyn), thus attaching his narrative of identity to an influential other rather than the more painful life circumstance.

Richard: Four days later she calls me up on the phone at work and says, “Richard”, she says, “I’m packing up and moving in with my brother in Pennsylvania so we can see each other on the weekends.” She says, “I just want to be able to get to know you.” I was shocked. I said, “How can you do that, just pack up and leave your whole life? You’re in Elkhart, Indiana. You were born and raised there and work there.” She says, “I’ve lived my life. My children are grown up. There’s nothing for me here. I want to go for it.” I said, “I can’t make you any promises.” And she said, “I’m going.” I said, “Okay.” She packed up, and that evening she drove to Pennsylvania. I left work and met her out there, got to meet her brother and sister for the first time. And I stayed that weekend, and then we alternated weekends: one weekend she’d come to Brooklyn, and then I’d go back to Pennsylvania. When my divorce was finalized, I asked her to move in with me, and she was there the next day with her car packed. It was amazing. I can’t describe how it was. It was magical.

From this portion of his narrative, Richard presented two potential story lines for the reader. In this piece of his narrative of identity, we heard the struggle between two converging lives: the past life of divorce and the present life of the possibility of love. Through the emerging narrative, Richard appears to narrate of uncertainty and hope, and he seems to see a self that is poised between an identity that is coming to completion and one that is coming into being. In the next fragment, Richard continues to evolve the narrative of identity with Karen as the key redemption component in that evolution.

Richard: We got her a job at Cantor Fitzgerald. A friend of mine was director of operations, and he needed a secretary, and she happened to be good on a computer only because the assembly line she worked on was automated so she had to use a computer. He couldn't believe her work ethic. She says, "I came here to work. I'm not here to fool around." She says, "You get a job, you get paid for it, you have to have to do the job."

She changed me as I changed her. I was a very stressed person. I was in a messy divorce. I had an ex-wife who I was battling with over money, and so I needed a little anger management. And when I met Karen, somehow she just relaxed me. She told me, "It's not worth it. You'll get through it. The divorce is done now."

And she showed me how to live in a city of stress without the stress. And in turn I showed her New York. This is a woman who never saw an ocean until she came to New York. When she came over the Verrazano Bridge, she says, "I'm in love with this bridge." She asked me what the waterway was there; I said, "It's the Atlantic Ocean." And she just became a New Yorker almost within weeks of her moving there. It wasn't anything that she imagined from what she saw on TV. She said it's like a small town only just everybody's closer together. There's more people and more buildings, but other than that it was a small town to her. And she just showed me how to appreciate what I had here.

She taught me patience. I had very little patience. Again, I was a tough guy from Brooklyn, grew up on the streets, went to work, and worked my way up in the company. And basically I was one of those guys who rolled down the window,

screamed at the drivers when they weren't driving the way I thought they should be. And she toned me down. She showed me how to be nicer to people, give it a second a thought before you start yelling. And I've carried that with me. She didn't sit down and teach it to me; it was just by her actions that I followed.

Here we hear the redemption of one identity through the narrative. Though we are not privileged to all the moments that have transpired since Richard and Karen met and formed a relationship, we can hear some of the potential sense-making that had occurred for him through her influence on his life. He contracts time and space and narrates new identity structures for the reader: kindness instead of anger, happiness instead of hostility.

Richard: She was a very spontaneous person. Any time we did a driving trip, it was always an adventure –even a short trip. We would go to her brother's house quite often. It was a two-hour drive, and one of the things we used to do became a joke later on. We would get a little frisky in the car and would decide to stop at a motel along the way, and, you know, we were both forty-something years old at the time. And her brother would be waiting for us to get there in two hours, and we wouldn't get there for five hours. You know, we said, “Well, what the hell? They can wait for us!” (Laughs)

But our best trips were to Las Vegas. She loved it there, and I loved it there. We just got back from there two days before she was killed, and we were going to get married there the following June. I'm going to need a moment...

At this point, the narrative shifts for Richard. Up to this point, he has narrated several identities (divorcee, falling in love, macho guy, softened guy) and has, also, shown us

how a re-assimilation narrative encompasses multiple narratives of identity. He walks us through his narrative restructuring from a man angry and adrift after what appears to be a bitter (or at least contentious) divorce to a man who found happiness and peace through the love of another. Through this construction, narrative of identity (and movement through the model) can be seen. From the beginning, self appears in stories. Separation shifts are narrated, and within that narrative, a version of Richard emerges. Sense-making can only be theorized at this point, though there seems to be intuitive proof that this process is occurring intrapersonally. Finally, the complete story is a re-assimilation shift – the outward discursive representation of the process. Richard is able to weave for us how his identity changed as well as how his fragments were made whole in ways that allow him to see kindness and be, mostly, free of sadness and pain. Time and space help build the narrative of identity in this process by providing bridges to which the unfolding narrative of identity can be anchored. By looking at re-assimilation narratives, a process of narrative identity can be studied in microcosm.

Ultimately all the stories within this research project were the communicative product of the identity process presented in *A Theory of Narrative of Identity*. These public pieces of life history are the sense-made selves of multi-faceted lives. These public narratives were the next embodiment of identity in the ocean of identity work each person was continuing to swim in. This model represents the answer to the question pondered in RQ3.

In this section, emergent themes and influences were explicated to show how people narrate self. Those themes and influences were placed into a grounded theory

model of narrative of identity for the purposes of understanding, at the process level, how we can see self narrated through story. Individuals within this analysis were not, necessarily, asked to narrate their lives in a way that would produce a narration of self, but they proceeded to do so of their own volition. This act of narrating self through story allowed individuals to make sense of the fragmented nature of life's events and create a story within which they could continue to live and grow.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research project was two-fold: 1) to add to the literature on understanding individual sense-making, identity construction, and performance; and, 2) to construct a theory of narrative of identity. After examining the literature on narrative and the literature on identity, three research questions were proposed,

RQ1: What concepts are fundamental to narratives of identity?

RQ2: How do the narratives of identity concepts relate to one another revealing an interpretive process?

RQ3: How can a theory explain narratives of identity?

A grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) was utilized to analyze 80 identity narratives culled from the archives of the StoryCorps Project. These narratives were taken from broadcasts of the narratives on public radio as well from the collection *Listening Is an Act of Love*. The results of this analysis supported the research questions and the original contention in Chapter 1: we use narrative to perform identity. In this chapter, I discuss my findings from the analysis, the theoretical implications, contributions to narrative identity literature and identity literature, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study and future directions for research.

Research Question One: Concepts Fundamental to Narration of Identity

The first finding from this analysis is that individuals narrate identities of self, and they use foundational concepts to make those narrations understood to self and others. This supports Banks's (2004) idea that humans organize and make sense of the world and the self through story. Through textual analysis of the StoryCorps narratives, categories

emerged that reinforced Young's (1989) perspective that narrative is an important way to make sense of self. Those concepts, refined into larger conceptual categories/themes, were apparent throughout narratives regardless of the demographics of the individuals telling the stories and regardless of the narrative being told from one perspective or co-constructed from two. Most of the narratives in this project and in the larger StoryCorps project were identity narratives. Though the narratives took place in a co-constructed environment with question prompts, respondents still, for the most part, wove the answer into a story and to give their sense of self a place to anchor to. For instance, if a presumed question from StoryCorps could be, "How did that make you feel?" the multitude of responses can range from a one word response to a more in-depth exploration of the respondents' inner world. Within the narratives in this dataset, most of the respondents chose to weave answers as some type of story rather than one-word responses. This result speaks to the first motivation for this project: to determine if a narrative way of thinking could be central to, rather than a subset of, identity. Given the resulting theory, it appears that a narrative way of thinking, at least in regards to this dataset, is pivotal to the role of identity. By choosing a narrative response to a question rather than a one-word response, a person is asking a story to stand in as representation for an identity.

When individuals narrated self within a story, they relied on separation events, turning points and influences to help make sense of their lives and to convey a cohesive sense of self in the telling. Regardless of the type of identity story, individuals relied on some type of event as a foundation for the identity story. This practice supported Mead's (1934) contention that we use language to construct reality and to help others makes

sense of that construction, thereby supporting the idea of constructing an identity through narrative (linguistic construction). Separation events, turning points, and influences were the discursive structures used to bring a narrative of identity into focus.

Separation events, whether life circumstances or redemption events, tied identity to the influence of others and supported Sclater's (2003) contention that self is an active agent that works with others to tell a certain tale, to tell a narrative of identity. Turning points and influences interacted the same way within narratives of self. These concepts were the mechanism by which the self was narrated. Supporting the work of Bakhtin (Erdinast-Vulcan, 2008), these foundational concepts give a sense of emplotment to the self and allow a coherence to come from fragmented lives; thus the narratives support this research question by revealing foundational concepts used in the narration of self.

Research Question Two: An Interpretive Process of Narrative of Identity

Building from research question one, the second finding from this analysis is that there is a process of identity performed through narrative. By using separation events, turning points, and influences, individuals engaged in a process of identity formation and performance that carried the self and the reader to an understanding of the current narrated identity (the re-assimilated narrative). This process was highly interpretive in that the stories were the result of the sense-making performed by the narrator, theoretically, internally as well as outwardly in the construction of the tale. This "interpretive practice" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), is a process of structuring the self through narrative and supports Eisenberg's (2001) idea that people make sense of life through the use of narrative.

By delving into the narratives, an answer to Eisenberg's (2001) challenge to "ask where people find both their motivations and the needed resources to construct such a narrative" (p. 536) presented itself. The interpretive process of constructing a narrative of identity is, in fact, a missing resource for understanding how people deal with the "existential/ontological uncertainty" (Eisenberg, 2001, p. 536) of life. By weaving together multiple narratives, individuals make sense of a fragmented life thereby reducing this uncertainty. This interpretive process, also, seeks to understand more about the motivations and resources available for construction of narrative self. In addition, it builds on the work on Identity Theory research, which examines internal dynamics within self that influence behavior (Burke & Cast, 1997; Tushima & Burke, 1999).

This new theoretical process allows scholars to gain understanding of how individuals integrate diverse life events (Polkinghorne, 1988) into a reconstructed past, present, and future (McAdams, 1996), while supporting the reality that identity is fluid. This interpretive process justifies the second motivation for pursuing this research: to explore the role of story and narrative as central components to identity. Through this analysis, I believe I have argued that self is not only revealed through story, it is constituted within story.

Research Question Three: A Theory of Narrative of Identity

The third finding from this research project is that there is a theory of narrative of identity. The foundation for this assertion is laid in the answers to the first two research questions. Upon this foundation, narrative of identity can be theorized as an assimilation of stories that are used to anchor and reinforce iterations of identity. Within this definition

is a process of identity formation and performance as well as a theorized view of internal sense-making. These complex concepts are visually depicted in the model located in Appendix A. This theory extends the works of Holstein and Gubrium (2000) and Eisenberg (2001) in that it brings an interpretive process to the abstract concepts previously theorized by these researchers (narrative of identity and personal narrative, respectively).

Individual identity can be seen as a construction of self through a process of separation and re-assimilation and influenced by time and space and, potentially, filtered through internal sense-making. This process is discursively expressed through the narratives of identity we use to explain to others who we are. It is a fluid, persistently unfolding process of identity designed to give cohesion to the narrated self and to give a cohesive account to others inquiring about that same self.

It is important to understand that narrative of identity is not a singular concept. In support of Somers (1994) who asserted that people exist within “any number of given narratives” (p. 618), I believe the research shows we weave multiple narratives from our past into re-assimilation narratives of identity in the present. This is the case because the separation phases of life events are multifaceted, requiring more than a singular moment of sense-making for cohesion and understanding. However, this multifaceted nature is not outwardly chaotic for self or for others because of the time I believe we spend in theoretical sense-making piecing back together a sense of self after a separation has occurred. Though beyond the scope of proof within the current research, I believe this

theoretical sense-making will become an important site for future research into narrative of identity.

In the model, the connecting arrows in the interpretive process represent the fluid nature of narratives of identity. Lives are a series of separation phases that occur simultaneously, consecutively, and concurrently. The narrative of identity/narrative of identities is a way that individuals come to recognize self, relay that self to others, and make sense out of those separation events and the fluid nature of everyday life. This identity is a story and this story is the identity. This identity theory supports Freeman (2001) in that it is story and requires story in which to become known. Through this analysis, the lives of the individuals were storied snippets designed to present a unified self (sometimes stabilized and sometimes in transition) even though the story being told required constructions within space and across time.

The theory of narrative of identity holds that we are storied individuals whose story is self and who constitute self through story. There is a fluid, interpretive process by which this self is performed, aided by space and time, ad infinitum. By acknowledging that there is a path of identity through stories, this theory allows for a new conceptualization of identity and a new way to research the question: who am I?

Theoretical Implications

Implications for Narrative Literature and Identity Literature

This research into narrative of identity adds to the existing literature on narrative and the existing literature on identity in at least three ways. First, this project attempted to distinguish between narratives of identity and narrative identity, thus leading to a working

definition for each that is separate from, yet influenced by, the other. In an attempt to find the discernible difference between the two, the research found, instead, a clearer definition for narrative of identity as noted in the preceding section. By adding a new definition to the literature, this research helps move scholars forward another step along the continuum of finding new definitions for identity for use in study. This development is important for two reasons: 1) as argued much earlier in the paper, scholars have conflated narrative identity (the end product of identity formation) and narratives of identity (the process of identity formation), and this project provides a resource to help bring clarity to that conflation; and 2) scholars have been required to distill a definition of narrative of identity from disparate, and sometimes conflicting, sources. By providing a clear, distinct definition of narratives of identity, that they are composites of assimilated stories pieced together to form a salient, and particular, sense of self, scholarship may move toward cohesion in terminology allowing for broader assertions to be made and allowing for studies to undertaken using this new definition as a starting point.

Second, this research extends the work of narrative scholars. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) and Eisenberg (2001) built on the works of Ricoeur and Bakhtin and added to the evolution and discussion of identity through narrative. This research extends that discussion to include a definition of narrative of identity more firmly articulated within story as well as a process by which we can understand how that narrative of identity is revealed through story. This is important because, as narrative scholars (e.g., Fisher, Bruner, Bochner, et al) articulated, life is formulated and reformulated through stories and those stories are an important part of the study of everyday interactions

(Langellier, 1989). By building upon, and extending, these earlier ideas, this project sought to add support to the importance of story and continue the paradigm shift articulated by Fisher and others.

Third, this research articulates an actual theoretical framework for the study of narratives of identity. It is common to see narrative of identity as an interpretive process in the current literature (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000); however, a clear articulation of that interpretive process was missing. This research fills that gap by explicating a process whereby identity can be conceived as movement through a model where separation events (connection/relationships narratives and redemption narratives) interacted with the influences of space and time coalescing into re-assimilation narratives. This is a process that researchers can adopt as they attempt to understand how narratives function to form identity and how they work in the performance of identity. Though Eisenberg (2001), Holstein and Gubrium (2000), and Hecht and Jung (2004) all laid a foundation for a framework to study narrative identity and narrative of identity, a gap was still evident. An actual framework to look at how narrative of identity was performed was not clearly articulated. This articulation became a goal of this research project.

Implications for Identity Literature

This research project adds to the literature on identity most significantly in that it extends identity theorizing further into the narrative paradigm. Identity has been theorized as a psychological process (Erikson, 1959), as a social process (Mead, 1934), as the fulfillment of a need to belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), as product of role fulfillment and socialization (Stryker, 1968, 1987), as a discursive product gained through

socialization (Ting-Toomey, 1998), as internalized roles acted out through communication behavior (Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004), and as a complex amalgam of mood, story, and communication (Eisenberg, 2001).

This project conceptualizes identity constituted by and situated within narrative. I would argue it complements the existing theoretical assumptions about identity while reinterpreting how those assumptions could be viewed. For instance, the need to belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is a salient characteristic of identity and one that can be explored through a framework of narrative identity without diminishing the concepts of self-concept and self-categorization. The issues of socialization and identity formation evident in identity theories by Stryker (1968, 1987) and Ting-Toomey (1998) are clear factors in construction and performance of narrative identity, which complement the works of these theorists and extend them to another level.

Finally, Gergen's (1991) postmodern conception of identity plays a key role in positioning identity through narrative. Through this project, I rejected the notion of a saturated self as Gergen defines it, but I do believe that the self is fragmentary in nature and that we have to make choices about which self we will embody. I believe I have shown through a Theory of Narrative of Identity how those choices might occur. While Gergen (1991) contends that the self is not wholly comprehensible or rational, I would argue that the self requires a level of rationality to function or at least to have a feeling of cohesion. Gergen argues that self is unintelligible because it requires something, in this case story, to render it clear and comprehensible (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). I am arguing it

is not unintelligible but, instead, crafted from fragments that have meaning for each individual.

The use of narrative to perform identity lends a rational layer to and gives rational shape to the self and offers self an avenue for reconstruction out of the fragmented, maybe even postmodern, self. Though I argue against some of the tenets of Gergen (1991), I find that the idea of the fragmented self finds some purchase within this theory.

In this research, identity is theorized as the composite of assimilated stories used to anchor and reinforce narratives of identity, and it falls in line with the continued evolution of identity theories and theorists. Through this project, I extended and complemented to some degree the definitions of earlier key theorists and added to the conversation about how we come to understand and study identity.

Applications and Implications of Theory/Model

Researchers looking at narrative of identity (e.g., the self performed through stories of Iraq war soldiers veterans), identity formation (e.g., the constitution of identity by abuse victims), or identity performance (e.g., the performance of identity by expatriate professors) may find this theoretical model a useful tool. This theory/model would also be useful for educators of communication as a tool for use in interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, and rhetorical communication classes. Because the theory/model builds on works by sociological and psychological theorists, the possibility exists to use this research in sociological and psychological research projects exploring identity. For example, sociologists studying the men in feminist organizations might use this theory as a starting point for looking at the change these men

may undergo by virtue of this affiliation. Psychologists studying the same phenomenon might use this theory to determine the motivations or, what drives these men, to become members of feminist organizations.

When looking at ways to understand individuals' sense-making activities, this model could be a constructive starting point for analysis. When attempting to explain identity formation situated within the context of everyday life (e.g. identity formed by motherhood), this model could serve as a framework for narrative scholars within in Communication to build research projects. This model incorporates particular stories from StoryCorps – those edited, and deemed acceptable, for publication and/or broadcast. There may be a different outcome if the StoryCorp narratives are looked at in their raw and unedited format so a study of those narratives may produce different processes in the theory. Other studies could look at the narratives present in mass media or narratives of identity in the workplace. The theoretical model would also be useful for helping scholars in other disciplines incorporate communication as a variable in understanding identity (e.g., sociological projects looking at the behavior of anti-war groups or folklore projects looking at cultural identity in oral traditions).

Another possible exploration would be to apply the theory to other texts of identity and see if it is still applicable. Potential use with autobiographical texts, biographical texts, interpersonal texts (e.g. letters), journals, etc., would all be viable ways to either lend support to or negate identity theory.

An interesting application would be to interview groups and individuals about narrative of identity. By looking within and between groups, the theory could be

bolstered by comparisons between demographic, social, and psychographic categories. By looking at the narratives of individuals, a process of narrative formation might be gleaned and the theory could be further applied to formation of narratives or modified to fit what is actually occurring. By engaging in this line of research, scholars using the theory could make broader claims about their findings while adding to the literature on the theory.

This theoretical model has many components that work together to provide a holistic way to understand identity but its parts could also be integrated into other theories. For example, interpersonal scholars could look at the separation shift in conjunction with communicative behaviors to explain relationships at the beginning, middle, and end of development (e.g. Duck's [1973] work on relationship dissolution in friendships). Scholars looking at intercultural communication might use the re-assimilation shift to gain deeper insight in to acculturation and assimilation practices (e.g., Orbe's (1998) work with the Co-Cultural Communication Theory and African-American male acculturation). Finally, scholars could look at the theoretical sense-making (or the liminal space concept) in conjunction with intrapersonal behaviors to gain deeper understanding of how internal communication plays a significant role in outward communicative behavior as was argued in this project but still needs significant study. Though this line of research in communication exists, some argue that this process is more about psychology than about communication. I would argue that it is both and being one does not negate the existence of the other. By exploring the concept of liminal

shift from a communicative perspective, the theory of narrative identity can grow into a more integrated model of identity formation and performance.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

There are several strengths in this research project. The first is the use of actual narratives not specifically created for this research project which is at once both a strength and a limitation. This limitation will be discussed under the next section.

By dealing with text taken from the accounts of expressions of real life and not for a structured research project, the resulting theoretical model shows great potential academic application. Though the accounts were facilitated by StoryCorps project, the narrators were not bound to the questions generated by StoryCorps question generator. Narrators and interviewers had flexibility in the choice of questions to generate or to bring their own questions to the interview process. By allowing the narrator to guide the interview process in this way, the StoryCorps project provided potential researchers with accounts designed to reflect the truth of the narrator and not, necessarily, the constraints of a research project.

Cultivating a way to use data generated from the real lives of people and not in a controlled environment allows research to be more applicable back to real-world situations. This does not negate research generated under controlled conditions; however, this project does show that research collected outside of controlled conditions can be credible.

The second strength of this project is the diversity of the sample used as texts though this is a strength that must be qualified. The StoryCorps project has collected narratives from a breadth of individuals (as shown by the number of narratives collected) covering many walks of life (as demonstrated by the various StoryCorps initiatives). In utilizing the StoryCorps project narratives, this interpretive theory is able to claim some limited application across the demographic and the psychographic make-up of the individuals telling the stories. Though the narratives chosen are structured to fit a certain pattern, I believe in the stories there is still a unique voice present. The voice of a self at this point in time. Those voices are a part of the unique individual telling the story. As such, this theoretical model could contribute useful analysis to identity work using a diverse sample.

The third strength of this project is that of focus. This project was conceived to look specifically at the problem of narrative identity. That focused problem allowed for a deep analysis of the data within a singular purpose: to define the construct and propose a theory. Though there was the possibility that this construct was not definable or that a theory would not be interpreted, this focus on one issue allowed for clarity in the finished project.

The fourth strength of this project is the model representation of an interpretive process. By keeping the focus on narrative identity and its formation and performance, a model was conceived to make application of the theory easier for future scholars doing narrative identity analysis. This model extends the work of seminal identity theories and

further aids the evolution of identity theories into more critical/interpretive/post-modern perspectives.

Limitations

A limitation of the project is the sample size. Because of restrictions on access, only a small sample of stories collected by the StoryCorps project was available for analysis. Some of those texts were mediated through National Public Radio and some were collected in the anthology, *Listening Is an Act of Love*. Once the sampling criteria were applied to the available texts, the sample size was small. A more robust sample would allow for a broader transferability of the findings. Once these narratives are released to the Library of Congress in their entirety, a more thorough analysis could be performed to determine if the process of narrative of identity still remains the same.

A second limitation of the project is the text itself. Because there is not a way to follow up with the creators of the narratives, the analysis is solely my interpretation as is the assumption of the effects on the narrators during the process of constructing the narrative. Though this interpretation is grounded in the available data, it is single-faceted and gleaned from a single point in time and could be made richer and more complex with the continued input of the narrators. This limitation could be mitigated by obtaining narratives constructed specifically for a project on narrative of identity and would allow for further refinement, and testing, of the processes in the theory. This limitation is important to acknowledge because the project relies on the voices of those narrators to be portrayed in a way that resonates with their own vision of the narrated identity and not simply my interpretation of it.

A third limitation of the project is the construction of the texts. As noted in the proceeding section, the construction of these texts is a source for rich data and analysis. The downside to this construction is the limited freedoms with the texts allowed the narrators. The narrators took part in a larger project, the StoryCorps project, and thus, are confined to the parameters of that project. Though I believe the texts produced are a slice of life that is worth study, the reality is that these texts are produced and co-constructed for the project. This is a limitation to the claims that can be made about the texts as completely accurate reflections of the life being narrated and must be taken into account when looking to transfer the results of this project to other texts.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation project was to re-conceptualize identity by theorizing that narration is a core of identity formation and performance. Though this is not the first project to look at narrative and identity (see Eisenberg, 2001), it is the first to look at narrative as the central component to identity and not as a by-product of identity. By depicting an interpretive process of narrative and identity and offering a new theory, this project provides another avenue for identity exploration.

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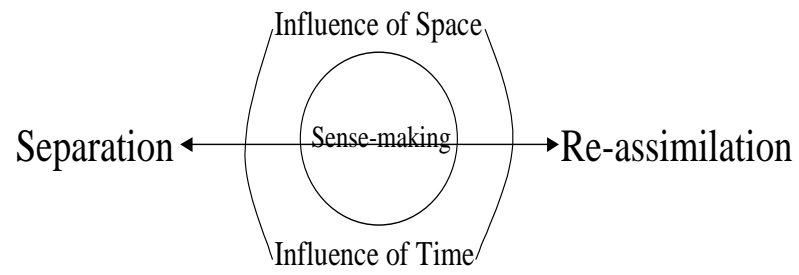
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Appendix A

A Theory of Narrative of Identity



VITA

Sacheen Mobley was born in Kansas City, Missouri. She holds a Bachelors of Arts in Communication Theory and Human Relations from Park University in Parkville Missouri, a Masters of Arts in Communication from University of Missouri- Kansas City and a Doctor of Philosophy in Communication from University of Missouri. Her research interests include narrative, identity, interpersonal communication and intercultural communication.

i

The names of the narrators are a part of the public record; therefore, names were not altered or changed in any way for use in this research project.

ii

LIAOL is a designation for narratives in the anthology *Listening Is an Act of Love*.

iii

NPR is a designation for narratives that aired on the National Public Radio show, *Morning Edition*, from 2005-2008.