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Brandon Larkins

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Memorable Family Narratives

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

Memorable narratives are highly under-studied in the world of family communication. By understanding what memorable messages entail and what a story is, we can bridge that gap and explain a narrative. In this study, 13 participants were recruited and interviewed. Only participants over the age of 18 years were recruited. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 and 49 years old. Seven of the 13 participants identified as female, and the remaining 6 participants identified as male. Of the 13 participants, 11 identified as Caucasian, 1 identified as African-American, and 1 identified as Asian. From these participants, three themes were gathered: affection, independence, and the world is cruel. From these narratives that were told, a better understanding of how and why narratives are so memorable was obtained.

Keywords: storytelling, memorable messages, narrative

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	1
Method.....	15
Results/Discussion.....	15
Conclusion.....	26
References.....	36
Limitations/Future Research.....	25
References.....	30
Appendix A: Human Subjects Approval Letter.....	33
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	34
Appendix C: Demographic Survey Questions.....	35

Memorable Family Narratives

Introduction

Memorable narratives may play a big part in the lives of children and the adults who tell them. According to Wang (2014), a memorable message is defined as a “verbal message which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive a major influence on the course of their lives” (p. 271). Memorable narratives are stories that are memorable based on the content that was told to an individual. Storytelling and memorable statements are a staple of family communication. This study explores the role of memorable narratives in family communication. According to Kellas (2010), “Research on family communication shows that the family is the first relational context in which we learn values and norms from interacting within and outside the family” (p. 459). By looking into the research on storytelling, memorable statements, and memorable narratives, researchers will be able to understand why and how memorable narratives have an impact on family members. Members of a family will also be able to understand when, how, and why memorable narratives play an important role in a child’s life. This way, family members will know when and why telling a memorable narrative is important and how it may impact the child.

Literature Review

Storytelling

According to Langellier and Peterson (2006), “Family is our first group, and storytelling is called our first language and the family imaginary” (p. 110). Storytelling, simply by the word itself, is a key to another world. When individuals tell stories, our imaginations run wild. With storytelling, people can talk about whatever they want and interpret the meaning of the story in a variety of ways. Stories serve multiple purposes within families. Stories help us to understand the

lives individuals live, and stories help individuals understand rules and norms of a culture (Braithwaite & Schrod, 2015; Kellas, 2007). Behind each story is a message that is to be understood and interpreted in its own way. Storytelling is a key concept in relaying life experiences to a child. Storytelling is a major influence on the makeup of the family. According to Langellier and Peterson (2006),

The communication practice of storytelling is one way, among many other examined in this volume, of “doing family.” As surely as we are born into genes, genealogy, and a body of relatives by blood, marriage, and bonds, we are “born into” family stories and histories, family myths and metaphors, family rituals, and routines, family language and secrets. (p. 109)

Langellier and Peterson state that we are born into family stories, meaning that the life our parent(s) live is going to be passed down to us through storytelling. Storytelling has been used for entertaining, teaching purposes, passing on values of cultures, explaining the world, and seeing beauty in the world when beauty is the last thing to be seen (Divinyi, 1995).

Purpose of storytelling. It is the parents’ job to help children learn right from wrong and one way of teaching children this is by storytelling. It is in times of guidance and hardship that children may learn the most from their families. Children may learn the most from their families because family members may be supporters and the individuals who give guidance and strong words of upkeep from the stories the family members tell. Through hardship and guidance, children learn what to value, how to behave, create an identity, and develop a family culture. This may be the first time where the children learn who they are in this world (Kellas & Trees, 2006; Thompson, Kellas, Soliz, Thompson, Epp, & Schodt, 2009).

Hardship. When children have hardship that arises in their lives, the parent(s), grandparents, and other adult family members can relate to the idea of hardship because the parent(s) have endured countless amounts of hardship from loss of loved ones, loss of jobs, stress, and so on. According to Trees and Kellas (2009), “When the difficulty is shared, either because all members of the relationship experienced the stressor or because one person’s hardship impacts interdependent others, stories about those stressors also become shared” (p. 92). The parent(s) would then tell their stories to help the children overcome their hardships because it is a way of learning and from this learning, the children learn how to overcome difficult obstacles. According to Trees and Kellas (2009),

Writing or talking about one’s experience, on the other hand, helps to create insight or make sense of the problem, develop a reappraisal of the situation, establish a greater sense of control over experiences, and facilitate catharsis through emotional expression. Telling about one’s problems aids in creating meaning by forcing one to label emotions and experiences and place them in logical, organized structure. In addition, telling the story of a difficult experience necessitates a consideration of multiple perspectives, which provides an opportunity for personal insight and encourages development of a coherent interpretation of events. (p. 93)

Children may very well learn to overcome their hardship by talking about their issues with their parents. By narrating what the children are experiencing, the children can make sense of what is happening to them and how to overcome a traumatic experience in their lives. Also, by telling the story, the children then get to structure their thoughts and experiences, giving the children a

chance to understand and process the experience. This allows the children to obtain an explanation or closure of the hardship.

When someone thinks of the word storytelling, this individual probably doesn't think that storytelling deals with passing of morals, giving guidance, entertaining, creating sensemaking, or even sharing the family history. An example for sharing the family history may consist of grandpa or grandma telling the story of when they moved to America from Germany. Grandma and grandpa may also talk about how the journey to America was harsh and brutal, but in the end, grandma and grandpa made a happy life. Another example that grandma and grandpa could pass on would be of the traditions that they followed. A tradition in Germany that grandma and grandpa may have done before coming to America may have consisted of baking lebkuchen cookies right after Thanksgiving.

Morals. For passing of morals and values, grandma and grandpa may talk about how they worked very hard over in Germany to make sure they had enough money to feed themselves and to live in an apartment. Grandma and grandpa may also speak about how love got them through the rough times because one may not have been able to survive without the other one during the trip to America. Both grandma and grandpa may talk about the history that they went through as a result of their race and ethnicity and pass the history along.

Entertainment. When someone gives a story for entertainment, the storyteller is looking for smiles and laughs. Grandma and grandpa could tell a story about the individual's parents. Parents like to keep the embarrassing stories to themselves. Grandma and grandpa could talk about how mom used to run around the house with her underwear on her head when she was a small child.

Guidance. To give guidance, the mom and/or dad may talk to their child about how he or she should do something correctly. For instance, dad may guide his daughter in swimming on how to do a stroke correctly so that (a) his child doesn't injure herself, and (b) so that the child can become faster and hopefully go to the Olympics one day. Another example is when dad tries to guide his child to a certain career for the future. Dad may tell his son that he needs to focus on the health care field so that the son is happy with his job later in life and so that the child is successful.

When a child isn't sure of something, a family member may try to make sense of the situation for the child so that child is reassured everything is well. For example, a daughter may not understand why her boyfriend or girlfriend broke up with her because she thought that her significant other was "the one." To make sure that the daughter is well, the parents may try to talk to their child about how, in one point or time, they were in the same situation that their daughter is in. According to Kellas (2010), "Storytelling not only helps us make sense of family experiences, but also performs, creates, and shapes family relationships as well as individual and cultural identities" (p. 3). Through the use of storytelling, the individual will be able to understand the purpose of a story.

Joint Storytelling. Joint storytelling is an important part of storytelling because family members may not be able to remember the full truth or the full meaning of a story. If family members tell a story together, then the story may be told to its full potential. A child may not fully remember a story if it is just told by one of their family members. If family members tell a story together to the children, the purpose behind the story may be more meaningful. According to Kellas (2010), "Stories are both individual constructions, formulated to help people make sense of their identities and the events of their lives, but also collaborative constructions,

acknowledged, celebrated, ratified, criticized, questioned, influenced, and/or co-told by others such as family members and relational partners” (pp. 3-4). These collaborative constructions are known as joint storytelling. Families engaged in joint storytelling can pick up where the other family members may have forgotten part of a story so that the story itself stays fluid and the story doesn't become tarnished. Most stories are actually told jointly instead of individually (Kellas & Trees, 2006).

Within these joint storytelling processes, the content and how the content is being told can tell a lot about a family and the relationships within the family. These jointly told stories help to create the family identity and of the family members (Kellas, 2007; Thompson, et al, 2009). For example, if a man was in public with his fiancée and he is telling a couple a story about how they cook dinner together, he would identify as a group to the other couple through the pronoun “we.” By using “we,” he is telling the couple that yes, his fiancée and he are a family.

Another form of joint storytelling is conversational storytelling. According to Kellas and Trees (2006),

One type of joint storytelling, conversational storytelling, occurs when the recipient contributes to the teller's development of a story. Stories told in conversation, as opposed to writing, are dynamic, and often malleable, constructions. Even if the story is not about a shared experience, the collaborative nature of conversation means the listener is actively involved in the telling of the story. (p. 51)

In this form of storytelling, the listener actually has to play a part in the telling of the story. The listener has dual roles in this form of storytelling. The listener is both the listener and a conversationalist within the story. While a man and fiancée tell the story about how they always cook dinners together, the other couple listening can ask questions, prompt for more information about the story or even suggest new ways of how to cook as a couple. Storytelling is a tool that helps children learn about the world they live in and the world they will face, and joint storytelling can help to make the purpose behind the story and the story itself more memorable. Jointly told stories are more memorable because as the family members tell the story, the children may listen to the stories told, for example, by a child's favorite aunt and uncle. Stories help us make sense of the world, but with the use of memorable messages, children will be able to take the messages that were told to them and apply the messages to their everyday life.

Memorable Messages

According to Wang (2014), a memorable message is a “verbal message which may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and which people perceive a major influence on the course of their lives” (p. 271). Memorable messages are those messages that family members tell to children that may impact the lives of the children. Memorable messages are meaningful in the way that they can help guide children, as well as help the children make sense of the world.

Common themes within memorable messages are those of family, jobs, receiving an education, communication, advancement, guidelines of behavior, aging, getting along with others, and role behaviors (Holladay, 2002; Kellas, 2010; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012; Medved, Brogan, McClanahan, Morris, & Shepard, 2009; Waldron et al, 2014; Wang, 2014). According to Kellas (2010),

Memorable messages last over time because they are personally involving, shared most often for the benefit and well-being of the recipient at a time when he or she might be particularly in need of help, and are brief and applicable across contexts. Memorable messages often take the form of a prescriptive command or injunction and may appear like proverbs, rules, or clichés. Despite the potential to be cliché, individuals tend to view them as highly personally relevant and may adopt them because they come from people of higher status in private settings. (p. 460)

Memorable messages play a significant role as a child goes through life events that are stressful, exacerbating, and life changing. Memorable messages are verbally expressed, majorly influence individual's lives, guide one's life, are remembered over a long period of time, and are told at a relatively young age (Holladay, 2002; Kellas, 2010; Medved et al., 2009; Waldron et al., 2014; Wang, 2014).

We see that memorable messages influence and guide one's life, but when and where are they told? Waldron, et al. (2014) looked at where most memorable messages were told,

Most messages (69.7%) were communicated in the home, in such places as the living room, kitchen, or around the dinner table.

However 7.9% were shared while traveling in a car and similar number occurred in public places such as restaurants or stores. Few were delivered via mediated channels, such as phone or email (1.7%). When asked if the parent(s) intended to share the message,

93% agreed. Even so, most messages were spontaneous (78.2%), not planned in advance (21.8%). (p. 383)

What do memorable messages contain that make the messages memorable? Messages being told from someone become memorable when the message itself is relevant to an individual's life at the certain point in time it was told. Waldron et al. (2014) and Wang (2014) believe that most messages tell the recipient what should be correctly done. Messages tend to be memorable when the individual is evaluating their own actions and/or life choices. It is also believed that memorable messages were perceived as "real" and "personal" by the recipient of the message. Also, beyond talking about problems or particular situations, it is the content being talked about by the sender that makes the messages memorable (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012, p. 203).

Types of memorable messages. Some suggest that the best time to tell memorable messages to children is at an early age. According to Medved et al. (2009),

As early as the age of 5, some studies have found, children begin to self-monitor their communicative behaviors, including evaluating their own messages and becoming skilled at sending socially appropriate messages. By observing and interacting with family members early in life, most people learn the requisite skills for social interaction as well as ways to think about communication. Communication rules learned early on in life play a role in helping shape the way children and adults coordinate meaning with others. (p. 165)

Communicating to children certain messages such as “do this” or “don’t do this because it is wrong,” may lead children to learn socially desirable behavior. Waldron et al. (2014) also state that when children are young, they are curious, so therefore, if a parent is to share messages that are meaningful, then the children may be better able to cope with present and future challenges.

Waldron et al. (2014) and Kellas (2010) suggest that when children evaluate their own life choices or moral conduct, the statements that were received from family members become memorable. The memorable messages also serve as guides or prescriptions that outline our actions and aid individuals in evaluating their behavior. Being a parent is rough yet rewarding. The parent(s) have to bring their children into this world of difficult times and hardship. When the parent(s) tell their children the statements, the statements could consist of a variety of themes such as good decision-making, personal qualities, relational commitments, fairness/justice, and caring for others, etc. (Waldron et al., 2014).

When a parent communicates to their children a memorable statement, it is usually something personal that should be remembered and practiced throughout the children’s lifetime. For example, if a child is in middle school, he or she may take more of an interest in girls or boys. Parents may state to their children “wait to date anyone until you have a successful job,” “don’t go having sex with women because if you accidentally get her pregnant, there goes your career and life, buddy,” “I just want you to become more successful than I did. I don’t want you to have a job like mine and I want you to have more than myself because I didn’t have that luxury,” or “You have to work hard for what you want, you can’t afford to slack off.” According to Wang (2014),

Although children may forget, ignore, or discount many of the messages they hear, they, may also remember, accept, or internalize some of these messages. Although message senders may be unaware of the impact of their messages, researchers suggest that when messages are remembered, they become a supportive and socializing force that influences the course of message recipients' lives. (p. 270)

Messages that become memorable may be positively or negatively valanced. According to Kellas (2010), "Individuals recall both positive and negative memorable messages, and research indicates that memorable messages help to create values in people that affect their interactions in future contexts" (p. 461). Even if the message is negative or positive, the memorable message will stick with your child for years to come.

Memorable messages may affect children's future because they serve as guides for behavior. A positive memorable message may include "you can do anything as long as you put your heart into it." A negative memorable message may include something such as "you'll never amount to anything." Both of the positive and negative messages that were previously stated are memorable and will affect a child's life. For instance, if a child is struggling with a sport and is trying to become better at said sport, the child may need a pick me up or something to motivate them to be better at the sport. This child could remember "you can do anything as long as you put your heart into it." This would then motivate the child to do something great. Now, if a child is in a situation such as a sport or in school and the child remembers that a family member said "you'll never amount to anything" on a constant basis, the child will remember this and also believe the message. Even though a negative message may have been told to a child by the

family member, the child may still decide to not follow the message because they want to make their own path. According to Kellas (2010), “People tend to recall a majority of positive messages” (p. 474). This may be because positive messages lead to a positive action or feeling, such as supporting the child’s friend.

Memorable statements play a role within the world of finances. When children grow up to become adults, the young adults may struggle with balancing fiscal responsibilities. The role of a parent is to step in and to guide these young adults. Guidance may involve getting the young adult out of the financial hardship, letting the young adult learn from their mistake, or a mixture of the two. When this instance takes place, the parent may tell the young adult to “watch what you spend your money on” or to “only spend money on things you need, not the things you want.” When a young adult struggles with their money, the parent may find this instance to talk about their past and to make sure the young adult learns from their parents’ mistake. According to Lucas and Buzzanell (2012), “Periods of financial hardship became teaching moments and building blocks for lifelong character development” (p. 201). When the child struggles with finances, this then would teach the child how to appropriately spend money.

Within memorable messages, the senders of said message tend to be of higher status. Holladay and Kellas (2002, 2010) suggest that the senders are wiser than those who are receiving the message and memorable messages are usually transmitted between a parent and child. According to Holladay (2002),

Memorable messages are remembered because of their effects on receivers. The effects may be related to uncertainty reduction and include changing behaviors or cognitions, or both. Research confirms that communication that holds personal significance

tends to be remembered more accurately than communication that is more impersonal. (p. 683)

If someone of a higher status was to give a memorable statement, then the message would be perceived more important as compared to a message that was given by someone of the same status as that of the receiver. According to Waldron et al. (2014), “Memorable messages communicate social knowledge across generations and sometimes serve as guides to present thinking and behavior. It is evident that messages are attributable to older and wiser people, often mothers and (less often) fathers, and other family members, but also teachers and mentors” (p. 377). I would also argue that even if the sender isn’t of higher status than that of the receiver, but is looked up to by the receiver, then the message may become memorable and, therefore, important. According to Wang (2014), “The message source, often an authority figure, adds credibility to messages and increases the likelihood that they will become memorable messages” (p. 271). When someone looks up to an individual, the person then takes their advice or stories to heart.

In summary, memorable messages are verbally expressed, majorly influence individual’s lives, guides one’s life, remembered over a long period of time, and told at a relatively young age (Holladay, 2002; Kellas, 2010; Medved et al. 2009; Waldron et al. 2014; Wang, 2014).

Memorable narratives are similar as to memorable messages as both help to guide our lives.

Memorable Narratives

While memorable messages have been the focus on previous research (Holladay, 2002; Kellas, 2010; Medved et al., 2009; Waldron et al., 2014; Wang, 2014), memorable narratives have yet to be studied in family communication. Memorable narratives are composed of storytelling and memorable messages. Since memorable narratives are composed of storytelling

and memorable messages, there a noticeable amount of similarities between the two. For instance, storytelling may be told by a family member but may not peak the children's interest because it wasn't memorable for the children. The children just may not care about the story being told because that story has nothing to do with their lives. Both storytelling and memorable messages help guide individuals when they are struggling with life. Also, they both help shape the views of the world for an individual. From both storytelling and memorable messages, this is where people learn right from wrong. Another similarity of both storytelling and memorable message is that the children take the meanings (positive or negative) with them for the rest of their lives. Both storytelling and memorable messages are long lasting.

According to Kellas (2010), "Memorable messages last over time because they are personally involving, shared most often for the benefit and well-being of the recipient at a time when he or she might be particularly in need of help, and are brief and applicable across contexts" (p. 460). Memorable messages last over time because they are memorable to the children due to the meaning behind the message. That is why memorable messages are important to this study and the same is true for memorable narratives. Narratives differ that of memorable messages because the narratives are stories and are distinctively memorable based on the content that was told.

Therefore, the research questions guiding this study are as follows: RQ1: What kinds of family narratives are perceived as memorable? RQ2: How, if at all, do memorable narratives have an impact on children within the family?

Method

Participants

After obtaining human subjects approval (see appendix A), 13 participants were recruited through the use of the snowball effect through social media. Only individuals 18 years or older were recruited. Regardless of the student's ethnicity and status, all were included. Thirteen participants partook in the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 49. Seven of the 13 participants identified as female, and the remaining 6 participants identified as male. Of the 13 participants, 11 identified as Caucasian, 1 identified as African-American, and 1 identified as Asian. This was an exploratory case study that was limited.

Procedure

The 13 participants arrived at a quiet location of their choosing at their scheduled time and date. Once the participants arrived at their location, the participants signed a consent form. Explaining what a family narrative is occurred before the in-depth interview. An in-depth interview occurred with the participants. The participants' voice was recorded. The in-depth interview with the participants lasted approximately for 30 minutes to 1 hour. The conversations were also audio taped and transcribed by the researcher. After the in-depth interviews were completed, all of the recorded conversations were coded. A copy of the interview schedule is contained in Appendix A.

Results/Discussion

After the interviews were completed, several themes were coded in order to organize the most common narratives that were told by the 13 participants. Unfortunately, not all of the narratives were used in the themes. Using Owens (1984) thematic analysis, three items must occur in order for a theme to arise: a) recurrence, b) repetition, and c) forcefulness. Recurrence

deals with how many times something is being repeated. For example, recurrence occurred as the author read the narratives and the author saw the same meaning in different narratives.

Repetition is about how many times something specific frequently appears. For example, when the author read the narratives and saw that there was a specific wording or phrase in multiple narratives, they were considered repetitive. Forcefulness deals with how strong something stands out. The author found forcefulness in the narratives when a specific phrase or set of words stood out. Not all of the narratives that were told were used, as not all of the participants met these requirements.

Theme 1: Family Is Support

Family narratives consisted of any narrative that was told by a participant that dealt with a family member. The most common narratives that were coded from the 13 participants were about closeness to family, always being there for family, treating family with love, family always being there, togetherness, and affection for family.

Subtheme 1: Togetherness. Togetherness is what brings a family closer. Togetherness can help a child learn that family will always love you and that a family will never leave you. For instance, Participant 13 spoke about how her grandma moved all over the world with her grandpa because he was on the committee who designed the Hummer vehicle “He was on the committee of who designed the Hummer for military purpose, and the Hummer came out and obviously was a huge success and that gave the two of them the opportunity to travel the world because the idea was that they had to travel around and debut the vehicle.” With her grandpa being so successful, her grandma could have just stayed in America to live out her life, but she decided to stick with her husband. This is a prime example of how togetherness is a strong family lifestyle.

Another story about togetherness comes from Participant 10, who spoke about how his father grew up. Participant 10 spoke about how his dad would always eat dinner with brothers and his dad. Every night it was a priority that they ate together,

My dad always tells that in all of his years that they ate dinner together, his mother never ate dinner at the same table as them, and she always ate in the living room, and I didn't know how to take it. Like was she not allowed at the table because it was a different time because women didn't have social standing as they do now, or she just wanted her family and her boys to eat with their dad.

Even though the mom left the room doesn't mean she wasn't part of the family. She wanted her boys to eat together and to spend time with one another every night. This may have been the form of being able to see each other for the day. Togetherness can be perceived in many different forms, and this could be their version of togetherness. This form of togetherness is still bringing the family together.

When life takes you to uncertain places, someone may follow no matter what. According to Participant 6, "She [Participant 6's grandma] grew up and was born in Italy, and she came to America and then moved to Germany with my grandpa, who was in the military, and they stayed in Germany for a long time, and they moved back to America." Participant 6 explained how his grandma would go to great lengths to make sure she would stick with his grandpa because they were family. With togetherness, family is a community and this community shouldn't break apart. If you're together with your family, then love may take place.

Participant 1 learned that family is your number one priority, and you need to always watch out for them. According to Participant 1,

My dad's senior year of high school, his sister attended the same dance as my dad at the senior prom with her senior boyfriend, who my dad did not like. Umm he didn't treat my aunt very well. My aunt's boyfriend just wasn't a very good guy in spite of him only being 18-year-old dating a 14-year-old was no Bueno. So after the prom, my dad and one of his buddies went and found the guy, and basically made him think that he was going to get his ass beat and scared the living day lights out of him so that he would stop seeing my aunt.

She found out from her dad that when family is being mistreated, you need to stand up for them even when they won't stand up for themselves because that's what family is for and that is what they do, they protect one another.

Subtheme 2: Affection. One of the most common stories was about how family will always be there for you and treat your family with love. The first story deals with a little different side of love. Participant 11 found out that her parents were always there for her, but her parents never really showed that outwardly affection for one another. According to Participant 11, "Growing up my parents always told me that there wasn't very much affection, so when I would go over to my friend's house, I would see how their parents would treat them, hug them, hold them, kiss them, and we never really had that and once I remember asking my mom do you love me?"

Participant 11 wasn't sure if her parents loved her when she was younger, but once she went over

to her friends whom were of a different race, she realized they were being treated differently. Love takes many forms and as she went home and asked “do you love me?” her mom told her “Of course!” Participant 11 went on to talk about how now her parents are able to show a little bit more of that outwardly affection for each other. She explained that when her mother was younger, her parents didn’t give that outwardly affection that other families may show. Affection does take many different forms, but just because someone doesn’t show it, doesn’t mean a person or couple doesn’t feel affection.

Participant 7 actually interviewed her grandma a while back and realized that even though you may be going through a rough time, someone will always be there for you. According to Participant 7,

When my mom was seven her biological father passed away and my grandma was left with five kids and my mom is the oldest. So my grandma was worried of having to take care of five kids on her own and try to find someone who would help her. So she met my grandpa and he was able to help her get through the tough time of raising five kids.

She realized that when life gets tough, that someone will always care for you and that person who cares for you will do anything to help you out.

Participant 6 spoke about how his grandma moved around the world with his grandpa and that shows how love plays a major in family life,

What she has taught us is to follow your heart because when she met my grandfather, she didn’t know her life was going to take her with him to Germany or different places all over the world and

eventually back here, and she didn't know what she was getting herself into, and she stuck with it because she loved my grandfather and they had three awesome kids together.

Here his grandma told him that as long as you do what you love, you should never regret what you do for the rest of your life.

Even when family is rude or cruel to you, never give up on your family and always love them. Love doesn't always take the nicest form, but when a member of the family isn't the best, there are still other members in the family to show love,

My mother's father was always an alcoholic, and he was battling with that addiction, and all my life I didn't know he had a drinking problem, and I remember once that my mom opened up to me about what it was like growing up with him. So growing up with him, she told me stories about how she kind of had to be the adult in the family because he was never around, and so I remember she used to tell me the story about Easter that she would actually stay up with her mother and do all of the Easter baskets and that she was the Easter bunny for her siblings while she wasn't even the oldest, she was the middle one, she's the one who's always trying to make things better, and she remembers every Easter she would put the Easter baskets together and hide them for her siblings.

Participant 2 found out that life isn't always the nicest to you, but as long as you have family, they will always love you and that they will go to great length to make sure you have a happy life. She

was told by her mother that her life was difficult, but because she had her mom and that she wanted to make her sisters happy, all would be well because she loved them. Affection is symbolic and meaningful word, but what if somebody wants autonomy and needs to find out who they are and what they need to be in this life?

The next narrative consists of Participant 2's grandfather who had a drinking issue and how Participant 2's mother handled the situation. According to Participant 2,

One time, she distinctly remembers that he would, he got upset about something, but he picked her up by her ankle and dropped her on her head. That was pretty intense to see that kind of action from the grandpa that I knew and like, it's my mother, like my grandpa stopped drinking once we were around, and you never would have known he was drinking. She didn't allow that abuse to affect her relationship with him in front of us, and she was still there for him and for everything, and I find that pretty honorable to be able to give that person that second chance, and I think that has a lot to do with my mother's faith in God, and I just know I'm not as forgiving as her.

Participant 2's mother was being mistreated when she was younger because her father had a drinking issue. In the narrative, her father dropped his daughter on her head, but yet, the daughter still continued to be with the family and show affection

Theme 2: Independence

Independence is a necessity for most individuals as time away from others and not having to rely on anyone is sometimes an important factor. In these family narratives, independence

stood out as a theme. Independence for these narratives stood out follows: you don't need a man in your life, being able to make the right decisions for yourself, establish yourself before making a family, and be whatever you want to be when you grow up. All of these narratives dealt with independence because the narratives all lead the participants to being independent.

According to Participant 4, "My dad would always look down on women who were divorced and what he would say about women and how the kitchen is where the woman is supposed to be except for his daughters. His daughters didn't need a man." Her father grew up in the era where women were seen as homemakers, but as he gained children, he didn't want that for his daughters. She learned that she doesn't have to be a homemaker and can be independent by not needing a man or a homemaker. In this society today, women are still being stigmatized, but there is less of the stigma of women having to be in the kitchen and clean the house. Parents are pushing their daughters to be more independent and to not follow the stereotypes of the homemaker mentality.

Deciding what you want in this life is sometimes difficult. Participant 9 knew that when it came to dating, her grandfather wanted her to be with the right man before having a child because it was important. According to Participant 9,

I have a foreign grandfather, and he is a very strict Muslim man and he is very set in his ways. He was always strict when I was growing up, and I was born out of wedlock because my parents were not together so he would always stress how important it is to be married before you have a baby or try to find the right guy before you have anything serious with him. So far he is telling me that I am doing it the right way too because I don't have a child

and I am getting married. So he is very proud of me for that, but I always remember him for that. When I was younger, he would drive me home to my mom's because I was at my dad's for the weekend and he would always tell me how you need a dependable guy who will take care of you and you don't pick the guy, the guy picks you, and it doesn't really matter if you like the guy or not because if the guy likes you that's what really matters because he will take care of you for the rest of your life.

Participant 9's grandfather grew up in a region where men married women even if the women didn't love them. If he was dependable, that was what made you marriage material. He passed this down to her so that she would marry a man who was dependable and would take care of her. As participant 9 grew up, she wasn't sure if she could date because she was always told that the first man she dates is going to be her husband. She wasn't sure about this because this made her feel that she had to marry her first boyfriend. As time passed, she realized that she needed to find the man she loved instead of marrying a man she may not have loved. She was independent because she followed her own path and decided when she should get married.

In this society, women are basically assumed to play a stereotypical role of care taker, nurse, or teacher. Participant 11 found out when she was young that she didn't have to stick to a stereotype. According to Participant 11,

My mom really wanted to be an artist. She is a phenomenal artist. She still paints and stuff, but her dad and her parents said that is not a way to make money, especially for a female. They said she just needs to do something to help her get married and that was

kind of how she was brought up. So growing up, my mom always said that I could be whatever I wanted to be, and she said that always no matter what, whether I was 5 or 17, she said you can be whatever you want to be, and she wasn't going to limit me because of my culture or my race, and I know that especially for my race because of the Asian community a lot of them go on to be lawyers, doctors, work in a big 10 company, but she never really pushed us. She told me that you won't make very much money, but if this is something that you want to do, do it because she always wanted me to find my own path because the one thing that she regretted the most was not being able to do what she wanted to do, and she spent all of this money on a degree that she can no longer use.

Participant 11's mother grew up being told that she had to live a certain way because of who she was, both gender and race. The mother didn't want that for her daughter because she wanted her to be herself and do whatever she wanted. Being a woman and Asian can be difficult, especially in today's society. Normally, she would have been pushed to be a doctor, lawyer, or something along those lines, but her mom taught her to be whatever she wanted to be. The world couldn't tell her to do something that wouldn't make her happy, but she went with something that did make her happy and that is what makes her so independent.

Theme 3: World Is Cruel

The world is cruel is a theme that entails narratives about how the world works, but the individual who tells the story speaks about how you don't have to act that way because you are

your own person and you make your own path. When the world is cruel, a person can feel as if everyone and everything is out to get you, but as stated previously, you make your own path. The first narrative that falls under this theme is a narrative that was already previously stated, but still falls under the theme of the world is cruel. According to Participant 1, when her father went to the prom, her father stood up for his sister because she was being mistreated. When her father disclosed this narrative to his daughter, Participant 1 realized that she doesn't have to be mistreated in this world and that if you have to choose between being mistreated or standing up for yourself, standing up for yourself is the better option. The same can go for when someone else is being mistreated. She learned that she needs to show others the same lesson.

The next narrative consists of Participant 2's grandfather who had a drinking issue. Her mother was being mistreated when she was younger because her father had a drinking issue. Also, Participant 2's mother didn't allow for her father to act that way, especially in front of the children. She stood up for herself, but also gave her father another chance to be in their life, even after the world was cruel to her.

Participant 12's narrative dealt mainly with race. He realized that even though the world is filled with racists, it is important to look past that and realize that not everyone acts that way. According to Participant 12,

My parents talked about was that they were born and raised in a small town in Oklahoma, and there was a racial issue there. They were in a conservative state, and they were like, "heyyy you should not be here," and predominantly, it was African Americans, Caucasians, and Native Americans, but it was just the fact that knowing that they grew up knowing how they were treated and

then that actually pushed them to move from Oklahoma to Detroit, and then all of the siblings came up here afterwards. Came to realize that my Dad was actually from Oklahoma, as well and he has given me basically identical stories with the racism that he had to deal with when he was in school growing up and in high school he was the only African American male on the basketball team, and the school and his team fought for his rights against other teams because there were racial slurs, and I have always been more accepting of anyone who is different.

Participant 12 found out that his family was from Oklahoma, and in the past, the state was very conservative and didn't treat everyone equally. His family eventually moved up to Detroit where it was more diverse as compared to Oklahoma. Participant 12 realized that, yes, people will be cruel because he is African American, but he doesn't have to be upset about that. He can show other people of different races that he accepts them for who they are and that doesn't define who they are as people. Participant 12 learned to accept people in this cruel world.

Conclusion

What makes a narrative memorable? To determine what made a narrative memorable, finding that key characteristic was important. That key characteristic would determine and possibly link other narratives together on how and why a narrative was memorable to the 13 participants.

First, simply knowing that family was there, no matter what, was one of the reasons as to why a narrative was memorable. Some participants were so close to their families and that

knowing they had a family who would be there for them in hardship meant the world to the participants.

Other participants found that their narrative was memorable because the world is cruel to them, and they know they don't have to live that way. Sadly, our society treats people who look different and come from different areas of the world poorly. Luckily, the participant's parents who told the narratives to them helped their children realize that even though you look different, it doesn't mean you have to live in shame or beat yourself up.

Another reason as to why the narratives were memorable was because of who told the narrative. Moms, dads, and grandparents were the majority of family members who told the narratives to the participants, and most of the participants during their interviews spoke about how they looked up to the individual who told the story or how the individual(s) were best friends with their parents and that they felt like their parents couldn't steer them wrong. It's not always what is said to someone or how a narrative is said to someone, but rather, it could also be who tells a narrative that makes it memorable.

The sense of independence was another reason as to why narratives were so memorable. Some individuals need to have autonomy from family and friends. Through their narratives, the family members were trying to tell and give examples as to why the participant should be independent. Independence is important because then you don't have to rely on anyone and you can live your life however you want to. This truly appealed to some of the participants.

Affection took place in a variety of the narratives, and this was a strong variable. Not only did the family show affection, but friends show affection as well. When it came to the

telling of the narratives, some families had to give stories of affection towards other family members and told the participant what it was like for them growing up.

These were the prime examples of what makes a narrative memorable. Memorable narratives are important, as they help to shape someone's life for the future. Memorable narratives also help to guide or decisions on how we treat others and how we view the world.

Limitations/Future Research

There are several things that could be done differently for future research. Let's start with limitations. First, only 13 participants were gathered for this study and this majorly hindered the ability to gain more data and more efficient data.

Secondly, the population was very narrow and wasn't diverse. In order to gain sufficient data, a diverse population may be needed in order to have more results and a wider variety in order to avoid bias.

Thirdly, when coding the data, if other individuals helped with the coding process, more themes and data may have been discovered. The author may have been able to catch something that he might not have seen originally.

Next, let's look over what future researchers should do in order to further this research. First, there could have been a better qualitative way to gather data. Interviewing, transcribing, and coding was all done solely by the author. The transcriptions took a decent amount of time, but if there is another way that could be used to gather more data (surveys, etc.) for this sort of research, go for it.

When future researchers plan to advance this research, the researcher needs to obtain more participants. Obtaining a greater population would significantly advance the research with themes and understanding why narratives are memorable.

Also, the participants should be recruited from a wider population. Gathering participants from EMU and through social media snowballing effects was helpful in obtaining participants, but if there is a better way of obtaining more participants in a more efficient way, then that method should be used. For example, the researcher could put out fliers around campus, go into specific classes, or send emails to professors to obtain more participants.

Lastly, there is so much research that an individual can do with narratives. Someone can focus of narratives based on gender or even race. The possibilities are endless with this topic and what one person can explore with this topic.

This research significantly helps and broadens the importance of family communication. Due to the study of family communication being so new to the world, not everything has been explained yet. This research is important because it helps others understand why it is important to tell narratives and how a positive and/or negative narratives can impact an individual and the choices they make.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A:
Human Subjects Approval Letter

UHSRC Determination: EXEMPT

DATE: November 1, 2016

TO: Brandon Larkins
Department of CMT
Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: #976162-1
Category: Exempt category 2
Approval Date: November 1, 2016

Title: Memorable Family Narratives

Your research project, entitled **Memorable Family Narratives**, has been determined **Exempt** in accordance with federal regulation 45 CFR 46.102. UHSRC policy states that you, as the Principal Investigator, are responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of your research subjects and conducting your research as described in your protocol.

Renewals: Exempt protocols do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please submit the **Human Subjects Study Completion Form** (access through IRBNet on the UHSRC website).

Modifications: You may make minor changes (e.g., study staff changes, sample size changes, contact information changes, etc.) without submitting for review. However, if you plan to make changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a **Human Subjects Approval Request**

Form and obtain approval prior to implementation. The form is available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects **or** change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an **Event Report** form, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website

Follow-up: If your Exempt project is not completed and closed after **three years**, the UHSRC office will contact you regarding the status of the project.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Alissa Huth-Bocks, Ph.D.
Chair
CAS Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix B:**Interview Questions**

1. Can you share a memorable family story?
 - Where were you when the story was told to you?
 - Who told the story?
 - Who usually tells stories?
 - Why did he/she tell the story?
 - Was it told by multiple people?
 - What impact did the story have on your communication with others?
 - Would you most likely share this with your children or other family members in the future?
 - How did this impact you?
 - Any other stories that you remember?

Appendix C:**Demographic Survey Questions**

Instructions: Please select the answer that best applies to you.

1. I am _____ - years old.

2. I am (check one): ___ female ___ male

3. I am (check all that apply): ___ African-American ___ Asian ___ Caucasian ___ Hispanic
___ Native American ___ Other