Parent-Adolescent Storytelling in Canadian-Arabic Immigrant Families (Part 1): A Grounded Theory

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Abstract

Interviews with 20 mothers, fathers, adolescent sons and daughters from Arabic immigrant families elicited descriptions of participants' experiences of storytelling in their families. Constructivist grounded theory analysis of interview data provided an initial conceptualization of intergenerational storytelling during adolescence that both reflects and serves to influence parent-adolescent relationships as well as the broader cultural domain through story content, storytellers' intentions, and responsive interaction. This preliminary substantive theory presents storytelling in immigrant families during adolescence as relationally grounded, influenced and expressed through a cultural/language "prism," responsive and active in moving relationships toward or away from connection, and dependent on story content/context as well as the storyteller's delivery and listener's response. These findings have implications for extending theoretical conceptualization of family interactions during adolescence beyond conflict, monitoring, and peer influences. In addition, practical implications for supporting and understanding the day-to-day interactions that support parent-adolescent relationships and cultural minority families are highlighted

Keywords

Parent-Adolescent Relationships, Immigrant Families, Grounded Theory, Dialogic Theory, Social Constructionism, Storytelling

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Acknowledgements

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Interviews with 20 mothers, fathers, adolescent sons and daughters from Arabic immigrant families elicited descriptions of participants' experiences of storytelling in their families. Constructivist grounded theory analysis of interview data provided an initial conceptualization of intergenerational storytelling during adolescence that both reflects and serves to influence parent-adolescent relationships as well as the broader cultural domain through story content, storytellers' intentions, and responsive interaction. This preliminary substantive theory presents storytelling in immigrant families during adolescence as relationally grounded, influenced and expressed through a cultural/language "prism," responsive and active in moving relationships toward or away from connection, and dependent on story content/context as well as the storyteller's delivery and listener's response. These findings have implications for extending theoretical conceptualization of family interactions during adolescence beyond conflict, monitoring, and peer influences. In addition, practical implications for supporting and understanding the day-to-day interactions that support parent-adolescent relationships and cultural minority families are highlighted. Keywords: Parent-Adolescent Relationships, Immigrant Families, Grounded Theory, Dialogic Theory, Social Constructionism, Storytelling

This paper is the first of two papers describing a study that examined parents' and adolescents' experience of telling stories to each other in the context of day-to-day family life utilizing two complementary analytic perspectives. The study serves as a window on meaning-making and relationship processes, an illumination of the day-to-day verbal interactions that comprise family life, with specific attention to family life experience of immigrant parents and adolescents (Arabic families who have migrated to Canada during adolescent's lifetime). We interviewed parents and adolescents about the stories they tell each other. Using Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM), we analysed transcripts of these interviews, contributing to the generation of substantive theory about intergenerational storytelling in families during adolescence. We used Narrative Analysis (NA) to further analyse parts of the adolescent interviews that incorporated a re-telling of typical stories previously shared with parents. NA provides evidence of the narratives and voices that are incorporated into the stories these adolescents tell their parents, with potential links to broader cultural narratives. In the current paper, we describe the GTM research focus, method, and analytic results in light of their contribution to substantive theory about intergenerational storytelling in families. We discuss the NA method and analytic results in a separate paper (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014).

We take, as a starting point, a social constructionist view that meaning is negotiated, understood, and constructed in interaction. This is a sensitizing concept in the tradition of GTM, directing our gaze to interactions and the meaning that parents and adolescents make

of their interactions with each other, but not imposing a priori assumptions in the area of inductive theory generation. Social constructionist views of meaning-making also premise that broader social discourses such as those associated with a family culture or dominant surrounding cultural context influence meaning-making (Ammerman, 2003; Few, 2009; Gergen, 1994; Hammack, 2008). We are, therefore, oriented to examining parent-adolescent relationships as potential sites of jointly constructed meaning about self, other, and broader questions of life that may be associated with adolescence, parenting, values and beliefs.

As investigators of family life during adolescence, we are interested in considering the mundane everyday practices that constitute much of parent-adolescent interaction and everyday talk between family members during this time period. Thus, a further sensitizing concept we considered in designing this study was Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's (2008) suggestion of *small stories* as a valuable lens from which to view the stories shared in the context of daily family life. Georgakopoulou (2006) describes small stories as telling "mostly about very recent ('this morning,' 'last night') events" (p. 126), shared past events, and anticipated future events in a dynamic manner that participants consider to be storytelling. We are interested in what parents and adolescents talk about in the course of their day-to-day lives, as well as how and in what contexts these topics are discussed.

Interviewing members of Arabic immigrant family members who currently reside in a predominately non-Arabic social context provided us with an opportunity to examine family storytelling in a group of families who share some cultural homogeneity (while also representing diverse countries of origin and non-shared cultural background), as well as the potential influences of broader dominant cultural discourses. The substantive theory generated through GTM analysis in this study, grounded as it is in the described experience of Canadian-Arabic immigrant families, is primarily reflective of this specific cultural group while suggesting areas for future exploration of family processes and interactions which may operate across cultures and context.

Intended for family researchers and social scientists utilizing qualitative methods, this study contributes to understanding family relationships, specifically adolescent-parent relationships, communication, interactions and meaning-making, with particular attention to the experiences of migrant families whose family life occurs against the backdrop of dominant cultural discourses and norms that may differ significantly from their culture of origin and/or family values.

Literature Review

We review here current research in the areas of storytelling, family migration, and parent-adolescent relationships. Our intention is to illuminate some of the gaps in this literature, as well as sensitizing concepts, that contributed to our research question.

Storytelling in families

Stories comprise much of family interaction (Fivush, Bohnek, Robertson, & Duke, 2004) and "are not merely ways of telling others about ourselves, but of constructing our identities, of finding purpose and meaning in our lives" (Berger & Quinney, 2004, p. 6). Storytelling as a medium of socialization is exhibited in parental stories of the past, encouragement for children to tell stories about themselves, content of family stories reflective of what the family values (Pratt & Fiese, 2004). Meaning-making is associated with both listening to stories (Arnold, Pratt, & Hicks, 2004) and storytelling (Koenig Kellas, 2005; Langellier & Peterson, 2004; Stone, 2004), which is linked to adolescent identity

development (McLean, 2005; McLean & Thorne, 2006; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009), adults' sense of self (McAdams, 1996), and family identity (Koenig Kellas, 2005).

There is general acknowledgement that across cultures and to varying degrees parents and caregivers use storytelling in a variety of ways to socialize children, teach preferred values or morals, and to pass along family and cultural legacies (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Manoogian, Walker, & Richards, 2007; Mathews, 1992; Wang, 2008). Most attention has been directed at storytelling between caregivers (usually mothers) and young children (e.g., Fivush & Nelson, 2004; Harkins & Ray, 2004). We understand less about the actual process and content of storytelling in families during adolescence. Utilizing a narrative approach to listening for parental voice in adolescent stories, Arnold et al. (2004) examined how adolescents construct personal beliefs and values in response to parental storytelling influence. Fivush and her colleagues have begun to examine storytelling and reminiscing in families of pre-adolescents, finding that mothers and fathers approach this differently and that the ways in which families tell stories about past events has an influence on children's wellbeing (Bohanek, Fivush, Zaman, Lepore, Merchant, & Duke, 2009; Fivush, Bohanek & Zaman, 2011). Collective remembering in families (Reese & Fivush, 2008), involving co-constructing narratives of personal and familial experiences beginning in early childhood and developing throughout adolescence, plays an important role in developing understanding of one's sense of self embedded in a larger familial and cultural context (Fivush et al., 2004) and contributes to the formation of family and individual identities (Thompson et al., 2009). The cultural context in which reminiscing and story-telling take place influences "memory conversations" in families, specifically, the functions of remembering and recounting past events and differences in socialization goals for these activities (Wang, 2004, 2008). Wang has demonstrated that these influences are both culture-specific and take into account the broader cultural milieu (see also, Hammack, 2008).

While we know about the importance of these processes in families and for family members, we know less about how they unfold during adolescence and for migrating families.

Family Migration

The process of acculturation (understood here as adaptation to the family culture or surrounding culture within which the family is embedded) can be understood as subject to on-going negotiation and reproduction of meaning in daily interactions between persons (Tardif-Williams & Fisher, 2009). A *dialogic* perspective (Bakhtin, 1986) suggests that this meaning making is emergent and subject to dialectical pushes and pulls arising in the relationship between dialogue partners and related to the broader cultural system. Tardif-Williams and Fisher (2009) argue that, in this way, acculturation is "unfinalizable" and relationally-constituted. Migration contributes an added layer to the diversity of family and cultural group experience - "moving cultures where here and there, past and present, country-of-origin and hostland, self and other are constantly being negotiated with each other" (Bhatia & Ram, 2001, p. 15). A dialogic, multi-voiced understanding of self and culture directs attention to the nature of their intersection, with particular attention to points of contact such as those associated with global migration (Hermans, 2001). Identity construction can be strongly influenced when migration means a move from being part of a religious majority to one that is in minority (Duderija, 2007) with associated changes to practices and beliefs that may have been "taken for granted" in the country-of-origin (Ammerman, 2003). These cultural changes can influence family patterns of interaction and assumptions as well. Of course, dialectical tensions, or the pushes and pulls within relationships and interactions (see Baxter, 2004;

2011) are not unique to acculturation and may be particularly evident in parent-adolescent dialogues as well (Ashbourne, 2009).

Parent-adolescent communication

Parents and adolescents are actively engaged in relationally-constituted negotiations every day associated with parental monitoring/knowledge and information sharing, and time spent apart and together (Ashbourne & Daly, 2010, 2012; Crouter, Head, McHale, & Tucker, 2004). These conversations frequently involve the management of the dialectical struggle between autonomy and connectedness (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Penington, 2004, Youniss & Smollar, 1985) or conflict and closeness (Laursen & Collins, 2004), and reflect differing communication strategies (Beaumont & Wagner, 2004). Parent-adolescent researchers often view parents as intentionally engaging in monitoring or questioning adolescents (Smetana, 2008), and adolescents as making choices about whether and what to disclose to their parents (Mazur & Ebesu Hubbard, 2004; Rawlins & Holl, 1988; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006; Smetana, Villalobos, Tasopoulos-Chan, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2009). Rather than focusing on how and when adolescents share information, the primary orientation of this research has been toward adolescent non-disclosure, with some consistency across cultures demonstrated in how and why adolescents choose to share information with their parents (Hunter, Barber, Olsen, McNeely, & Bose, 2011). Attention to how and when parents share information has been limited to examining separated/divorced families (Afifi & McManus, 2010; Luedemann, Ehrenberg, & Hunter, 2006), with parental disclosure described as having potentially negative or positive influences on adolescent well-being and parent-adolescent relationship quality, depending on how and what information is shared.

Research question

The research study we conducted here extends two areas of family research – family storytelling and parent-adolescent communication. While various types of stories and storytelling in families have been examined (life narratives and jointly created stories primarily), this research has frequently been directed at understanding meaning-making practices, broader themes, and the processes of jointly constructing stories related to family identity and legacies. What has been less extensively examined, particularly during adolescence, are the daily mundane practices of spontaneous storytelling shared between parents and children. In this research project, we explicitly invited subjective descriptions of the experience of storytelling by both adolescent parents in the context of daily life. Secondly, the consideration of information-sharing and personal disclosure in families during adolescence has been primarily directed as adolescent disclosure with little consideration of parental disclosure. In addition, the predominant focus has been on adolescent information sharing in the context of parental monitoring and adolescent safety or delinquency. In this study, we were interested in the specific type of adolescent disclosure alongside other type of stories that are spontaneously shared in everyday family life by both parents and teens.

The families interviewed for this research project were members of a religious and ethnic minority in their current home, having moved from countries where their ethnic and religious social location was more firmly as part of the majority. Such a move means changes in taken-for-granted practices and values that may be particularly challenging for parents and adolescents during this coming-of-age stage of family life (see Ammerman, 2003; Duderija, 2007). The experience of these families was examined in order to contribute to the diversity of published family research beyond the lived experience of white middle-class majority families in North America and Europe which has predominated this literature. In addition,

because of the uniquely-situated perspective and challenges associated with a move from majority to minority social location, we were interested in eliciting these family members' perspectives on their experience of family life at the intersection of these broader cultural discourses.

There is a range of forms that stories told in families can take as described earlier (life narratives, jointly created stories, small stories). For this study, we were interested in allowing participants themselves to determine their own meaning of what constituted a 'story' and 'storytelling' in the context of everyday family life. We were primarily interested in inviting the types of stories that are told as part of everyday family life, potentially inviting participants to reflect more on the telling of small stories than broad narratives, but we did not provide our own definitions of the types of stories they might describe.

These families who were recruited for this study are members of a fairly large but minority status group, in a midsized Canadian city, which is made up of families of diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds who have migrated to North America from the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe. This is not a homogeneous group and the selection of this immigrant community was taken with an appreciation of the complexities of locally constituted identity and the simultaneous occupation of multiple social locations in which nationality, culture and language have influence (Blume & De Reus, 2009; Falicov, 1995; Ngo, 2008). While this group represents diversity in individual adherence to Muslim religious practices, there are also shared aspects of culture and immigration experience across individuals given the large or predominately Muslim population in these countries of origin.

The research questions for this study included: What are immigrant Arabic-Canadian parents' and adolescents' experiences of telling stories to each other? What do these experiences suggest about storytelling between parents and adolescents more generally? What do these experiences suggest about broader cultural influences on parent-adolescent interaction?

We, the two authors, are both engaged in working with and supporting a wide range of families, parents, and adolescents as they negotiate family life. As a family therapist (LMA) and psychologist (MB), we are interested in how meaning is constructed in families and the day-to-day communication and relationship practices of parents and adolescents specifically. We are both parents of adolescents and young adults, and have previously worked together in a community agency with parents and adolescents in immigrant and non-immigrant populations. MB immigrated to Canada with his family from the Middle-East. LMA is Caucasian and her family immigrated to Canada between 2 and more generations ago. We both recognise the ways in which spiritual/cultural practices and the migration experience influence our own and others' families. MB is currently the executive director of an agency engaged in establishing social support networks for the diverse London Ontario Muslim community in dealing with issues of integration, family conflict, domestic violence, and children in conflict with the law. As such, he is engaged in working toward building the capacity needed to overcome challenges that Muslim families may face at different stages in their lives. He has observed that a key element of coping with these challenges is family communication and relational practices during adolescence. LMA is currently a faculty member in a couple and family therapy graduate training program in Guelph Ontario. In training new therapists to attend to the intricacies of culture, ethnicity, migration, adolescence, and interpersonal practices in families, she holds that an enhanced understanding of the micro-processes of communication and meaning-making between parents and adolescents can make a positive contribution to interventions and therapeutic conversations designed to build on existing strengths and address relationship challenges. We were engaged directly in the design and implementation of this research project, mentoring interviewers and graduate student research assistants in GTM interview and analysis

procedures. The two interviewers, immigrant women who have been associated with the work of the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in London, Canada, and two research assistants from the University of Guelph, contributed their own knowledge and life experience as well as careful attention and enthusiasm as researchers to the overall team. Our reflexive practices included written memos, face-to-face conversations, and team discussions throughout the course of research design, recruitment, mentoring, interviewing, transcription, and analysis.

Method

We designed this study to allow for initial theory-generation in the area of parent-adolescent storytelling and to examine more closely the nature of the stories told between parents and adolescents. To this end, we utilized both grounded theory methodology (GTM) and narrative analysis (NA), seeing these are complementary in meeting these two objectives. We intended the data collection (interviews) to provide thick, rich descriptions of storytelling in families during adolescence, utilizing GTM concepts of theoretical sensitivity and theoretical saturation to guide initial and subsequent interview questions. In addition, we asked a final question of all interviewees, which invited each participant to tell a story as if to their parent or teen, and we analysed this part of the interview data using NA. We see the preliminary grounded theory as both contributing to our NA by setting a conceptual framework for storytelling, and being enriched by the finer detail related to the actual stories told. We describe in this paper the GTM data collection, analysis, and analytic results.

Interviewers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews in 2011 with 20 family members (5 mothers, 5 fathers, 5 male and 5 female adolescents) incorporating open-ended questions about storytelling in their families during adolescence. They followed the initial question "Describe the stories you tell to your mother/father/son/daughter – when, how, with what purpose do you tell these stories?" with questions designed to elicit more detail or specific examples of what participants described. Following institutional research ethics approval from the University of Guelph, recruitment took place through word of mouth and posters placed in community centres, etc., by staff at the Muslim Resource Centre for Support and Integration in London, Ontario, Canada. Interviewers conducted the interviews in English, although most participants spoke Arabic as their first language. The two interviewers were fluent in Arabic and English, and provided occasional translation or restating of questions and responses during the interview to add clarity for participants and aid in preparation of transcripts. The first author provided an initial training session and ongoing consultation and mentoring to the two interviewers to ensure consistency in approach and to enhance opportunities to elicit rich descriptions and follow up on interesting new information to enhance the transcript 'data' collected for analysis. Audio-recordings of interviews were transcribed verbatim by one of the graduate research assistants and we used a team approach to analyse resultant transcripts following a constructivist orientation to GTM (Charmaz, 2006). During GTM analysis, we utilized in vivo open coding of participants' descriptions of their storytelling experiences (Charmaz, 2006) with close attention to incorporating new leads (theoretical sampling, see Strauss & Corbin, 1998) into subsequent interviews (e.g., questions regarding the use of Arabic v. English language in storytelling at home were added after first two interviews based on participants' responses) and attainment of theoretical saturation. Two coders completed the initial line-by-line coding for the first eight to ten interviews independently: the first author, a non-immigrant Caucasian female parent of young adults, and a graduate student, young adult male Iraqi immigrant. We conducted open and focused coding (Charmaz, 2002) which incorporated an iterative inductive process of constant comparison within and across transcripts to identify emergent themes. In order to attend to

reflexivity and awareness of researcher a priori assumptions and understanding of participants' talk, coders engaged in individual memoing, and review and discussion in a team context (including a second graduate student, non-immigrant young adult female Caucasian). The second coder completed coding of the remaining interviews and maintained consistency with practices established and discussed during coding of first ten interviews. Once coding was complete, we shared the categories and relationships along with supporting quotes with the second author, a male Arabic immigrant parent of adolescents, who reviewed the conceptualization and contextualization of quotes for coherence and cultural congruence. The nature of this study was exploratory, intended to initiate the generation of substantive theory about storytelling in families during adolescence. While participants included males and females, parents and teens in equal number, no attempt was made at this exploratory stage to draw distinctions based on sex/gender or generation. We were primarily interested in understanding the experiences and meanings that appear to cross gender and generational lines for family members during adolescence, while acknowledging the value of future examination of how these differ based on family position and gender.

Participants

The participants in this study migrated to Canada in the past 2-21 years (adolescents: mean = 9.5 years ago, range 2-17 years; parents: mean = 13.7 years ago, range 8-21 years) from the following countries:

- Egypt (4);
- Libya (3);
- Saudi Arabia (3);
- Yemen (2);
- Sudan (2);
- Lebanon (2);
- Jordan (2);
- Syria (1); and
- United Arab Emirates (1).

All adolescents (mean age = 17.4 years, range 15-20 years) were full time students (Grade 10 to 3rd year university) and lived at home. One adolescent reported part-time employment at the time of participation and all others were not employed. Parents reported full time employment (3 fathers, 1 mother), part-time (2 mothers), and no employment (2 mothers, 1 father retired); with one father not reporting his current employment status. All parents (mean age = 50.3 years, range 34-66 years) were married and living with their children (mean number of household members reported by parents and teens = 4.8).

In the following results section, we describe, with transcript excerpts[1] for support, the four emergent categories supported by the GTM analysis. These categories include the stories that are told (what, where, and when); the storytellers' intentions and skills; the responsive nature of storytelling; and cultural and language influences on intergenerational storytelling. In the last subsection of the results, we present an emerging preliminary theory of how these categories are related to each other.

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[1]A style note - we use ellipses (...) in quotes from transcripts in the results section to indicate where sections have been removed for brevity and clarity. The material removed typically included a series of fumbles such as "um" or "like" and we used these ellipses carefully to ensure clarity for the reader and that original statements were not misrepresented or obscured.

Where we describe parent or adolescent experiences and voices explicitly, this is done to provide the reader with a sense of how categories incorporate their different perspectives. We have provided excerpts demonstrating a category from the perspectives of mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters where possible, even though this contributes to some lengthy quotation sections. Note, however, that a more in-depth analysis of the generational differences is beyond the scope of the current study.

Results

The stories: What, where and when they are told

This category included evidence of the following influences on content and context of storytelling: the storyteller's self-awareness and knowledge about listeners; relational influences based on past and current interactions; space and time aspects of family life; and gender/generation/cultural differences.

Adolescents and parents described the content of their stories as primarily comprised of their own experiences. For adolescents, this included school-related stories (events that take place there and academic performance), day-to-day experiences, and social dilemmas. They described these stories as selective in that they generally reflect positively on the adolescent storyteller and relate to current life experiences. They also described telling more negative stories (for example, about bad grades or damaging the car) as a preventative measure in order to ensure that parents heard about these events from the adolescent rather than from others. Parents described stories about recollected times when the parent was of a similar age to the adolescent listener. They indicated that these stories provided examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (e.g., direct examples of good and bad choices, identification of parental sacrifice for the good of their children, evidence of understanding based on shared experience). Family members described telling stories of what the storyteller had heard, seen, or read. These stories of others demonstrated good and bad choices (presented by adolescents as support for claims of their own good behaviour, by parents as comparators for current adolescent behaviour) and included shared interests (e.g., current events, sports). Adolescents in particular identified their own selectivity in refraining from telling stories about others that might be considered gossip or private information. Participants talked about their attempts to keep the content of the stories they tell fairly positive – adolescents telling entertaining stories and stories of success; parents keeping some distance from the negative events of their past. Storytellers indicated that they did tell stories of a more "tragic" nature sometimes, acknowledging the importance of parental knowledge about tragedy affecting adolescents and/or their friends, and preventative warnings contained in parental stories. Story content was reflective of sons' and daughters' age, with parents referencing the age-appropriateness of certain stories they will share or have shared, and adolescents describing increased privacy with age. The types of topics that were described as important to share with each other included social and religious dilemmas experienced in relation to current cultural minority status, parental stories about traditional practices "back home", religious stories about right and wrong, and stories of migration intended to provide a better life for children.

Participants described telling stories in contexts reflective of their daily lives and knowledge about each other. Storytelling took place in kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, and yards; in cars and coffee shops; with other family members present in the busiest times of day and one-to-one late at night. Storytelling was described as both planned and spontaneous. Adolescents talked about their own knowledge of when a parent is mostly likely to be relaxed and receptive, when space will be quiet and fewer family members around. Distinctions were

made between the storytelling that takes place in livelier shared family time during dinner or in front of the TV, and one-on-one time where conversation initiated by storytelling can include more serious content, proceed into longer discussions that follow tangents and cover more private or personal information. This suggested close attention in choosing when/where to talk about what, and that content and context are closely linked from the perspective of the storyteller – taking advantage of a certain context to tell a certain type of story, or planning to utilize a certain context because of the nature of the content that one is wishing to share. There was evidence that both parents and adolescents waited for the right opportunity to arise – suggesting experience over time with what works and what doesn't:

> If we're comfortable around each other you know, and there's no like, it's not intense or like we have no tension and stuff, and it's like comfortable, it's like a nice day and my mom isn't mad, or no one is mad, then that's when like I feel comfortable to actually saying a story, I can open up. [Daughter 010]

Unplanned spontaneous storytelling was described, usually about day to day events: in a more relaxed manner - "it's gonna come out where it's gonna come out" [Son 007]; or with excitement - "basically because I'd have like so much things that happened like… then when I'm like ready to come home and just tell my mom and just say it all out at one time" [Daughter 001]. Even this, however, appeared to be based on experience of what works and some opportunism regarding best times:

> If I want really advise my children… eleven o'clock or twelve o'clock, it doesn't really work, but… feed them really for good when they are really relaxed, and I can tell them like that, when I see something in the TV, something happened, I said "oh, you remind me about so and so", I tell them a story different about that occasion… so that story, the one in mind. [Father 013]

Further underlining the importance of what, when and where stories are told in families, participants in this study identified that obstacles to storytelling included scarcity of time in busy family households; lack of responsiveness or receptiveness on the part of other family members – "you're just not in the mood to get frustrated" [Daughter 005]; and generational, cultural or gender divides – "I can't say things that… aren't acceptable in the religion or culture or I know like my mom wouldn't accept it" [Daughter 010], and the following:

> (Interviewer: do you share with him [son] about your life when you were a student, as a teenager, or as a young student who went to university, do you tell him stories about this?) Yeah because, yes, it's not, not much because you know there is uhh a gap between our, our life as is, as you know, as a teenager, especially in uhh… (I: difference in generation?) Yeah generation and also, you know, I didn't umm I didn't grow up like him here in Canada, I grew up in another country. [Father 011]

The content and context of stories told by adolescents and parents reflected various relational influences that shaped storytelling. These included:

(i)   knowledge about each other based on past relationship and interactions;

(ii)   attention in the present to the listener's presence and receptiveness; and

(iii)   utilization, based on experience and knowledge of family and individual family members' time, of opportunities that spontaneously arise.

Storyteller's Intentions and Skills

This broader category contains the intentional nature of storytelling based not only on selection of content and context, but also on developed skill and the nature of how stories are told. In addition, this category includes storytelling as a vehicle for enhancing the relationship between storyteller and listener, influencing the listener in terms of eliciting desired responses and providing direction, and improving one's own well-being.

Storytellers' intentions for enhancing their relationships were described in similar fashion by parents and adolescents. Both described a sense that simply communicating with each other would improve their relationship and enhance a positive bond. They stated that sharing happy or positive stories could make the other happy, and that storytelling could contribute to trust-building and initiate enjoyable conversation. In addition, as described above, adolescents felt that it was better for their relationship with their parents for parents to hear stories of negative events directly from them rather than from others. Parents and adolescents shared a belief that parents should and could provide valuable advice to adolescents. This was evident in the ways that adolescents described storytelling with intent to seek parental advice, and in the ways that parents talked about storytelling in order to impart advice. In addition to advice, adolescents identified that they told stories in order to elicit other forms of parental response: listening, confirmation, understanding, pride, comfort, and caring. Parents and teens described using storytelling to elicit different perspectives and enhance understanding of each other. In an area only identified by adolescents, storytelling was seen as an opportunity to 'vent' – simply telling a story could have beneficial effects for these adolescents. "I just like, to makes me feel better, 'cause sometimes like I really need to get something out… it comforts me that someone else knows what I've been through" [Daughter 004]. "Sometimes I don't get to see him [father] and so, I have to, I kind of have to bottle a lot of things up… if I don't let it go, it can honestly be very dangerous… it's not helpful if you keep it in here" [Son 002]. Some parents identified the benefits to them of hearing a good question from their teen in response to their stories, and of learning along with their son or daughter in remembering one's own stories:

> When I talk to my son, I feel like I'm… talking to myself, so it's… two ways, umm, teaching him and a relief for me and especially when he comes up with question that I, I never thought about it, [laughs], so I feel… happy you know, that "oh look my son is growing and he's asking and he's thinking and he's connecting the dots or the ideas". [Mother 014]

While they described varying levels of success in storytelling, both parents and adolescents pointed to storytelling skills as valued. These skills were learned from someone close to them, as a cultural or family practice, or were seen as a "natural" skill not requiring learning. Both dominant culture, including media, and traditional cultures associated with the family's country of origin were identified (the former exclusively by adolescents, the latter by both) as influencing these skills. Storytellers indicated that they judged their own success at storytelling by signs of understanding and appreciation expressed by listeners. These signs of success included questions or answers relevant to the story and indicators of the listener's enjoyment. Adolescents also described utilizing their skill at telling stories in order to shape

parental response "like if I'm talking to my mom, I'd tell her from…a point of view that she'd like to hear kinda, so kinda like juice it up for her a little bit, just so like I don't want her jumping in my face you know, (laughs) like it's like, kinda like calm it down a little bit, yeah." [Daughter 005]

Specific aspects of how stories are told were identified by adolescents and parents as being integral to their storytelling. Incorporating detail, and leaving it out, was described particularly by adolescents as reflecting both their personal style as well as the listener's response. Parents and adolescents said that details added to their storytelling by providing better examples and description, underlining the importance of the story, and improving communication – "They love the details, you know so they, they ask for them" [Mother 015]. At the same time, parents talked about leaving out details of more painful stories, and adolescents stated that including or leaving out details could influence how many questions parents ask in response, the length of time taken to tell the story, and the listener's understanding. Adolescents in particular described the value of sometimes getting directly to the point of the story (particularly when goal is primarily information-sharing). This was also associated with a more "Canadian" way of storytelling. Other times, they would build up to a story more gradually (e.g., if informing a parent about negative events).

> I'm a big fan of being descriptive and analogies, because sometimes I feel like people aren't getting what I'm saying right away, I feel like... it's not reaching them the way I want it to reach, and some things obviously if you say and just shut up, it tends to be misunderstood and taken, you know, it just, it's just taken way out of proportion you know, so I like to be descriptive, I like to, to say things in related to things…examples, similes, metaphors, analogies and so forth. [Son 002]

Other aspects of storytelling style included storytelling as part of a back-and-forth interactional conversation that involves questioning and redirection, joking in the context of storytelling in order to heighten entertainment (primarily adolescents), and retelling stories.

Storyteller and Listener – Responsive Storytelling

This category incorporates the influence of the listener on storytelling, in particular storytellers' descriptions of their awareness of the listener's response and how this influences their storytelling. Adolescent storytellers described their awareness of a parent's mood, distress, judgment, need for time to think, and impatience. Parents similarly identified awareness of their son's or daughter's boredom, attentiveness, or enjoyment in response to storytelling. Parents and teens talked about how this awareness in the moment, together with knowledge about the listener and his/her anticipated response and the nature of their relationship shaped both the content of stories and how they told them.

Storytellers stated that they adjust how they tell stories based on the listener's personality, age, or gender, as well as the nature of their relationship – telling a story quickly and to the point, avoiding or adding jokes, telling a story gradually to ensure understanding. For example, "My mom wants more direct, so I would just tell her like straight to the point," [Son 006], and the following:

> Like sometimes you gotta tell your dad what happened right, like let's say if you hit the car, you can't just not tell your dad and be like somehow he comes home you know "what is this?" you know, so you gotta obviously tell him in a certain way right, you obviously gotta bring it gradually, you can't just like

throw it at him, cause especially like parents, they, in my opinion, they think of the worst possible outcome, so if you say, you go up to your parents and you say I crashed the car, they're gonna think like you, you t-boned the car, it's not moving anymore, stuff like that, so you gotta come out in a certain way, you gotta be like, okay so I was backing up and this is based on a true story, so I was backing up and uhh, I was just turning and then my corner, the corner of the car hit their corner and it's only this thing, it's only nothing happened I swear, I already talked to my friend, he said he's gonna fix it for this much, and this and that, so you, if it's, if it, depending on the emotion of the story, you uhh you how do you say, spice up or fix up the dialogue or dialect, whatever you can say for that, just so it would sound easy to take. [Son 007]

It's very important to...have...a dialogue between a parent and a teenager...you can deliver him or her what you want to...and in the same times you can understand how's your son or daughter thinking...it's a friendly dialogue without...looking like you are lecturing him. [Father 011]

Every human being is different and we have to know our kids, what they're interesting for... how they will listen and what really attach them to the story...I will choose different situation to tell... him and the way he will respond to what I am saying it will be totally different, so I have to be careful, I have four kids and everyone I tell him different way and different stories, depend on their personality. [Mother 017]

… because I'm comfortable with her [mom], but I always maybe change it around because I have to talk in a mannered way with my mom, maybe if I'm telling my friends, or my sister and brother, I wouldn't talk as mature in a way, I would talk more teenager slang. [Daughter 003]

Storytellers described adapting content of stories to accommodate the listener. Parents adjusted content based on children's age (whether teen is old enough to understand, anticipating risks or situations they could be facing at current age). Adolescents considered shared interests and areas of parental expertise when seeking advice, as well as anticipated responses. They attempted to predict when parents were ready to listen and engaged in storytelling at those times (parent less preoccupied with other family members, more relaxed) or delaying storytelling. These teens avoided talking about certain topics with a parent who was typically more reactive, excitable, or protective. For example, girls would not talk about boys with a parent who was more likely to "get mad," but would talk about this with a parent who would simply listen and give advice:

Well I would have to like try to sneak in some Arabic words, which would be very difficult and I would, it, like depending on the story, like I can't tell my dad "oh like today, I went out like for lunch or like something, and there was guys, there so like, we talked and like-", I can't say a story that involves guys in it, it'll be weird, like it doesn't matter if it's like school stuff, you know a project, but other than that I can't bring it up, but if it's my mom, I can, I can bring it up to her, like she won't get that mad, but my dad would just give me a lecture on guys for hours and hours. [Daughter 005]

In addition to this awareness and anticipation of listener's responses, both parents and adolescents described their experience of storytelling itself. They identified enjoyable aspects of storytelling such as having one-on-one, uninterrupted time in the face of busy family schedules, and that the storyteller's enjoyment was determined by topic area and the listener's enjoyment. If the topic area is serious or difficult, or when the listener is not enjoying the storytelling, then the experience is, not surprisingly, considered not enjoyable. The experience of storytelling was also described as sometimes quite dramatic or emotional.

> If he doesn't, if he's like "what?", then it's kinda like umm, yeah sure, but if, if he, if he finds that it's a funny story or if it's an enjoyable story to listen to, then I enjoy telling it to him.[Son 006]

> I'd just say - it would be like kinda, at times it's like joyful, 'cause some things like we do discuss - but other times, it could be like dramatic, we'll just say. [Interviewer: Dramatic stories?] Yeah like, it can, I don't know, I feel like when we talk it could go from just talking about one thing, then it gets into something deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper, and then we could fight about it after (laughter). [Daughter 005]

> If the, the story is sad, for sure it's gonna be sad you know. If it's, it's funny, I'm gonna be funny, I'm like umm like uhh, depends about the action, and it depends about the story and what's you know, what you say to them, yeah, like this. [Mother 015]

> I can't say enjoy, because at least uhh behind all of this dialogue is a worries, so how can I enjoy it while I'm telling it? I'm usually only telling story and I'm something worry about, not, it's, it's, it won't be enjoyable, even sometime it's heavy, it's burden on my shoulder to talk about this. [Father 020]

The responsive and experiential nature of storytelling was described as variable, emotional, sometimes predictable and sometimes dramatic. These descriptions touch on the nature of relationships and personality, the changing influences of age and situation, the shifting nature of enjoyable and difficult topics together with concerns about safety and preparedness. This points to a complex and contingent storytelling experience that is reflective of and responsive to the relationship between parent and adolescent.

Culture and Language at the Generational Fault-line

Cultural and language influences were evident across the three categories described above, in all aspects of intergenerational storytelling – content and context of stories; intentions and skill of storytellers; and responsive storytelling. Daily experiences of 'culture clash' were evident in adolescents' stories about their experiences of running up against religious or cultural taboos in school or public spaces. Adolescents used these stories to solicit parental advice and inform parents of these aspects of their lives - "what I'm struggling with, sometimes just, these social problems… if I'm having a hard time trying to like umm balance my religious views and my social status somewhat," [Son 002]. Parents provided culturally-based lessons in their stories with a view to protecting or warning their children. At the same time, they encouraged their children to adopt the positive aspects of their new home, "to do everything necessary for Canada and for living in here" [Father

013],and incorporated their rationale of improved life for their children into their storytelling about migration: "Yeah I actually [tell] this story really to remind them just only to, to work really very hard because we came here for good, and we came here just for them, so I want just let them know their duty."[Father 013]

Storytellers indicated that they withheld parts of stories based on assumptions about what the listener would understand – sometimes based on non-shared experience of "here" or "there", and sometimes based on the challenges associated with adequately capturing these experiences in words. Cultural values also were referenced as creating some obstacles to storytelling. One daughter described the most difficult stories to tell her mother as "school stories":

> It's like a different environment at school… and I'm like surrounded by… non-Muslims… and like sometimes a guy would come hug me, and I'm like "okay", you know, and then like I won't be able to tell my mom that, cause she'd get mad, she'd be like "you, you shouldn't' let a guy hug you" and stuff, so I would have to kind of hide that from her and stuff yeah, like it depends cause it's different environments like at home and then at school. (Interviewer: Okay…why do you think that sometimes you choose not to tell these stories?) Because she'll get mad, and then she would probably start thinking in the future "oh like she can't, you know, like she's not strong enough to do that, or she can't like stand up to her faith or to her religion" and stuff. [Daughter 010]

Language was identified as an important constituent of content and context for storytelling in these Arabic immigrant families, as well as reflecting storytellers' skills, intentions, and responsiveness to listeners. Stories were told in both Arabic and English between parents and adolescents. Sometimes these decisions were based on fluency and comprehension, for example, "mostly English though, 'cause my Arabic is very bad, it's horrible," [Daughter 010], and:

> My mom, she speaks perfectly fine English, but my dad on the other hand, he doesn't, that is one of the reasons I don't really talk to him about anything, because he misinterprets what I'm saying, so I usually tell my mom if I want my dad to know, my mom will translate it in Arabic to him. [Daughter 003]

Storytellers indicated that the language in which stories are told has implications for meaning and tone. For example, one daughter described her mother's response to the daughter's use of Arabic in storytelling as "she'll feel like she's talking to someone older too, not just 'oh I'm talking to my child', you know."[Daughter 005] Other family members talked about meaning and tone related to language use as well:

> If I were to say it in Arabic, it would kind of like, I'd mess up and like stuff, my mom would kind of get the wrong message and everything, and I wouldn't be able, like I'd use wrong words to kind of get the message through and it wouldn't work out… I can be more descriptive and like tell more information in English, while in Arabic just tell like the main information, that's about it, just be like "oh like I went there and I met this person", like I can't go into details. [Daughter 010]

> Sometime when I get serious… I prefer it's in English…formal… because it, it remind me as a professor in school, they talk in intellectuals… I always try to be in this position. [Father 020]

The choice of which language to use in storytelling was dependent on several key factors: the language in which the events of the story took place, the language spoken and understood best by the storyteller and the listener, and the intentions of the storyteller (e.g., maintaining acquired language or practicing/encouraging new language skills).

> Umm…depends, like sometimes the story wouldn't make sense in Arabic, but it does in English, and vice versa, so if it, if the occasion comes up where I can say it in English, then I'll just say it in English. But like, if you use it, a little translation from English to Arabic, then it kinda wouldn't make sense. Like for example if my English teacher made a joke and I would want to tell my dad that joke... it might not make sense in Arabic, so I would just say it in English. [Son 006]

> Uhh, when we came here, mainly in Arabic because uhh, at that time her English was you know not, she was six years and a half, and uhh mainly she speaks Arabic and uhh for me again my English was very limited and then after that I start to switch to English, to practice my English and to enhance [daughter's name]'s English, but with [son's name] it's different story, I do this with him right now in Arabic, because I want, he born and raised here, so I wanna enhance his Arabic as much as I can. [Mother 016]

Some parents indicated that it was difficult to tell stories related to their own past, events that occurred in an Arabic context, in another language because the concepts and meaning were less accurately captured in English, and others described storytelling in Arabic in order to maintain and encourage adolescents' cultural practices.

Figure 1: Conceptualizing Intergenerational Storytelling during Adolescence in Immigrant Families

A preliminary theory of parent-adolescent storytelling in Canadian-Arabic immigrant families

The grounded theory analysis described herein contributes to an initial conceptualization of family storytelling during adolescence. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of preliminary substantive theory, presenting storytelling as relationally grounded, influenced and expressed through a cultural/language prism, responsive and active

in moving relationships toward or away from connection, and dependent on story content/context as well as storyteller's delivery and listener's response.

Discussion

These analytic findings suggest that parent-adolescent relationships are *reflected in* the stories that are told in families, how these stories are told, and the interaction/responsiveness between storytellers and listeners. In addition, there is evidence that storytelling itself – the stories, intentions, and responses, as well as the opportunities provided by storytelling engagement – in turn *influences* parent-adolescent relationships. This initial theory of intergenerational storytelling demonstrates the emergent meaning-making between speaker and listener – that *what* is said and the meaning associated with that is responsive to the presence of the listener, the various pushes and pulls present in that interaction, and the history of storytelling and meaning-making leading up to this present storytelling event. This fits with a dialogic conceptualization of relationships and communication interactions (Ashbourne, 2009; Baxter, 2004, 2011) suggesting that meaning is emergent in the dialogic gap between speaker and listener – that *what* is said and the meaning associated with that is responsive to the presence of the listener, the dialogic tensions (centrifugal and centripetal forces) present in that interaction, and the chain of utterances leading up to this present utterance. What these findings demonstrate is that this responsive *speech chain* (Bakhtin, 1986) includes the relationship history of the parent and adolescent, and that the influences on how stories are told and the meaning-making of both storyteller and listener include the micro processes of their relational and family interactions as well as space/time dimensions of family life and broader social/cultural/systemic influences.

This conceptualization also provides a way to consider parental or adolescent intentions such as monitoring or disclosure, which have been more closely examined in previous research, and other intentions which have been less evident in parent-adolescent research. The concept of intentions does not fit so well with a purely dialogic theory of responsive utterances. Here we are describing what we heard from both parents and adolescents that their experience of how they entered into dialogue with each other was, at times, quite intentional as well as responsive. The intentions were described as interacting with storytelling skills. These participants appeared to assess the *successful* delivery of a message or eliciting of a response as being dependent on other factors such as timing, history of relationship, context and content of message or story, and responsiveness in the moment of interaction. This model also invited consideration of the complexities and nuance of parent-adolescent relationships beyond the more limited exploration to date, for example: the role of family, relational, cultural history; broader cultural considerations; humour and engagement; family time and space. The current analysis demonstrates the complex pushes and pulls of this relational context for telling stories, selecting content and delivery with knowledge of the listener, and broader social influences on how and what is told. Examination of the interrelationships between these various dimensions of parent-adolescent relationships extends research in the areas of family storytelling and identity (McLean, 2005; Pratt & Fiese, 2004); the tensions of autonomy and connection (Grotevant & Cooper) as well as potential peer influences; adolescent and parental disclosure as demonstrated in interaction and mutual influences (extending the work of Afifi & McManus, 2010; Smetana et al., 2009). Gergen (1994) has called for more direct attention to the specific processes of relationships and relational units. The initial theory generated in this study provides starting point for extending both research and clinical interventions to accommodate these areas.

We see some clinical implications in these findings for family therapists who are working with immigrant families during adolescence, as well as practical implications for parents and adolescents who are looking to improve their communication with each other. First and foremost, supporting families to make room for storytelling in their daily interactions if they are not already doing so provides opportunities for connection and relational interaction that more problem-focused communication may not allow. The family members participating in this study pointed to the importance of considering the best time and place for storytelling, or talking and listening. Adolescents described waiting up until late at night to talk to fathers who were absent or preoccupied at other times of day. In addition, they pointed to the importance of paying close attention to cues that the listener is bored or does not understand what the storyteller is attempting to say. These storytellers based their delivery on knowledge of whether the listener prefers brevity or lots of detail. With respect to language, these family members described the value of attending to the challenges of translation – perhaps suggesting that it is helpful to consider what content or messages will work and which need to be avoided or approached in an alternative fashion. While therapists often see families in part because they are struggling with communication and/or relational connection, the focus in family therapy sessions or in parent-adolescent interaction may be primarily problem-oriented. These participants' reflections on how they engage in storytelling in their daily family lives recommend the value of telling stories that are entertaining and enjoyable. They also underline the importance of saving more serious content for times when both the storyteller and the listener are relaxed, there are few distractions, and the history of the relationship allows for sharing more difficult experiences. Family members who are in a listening position can be encouraged to ask about personal experiences, focus on not being reactive, asking about less problematic daily events in the storyteller's life and allowing for alternative perspectives which are frequently valued according to these findings. Considering the potential misunderstandings that may attend generational and cultural differences, both listeners and storytellers should closely attend to asking for clarification, noting the challenges and limitations of language and translation, and understanding the context in which the events of family members' lives take place.

Future research directions include a closer examination of the interactional nature of small stories in family life during adolescence, including potential influences of this type of storytelling in ordinary daily contexts on parent-adolescent relationships and individual understanding of identity for both parents and adolescents. It may also be useful to analyse transcripts of family therapy sessions in which parents and adolescents engage in storytelling, again with attention to both larger life narratives and small stories, with a view to understanding the nature of these interactions and their contribution to therapy process, enhanced relational functioning, and meaning-making.

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