Article

You Hear Stories About What They Did and It Makes You Go "Wow": Adolescents Narrate and Interpret Caregiver Stories About a Difficult Time

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Abstract

This study examined how adolescents recall and interpret caregivers' personal stories about a difficult time. Respondents were 49 ethnically diverse adolescents (M = 15.76 years; 63% girls; 53% from immigrant families). Analyses examined story features (topic, narrator, elaboration, and meaning) and variations due to gender, age, and immigrant background. Four overarching topic categories were identified: *family hardship* (39.5%), *caregiver's personal problems* (25.6%), *family interactions and dynamics* (20.9%), and *interpersonal situations outside family* (14%). Youth extracted a variety of personal lessons from caregiver stories, with meanings differing across some topic categories (e.g., stories about *family hardship* typically emphasized that youth should persevere/work hard). Story features differed based on characteristics of storyteller and listener, particularly gender and immigrant background. For example, adolescents (particularly girls) were most likely to narrate a story heard from their mother, and more boys than girls

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retold stories emphasizing perseverance and hard work. Adolescents from immigrant families told stories that were more elaborated than those told by nonimmigrant youth, and stories told by caregivers reflected unique life experiences and goals. Findings contribute to the literature on family storytelling and have implications for future research and practice with diverse populations.

Stories of personal experience represent a significant genre of storytelling that is found across cultures (Miller & Fung, 2012; Pratt & Fiese, 2004). When told by elders to children, personal stories can convey powerful and often long-remembered messages (Miller & Moore, 1989), and thus, story-telling represents an important medium of socialization (Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997). Caregiver stories about a difficult time represent an important type of personal narrative that provides insight into family beliefs and meaning systems (Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2006). This type of story appears to be relatively common. In a study that elicited caregiver stories from a sample of predominantly European American, middle-class adolescents, one third of the stories were about negative events (e.g., "mishaps, accidents, and illnesses"; Zaman & Fivush, 2011, p. 709). Other works suggest that parents from historically excluded or socially marginalized groups tell stories about past difficulties as a way of preparing children for potential life challenges (e.g., overcoming barriers, dealing with discrimination) and motivating them to pursue life goals (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Bylund, 2003; Harris & González, 2015). Thus, stories told by caregivers offer insights into their beliefs and goals for children.

Despite acknowledging that family stories are told within a particular sociocultural context, scholars have not conducted systematic evaluations of how features of caregiver stories told to adolescents vary due to sociocultural characteristics like race/ethnicity or immigrant background (Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015; Pratt & Fiese, 2004). Given demographic changes in the U.S. population, attention to the experiences of ethnically diverse and immigrant adolescents is warranted. In 2014, 48% of children below the age of 18 were categorized by the U.S. Census as racial or ethnic minorities (Colby & Ortman, 2015), and one quarter were living in immigrant families (Child Trends, 2014); both groups will increase in coming

decades (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Because of their unique life experiences and social positions, ethnically diverse and immigrant families must be included in studies in order to generate a full understanding of child development and family socialization practices. An important step in understanding storytelling as a family activity is to document its features (Fiese, Hooker, Kotary, Schwagler, & Rimmer, 1995). Accordingly, the current study was aimed at exploring caregivers' personal stories about a difficult time as retold by a diverse sample of adolescents.

Conceptual Frameworks for Studying Caregiver Stories During Adolescence

Our work was informed by two main conceptual frameworks (family narrative and socialization theory). The family narrative framework views storytelling as a multidimensional and multifunctional discursive practice (Fiese & Pratt, 2004). In this framework, storytelling can be understood as a specific form of social interaction that caregivers use during the socialization process (Haden & Hoffman, 2013; Miller et al., 1997). Socialization is broadly defined as the process through which children become competent members of their social group. Parents are considered primary agents of socialization, with social interactions within the family representing core socialization processes (Grusec & Davidov, 2007)—including verbal interactions like storytelling (Fiese & Bickham, 2004).

Within the narrative approach, scholars have emphasized story features such as topic, structure, and meaning (for review, see Haden & Hoffman, 2013; Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015; Pratt & Fiese, 2004). The thematic content of stories is thought to reflect caregivers' socialization goals. Through stories, caregivers transmit values, provide models of desired behavior, and teach life lessons (Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015; Miller & Moore, 1989). Storytelling also allows caregivers to connect to children by discussing common experiences (Thorne, McLean, & Dasbach, 2004). Typically examined structural features are narrator (who told the story) and elaboration (level of detail or complexity). From a socialization perspective, the meaning individuals take from a story is as important as its content or structure (Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015). Children are not passive recipients of caregivers' intended messages but rather active meaning makers. This may be particularly true for adolescents, who can use their emerging cognitive, social, and emotional capacities to interpret stories told by adult caregivers. When listening to stories, adolescents are able to empathize with the protagonists' experiences, evaluate the characters' actions,

reflect on how events may be relevant to themselves, and extract lessons they can apply as they pursue developmental tasks (Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2010; Pratt, Norris, Hebblethwaite, & Arnold, 2008; Zaman & Fivush, 2011).

In keeping with current conceptualizations of socialization as a culturally situated and reciprocal process (Keller, 2015), story features would be expected to vary according to characteristics of both storyteller and listener. Prior research has not examined caregiver stories about a difficult time, but variations attributable to gender of both adolescents and parents have been reported in general storytelling research. In one study, adolescents' stories about mothers were more elaborate, containing a higher level of descriptive information and detail, than stories about fathers (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). This may reflect greater closeness with mothers or greater attention paid to stories told by mothers. Girls' stories about their fathers also had more achievement themes than boys' stories, which might reflect gendered socialization practices (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Other studies suggest that story features may differ by the child's age. For example, immigrant parents stated that stories including negative events or warnings were more likely to be told as children got older (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014), and adolescents' retelling of caregiver stories became more complex with age (McKeough & Malcolm, 2010).

Finally, consistent with both family narrative (Fiese & Pratt, 2004; Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015) and socialization (e.g., Grusec & Davidov, 2007) perspectives, stories told by caregivers are expected to reflect the family's sociocultural background.

Cultural Variations in Family Storytelling

Families are situated within a particular sociocultural context that is likely to influence the content, function, and meaning of storytelling. We draw on conceptualizations of culture as a set of principles guiding how members of a group live their lives and socialize the next generation (Guerra & Jagers, 1998). Culture is manifested in values, beliefs, and practices that are shared (to a greater or lesser extent) by members of groups defined by multiple intersecting categories, including ethnicity, race, and immigrant background (Jensen, 2015). Cross-cultural variations in storytelling are richly documented in the work of Miller and colleagues, who have examined parental stories about young children in the United States and Taiwan (see Miller, Fung, Lin, Chen, & Boldt, 2012). Parents in these two cultural contexts use stories to achieve different socialization goals; for example, Taiwanese parents tell stories to instruct and motivate their children, whereas U.S. parents tell stories to enhance their children's well-being. This work highlights the

salience of storytelling as a cultural practice and underscores the value of examining sociocultural variations in storytelling.

An emerging U.S.-based literature illustrates how caregivers' stories reflect their sociocultural background. In terms of structure, Delgado-Gaitan (1993) observed that Latino families often use stories, proverbs, and cultural sayings as a way of conveying messages to their children. Focusing on story content, Zaman and Fivush (2011) noted that working-class mothers narrate more negative personal experiences to their young children than middle-class mothers, perhaps as a way of preparing them to deal with difficulties in their own lives. Similarly, ethnic minority parents may use storytelling to socialize their children's ethnic identity, and prepare them to confront challenges such as racism and discrimination (for review, see Harris & González, 2015). In a case study of three families from different ethnic backgrounds, there was considerable overlap in the functions stories served, but differences emerged that were tentatively attributed to ethnicity or immigrant history (Bylund, 2003). The European American family told stories that were "celebratory" (e.g., about amusing incidents or positive moments), whereas stories told by the African American and Latino families often served the purpose of "working through problems" (e.g., dealing with racism, overcoming hardships related to immigration).

Few studies have focused specifically on stories told to adolescents in culturally diverse families. One study of Mexican American college students described parental stories about adversities associated with poverty and immigration being told to motivate children's academic achievement (Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006). Drawing on an in-depth investigation of storytelling in 20 Arabic immigrant families, Ashbourne and Baobaid (2014) developed a grounded theory incorporating characteristics of stories, storytellers, and listeners. Consistent with family narrative and socialization perspectives, parents described telling stories to provide children with models for how to behave, transmit messages about parental sacrifice on children's behalf, and foster trust and mutual understanding. Cultural issues were also evident in parents' stories (e.g., stories about traditional practices, experiences of "culture clash" after migration, use of Arabic in storytelling).

In summary, scholars have begun to generate a descriptive picture of storytelling in ethnically diverse and immigrant families. The extant literature demonstrates the salience of family storytelling as a culturally situated socialization practice, but caregiver stories have not been systematically examined. Moreover, studies of cultural variations in storytelling have not examined the same story features as studies with general populations, limiting understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, little is known about how adolescents make meaning of caregivers' personal stories about a difficult time. Scholars have

noted that adolescence represents a fruitful time to examine how young people recall and interpret stories told by adult caregivers given their developing cognitive, social, and emotional capacities (Fivush et al., 2010; Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Adolescents growing up in immigrant and culturally diverse families face unique developmental tasks as they negotiate life between the worlds of home and the larger society, and thus, including them in storytelling research may offer important insights.

Current Study

The main goal of the current study was to describe features of caregiver stories about a difficult time in a diverse adolescent sample, and uncover potential variations due to individual and family characteristics. Theory and prior research were used to guide our approach; given the exploratory nature of the study, our inquiry was framed around two research questions:

> **Research Question 1:** What are the features of caregiver stories about a difficult time retold by adolescents?

We examined four features of caregiver stories: narrator (who told the story), elaboration (level of detail in the story), topic (what the story was about), and meaning (messages adolescents took from the story).

> **Research Question 2:** Do features of caregiver stories about a difficult time vary according to narrator or listener characteristics?

We examined potential variations in the four story features due to gender, age, and cultural background.

Method

Overview of Study Design and Procedures

Caregiver stories were collected from adolescents participating in a larger study of positive youth development conducted in 13 out-of-school and after-school programs focused on arts, leadership, or science and technology. Consistent with the larger study's goals, programs served primarily low-income and middle-income youth living in urban, suburban, and rural communities in two Midwestern states. Seven programs served primarily Latino/a adolescents; the others served primarily European American and African American youth. Following institutional review board–approved procedures,

a member of the research team presented information about the study to program participants, and gave them a parent information letter describing the study and providing instructions for opting youth out of the study. After providing assent, youth completed structured questionnaires at four time points; a subsample also participated in qualitative interviews. Participants received modest incentives for completing each study component.

The current analysis examines data collected from 49 youth in the qualitative subsample during their fourth (final) interview. Previous interviews focused primarily on program-related experiences (e.g., interactions with leaders and peers, youth work on projects, parental engagement in program activities) and how they related to the development of various skills (e.g., responsibility, teamwork, emotion regulation). Questions on caregiver stories were part of a set of questions on cultural and family issues designed to allow team members to explore topics of interest that were not part of the main study. These questions were only administered at the fourth interview. Interviewers were graduate students, staff, and faculty members from a range of disciplinary (mostly social sciences) and ethnic backgrounds; all attended group trainings.

Sample

The 49 adolescents in the analytic sample were 13 to 18 years old ($M = 15.76$ years, $SD = 1.22$ years) and ethnically diverse (42.9% Latino, 26.5% African American, 24.5% non-Hispanic White, 6.1% Other). More than half ($n = 26$; 53.1%) were in immigrant families; of these, 15 had been born in the United States to one or two foreign-born parents, and 11 had been born outside the United States. Ethnicity and immigrant family status were strongly associated: All Latino youth were from immigrant families, compared with five of the 28 non-Latino youth. The analytic sample included more girls ($n = 31$; 63%) than boys ($n = 18$; 37%). Approximately equal numbers of girls and boys were initially recruited into the interview sample (32 and 30, respectively); however, more boys stopped participating in the programs during the course of the study and thus did not complete the fourth interview. The majority of youth (62%) lived with two parents, 34% lived with one parent (mostly mothers), and the rest lived with a guardian or other parent figure.

Interview Protocols

The corpus of data consisted of interview segments pertaining to caregiver stories. Youth were asked who played a parental role in their life, and their label was used in questions about caregivers. Youth were asked, "Have your

(parent[s]) ever told you a story about a difficult time they went through (like when they were younger)? What was the story?" They were also asked if the story influenced their behavior in the context of the program and, if so, in what way. Interviewers were trained to probe and follow up to obtain a detailed response. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and checked by the original interviewer.

Coding and Analysis

Analyses followed an inductive approach to identify emergent patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and utilized a consensus approach to make judgments about the meaning of the data (Hill et al., 2005). During the first stage of analysis, open coding was used to identify meaningful concepts within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding was also informed by the literature on family stories, which identified salient analytic categories that served as sensitizing concepts (e.g., story topic). In keeping with the constant comparative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), coding was an iterative process, with authors reviewing interview segments individually, writing analytic memos and coding notes, meeting to discuss emerging analytic categories, and returning to the data. Through this process, four dimensions were identified that captured the phenomenon of interest (narrator, elaboration, topic, and meaning), and written coding schemes were developed for each. Six youth were excluded after the first stage of analysis; five could not recall a caregiver story about a difficult time, and one recalled a story but declined to share it. Excluded youth were evenly divided by gender, age, and immigrant background; four were non-Hispanic White.

The second stage of analysis involved the 43 adolescents who shared a caregiver's story. During this stage, we conducted focused coding using the written coding schemes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Codes for topic, elaboration, and meaning were applied independently by two authors. Interrater reliabilities indicated "substantial" agreement between coders (Landis & Koch, 1977); kappas were .81 (topic), .79 (elaboration), and .69 (meaning). Discrepancies were resolved by discussion and (if necessary) consultation with other team members. This process ensured that different perspectives were considered throughout the interpretive process (Hill et al., 2005). Coding for narrator did not involve making inferences, so one author coded all the transcripts (consulting another team member if questions arose). Following this process, each story was coded for the following four dimensions.

Narrator. The storyteller was assigned to one of five mutually exclusive categories (mother, father, both parents, grandfather, grandmother). The last two categories were combined for some analyses given low frequencies.

Table 1. Story Topics: Overarching Categories and Subcodes (*N* = 43).

	n	%
Family hardship	17	39.5
Unable to attend school (e.g., due to poverty)	4	9.3
Migration-related struggle	3	7.0
Started working to help household	3	7.0
Difficulty earning living	3	7.0
Other (living on remote farm, doing chores)	4	9.3
Caregiver's personal problems	11	25.6
Unplanned/early pregnancy	5	11.6
Education-related difficulties	3	7.0
Other (drug involvement, jail, running away)	3	7.0
Family of origin interactions and dynamics	9	20.9
Interpersonal situations outside family	6	14.0

Elaboration. Complexity and depth of recall was scored holistically using a coding scheme adapted from Zaman and Fivush (2011). Codes indexed level of detail (e.g., recounting of specific incidents, use of quoted speech) and narrative complexity (e.g., connections between ideas, reference to character's motivations). Each story was coded as 1 (*low elaboration—no narrative, only one event mentioned with minimal details*), 2 (*medium elaboration—one or more events described and expanded to some extent*), or 3 (*high elaboration—one or more events described in detail, actors quoted, motivations and feelings described*).

Topic. Each story was assigned a code reflecting its explicit focus or content—what it was about. Thirteen mutually exclusive topic codes emerged from the analysis (see Table 1); these were grouped into four overarching categories: *family hardship*, *caregiver's personal problems*, *family of origin interactions and dynamics*, and *interpersonal situations outside the family*.

Meaning. Each story was coded for what the adolescent took from the story, in terms of its influence or underlying message. Many youth spontaneously described drawing personal lessons from stories; others, when asked if the story affected their behavior, described how the story influenced them. Five meanings were identified: *persevere/work hard*, *do the right thing*, *appreciate your life*, *be independent*, and *treat others well*. The code *no meaning or influence* was used when youth stated that the story had no influence or they drew no personal meaning from it.

Codes were entered into an SPSS database that included demographic characteristics of respondents (age, gender, ethnicity, and family immigration background). For each dimension, two sets of analyses were conducted. First, descriptive analyses examined story features (e.g., distribution of responses within each dimension), and illustrative examples were identified. One author listened to the audiotapes, and took notes on intonation, pauses, and other linguistic features; these were used to characterize the extracts presented in this article but were not coded or formally analyzed. In presenting interview excerpts, most verbal fillers (e.g., um, like, you know) were removed for smoother reading. Aside from this, every effort was made to conserve participants' voices. Ellipses (. . .) indicate that text was removed (for brevity or clarity), and square brackets enclose additions (e.g., translations, explanations). Dashes (—) indicate pauses of longer than 2 seconds; words or phrases spoken with emphasis (e.g., louder or slower speech) are underlined. To maintain confidentiality, youth were given pseudonyms.

The second set of analyses involved evaluating variations in story features due to demographic characteristics. Because three of the demographic variables were categorical (gender, ethnicity, immigrant background), for consistency, age was dichotomized into two groups corresponding to middle adolescence (13- to 15-year-olds; 42.9%) and late adolescence (16- to 18-year-olds; 57.1%). In preliminary analyses, ethnicity and immigrant background were examined separately; however, given the strong association between these variables and the lack of significant differences by ethnic group, we only report results of analyses examining variations due to immigrant background.

The authors discussed the results and interpretation of findings on an ongoing basis. As a check on the integrity of the analytic and interpretive process, a draft of the article was circulated to members of the larger research team who were not involved in the analyses and are not authors of this article for feedback and discussion.

Results

Results are organized around the four dimensions of narrator, elaboration, topic, and meaning. Within each section, we first describe overall patterns and provide illustrative examples, and then report differences due to youth characteristics and story features.

Narrator: Who Told the Story?

More than half of the adolescents narrated a story told by mothers ($n = 22$, 51.2%), followed by fathers ($n = 8$, 18.6%) and both parents ($n = 8$, 18.6%).

Five youth (11.6%) retold a story heard from a grandfather ($n = 4$) or grand-mother ($n = 1$). Chi-square analyses revealed no differences due to age or immigrant background. The distribution of narrator by gender was margin-ally significant, $X^2(3, N = 43) = 6.80, p = .079$. Tests for the difference between proportions indicated that more girls than boys narrated a story told by their mother (64.3% vs. 26.7%).

Elaboration: How Detailed Is the Story?

In terms of elaboration, 19 stories (44.2%) were coded as low, 16 (37.2%) as medium, and eight (18.6%) as high. Following Zaman and Fivush (2011), elaboration was treated as a continuous measure in tests of group differences. Mean levels of elaboration were higher among adolescents from immigrant families ($M = 2.0, SD = 0.83$) compared with those from nonimmigrant fami-lies ($M = 1.42, SD = 0.51$), $t(41) = 2.66, p = .011$. Elaboration did not differ by age group or gender, and additional analyses showed no differences by narrator or story topic.

Topic: What Is the Story About?

Overall patterns. Caregiver stories told by adolescents were classified into 13 mutually exclusive topic codes that were grouped into four overarching cat-egories (Table 1). The first two overarching categories had subthemes, whereas the last two did not. We describe each category and provide an example from each in this section. Additional examples are provided in the next section, where we analyze the meanings adolescents took from stories.

Seventeen adolescents (39.5%) recalled a story about *family hardship*. These stories described adversity in the storyteller's family of origin. Specific topics included poverty resulting in interrupted schooling, struggles associ-ated with migration, early initiation of work to assist the family, or other hardships (e.g., living in a remote location, doing chores on the family farm). For example, one young man described his parents' stories about challenges they confronted after migrating from an African country to the United States, choosing his words carefully and reflecting thoughtfully on their intention in telling these stories:

> Frankie: They have told me a lot of different stories . . . [about] their experiences when they first came here, to the States. Like different attitudes towards them, being African Americans, like there are obviously different expectations, different stereotypes and different things that they don't want us to really fall prey to. And they want us to realize it doesn't matter if you're African American,

it doesn't matter this or this or this or whatever. You can still achieve what you want to, and it doesn't matter what everyone else thinks. So a lot of times my dad tells us stories about when he first came to college here, and how people treated him, how different people saw things. — At some point he was the best in his class and people didn't like it, and so he would be threatened and sometimes and he's like "you guys do not have that to the extent that I did, but still know that these attitudes exist" and things like that, and so they've helped us to be more aware of those types of things . . .

Eleven adolescents (25.6%) retold stories relating to a *caregiver's personal problems*. Stories in this category focused on a range of difficulties resulting from the caregiver's personality or problematic behavior, including unplanned pregnancies, running away from home, struggles with schoolwork (e.g., academic difficulties, lack of focus), and other individual problems (e.g., substance use, going to jail). Five of these stories were about early or unintended pregnancies, including Eloisa's vivid retelling of her mother's experience:

Eloisa: When she had to tell my grandparents that she was pregnant, it was probably the hardest thing because my grandpa was always like, since she's the youngest one, she's the baby, so it was really hard for her since — she was really scared because he was obviously going to trip out and he did. Like she came and told him, "I have to tell you something" and then my grandpa automatically knew and then he was like, "*Vieja*!" ["Hey old lady!"], he called my grandma and was like, "*Que pasó*?" ["What happened?"] and he was like, "*Que tu hija está embarazada*" [Your daughter is pregnant"]. But my mom didn't even tell him, she was just like, "I have to tell you something" and then he called my grandma and was like, "*Tu hija está embarazada*" and then my mom was like, "How do you know?" [Lowers voice almost to whisper] Parents know their kids so well, it's scary.

Stories about *family of origin interactions and dynamics* were told by nine adolescents (20.9%). This category included stories about various types of difficult situations, such as conflicts with parents, strife within the extended family, or the death of a family member. For example, when asked to recall a story she had been told by a caregiver about a difficult experience, Alma barely hesitated before launching into a detailed and enthusiastic retelling:

Alma: Oh, yeah. She [mother] told me about this one time with my grandma . . . she wanted to be a nun really badly because like you know *el llamado* [the calling]? Have you heard about that? . . . my mom when she was my age, she wanted to be a nun . . . with such passion. She told me that she didn't know what went through her. Every single day she wanted to be a nun, she wanted to be a

nun, she wanted to be a nun. And when she mentioned that to my grandma, my grandma was like, "*Estás loca*?" ["Are you crazy?"] . . . because their mind, their mind is set that the girl marries and [has] a family, not nun. She said she was really disappointed and then she couldn't really talk to her mom like that saying her passion for wanting to be a nun . . . She was reminded of that, because I told her that I wanted to be a nun . . . We would go to church every Sunday, and every day that the topic came up, I just kept telling her, "Mom, I'm gonna be a nun."

Finally, six stories (14%) focused *on interpersonal situations outside the family*. This category encompassed caregivers' stories about difficulties with friends and peers (e.g., conflict, bullying, fighting). For example, Elena's father used his own experience of getting into fights to help her deal with a situation she had recently confronted:

Elena: Like when I got into a fight, my parents, my dad told me like, like he got into, 'cause my dad got into a lot of fights before so — he told me that "People were going to be talking just because they have a mouth, just because they want to." 'Cause it used to bother me a lot and it used to get at me and my dad told me that, "That's what they want, to get you mad, get you heated again and by that you're letting them win." So then I started thinking and he's right. So then like you just got to let people talk, I guess.

Variations due to demographic characteristics. Analyses were conducted to evaluate demographic variations in the four overarching topic categories and whether story topic varied by narrator. These analyses were not significant. However, inspection of patterns across the specific topic codes provided indications of potentially meaningful variations. For example, four of the five adolescents who narrated a pregnancy-related story were girls. Moreover, the specific topics within the overarching category of *family hardship* differed by immigrant background. All nine adolescents who told stories about caregivers' migration-related struggles, starting work to help support the household, and difficulty earning a living were from immigrant families. In contrast, seven of the eight adolescents who told a story about caregivers being unable to attend school or described other types of hardship were from nonimmigrant families.

Meaning: What Did Adolescents Take From the Story?

Each story was evaluated for its meaning—the message it contained or influence it exerted on the adolescent. Many youth (like Frankie, above) spontaneously described drawing personal lessons from stories told by caregivers.

Table 2. Meaning Conveyed in Stories Told by Parents (by Gender and Overall).

Meaning code	Boys (n = 15)		Girls (n = 28)		Total (N = 43)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Persevere/work hard*	8	53.3	5	17.9	13	30.2
Do the right thing	3	20.0	4	14.3	7	16.3
Treat others well	0	0.0	5	17.9	5	11.6
Appreciate your life	0	0.0	4	14.3	4	9.3
Be independent	1	6.7	3	10.7	4	9.3
No meaning or influence	2	13.3	2	7.1	4	9.3
Uncodable	1	6.7	5	17.9	6	14.0

*Significant gender difference based on test for difference between proportions ($p < .05$).

Others, when asked whether the story affected their behavior, discussed whether (and, if so, how) it influenced them.

Overall patterns and variations due to demographic characteristics. The distribution of story meanings is displayed in Table 2; illustrative quotes are provided below. The most common lesson conveyed by stories was that youth should *persevere/work hard*, doing their best and never giving up ($n = 13$, 30.2%). In seven cases (16.3%), youth said that the story influenced them to *do the right thing* by making good decisions, being responsible, and staying out of trouble. The remaining cases conveyed that youth should *treat others well* (e.g., respect, accept, and help others; $n = 5$), *appreciate their life* (e.g., be grateful for what they have and recognize that things could be more difficult for them; $n = 4$), or *be independent* (e.g., stand up for themselves, be financially independent; $n = 4$). Four youths (9.3%) stated that the story had *no meaning or influence* on them, and another six (14%) provided uncodable responses.

No variations in the distribution of story meanings by age or immigrant background were found, but a marginally significant association was observed for gender, $\chi^2(6, N = 43) = 10.53$, $p = .104$. Tests for the difference between proportions indicated that boys were more likely than girls to tell stories emphasizing perseverance and hard work (53.3% vs. 17.9%, respectively, $p < .05$); no other pairwise differences were significant (see Table 2).

Associations of topic and meaning. During the analytic process, coders noted that story topics and meanings appeared to be associated. This was evaluated by cross-tabulating the four overarching story topics by the seven meaning codes. The chi-square test was significant, $\chi^2(18, n = 42) = 40.08$, $p = .002$.

However, the majority of cells (27 of 28) had an expected count of less than five, so these results must be considered preliminary, and only major patterns are described. Interpretable patterns emerged for the two most common story categories (*family hardship* and *caregiver's personal problems*). Stories about *family of origin interactions and dynamics* were not associated with particular meaning codes, and only a handful of stories about *interpersonal situations outside the family* were coded for meaning, precluding detection of associations.

Stories about *family hardship* most commonly emphasized that youth should *persevere/work hard* (nine of 17, or 52.9%, of the stories in this category). One adolescent described how his grandfather's story about working on a farm helped him maintain his commitment in the very different context of a drama program:

> William: I think just grandparents in general like to just — you know, "When I was your age I was tending 50 head of cattle. And I had to — in the winter I had to walk two miles down to the neighbors to cut a hole in the ice for his cows when he was away in the winter." — You hear stories about what they did and it makes you go "wow." . . . Even when you are tired and you don't want to — get up and dance and sing you still have to, because you've made this commitment.

Jenayah described how her parents used their own lack of educational opportunities as a way to motivate and inspire her:

> Jenayah: [Parents] told me like if they would have went to school things would be so different for them and probably us. — So that's probably one of the main things that they, I would say, regret but then again it's different because back then, many people didn't go to school . . . back then college wasn't really a priority . . . [W]e have so many things that they don't want me to just miss out on it because they don't want me to feel like well if they didn't do it then I don't have to do it. But they want me to think outside the box and just be like "I want to be better than my parents like I want to make them proud." You know I want to do things and make myself happy as well as them.

Several youth from immigrant families described how hearing about their parents' hardships conveyed strong lessons regarding the importance of perseverance and effort. Valeria said that her mother's stories about growing up in poverty and having to work instead of attending school made her realize it was important to give "your best in everything that you do." Similarly, Jennifer said that hearing about her immigrant parents' struggles to make a living and fit in when they first came to the United States "really inspire[d]

me to do what they told me, like work hard and you know don't give up because they never gave up coming over here."

Stories about a *caregiver's personal problems* were most commonly associated with the message that youth should *do the right thing* (six of 11, or 54.5%, of the stories in this category). Adolescents described these stories as attempts to transmit explicit expectations that children would avoid repeating parents' mistakes by making good decisions. For example, Isabella explained how her mother used stories of being a single parent to emphasize "that she doesn't want me to have a baby at such a young age. Because she wants me to have a good education, have a job, and then think about having kids." Similarly, Noah had absorbed his father's messages about the need to make thoughtful educational and career decisions:

> Noah: My dad. He's told me a lot of stories. Kind of given me little bits of wisdom or whatever . . . He got a degree that wasn't necessarily the best type of degree coming right out of college to get a job. So he had four or five years of limbo where he was just working at jobs he didn't want to be at. And so, he's given me direction to choose a job that you want to do and also a job that will get you something, get where you want to go. Because he doesn't want me to have those five years where you're working at McDonald's as a manager when you really don't want to be there . . . It does influence me in making all my decisions. Trying to not just rush into something, but kind of sit back and wait and see if you want to, the repercussions of the decisions that you're making. If I make this decision as opposed to this one, all this will happen and if I want that or not. And if I, if it's a good decision for me in the end. And not to just go with a decision and see what happens . . . I think he's trying to tell me that over time. 'Cause I'm pretty sure he made a couple snap decisions here and there [laughs].

In other cases, caregivers were less directive, but youth extracted personally meaningful lessons. This was evident in Eloisa's story about her mother's pregnancy, which "makes me feel like I have to make the right decisions."

Discussion

Caregivers' personal stories represent powerful vehicles of socialization. By asking adolescents to retell caregiver stories about difficult times, we uncover how they narrate, interpret, and internalize these socialization messages. In discussing the study findings, we focus on contributions to the emerging literature on the role of family storytelling during adolescence and suggest directions for future research.

Stories about a difficult time are used by parents to prepare children to confront life challenges, overcome barriers, and strive for success (Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014; Bylund, 2003; Harris & González, 2015; Miller et al., 2012; Zaman & Fivush, 2011).This type of story has been described in prior work, yet to our knowledge, the current study is the first to explicate features of caregiver stories about a difficult time in a diverse sample of adolescents. It has been noted that some youth may be reluctant to share stories about parental difficulties due to concerns about privacy (Thorne et al., 2004); however, most of the adolescents we interviewed retold a story. Stories focused on a variety of caregiver experiences, including family hardship, caregivers' personal problems, family of origin interactions and dynamics, and interpersonal situations outside the family. This array of topics suggests that youth interpreted "difficult time" broadly, as we intended. Future research can build on this work by eliciting stories about specific types of difficulties. Focusing on specific topics could yield insight into caregivers' socialization goals relating to particular developmental domains. For example, research on parental stories about their past risk-taking behavior indicates that parents weigh a complex set of considerations when deciding how much to disclose to their adolescents (e.g., balancing a desire for honesty with promoting children's safety when discussing marijuana use; Thorne et al., 2004).

Replicating findings from studies conducted in primarily European American samples, features of caregiver stories differed based on characteristics of both the storyteller and target. For example, more girls than boys shared stories told by mothers, which may reflect girls' closer relationship with mothers or mothers' tendency to share experiences with daughters as opposed to sons (Zaman & Fivush, 2011). Previous studies have also revealed gendered themes in stories told to adolescents (Zaman & Fivush, 2011), and we found that what adolescents took from stories differed, with more boys than girls describing messages of perseverance and hard work as opposed to other life lessons (e.g., treat others well, appreciate life). Furthermore, more girls than boys retold stories about their mother's unplanned pregnancy (although this difference was not statistically significant). These variations may reflect parents' gendered expectations for, and concerns about, their children. A long-standing line of inquiry has examined gender-related socialization patterns and their effects on children (Leaper & Farkas, 2015). Our findings extend this work by providing insights into gendered socialization messages transmitted through caregiver stories. Future work can build on our findings by examining how these messages are linked to adolescent development (e.g., gender-role identity, career aspirations).

One novel aspect of our study is that the sample included substantial numbers of ethnically diverse and immigrant adolescents, allowing us to contribute to the

sparse literature on storytelling in culturally diverse families. Because ethnicity and immigrant background were strongly associated, we focused on immigration as a salient organizer of family experience. As a reminder, the majority of immigrants were Latinos, and (consistent with our sampling approach) most participants were from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Analyses indicated that adolescents from immigrant families told stories that were more elaborated than those told by youth from nonimmigrant families. Youth from immigrant families tended to provide detailed stories, many of which incorporated cultural elements (e.g., quoted speech in Spanish). These differences may reflect the salience of storytelling as a vehicle of communication and socialization in immigrant and culturally diverse families (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 1993; Harris & González, 2015). Moreover, there were (nonsignificant) variations in the content of stories told by immigrant and nonimmigrant youth. Adolescents from immigrant families recalled stories about caregivers' migration-related experiences (as might be expected); in addition, only these adolescents retold stories about early initiation of work to support the household or difficulty earning a living. In contrast, youth from nonimmigrant families retold stories about other types of difficulties (including poverty that resulted in interrupted schooling or general family hardship). These variations likely reflect life experiences and current realities that are influenced by cultural, socioeconomic, and contextual factors (including structural aspects of immigration, such as legislation). An important question for future research is how caregiver stories change across immigrant generations. For example, based on our findings, we speculate that the focus of stories may shift to reflect different challenges across immigrant generations (e.g., first-generation immigrants may describe migration-related difficulties, whereas second-generation individuals may describe racism and discrimination).

Consistent with the notion that adolescents are active meaning makers (McKeough & Malcolm, 2010), youth derived a variety of meanings from the stories they were told. Caregivers' stories about a difficult time resonated with most youth. In some cases, this was because stories were told by caregivers in direct response to issues that adolescents were experiencing (e.g., peer difficulties, career decisions). In other cases, stories conveyed more subtle messages about the type of person caregivers want their child to be. These findings are consistent with prior work showing that young people often listen to, and internalize, caregivers' messages (Pratt, Norris, Lawford, & Arnold, 2010). Although we cannot draw conclusions about caregivers' intentions, the types of meanings that adolescents reported to us are consistent with parental reports obtained in other studies (e.g., Ashbourne & Baobaid, 2014). Confirming these findings in a larger multiethnic sample represents an important contribution of our study. Future research can build on these findings to explicate the influence of caregiver stories on youth.

Limitations and Contributions

The main study limitation is the relatively small sample size and data corpus. Although we were able to describe key features of caregiver stories about a difficult time, we had to create aggregated categories for analyses, which may have obscured important variations. For example, the overarching topic category of *caregiver's personal problems* included stories about a range of situations (e.g., substance use, unplanned pregnancy, running away from home). These individual difficulties are generally considered interrelated "problem behaviors" (Donovan & Jessor, 1985), but scholars have noted ethnic and gender differences in the pattern of interrelations among different problem behaviors (e.g., Zamboanga, Carlo, Raffaelli, & Rivers, 2004). We also had limited power to conduct statistical tests of variations in story features due to intersecting demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, immigrant generation) or explore associations between story topic and meaning. These limitations can be addressed by collecting stories from a larger sample of youth; to ensure that a full range of story topics is represented, each respondent could be asked to retell stories about various types of caregiver difficulties (e.g., one in each of the four overarching topic categories we identified). Moreover, the study was conducted in two Midwestern states, and (by design) adolescents from low- and middle-income families were targeted; thus, our sample is not representative of the larger U.S. population. Finally, using adolescents as informants allowed us to examine how they narrated and interpreted caregiver stories but does not provide information about caregivers' intentions. An important direction for future research is to investigate caregivers' perspectives directly as a way of gaining insight into their storytelling practices and goals.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the current study contributes to the literature on family storytelling in several key ways. Contributions include the focus on an understudied population (culturally diverse adolescents) and examination of a specific type of family story (caregiver narratives about a difficult time). Findings underscore the salience of storytelling as a cultural practice and highlight the potential value of incorporating storytelling into work with immigrant families (e.g., family-based interventions). Researchers can build on our findings by examining how family stories contribute to adolescent and family well-being (Fivush et al., 2010; Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman, 2015). For example, a program of research (summarized in Arnold, Pratt, & Hicks, 2004) has shown that the extent to which adolescents internalize parental messages is linked to the overall quality of the parent-child relationship and later psychosocial development (including identity development and self-esteem). An important task for the future is to

create integrative frameworks to guide research on storytelling in sociocul-turally diverse families that incorporate features of stories, the meaning adolescents take from them, and implications of storytelling for developmental outcomes.

Authors' Note

Maria I. Iturbide is now at Humboldt State University in Arcata, California.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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