

Creating something new from past experiences

- The meaning of change in repeated narratives

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The study has been approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg, Sweden (Dnr: 311-06; Dnr: 206-11; Dnr: 263-15), but this approval does not include sharing raw data as the interviews contain personal information that may lead to participant identification, which researchers are prohibited to publish or share. For more information on data access contact the corresponding author. Other materials used in the research are available, such as the codebook and the background interview. These materials can be found on the Open Science Framework (OSF) project page https://osf.io/pxme3/?view_only=f8722ff4e5814a52b2185a2645e16187

This study has not been pre-registered.

Authors have reviewed standards for disclosing key aspects of the research design and data analysis (Levitt et al., 2018) and followed those standards which are relevant for the research application.

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Abstract

Introduction: Narrative identity is an essential level of personality, and to develop, the life narrative should entail both stability and change (Adler, 2019). In this study, we examine the meaning of change in repeated narratives about occupational experiences.

Method: Fifty-nine individuals were interviewed at age 25, 29 and 33. In these interviews 544 narratives and 142 sets of repeated narratives were identified, of these 39 sets of repeated narratives had changed between interviews. A thematic narrative analysis was conducted focusing on the meaning of change in repeated narratives.

Result: The analysis resulted in five narrative themes: Gaining insights about one's identity, Transforming views of past challenges, Increasing agency, Increasing motivation for occupational commitments, and Accentuating competence and importance. In the context of occupational experiences, the results from the narrative themes illuminate how narrators repeatedly engage with the same narrative to elaborate their narrative identity.

Conclusion: This study presents a novel method for capturing identity development, which show that changes in repeated narratives can entail important information about identity growth as well as the way narrators create new stories of their previous experiences in order to continue to make sense of their lives.

Keywords: narrative identity, repeated narratives, early adulthood, longitudinal qualitative analysis, cultural narratives

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“Shift in the narrative would occur – the past never a fixed and dormant landscape but one that is re-seen. Whether we want to or not, we are travelling in a spiral, we are creating something new from what is gone.” (Vuong, 2020, p. 28).

The quote above illustrates the idea that the way we narrate past experiences can change over the life course. This notion was a starting point for this study, which was to investigate how change is manifested in repeated narratives and the meaning of these changes for the identity. Narrative identity is an essential level of personality, conceptualized as the evolving story of the self that individuals construct in order to make sense of their lives (McAdams & Pals, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). The story connects the autobiographical past and the imagined future through the reconstruction of autobiographical memories and serves to explain how the person came to be, and where his or her life is going (McAdams, 2011). Although personality psychology is a field that has a relative emphasis on stability (Dunlop et al., 2016; McAdams et al., 2006; Roberts, & DeVecchio, 2000), narrative approaches point to the importance of both stability and change (Adler, 2019), for example, new experiences and insights need to be incorporated into the ongoing and developing narrative identity (Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 2013). A systematic and meaningful change in how events are narrated, such as increased meaning-making, often represents narrative identity development (McAdams, 2019). Narrative stability, such as repeating the same narrative at different occasions, may on the other hand provide the

individual with a sense of continuity, that is a feeling of being the same person across time and situations (e.g., Dunlop, et al., 2016; Köber et al., 2015; McAdams et al., 2006; McLean et al., 2021). To understand the complexity of stability and change in narration more fully, researchers within the narrative field have recently started to focus on repeated narration; that is, the repetition of similar story content across different occasions (see Adler, 2019; Dunlop, 2019; Fivush et al., 2019; McAdams, 2019; McLean et al., 2019; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2019; Singer, 2019; Camia & Habermas, 2020). In the research presented, stability and change are conceptualized as opposites with stability being defined as repeating an event and change as not repeating an event, but instead narrating a new event. However, in present study we wanted to explore change within stability, that is, how do narratives about the same event, that is repeated at different occasions, change and what is the meaning of the changes in repeated narratives for identity.

Narrative Identity and Repeated Narration Across Time

A central piece of Erikson's (1950, 1968) life span theory of development is identity development. Although identity formation is the developmental stage of adolescence, it is a lifelong developmental task as a sense of identity "is constantly lost and regained" (Erikson, 1980; p. 127). McAdams (1985, 2001) suggested that a sense of continuity in one's identity is created and maintained through the process of narration, in which people develop an integrated understanding of themselves by making sense of their past, present, and imagined future (see also Syed & McLean, 2016). This coherent integration of experiences constitutes a narrative identity, which provides the individual with a sense of unity, purpose and meaning (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Syed & McLean, 2016). Moreover, individuals may go beyond the plots and details of events to express what they believe their stories say about who they are. Such narrative meaning-making is defined as the degree to which a narrator learns something from an event and explicitly expresses it through narration, for instance learning a

concrete lesson or gaining deep insight about life (McLean & Thorne, 2003; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Since the same experiences might possess different meaning at different times, parts of the life story may need to be modified through the life course (Josselson, 2009). According to Syed (2010), change in identity can be found when new meanings are added to old experiences. Therefore, the continuous development of narrative identity may function to refine meaning and thereby help achieve an evolving, yet congruent, understanding of the self over time (McAdams, 2018).

Recently, the concept of repeated narration has received attention as a unique component of narrative identity development. Repeated narration is defined as the repetition of similar content across different interview occasions several weeks or even years apart (Adler, 2019). Repeating the same manifest content may generate a more solidified life story and accomplish a sense of continuity within the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013), but it may also reflect stagnation (Syed & Azmitia, 2010) or constrain personal development, since the longer a story has been around, the harder it might be to change it (McLean, 2017). Moreover, longitudinal research on narrative identity has shown that when people do not repeat previous events in their narratives, this can be a function of changed life circumstances, changes in the context in which the narrative is told or that the event is less relevant to the self (Camia & Habermas, 2020; McAdams, 2019; McLean et al., 2019; Pasupathi et al., 2019). The relationship between repeating and changing events in the life story is thus complex.

In a theory building exercise several research teams used the same data to apply different empirical and theoretical lenses to the question of repeated narration in identity development (Adler, 2019; Dunlop, 2019; Fivush et al., 2019; McAdams, 2019; McLean et al., 2019; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2019; Singer, 2019). Several of the teams focused on similarities and differences between those with little repetition of manifest narrative content

(i.e., low repeaters) and those with a much greater amount of repeated content (i.e., high repeaters) in the life story interview. Results suggested that repeated content can work as either rigidity or stagnation that impedes development, or as a chance for the development of meaning and self. However, in this special issue the analyses were not specifically focused on the meaning of change in repeated narratives. In most previous research on repeated narration, change is conceptualized as not repeating an event in the life story but instead replacing it with another event (e.g., Adler, 2019) or as structural changes in the way that a story is narrated (e.g., McLean et al., 2021). To our knowledge, there are three studies that partly address the meaning of change in repeated narration. In a case-study, Josselson (2009) focused on how one memory appeared in the repeated narration of a woman across her college years, and ages 33, 43, and 55. The study showed that it is not only the content in the repeated narrative that changes, but rather the meaning of the memory for the present identity that keeps evolving throughout life. In another case study, which investigated differences and similarities between high repeaters and low repeaters, McLean et al. (2019) also described how one of the participants continued to refine her repeated narratives, which made the narratives appear more accessible and functional for communicating her identity, thus changing the meaning of the repeated narratives for her identity. Although case-studies are valuable for exploring an understudied phenomenon in order to make further investigations into that phenomenon there is also a need for studies that take the experiences of more individuals into account. One attempt of exploring the changes in repeated narration was made in a longitudinal study about how college-attending emerging adults narrated their transition to college, where Patterson et al. (2022) showed that change in the evaluation in their repeated narration, especially decreasing positivity concerning the transition, was associated with an increase in a reflective process that revealed a greater acknowledgement of emotional challenges and a deeper understanding of the meaning of the transition when

reflecting on experiences involving mental health and marginalization. These three studies together illustrate the importance of investigating change within repeated narration, as they show that the meaning of past experiences may change when the experiences are re-told. However, they all have limitations when it comes to understanding the meaning of change in repeated narratives. While participants in both Josselson's (2009) and McLean et al.'s (2019) studies have been interviewed about their whole life story, both studies were case studies with only one participant in each study that changed their repeated narration. In Patterson et al. (2022) there were 146 participants, but the study concerned a very specific event - the transition to college. As far as we know, there are no studies that specifically focus on investigating how change is manifested in repeated narratives within a community sample to explore the meaning of these changes for the narrators' identity.

The Present Study

The overarching aim of this exploratory longitudinal study was to investigate the meaning of change in repeated narratives in early adulthood. As this study examines narratives that have been repeated across a lengthy period of time, which could indicate that they hold a specific value for the narrator, it is particularly suitable for capturing meaningful changes for identity. In this study we examined experiences in the occupational context in a community sample.

There are several reasons for studying narrative identity in the occupational context. According to Erikson (1968) the occupation is of primary importance for identity development in adolescence and early adulthood, and occupational identity is a major part of the overall identity of many adults (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Development in the occupational context often work as a factor in the emergence of meaning and structure in people's lives (Erikson, 1968), and the complimentary effect of development and learning due to work have shown that gains in one identity domain often lead to gains in the other

(Hoare, 2011). Furthermore, research has found that narratives about occupation include more meaning-making, for example specific insights that applies to broader areas of the narrator's life, than narratives about other contexts, such as relationships (McLean et al. 2016). In Sweden, the cultural context of this study, many individuals establish themselves on the labor market during early adulthood (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2018) and occupation has been shown to be one of the identity domains of great importance at this age (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011), therefore it was considered to be a relevant domain for many early adults.

According to Miscenko and Day (2016) there is a lack of both qualitative and longitudinal research on occupational identity. We wish to address this lack of research by investigating the meaning of change in narratives about occupational identity that were repeated between ages 25, 29 and 33.

Method

Participants

This study was part of Gothenburg Longitudinal study of Development (GoLD), conducted at the University of Gothenburg. GoLD started in 1982, with a community sample of 144 children aged one to two years (Lamb et al., 1988). The participants were recruited from waiting lists for public childcare in different areas of Gothenburg, the second largest city in Sweden. At the time the study began, the families were considered representative when compared to all two-parent families with firstborn children in Gothenburg concerning socioeconomic status (SES), occupation, and parental age (Broberg, 1989). Nine percent of the parents had immigrated to Sweden, which is comparable to the 12.5% of immigrants of the population in Gothenburg at the time (Gothenburg city office, 1986). The present examination concerns the eighth, ninth, and tenth wave of the GoLD study. In the eighth wave, 136 participants (68 women, 68 men, $M_{age} = 24.9$, $SD = 0.7$) participated (94% of the original sample). In the ninth wave, 124 participants (63 women, 61 men; $M_{age} = 29.3$, $SD =$

0.6) participated (86% of the original sample), and in the tenth wave, 124 participants (62 women, 62 men, $M_{age} = 33.3$, $SD = 0.5$) participated (86% of the original sample). A total of 118 participants participated in all three waves (82% of the original sample). Based on our pilot reading of the material, half of the sample ($n = 59$, 177 interviews) was estimated to be enough to get a material for the analysis that was both varied and cohesive. This study thus contains the interviews of 59 early adults who participated at age 25, 29 and 33.

Procedure

At the beginning of each wave of data collection, participants were contacted by letter, and then by telephone to schedule an interview. Most participants were interviewed at the Department of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg. If the participants lived in another area of Sweden or abroad, we arranged to meet with them at a suitable place in their area or performed the interviews via voice-over-IP services. When the participants were 25 years old interviews were performed by one female clinical psychologist with a PhD-degree, one male clinical psychologist, and two female Master's students in clinical psychology; when the participants were 29 years old the interviews were performed by one female clinical psychologist with a PhD-degree, two female doctoral students, and two female Master's students in clinical psychology; and when the participants were 33 years old the interviews were performed by the second author (P.L.E.), two female doctoral students, and one female post-doctoral researcher. All interviewers went through the same interview training and were at the time of the interview approximately the same age as the participants, except for the male clinical psychologist who were twice their age. The Regional Ethical Review Board in Gothenburg approved all data collections.

Measures

Background Interview. A structured interview was performed at all three time points. The interview included questions about the participants' living situation, education, and current occupational status.

The Ego Identity Status Interview. Marcia's Ego Identity Status Interview (Marcia et al., 1993) was performed with the participants at all three time points. The interview was previously translated into Swedish and adapted to Swedish conditions (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011). All interviews were performed by trained interviewers and audio recorded. Material from the occupational identity domain was explored in this study. Questions concerned past, present, and future occupational decisions, such as: *How did you come to choose to do [the type of work described]? Was there ever a time when you were trying to decide between two very different directions for your life – the work you wished to pursue? Do you think your parents may have had a preference for one field over another? How willing do you think you'd be to change your plans if something better came along? What would make you change your plans?*

Data Analysis

The occupational domain from the identity status interviews were analyzed in several steps described in the following section. For an overview of the data analysis see Figure 1.

Identifying narratives. First, to identify narratives in the occupational domain of the identity status interviews, we developed a codebook building on Labov and Waletzky's (1967) definition of a narrative (Coding systems can be found on the OSF project page at https://osf.io/pxme3/?view_only=f8722ff4e5814a52b2185a2645e16187). This definition includes five categories: orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and coda. However, after applying the codebook to eight interviews we discovered that all categories of a narrative were found in the interviews but not within a specific order. We then revised the original criteria concerning the specific order of the categories (Labov & Waletzky, 1967)

with a new definition stating that all categories needed to be present but not in certain order, with the exception of coda that did not have to be present. In addition, as McAdams (1993) separates characters from setting (which are both included under ‘orientation’ in the Labov and Waletzky definition), we therefore added character (the self and/or others) as its own category in line with McAdams’ suggestion. The final coding scheme for the present study thus resulted in six categories: 1) *Orientation*, information that aims to orient the listener in terms of time, place, and situation. This part of the narrative provides the setting of the story. 2) *Character*, who can be both the self and/or others. If the character in the narrative is the self, there should be internality to the person (e.g., motivation, self-reflection). 3) *Complication*, a sequence of events that often, but not always, involves a complication. This is the plot of the narrative and should involve something that has happened. There can be several separate events in one story, but the events should be told as parts of the whole story. 4) *Evaluation*, the part of the narrative where the narrator evaluates his or her experience during the event, which may involve thoughts, emotions, or comments on the meaning of the experience. 5) *Resolution*, the narrative sequence that follows the evaluation. This is the outcome of the plot. If the evaluation is the last part, the resolution is the same as the evaluation. Narratives can either end with the resolution or have an additional part termed Coda. 6) *Coda*, a means of ending the narrative in order to return the perspective to the present that is not a part of the episode described in the narrative. In order to be coded as a narrative the story should include Orientation, Complication and an Evaluation *or* Resolution part as well as meaningful Characters; however, we did not require a Coda to count as a narrative. Examples of the six categories with quotes from the present study are provided in Table 1. Together, the 59 participants told 544 narratives across the three interview occasions. Table 2 shows the number of narratives told at different ages.

Identifying repeated narratives. In addition to the first part of the codebook, we added a second part in order to capture repeated narratives. This second part of the codebook was developed by examining the narratives found in the interviews from eight participants at the three time points (i.e., 24 interviews in total) focusing on information about events that were repeated one or two times across two or three different interview occasions by the same participant. Building on these examinations, two requirements for coding for repeated narratives were identified: 1) A set of repeated narratives were defined as narratives concerning the same event, repeated one or two times across two or three different interview occasions. 2) The event had to exhibit the same orientation and complication through all narratives, thus the story should include a similar setting (time, place and/or situation) and a similar narrative plot. However, as the resolution of an event could be different as new experiences may be added, and a person may alter his or her evaluation of events due to later life experiences (see e.g., Josselson, 2009; McAdams, 2013; 2015) the evaluation and resolution to an event did not have to be repeated in order to count as a repeated narrative. Also, since details of an event may change due to normal memory functioning (Camia & Habermas, 2020), minor details could change, and the narrative would still be considered repeated (for further information on Codebook see the OSF project page at https://osf.io/pxme3/?view_only=f8722ff4e5814a52b2185a2645e16187).

Reliability testing. We established reliability for the first (C.J.), second (P.L.E.) and third (I.M.) author for the agreement of narratives per interview as well as which of these narratives were repeated across time. These analyses included 12 participants and 36 interviews, approximately 20% of the sample, in line with the recommendations by Syed and Nelson (2015). C.J coded all interviews while P.L.E coded 24 interviews, and I.M coded 12 interviews. Reliability was tested using Cohen's Kappa and was found to be moderate to substantial for identifying narratives in the interviews, $\kappa = .64$, $p < .001$, with 95% confidence

interval = 0.58-0.7, and almost perfect for identifying repeated narratives across interview occasions, $\kappa = .92$, $p < .001$, confidence interval = 0.89-0.95. Note that reliability was established for identifying narratives, and not for each category separately (e.g., orientation, complication) as the focus was on the narrated events that were repeated and not on the structure of the narratives. Of the total 544 narratives, 335 narratives were repeated, which resulted in 142 sets of repeated narratives. These narratives concerned the same event and were repeated once or twice across interview occasions. All participants, except two, repeated at least one narrative across interview occasions. Table 3 shows the variations in repetitions between different ages.

Identifying changes. To find out whether and how the narratives changed between interview occasions, we examined the sets of repeated narratives. The repeated narratives were analyzed with an inductive case-centered approach (Riessman, 2008) by examining each set of repeated narratives separately for each participant. As previously stated, for the narrative to be repeated the orientation and course of events in the complication should be similar. Changes in the repeated narratives were in the present study evident in three ways: 1) by elaborating or condensing the complication (e.g., adding or removing details in the narrative), 2) by changing the evaluation of the event (e.g., increasing or decreasing the emotional tone or changing the emotional tone from negative to positive or vice versa), 3) by changing the role of characters in the narrative (e.g., adding/highlighting a character, removing/diminishing a character) including the role of the narrator. All changes found in the repeated narratives were marked in italics and then the authors discussed if the changes were to be considered as change or not, as minor details could change due to normal memory functioning, some of the minor changes in details might not be counted as a change, such as adding or removing content that did not alter the meaning of the repeated narrative (see Table 5 for an example from the 103 unchanged repeated narratives that contain minor changes

without altering the meaning of the narrative). The changes in the narrative could in some cases be enough to alter the complication but was not considered meaningful for the narrator and was thus not considered a change. In this work with identifying changes, disagreement among authors were discussed and resolved when consensus was reached, thus applying consensus reliability (Syed & Nelson, 2015).

Thematic Narrative Analysis of Changes in Repeated Narratives

This part of the analysis concerned only the 39 sets of repeated narratives that included change (see Table 4.)¹. We used an exploratory, data-driven approach (Adler et al., 2017) and performed an analysis based on the method framework by Braun and Clarke (2006) and the concept thematic narrative analysis presented by Riessman (2008) focusing on the meaning of change in repeated narratives. There is little data of how much stability there is in the narration of important experiences over time and what change in repeated narratives looks like if it exists, and previous work (e.g., Josselson, 2009; McLean et al., 2019; Patterson et al., 2022) have shown that that careful descriptive qualitative work is necessary to understand the meaning of change in repeated narration for identity development. Therefore, we chose to conduct an exploratory study instead of using an existing codebook in the narrative thematic analysis. The repeated narratives were examined by the first and the third author (C.J and I.M) who extracted segments from the repeated narratives based on elements of change. Segments involving types of changes were then discussed between the authors and grouped into themes that showed different meaning of change in the repeated narratives. Five themes were generated from the segments, where seven of the 39 repeated narratives could be found in more than one theme, for example both within the themes Increasing agency and Increasing motivation for occupational commitments. All authors then

¹ Originally there were 42 sets of changed repeated narratives. However, for three sets we did not find any meaningful patterns in the thematic narrative analysis of meaning of change, nor did they fit into any of the developed themes. These three sets of repeated narratives were therefore excluded from the results.

examined all sets of changed repeated narratives once again and discussed the changes. In this thematic analysis, we strived for consensus and agreement among the authors (described as “consensus reliability” by Syed & Nelson, 2015). The narratives were analyzed by using the original Swedish interviews and were translated to English by the first author after the analyses. The translation was discussed between the four Swedish speaking authors (C.J., P.L.E., I.M., and A.F) and then with the English-speaking American author (K.C.M).

Results

In 39 of the 142 sets of repeated narratives, we found changes that indicated new development for the individual identity. A thematic narrative analysis focusing on these 39 sets of repeated narratives told by 28 participants resulted in five themes that capture the meaning of change in repeated narratives. One participant could repeat more than one narrative (see e.g., Adler, 2019) and one set of repeated narratives could be coded to more than one theme. We detail the themes below (see Table 6 for themes, number of sets of repeated narratives and number of narrators). The changes in the excerpts provided are highlighted by showing (in italics) parts of the narrative that has been added, removed or changed. Follow-up questions from the interviewer are presented in bold. All narrators’ names in the results section are pseudonyms.

Gaining insights about one’s identity

Narrators told repeated stories that involved gained insights about their identities over time, showing a more elaborated understanding of their choices. Narrators who for instance at the first interview occasion explained their career choice by stating, “*it was fun*” could at a later occasion describe the choice as “*I felt that I found my place*” or “*I followed my heart*”. Most evident was that the events were told with more depth, signifying their importance and broadened views of the choices made, bringing more meaning into narrators’ professional roles. For example, in the repeated narrative below Maria speaks about an event in school

that was the starting point of her interest in environmental work. At age 33 she repeats this narrative but adds details about her past and what this meant for her occupational decision.

Age 25. “It might have been when I was about 14. There was a small box in the Science Hall, and it said that if you recycle this and that many tons of paper you save this and that many trees, and since I am a bit economic, I thought it was damn stupid to throw it in the waste bin so it [the environmental interest] came in that situation. I remember, yes, it is a bit funny that it was such an event that started it.”

Age 33. “When I was 14 it hit me that there was a paper recycling bin in the Science Hall where it said that if you recycle this many tons [of paper] you save this and that many trees. I thought that it is damn stupid that you throw it in the regular waste bin, and *it [the insight that hit her] was a bit induced by relatives and family who are from the southern inland and who thinks that “you have to spare the resources”, and [who are] Christians “you have to take care, be a good person and so on”*. So, then *the penny dropped, and I felt well that it is not enough with the little I do, climate wise, we need to get more people to do more. So at that point I realized that I should work in environmental science.*”

At age 25 Maria’s narrative was a straightforward account of the event that started her concern for the environment. However, at age 33 she related this event to her past, referring to her relatives that were Christians “*from the southern inland*”, a Swedish region about which there is the negative stereotype that the inhabitants are stingy with their money (Larsson et al., 2013). She also connected the event to her future mission to work in environmental science. This transformed the story of the recycling bin to a story that involved a gained insight (“*the penny dropped*”) and how she came to make use of this insight to “*get*

more people to do more” by working in environmental science. By relating the event about the paper bin to gained insight, to her relatives and her future mission to work in environmental science she created a narrative about personal continuity through time, placing herself in her personal historical context and committing to a life path.

In the following repeated narrative, Daniel talked about his choice to pursue a career within the university. The narrative of this experience evolved at each age, and Daniel’s perception of his occupational choice seemed to have become clearer for him over time.

Age 25. “During upper secondary school I was quite sure I was going to be an actor, or writer, or director, I was very into arty stuff back then (...) then it was also a lot of other things going on, but you might say I changed direction when I was 21-22, then I realized I want to work with something that is more direct like academic.”

Age 29. “After upper secondary school I was going to be a writer. I started to study, and people said that, to study is always a good option so I took a class in literary studies (...) To make a career at the university felt completely impossible. But it was somewhere at that time that I spoke to someone, *I think I spoke to a doctoral student and then I just got the idea, maybe one should try to doctorate.*”

Age 33. “I was a little bit seeking those years after upper secondary school, I guess many are (...) it was film direction, and I also wrote on a novel then I realized, one may actually do research and doctorate. *That it would be an option for me, it didn’t exist, until I spoke to someone who was a doctoral student and then I realized like ‘oh you could apply for a job and work with that’. It was during an afternoon I just decided ‘of course I should do that’. It was like so right for me and when I spoke to people I*

knew they said 'of course you should do that, it's like, it couldn't suit you any better' and it felt like oh, what a relief. Because during that time after upper secondary school, it was all so confusing, like shaping one's identity."

In the narrative at age 25, Daniel had started to figure out what kind of occupation he wanted to pursue, "something that is more direct like academic". However, at age 29 his idea of working in academia had taken a concrete shape as he added a doctoral student to his narrative to explain where his idea of applying for doctoral studies initially came from. At age 33, the insight connected to speaking to the doctoral student was outspoken. To further anchor his occupational commitment, Daniel added people he knew who encouraged him to move forward and connected this to who he was by stating their encouraging words "*it couldn't suit you any better*". At age 33 he also names this process of sorting out confusion concerning what to do workwise in life as "*shaping one's identity*". From the interviews at age 29 and 33 it is evident that the conversation with the doctoral student took place before the age of 25. By adding characters and reflections on their impact on his occupational choice, Daniel showed development of insight over time concerning himself and his identity-defining choice. Like the repeated narratives from both Maria and Daniel, most repeated narratives in this theme involved events that had awoken insights and that marked the start of the narrators' way towards their current occupation.

Transforming views of past challenges

Some repeated narratives that changed also revealed a focus on transforming views of past challenges. Over time, some participants narrated the events with less emotional engagement, or more distance, which may have allowed them to alter their views of the challenging events and move in a new direction. As the transformation of the views on past challenges occurred in the narrative that was repeated at a later interview occasion, the

narrative was often more condensed and processed than in the first interview occasion where it could be more detailed and unsorted. In the repeated narrative below, Angelica speaks about having to give up her ambition to work in advertising in order to make money.

Age 25. “Then [after upper secondary school] I applied for lots and lots of jobs in advertising so that was the goal. I started an education for a month or so, I was applying for jobs all summer and autumn in the field I wanted to work within. And then I started an education in the winter afterwards because then I thought that I needed to be more educated to get a job. It [the education] was advertising and marketing but it was so much of what I had already studied before, so I knew almost everything that had to do with advertising, creative wise, in the practical courses I knew everything, so *I quit after a month and thought well I have to apply for other work I have to wait and see what the meaning is. Wait and make some money first and maybe not think exactly of what I want to work with.*”

Age 29. “Then [as a teenager] I wanted to work in an advertising agency, as an Art Director, or as a web designer or a photographer, that was the dream. So it has been there all the time. (**How come you did not continue with that?**) It was, I just wanted to make some money. So, and I wasn’t sure of what orientation and... well then it was not a good time for the advertising business when I finished upper secondary school. There was a dip then, so *it did not feel like a good choice at the time.*”

At age 25 Angelica’s narrative was full of details about applying for advertising work, doubting, and regaining faith in her competence and the decision to apply for unqualified work instead, in order to make money and to figure out what she really wanted to do in life.

At age 29 she had found a different, maybe more plausible, explanation to why she couldn’t

get a job – not because of unknown personal shortcomings that prevented her from getting a job, but because it was a dip for the advertising business at the time. In this way she reinterpreted her decision not to work in advertising from personal failure to “*it did not feel like a good choice at the time*”. This could indicate that Angelica transformed the view of this challenging event, from a narrative about the personal failure of not finding work that matches her expertise, into a new view of this past challenge, as caused by overall changes in the labor market, and had come to terms with it. By not telling the whole story all over again, but instead making a comment on her decision afterwards, she was in a way implying that she had a new view on the event, had made some distance to the event, and perhaps had preserved or repaired a more positive self-view.

Another narrator who transformed his views on past challenges was Johan who, at age 25 communicated a lot of emotion in speaking of playing football as a child and commenting on his friends’ jobs as football players. At age 33 the football was barely mentioned.

Age 25. “Football was a great part of my life since I started playing at the age of five, I have always played. *It wasn’t a hard choice to opt out, it came naturally, but I can regret it afterwards when I have friends who make millions by like kicking a f*cking ball that I didn’t put more time into it*”.

Age 33. “I read extremely much as a kid. At the same time, I played an extreme amount of football.”

These various forms of transformation, by diminishing the impact of the event, finding new explanations, or changing a negative evaluation to a more neutral or even positive evaluation, showed that the narrators had transformed their views of the past challenge in a way that may have let them move elsewhere with their identity explorations and commitments.

Increasing agency

This theme describes how narrators emphasized and increased their experienced agency in the repeated narratives at later interview occasions. Narrators tended to feel more in charge of occupational choices over time, illustrating them more as their own, and perhaps more a part of their narrative identity. Narrators also seemed to have grown into their paths and professions during later repeated recollections of events, and that process could involve taking perceived ownership of past actions. In the example below, Martin told a story about the process of applying to a program at the university. First, at age 25 he stated that he was not sure of what he wanted to study and instead followed a friend's choice, displaying uncertainty and a relatively neutral tone towards this choice. In the narrative at age 33 the story had changed and now involved the two of them together contemplating over their future, highlighting the increased agency of Martin within the narrative.

Age 25. "It was actually it was a friend that had applied for the education program, and *I wasn't sure of what I wanted to study and I applied for it and there was a hassle* actually it wasn't really supposed to start but at last it did start up and I hung on and it felt great. So it was a bit of sail with the tide that I actually got into the course I chose."

Age 33. "It was a bit of sailing with the tide already from the start, *before we started to study at university me and a classmate, a best mate, talked about what we should do in the future, if one should start [to study] because it is quite clear for both of us* that we should continue our studies at least. But my plan was from the beginning to study economics to continue with that but then we found this education program Shipping and logistic *and we both got damn excited to start study that.*"

At age 25 Martin was a bit more uncertain and followed his friend's choice without much thought. At age 33 he stated that he and his friend explored choices, applied together and were "*damn excited to start study that*". Martin's agency is increased in part by changing the ownership of the decision to study from his friend into a mutual decision.

Repeated narratives in which the narrator's role as an agent was highlighted, by subsequently representing him- or herself as more in charge of choices concerning his or her occupational path, sometimes manifested as the removal or diminishing of a character. In some narratives, characters were initially involved in getting the narrator a job, and at a later stage the characters were placed in the background in the story. It seemed then as if these narrators had made the effort themselves to get where they were, perhaps more grown into their paths and professions during later recollections of the events. To illustrate, in the repeated narrative below, Laura diminished the importance of her parents' role in the story about how she came to choose to work in economics.

Age 29. "I think now that I am 30 and think back it had a lot to do with *my parents thinking that economics was a good, secure, education that you can always fall back on* and I had always been interested in languages and travelling and I can travel a lot in my work and it sounded like economy is the type of work that you can take with you everywhere, not so bound to a certain trade, so it was, *a lot of it had to do with my parents, not that they said "Choose economics" but all of the other orientations I suggested was always "No, no don't choose that, it doesn't pay!" and my mother who has been a teacher for all of her life, and I was thinking of becoming a teacher and it was the same "No, it doesn't pay, it's not for you" and I was interested in archeology, so interesting with the history and all but "No, no, there are no jobs as an archeologist, choose something else". So it wasn't like they handed*

me a ready suggestion but they weren't keen on any other suggestions anyway"

Age 33. "When I was younger, I was very interested in languages and traveling and I have always thought it was fun to study English and German and Spanish so I have always been really interested in languages, and in writing so I have thought that I would like to be a writer or a journalist or work with languages somehow. *But then I think I realized when I was older that it is a hard trade to choose and with both journalism and being a writer it is tough to find a secure employment and it's a lot of hard work and bad working hours and that it is a hard trade to choose* and then my parents, especially my mum, has been very firm with that you shouldn't choose an insecure line of work, that you should basically get an education in a field where you have the chance of getting a job. *So around there I switched over and thought that I can work with economy and numbers because that's an occupation that you can work with anywhere in the world.* It's the same type of work tasks if you work internationally or locally and numbers is a kind of language as well."

The diminishing of her parents' role in the narrative between age 29 and 33 showed that, although they were referred to in her later narrative, they were not a central part of the process. At age 29 she mentions her parents in the beginning of the narrative, the narrative is almost only about them dismissing her suggestions and she even impersonates their opposition three times. In the interview at age 33, Laura's parents are mentioned as an inspiration to get a steady job, but Laura is the one who realizes that this might be a good idea after exploring different insecure options. Thus, the story seemed to evolve and in the repeated narrative she illustrates her own agency in the decision.

Another example of increasing agency by diminishing other characters, is Sara who at age 29 credits her father for her decision to work at a car company by stating that “...*my father worked at the company so I knew that it was a good employer*”, whereas at age 33 she commented “Then I ended up at the car company where *my dad works, that was not the reason I ended up there, I have always thought that it was a good company*”. By diminishing her father’s role Sara emphasized that she had always known herself that it was a good company thus placing the decision to work there solely within herself. Sara’s role as an agent thus became stronger as her ownership of the decision at hand increased.

Increasing motivation for occupational commitments

A few narrators changed the motivation for their occupational choice in their repeated narratives at a later interview occasion, which gave the events an elevated meaning for their occupational commitments. By changing the motivation in the narrative, narrators showed that their occupation had become more important on a personal level, for some a mission in life, and thus elaborated why they were engaged in their current work path. For example, at age 29 Nina explains her choice of working with work environment as something she just “*ended up with*”, while at age 33 she gives a deeper explanation for her choice.

Age 29. “*That I got into this job was more of a coincidence. When I had finished Technical College I was looking for a job and there was this work with quality control that I thought I just take it over summer, because they were looking for a shorter employment. And in connection to this, the woman who was responsible for quality and work environment at the company quit and I was asked to stay and well, I just ended up there.*”

Age 33. “[After university] I slipped into the quality and environmental area and have worked a lot with these [work environment] questions and felt that *I am more passionate about that people feel good*

and are safe at work than... quality is pretty much about saving money in the end and doing the right thing and of course that people should thrive as well, but still. I felt that it was more interesting, it felt more important for me that you have a good work environment and I have worked at a company where there was a fatal accident and of course it has affected me that you see that people can actually die at work and that cannot happen at my workplace. I feel that it is an important role to work with these questions.”

In both narratives, Nina started working with quality and work environment by chance. However, in the later description, she has a greater emotional engagement in the description of her work and her motivation had changed and increased into a narrative about life and death, giving her work role a crucial importance.

Another example comes from Linda who found more meaning in her occupational choice over time.

Age 25. “After three years [at university] it was time to choose orientation and I felt that I was tired, it had been too much mathematics and too theoretical so I took an extra year to decide what I should do and catch up a bit and take some courses. I chose two courses during that time and then *there was an international master’s program in that area that I felt would be more fun than to continue with what I had done.*”

Age 29. “I chose a course that was different from what I had studied previously (...) it was a pretty interesting course. (**How come you chose the other direction?**) In part because it seemed interesting, and I was pretty tired of studying such a theoretical education and *I chose an orientation that was more adapted to reality.* (**More practical?**) Yes, above

all it was not just calculating things but to *get out in reality and study companies and see how things work.*”

At age 25 Linda’s explanation for adding courses was that she wanted to take some time to decide what she wanted to do in the future, while at age 29 the reason for choosing that course was to “*get out in reality and study companies and see how things work*”.

Although her evaluation of her starting point was the same, she was tired of the theoretical education, the motive for choosing this new course was different – from needing time to explore options to committing to an orientation adapted to reality. This change also corresponds to Linda’s occupational path – at age 25 she was in the final year of her studies, ready to explore the work market, at age 29 she had tried out different workplaces and could perhaps with more working experience further articulate her exploration process.

Accentuating Competence and Importance

This theme was marked by narrators who accentuated their competence and importance by creating more dramatic stories in their repeated narratives. For most narrators, this was expressed by the addition to later narratives of aggravating events or obstacles to the narrators’ occupational paths. These narratives ended with the triumph of the narrators overcoming their obstacles, by going their own way despite other peoples’ attitudes or through increasing hard work or competence. In the example below, Linda’s narrative at age 29 was a straightforward account about how her career started by registering at the public employment service. At age 33 she elaborated the narrative of the events by adding a hindrance in the form of a skeptical official at the public employment service. Her narrative shows that by going her own way, despite the negative attitude from the official, she got recognition for her competence.

Age 29. “I had registered at the public employment service and there was a company that was looking for an employee who called and asked if I wanted to come to an interview”.

Age 33. “I thought that I might register at the public employment service just to be done with it and so I did. *And the guy that I talked to at the employment service more or less said that ‘You can register but don’t count on finding a job, I guess it’s good to be registered but I don’t think I can help you’.* But then, my phone rang at home one day when I was at home, writing, and they called me from a consultant company and said that they had contacted the employment service and had gotten a bunch of CV’s, and *they thought that I was interesting* so they wanted to know if I could come to an interview. *I thought that it sounded interesting*, so I went and I got the job”.

Linda narrates a change in the story with additional details of perseverance over the official’s pessimism and getting noticed by the company of her interest. Johan’s repeated narrative also illustrated this theme by adding potential challenges in new characters to the plot that seemed to help accentuate his competence. Note that the adding of characters took place between age 29 and 33.

Age 25. “I have always read a lot when I was a kid and I liked to write. And then when I was ten, eleven I got a job as a youth reporter at [a newspaper].”

Age 29. “I have been writing and working as a youth reporter at [a newspaper] once when I was very young, and then I applied to the School of Journalism, Media and Communication and got accepted and that is how it went down more or less.”

Age 33. “I loved to write and everything, I applied to become a youth reporter at [a newspaper] when I was eleven and it was like *thousands who applied*. I really want to say it was like that but yeah [laughs] but maybe it was *eleven or twenty people* who got the job and I was one of them.”

From only including himself at age 25 and 29, at age 33 Johan added thousands of others who competed with him for the position as a youth reporter, to put emphasis on his own importance and competence. He also mentioned himself in a group of twenty that overcame an obstacle by being the applicants of many, implying that he at a very young age got validation for his talent by being one of the few who were suitable for the job. In this and similar ways narrators changed their repeated narratives, emphasizing their own part and overcoming obstacles to reach goals which highlighted their own importance and in turn strengthened their sense of identity.

Discussion

In this study we investigated the meaning of change in repeated narratives. We found five themes that illuminate identity development within repetition: *gaining insights about one's identity*; *transforming views of past challenges*; *increasing agency*; *increasing motivation for occupational commitments*; and *accentuating competence and importance*. The themes will be discussed in relation to narrative identity literature, focusing on the meaning of change for identity development in general, as well as the cultural meaning of change in repeated narratives, with suggestions on further research.

The Meaning of Change in Repeated Narratives for Identity Development

Two of the themes in the analysis were highly relevant for identity development in general: *gaining insights about one's identity* and *increasing agency*. Narratives in the theme *Gaining insights about one's identity* were at the first timepoint likely to be more

straightforward and limited accounts of an event in which the narrator showed no or little insight about the occupation they pursued. At later interview occasions, the narrative had evolved and contained more depth and importance for the individual, broadening views of the choices made and thus bringing more meaning into the narrators' identity. This theme resonates with the self-event connection proposed by Pasupathi et al. (2007), which is defined as the relationship between a specific experience and one's sense of self constructed within a particular narrative. When the repeated narrative changed and revealed a gained insight, the actual experience did not change (as it had happened many years before) but rather how the experience was perceived, implying a new, more comprehensive, vision of the narrator. The theme of gaining insight is also in line with previous longitudinal research which has shown that when people repeat a narrative after several years, the focus is more on understanding and making sense of the repeated event (Negele & Habermas, 2010). Such meaning making has been found to be associated with ego-development (Bauer et al., 2005), and perceived growth (McLean et al., 2020), supporting the idea that insights gained in one specific context (such as occupation) can also be connected to identity development in other contexts as well as identity development in general (Mitchell et al., 2021; Syed & McLean, 2016).

In the theme *Increasing agency*, narrators repeated narratives about events where they tended to feel more in charge of their choices at later interviews, describing the decisions more as their own. This is in line with previous research that has shown that individuals who tell agentic narratives internalize their actions, reflect on them, and engage in them with a full sense of choice (Adler et al., 2012), and a part of the definition of agentic growth is the sense that one can influence one's environment (Bauer & McAdams, 2004). This sense of influence on the environment may come easier when individuals have required more knowledge and experience in one context of life (such as gaining working experience). Findings from this study also shows that agentic growth in narrative development may also be a process of

repeatedly engaging with the same narrative. In contrast, previous research has found a tendency for decline in agency in older compared to younger ages (De Silveira & Habermas, 2011) and within repeated narration (Booker et al., 2021) as well as an increased contextualization in repeated narration instead of increased agency (Schiff, 2005). This finding of increased agency could thus be specific for narrating about occupational experiences in this time of life. The kind of experience that is being re-told could therefore play an important role for the development of agency, as it is not only the content but also the meaning of the repeated narrative for the individual's present identity that changes. Indeed, narratives that have been repeated over a long period of time, such as those examined in the present study, may hold a specific value to the narrator and change in these narratives may therefore shed light on changes meaningful for general identity development. Future longitudinal research on narrative identity development may include a mixed-methods approach (see e.g., Creswell & Clark, 2017), such as adding measures on satisfaction with life to this type of analysis to add knowledge on how change in repeated narration is associated with well-being. For example, Booker et al (2021) found that levels of coherence and growth in repeated narratives of low points was associated with well-being. Thus, by repeatedly engaging with the same narrative, narrators used the narrative form to elaborate their agency and insights about identity. In this way this study shows that change in identity can indeed be found in how people narrate their earlier experiences with new meanings (Syed, 2010).

One of the five themes consisted of narratives specifically about the meaning of change for identity in the occupational context, the theme *Increasing motivation for occupational commitments* which contained narratives that included changed motivation for occupational choices over time. In this theme it was clear that the current occupational context, that is the narrators' career at the time of repeating the narrative, could have

influenced the change in the narrative. The repeated narratives showed that the narrators' occupations had become more important for them over time, as they elaborated on why they were engaged in their current work path. This is also in line with the developmental period of early adulthood where an initial period may involve exploration of different options, while by their early thirties most adults have made commitments to an occupational path (Gyberg & Frisé, 2017). This development can also be ascribed to the historical and cultural context that the participants are situated in, for example the age of establishment on the labor market has increased in Sweden from 21 years in 1987 to 28 years in 2018 (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, 2018) due to higher demands of education (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2018). This was a development that is in line with Erikson who, despite placing identity formation in the developmental stage of adolescence, also spoke of a prolonged adolescence where young adults experimented with roles to find their niche in society as identity is not only matter of biological and psychological development but also an increased societal pressure of finding one's place in society (Erikson, 1968; 1980). In this study, the increase in motivation reframed events so the event took on an elevated role for the individual and was used in the narrative to emphasize the understanding of a certain line of work or increasing the emotional engagement in the narrative. These components have also been shown to have importance for job motivation (Kelchtermans, 2009) and occupational identity (Knez, 2016). In future research on repeated narratives in early adulthood it may be beneficial to study if the context of the described events is important for what type of identity development that is present within the changed narratives.

The Cultural Meaning of Changes in Repeated Narratives

First, we note that we explored changes in repeated narratives about occupational experiences amongst early adults in Sweden, a country that has repeatedly been classified as extreme when it comes to individualized values such as secular-rational values and self-

expression (e.g., World Values Survey, 2020). This self-expression could be found in the two themes *Increasing agency* and *Accentuating competence and importance*. These agentic stories are examples of narratives that adheres to the western master narrative of career development, as agency often is associated with achieving valued outcomes, self-mastery, a desire for power, status, and prestige (McAdams, 1993; Bauer & McAdams, 2004), qualities that are useful in the occupational context (Dunlop et al., 2014). Further, changing the repeated narrative, and creating a personal myth, adheres to a general form of storytelling in the western world, “The romance”, which contains a hero, a mission, an antagonist, or a hindrance, and ends with the victory of the hero (McAdams, 1993, p. 51). Dramatizing events can reflect a full reexperiencing with all the emotions while diminishing perspectives other than the narrator’s (Habermas, 2019).

By studying the meaning of change in repeated narratives across early adulthood, we found that changes were related to positive developmental processes as all 39 of the repeated narratives in the thematic analysis changed in a positive direction (increased agency, gained insights) which show that an important function of change in repeated narration is to facilitate identity development. We also note that the ability to change, grow, and experience agency may be very much dependent on structural aspects of one’s society that are beyond one’s control, such as a recessionary period that limits the access to employment or work market discrimination due to ethnicity or gender. Individuals who do not experience such positive change may have a very different story to tell us about the interaction between self and society and how structural support and opportunities may shape identity pathways. However, a strength with the current study is that it contains narratives from a community sample, which means that there should be a larger variation in experiences than in, for example, a college sample.

An altogether different way of changing a repeated narrative was found in the theme *Transforming views of past challenges*. Most previous research on narratives that involve transforming past challenges is made in a North American context, where the redemptive sequence in life stories, that is challenges transforming into good outcomes, is so powerful that McAdams (2006: 2013) argued it is an American master narrative. However, in this theme the narrators repeated narratives of past challenges and at a later interview occasion they had diminished the impact of the event, found new explanations, or changed a negative evaluation to a more neutral or even positive evaluation. While some of the narratives that were more toned down and limited compared to the first version align with previous research that show condensing and distancing as a function of a loss of significance of the event (see e.g., Habermas & Berger, 2011), there are some indications that other repeated events in the narratives were still a stable part of the narrative identity. For example, most narrated events unfolded several years before the first interview and participants were not prompted to repeat any events, instead the questions were open, such as “How did you come to choose to do [the type of work described]?”. Research from United Kingdom (Blackie et al., 2020) and Sweden (Eriksson et al., 2020) has suggested that although redemptive themes are present in narratives about difficult experiences and trauma, other ways of narrating these experiences (e.g., recuperation, combined positive and negative emotion, neutrality) were more common than, or as common as, redemptive narratives. The toned-down manner, in which some narrators in this study repeated their challenging experience, could thus function to express distance towards what had happened and show, in a culturally appropriate way, that the narrator had moved forward in their narrative identity. This study indicates that there can be different cultural impacts on the narratives that people tell, both a larger global or western culture as well as the national or local cultures. Recent research has also offered a critical view on American master narratives, as they emphasize the individual aspects of

development (such as agency and redemptive narrating), ignoring structural barriers in individuals' lives, and overshadow alternative narratives of development (Syed & McLean, 2021). Therefore, more research is needed on different ways of narrating identity development.

Limitations

One limitation in the data collection of this study was that there were different interviewers who interviewed the participants at different waves of the study. This might have led to differences in the interview that could have affected the results, such as different interviewers asking different follow-up questions. However, the identity status interview is a well-structured interview, and all interviewers went through the same interview training, with focus on enabling the participants to tell their own story. Most interviewers were approximately the same age as the participants, and among both participants and interviewers the majority were Swedish or from other Nordic countries. However, all interviewers had minimum a master's degree in psychology while the participants represented a variety of educational and socio-economic statuses. As this is a study of narrative identity in the occupational context, we cannot rule out the possibility that this had an impact on interviews with participants who had not completed education past compulsory or upper secondary school. However, as this was a longitudinal study in which all participants repeatedly participated voluntarily, and previous analysis of attrition has not shown any patterns of attrition due to gender, or SES in adulthood. We therefore believe that the interviewer characteristics and the change in interviewer between waves has had a limited effect on the result of the analysis.

Another limitation in this study is that we only explored experiences within an occupational context and did not ask the participants to tell their full life story. According to Camia and Habermas (2020), the entire life narrative is the best way of capturing the

narrative identity since it covers the whole life span with the different life events being coherently and meaningfully related to each other (see also McAdams, 1993). However, as life stories are made up by life events, which includes personal memories and experiences, the life narrative is given substance, size, and shape by the singular narratives it consists of (Birren & Schroots, 2006). Furthermore, the ego identity status interview (Marcia, et al., 1993) contains information, not only about whether a person has explored alternatives and committed to an identity, which is the basis of the identity status coding, but also developmental narratives about how, when, and why this identity exploration and commitments came to be. Since the identity status interview includes this type of information, narratives from this interview can be used to study processes of identity development, beyond exploration and commitment, in explicit detail. Therefore, this study shows that collecting narratives from the identity status interview about singular events in the occupational context can be a way to find identity relevant events in the narrators' lives, and of studying narrative identity.

Within research on repeated narration there are different conceptualizations of repetition that impact how repetition is examined (see Adler, 2019 for an overview of a special issue on repeated narration). The main two conceptualizations are (1) the way that a story is narrated and (2) the content of the narrative. A limitation in the present study is that we only explored change in the repeated content in the narratives, neglecting other narrative processes that might have been stable in the narratives (see e.g., McLean et al., 2021). However, as the purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of change in repeated narratives, looking into other narrative processes was beyond the research question in this study. We are also aware that how the changes were described in the method section in this study (i.e., elaborating or condensing the complication, changing the evaluation of the event, changing the role of characters in the narrative) is not a comprehensive list of possible

changes that can occur in repeated narratives. It is also probable that narratives from other identity domains could have produced other changes in the repeated narratives. Studies on how people change the way that a story is narrated, including for example change in terms of complexity or the completeness of the structural elements of the model based on Labov and Waletzky's (1967) work, will likely give an important contribution to future research on identity development. Furthermore, it would also be valuable to examine changes in repeated narratives concerning goals, values, or autobiographical reasoning. There is also the possibility of examining how some might view former occupational decisions as mistakes, as regret can be a motivator for change

Another limitation is that the analysis of changes in sets of repeated narratives started at age 25 and not earlier. In the analysis, about a third (39 of 142) of the sets of repeated narratives changed, while two-thirds remained the same. The reason for the relatively low number of changed repeated narratives may be previous development within the occupational domain, as some narratives about occupational identity might have changed before age 25 and remained the same after that. That changes in repeated narratives might be harder to find in an occupational context has been described previously by Sengsavang et al (2018) and is in line with Erikson's (1968) theory on identity formation in adolescence. Further research on narrative identity development in the occupational domain in early adulthood may benefit from using a wider time frame, including late adolescence and the earliest years of early adulthood. This would also make it possible to further study the leap in socio-cognitive development that reaches its height between the ages of 20 and 29 years and then plateaus in early adulthood and remain stable until late adulthood (De Luca et al., 2003).

Another possible limitation is the relative absence of repeated narratives where the first narrative was told in a positive tone and the later narrative was told in a less positive or even negative tone. It is impossible to say if these narratives would be more common in

another sample or if they are exceptions to how individuals usually narrate change, and in that case, why? Recently, researchers have brought attention to how master narratives are permeated with social power and are a major stabilizer of cultural power dynamics (Syed & McLean, 2021). This raises the question of which narratives are endorsed by the culture we live in, and which are not? To be able to answer this question more research on the meaning of change in repeated narratives, and the relationship to culture, is needed.

Conclusion

The present study contributes with a novel conceptualization of the meaning of change in repeated narratives for narrative identity. The repeated narratives in this study are particularly suitable for capturing meaningful changes for the identity, both since they are repeated, which indicates that they are salient for the narrators' identities, and since they have been repeated across a large period of time (four or eight years), as narratives of specific events that are important for the narrative identity need time to be understood, interpreted, and integrated into the life narrative. This study also showed that examining repeated narratives of specific events and how these narratives change can generate knowledge on how narrative identity continues to develop over time. Through examining changes in the repeated narratives, the present study captures the process of development in the re-telling of experiences. In this way the present study contributes to a novel method for capturing identity development. In the context of occupational experiences, the results from the present study illuminate how narrators repeatedly engage with the same narrative to elaborate the story of themselves by adding content about gained insights, transformed views, increased agency as well as to accentuate competence and to show how their motivation for their present occupation has increased. Thus, the findings showed that the way we narrate our past is not fixed and that changes in repeated narratives can entail important information about identity

growth and how narrators create something new from their past in order to continue to make sense of their lives.

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