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# Two Worlds, One Family-Acculturation, Identity Development, and Storytelling: Literature Review

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Two Worlds, One Family-Acculturation, Identity Development,  
and Storytelling: Literature Review  
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Expressive Arts Therapy

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### Abstract

As immigrant families settle in their host culture, acculturative stress occurs affecting an individuals' identity development, as well as the family dynamic. The task of maintaining their heritage culture and navigating through the host culture challenges many first generation American and immigrant adolescents, often unsure which culture, or possibly both, best aligns with their identity. Both parent and child alike experience the acculturation process, although children acculturate into the host culture faster than their parents do. This difference in acculturation speed creates a gap that ultimately affects the family dynamic and the parent-child relationship. However, it is the opinion of this author that with the opportunity to share stories can minimize the familial conflicts could be better served. Parents could feel empowered by sharing stories of their heritage and through those stories; children could feel grounded in their ethnic identity. Sharing family narratives could also aid in developing the family identity. Overall, this literature review explores the acculturation challenges and (a) its effects on individual identity development, (b) its effects on the family dynamic, and (c) the effects sharing family narratives has on identity development and the family dynamic.

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Review

**Introduction**

I am a first generation American, as my parents were both born outside of America. Growing up, I did not anticipate the challenges of living in two cultures, the American and the Haitian culture. My acceptance of both cultures came much later in my own identity development process. Not only did I have to learn about my parents' culture at home, but I also had to assimilate into environments outside of my home, such as school and work. Attempting to find acceptance in both cultures affected my identity development, as I undertook a bicultural identity formation process. I gained “the ability of a person to function effectively in more than one culture and also to switch roles back and forth as the situation changes” (as cited by Jambunathan, 2000, p. 187). However, I felt like I never truly belonged to either.

In my family dynamic, I felt and recognized the challenges of living in two cultures. As my parent acculturated to the American culture, they tried to maintain their home culture and enforce those values and behaviors on my siblings and me. Nevertheless, this gap between parent and child created by the acculturation process, incite conflicts in the family dynamic. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), nearly 44 million families in the U.S. are immigrants. Each must undergo the acculturation process. With a child’s “faster acculturation rate to the host culture and their distancing from the heritage culture, parents may become either disengaged from their children or overly rigid in trying to preserve traditional child rearing practices” (Wiesner, Arbona, Capaldi, Kim, & Kaplan 2015, p. 2). These challenges create conflict amongst family members, parent/child, siblings, etc., and within individuals, as it challenges their own identity development within their ethnic culture and personal identity.

There is value in sharing a story. Family stories offer insight and are a “major source of information about the family’s ethnic and sometimes sociopolitical past” (Stone, Gomez, Hotzoglou & Lipnitsky, 2005, p. 382). Many of these stories transcribe through many generations, as they “[regulate] family beliefs and interaction patterns. These narratives become a scrapbook of family history...” (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999, p. 3). For the parents, sharing a family story helps maintain their heritage culture and transfer the culture to their children, U.S. born or not, influencing a positive family dynamic. For the children, hearing and internalizing these family stories aids in securing their identity in their heritage culture, which encourages positive identity development.

Research about the acculturation process and family stories offer an opportunity to learn about immigrant families and the challenges they face. This paper assumes that individuals approach acculturation through the bidimensional model, which is “a process of acculturation to the U.S. culture [and] an enculturation process that functions to retain the heritage culture” (Wiesner, Arbona, Capaldi, Kim, & Kaplan 2015, p. 2). This paper reviews literature on (a) the identity development of first-generation American and immigrant adolescents, (b) relationship between parents and children immersed in the acculturation process, and (c) storytelling as information into the family dynamic and as an intervention in family conflicts due to acculturation gap.

### **Literature Review**

This literature review explores the acculturation challenges and (a) its effects on individual identity development, (b) its effects on the family dynamic, and (c) the effects sharing family narratives has on identity development and the family dynamic.

### **Multicultural Identity Development**

Many scholars have researched the effects of acculturation stress on immigrants and minorities in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Researchers also explored the intersectionality amongst cultures and the effects on an individual's identity development. Sodhi (2008) studied the second-generation Indo-Canadian population and their bicultural identity development. Sodhi quotes Jambunathan et al. (2000), in defining the concept of biculturalism as the ability of an individual to maintain and switch between cultures when needed (p. 187). Sodhi refers to the interchangeability of cultural worlds as situational ethnicity, further explaining, "second-generation individuals [have] the option of selecting and discarding assorted cultural values and traditions" (p.188). This concept relates more to identity exploration and internalization than the ability to switch between cultures. Plake (1992) describes three different approaches toward cultural identity formation: "Assimilation, Biculturalism, and Observance of Tradition (rejection of the dominant culture)" (p. 190), each on a spectrum of cultural acceptance and self-identification. Sodhi (2008) observes that, "Bicultural identity formation also involves the amalgamation of individualistic (Canadian) and collectivistic (East Indian) world views" (as cited in Hofstede 1991; Triandis 1994, 2001). The conflict occurs when there is the unification—or the attempt to unify—individualistic and collectivistic worldviews. There are expectations set by parents that the individual must live based on the heritage culture, which is the collectivistic lifestyle. However, Individuals might experience societal expectations towards autonomy; Therefore, Sodhi (2008) observes that with the conflicting worldviews "Conflict arises when some second-generation Indo-Canadian individuals are left wondering, 'Who am I?', 'Where do I belong?' or 'Where am I from?' which may lead to a bicultural identity crisis" (p. 189). In the bicultural identity formation process, individuals choose to integrate elements of both cultures and reject other elements, relating to traditions, values, beliefs, etc. However, Individuals might

feel conflicted between meeting parents' cultural expectations or "[pursuing] their own aspirations and identify more with the dominant culture" (Sodhi, 2008, p. 189). Individuals go through this complex process as part of their cultural identity formation. As stated in the article, Phinney (1989) believes that, ideally, an individual achieves cultural identity formation by the end of their adolescence. However, bicultural identity formation is a lifelong process. Sodhi (2008) states, "bicultural identity formation can be seen to continuously shift and modify after one's adolescence is actualized, tested periodically by significant events in one's life (e.g., academic/professional achievement, marriage, the birth of a child)" (p. 190). Previous literature regarded bicultural identity formation as a temporary process. However, Sodhi's research supports the concept as a lifelong development. There is a challenge of having to reevaluate constantly where one stands in their bicultural identity. Sodhi (2008) acknowledges a few bicultural challenges, stating, "Unrealistic expectations to preserve their culture as if they were living in the country of origin, pressure to excel academically and professionally..." (p. 192). These challenges, as well as others, raise mental health concerns, such as anxiety and depressive related disorders.

Alessandria and Nelson (2005) conducted a quantitative study questioning whether first-generation American (FGA) college students have lower self-esteem and identity development compared to non-first-generation American (NFGA) students. The FGA students confront a challenge of not only leaving home but also leaving a "setting where both parent and U.S. culture was likely emphasized, to live in a setting that emphasizes the U.S. culture" (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005, p. 4). In this setting, students must affirm their identity in their heritage culture, while also immersing themselves in the U.S. culture. However, not all FGA students want to maintain their heritage culture. Despite the choice of heritage cultural identity, FGA students

have to answer questions about who they are and what they will contribute to the world. An assumption made in the study is “because FGAs are one generation removed from the immigrant experience, total assimilation has not occurred and these individuals have to negotiate into their identity both parent culture and the immediate societal culture” (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005, p. 4). This assumes that the individual has a desire to assimilate into either the heritage culture or the host culture. Alessandria and Nelson (2005) review identity theorists, such as Erikson and Phinney, to identify different aspects of identity development. For one, Erikson recognizes identity development as a life-long process, which is continually developed. Erikson describes a positive result of the process as, “a feeling of being home in one’s body...an inner assuredness” (p. 4). His model is a foundation for other developmental theorists, such as Phinney. Phinney et al. (1997) explain, “Research indicates that minority group status alone, does not impact self-esteem negatively. It is the lack of identification...that negatively influences self-esteem” (as cited in Alessandria & Nelson, 2005, p. 6). With this distinction in mind, the results of the research indicate FGA students had significantly higher self-esteem compared to NFGA. Although not significant, FGA students also have high identity development compared to NFGA students. College presented an opportunity for FGAs to explore their identities, personal and ethnic. Further research explores the influence of the school system on an individual’s ethnic identity development.

Researchers, Acar, Yigit, and Aslan (2016), conducted a study around the challenges of multicultural identity development in schools among first-generation American children. Many migrate to America in hopes to live the American dream. Researchers state, “In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau pegged the country's foreign-born population at 11.5 percent, not far off the historic high of 15 percent in 1910” (p. 106). As immigrants come to America, they must

acculturate or assimilate to the dominant culture. This process involves not only the individual migrating from a foreign country but their first-generation American child. Previous research implies children develop their multicultural identity before they reach adolescence. Although they may begin their multicultural identity development process prior to adolescence, identity development is a lifelong process, as identity is constantly changing. Furthermore, some researchers believe there are two parts of one's identity, "personal identity is about personal values and beliefs, cultural identity is related to the common beliefs, norms and ideas represented in distinct cultures" (p.106). In some instances, depending on the approach taken by the individual, personal and cultural identity may intertwine. Difficulties occur during the process of assimilation or acculturation into the dominant culture. "While still living with their families, their friends and community have always been there to remind them of their ethnicity" (p. 106). FGA students enter a new environment, such as college, where others may question their ethnic identities. These questions often lead to the challenge of balancing two cultures, honoring the heritage culture and navigating the dominant culture. Researchers further state that some parents and family members do not support further education in the U.S. for FGAs because of fear that the dominant culture will have more influence than their heritage culture (p. 106). On the contrary, parents and families who support FGAs desire to further their education allow the individual to explore their identity and develop without consequence.

Similarly, Cone, Buxton, Lee, and Mahotiere (2014) explored the influences of schools systems on the identity development of young Haitian students in South Florida. After the 2010 earthquake, the percentage of Haitian individuals migrating to America increased exponentially, many of them school-aged children. The article furthers explaining the education system in Haiti, or the lack thereof, and the challenges Haitian youth face in their new home and school

ultimately affecting their identity development. Researchers note there is limited literature on the impact of home and school experiences of Haitian students and their identity development; however, they used structural and cultural perspectives on identity formation as a framework to guide the study (p. 266). When defining culture and identity, the article states, "Whereas culture can be thought of as collective sense-making...identity is generally viewed as an individual process of assimilating cultural ideas and then presenting and representing those ideas as part of oneself in a given context" (p. 267). In this case, culture references one's home experience and school experience. Culture and identity are constantly progressing, keeping up with the changes occurring in the world. Furthermore, schools are the primary source of structure for many young children, as they spend seven or more hours a day and five days a week in this system. There are structural biases reproduced in school systems, such as class, race, and gender, influencing the decisions made by young students, including Haitian youth in South Florida. Researchers acknowledge, "identity is largely formed due to the effects of external forces at work upon the individual" (p.268); However, they also note that other forces, such as the Haitian culture, influence the identity development of Haitian youth in America. When coming to America, young Haitians find that they must redefine themselves, as the values of Haiti contradict those of American culture. Therefore, they look for peer role models. Often through similarities of skin tone, Haitian youth often emulate African American youth behaviors and values, in turn defining their own identity through those concepts. Although some Haitians choose to form their own communities separate from African Americans, many identify Haitians as African Americans, quoting Bryce-Laporte (1972), "Haitians are seen as Blacks by Whites and as foreigners by native-born Blacks" (p.272). This conflicting categorization of Haitians furthered the challenge of identity development for many Haitian youth and Haitian-Americans alike. Although this

identification has not changed, as of recent years, an increase of Haitian youth exhibit pride in their culture in the United States. In the 80s and 90s, American society negatively portrayed Haitians; therefore, Haitian youth “were resistant to identifying themselves as Haitian” (p.273). However, as Haitian pop culture increased in America, so did the pride of many Haitian-Americans. Along with the increase of Haitian culture in the American Pop culture, in South Florida and other parts of the Haitian Diaspora, Haitian teachers, administrators, and other influencers promote the Haitian culture and encourage Haitian youth to explore and take pride in the influence of the Haitian culture in their identity development. As Haitian adult figures, such as teacher and parents, support Haitian youth, they often want to separate from the structural components associated with being African American, stating “Since identity is a process of both internalization and externalization, Haitian youth are asked to reject an affiliation with African American students, a group perceived as lacking upward social mobility” (p. 287). All the same, like many adolescents, Haitian youth look to their peers as they define their sense of self. According to the research, “Haitian immigrants are frequently subject to negative peer critiques of their school identities, both by African American students and by other Haitian students who have been in the United States longer and have become more ‘Americanized’” (p. 287). These critiques often leave Haitian youth conflicted between pride in their culture and identity as a Haitian and shame. In order to avoid conflict from peers, Haitian youth often hide their culture and express behaviors of mainstream African American culture. This conflict of identity development affects not only Haitian youth, but also other immigrant youth and first-generation Americans.

Schwartz et al. (2016) conducted research examining the identity development of newly migrant Hispanic adolescents and the effects on psychosocial and risk-taking behaviors.

Researchers addressed previous studies focused on both first and second-generation adolescent immigrants, whereas the present study focuses specifically on first-generation Hispanic adolescents. Schwartz et al. utilized Erikson's (1950) understanding of identity “as a dynamic interplay between coherence and confusion, where healthy identity development is represented as a preponderance of coherence over confusion” (p. 898-899) when examining the identity development of Hispanic adolescents. Identity coherence is accepted aspects of self, whereas identity confusion is uncertain elements up for exploration (p.899). There are various intersecting elements of identity adolescents explore, such as career path, religious and spiritual beliefs, relationships, and for some, cultural identity. Within each element, adolescence experience identity coherence and confusion. Erikson clarified that identity coherence and confusion coexists within an individual, although they function independently and have separate effects on positive psychosocial functioning (self-esteem, positive attitudes, prosocial behaviors, etc.), depressive symptoms, and externalizing problems, including but not limited to negative conduct and substance use (p.899). Identity development of immigrant and minority members is a more challenging process because along with general identity work, such as career, relationships, and values, these members must explore their cultural identity as well. In the United States, Hispanic individuals represent a large and rapidly growing percentage of the immigrant minority group. According to U.S. Census Bureau, in 2014, 17 percent of the population identified as Latina/o, which is more than half of the population growth between 2000 and 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau 2015; Bernstein 2013, p. 900). Many Americans view these statistics as a threat to their way of life; therefore creating the perception that Hispanic individuals are unwanted, which further complicates the identity development process for Hispanic youth (p.900). The results of the study indicate, “levels of identity confusion occurring shortly after immigration predict low self-

esteem, higher depressive symptoms, and greater externalizing problems over time” (p. 911). However, the results also indicate that increased identity coherence prior to immigration is grounding for adolescent Hispanic immigrants as they acculturate to a new world.

Sanchez, Whittaker, Hamilton, and Arango (2017) conducted a study analyzing the importance of cultural socialization in families and its effect on ethnic identity development of Mexican adolescents. Researchers recognize the importance of developing a positive ethnic identity for Latina/o adolescents, as it is essential to positive acculturation and healthy psyche, and the family’s role in the developmental process. This study continues to examine the conceptual process of ethnic identity development, describing it as three distinctive parts: ethnic identity exploration, resolution, and affirmation. The study describes each as “ethnic identity exploration (the degree to which individuals have examined and explored their ethnicity)...resolution (the degree to which the individual has confirmed what their ethnic identity means to them), and...affirmation (an individual’s feelings about their ethnic group membership)” (p. 337). This process allows individuals to explore and internalize their ethnic identity in different degrees. The study uses Umaña-Taylor and Fine’s (2001) framework to describe familial ethnic socialization (FES). Using two dimensions, Overt FES and Covert FES, each describes different approaches parents take to teach their child about their ethnic culture, values, and behaviors. Overt FES is a direct approach parents' use teaching through books and discussing the culture and the importance of having knowledge of the culture. Covert FES is discreet and unconscious communication of cultural values and behaviors through language, traditional food, music related to ethnic background, or stories shared about the native country. (Sanchez, Whittaker, Hamilton, and Arango, 2017, paraphrase Umaña-Taylor and Fine’s, 2001, p. 336). Extended research shows the more families discussed ethnic culture, the rate of identity

exploration increases and a positive ethnic pride develops, which in turn have a positive and long-term influence in youth ethnic identity development. The family dynamic can influence the quality of an individual's identity development during the acculturation process. However, acculturation affects the family dynamic, as the stress raises conflicts between parent and child.

### **Acculturation Stress on the Family Dynamic**

Previous research hypothesizes that acculturative stress influences the family dynamic of immigrant families. Quantitative research conducted by Wiesner, Arbona, Capaldi, Kim, and Kaplan (2015) examined whether health-risking behaviors and emotional problems resulting from acculturative stress impact the mother-child relationship. This article explores the challenges of youth adjusting to cultural discrepancies. There are two models used to conceptualize the acculturation process, unidimensional and bidimensional. Unidimensional acculturation is the process when the child fully immerses his or herself in the host culture, in this case, the American culture. This model often increases the gaps between the parent-child relationships, as the values of each culture are different. Due to a child's "faster acculturation rate to the host culture and their distancing from the heritage culture, parents may become either disengaged from their children or overly rigid in trying to preserve traditional child rearing practices" (Wiesner et al., 2015, p. 2). Parents often feel rejected by their child when they see their child fully accepting and expressing the host culture rather than their heritage. In some cases, there is a language barrier in the parent-child relationship further increasing the acculturation gap. Bidimensional model is "a process of acculturation to the U.S. culture there is an enculturation process that functions to retain the heritage culture" (Wiesner et al., 2015, p. 2). The research is a self-reported test that explores the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, depressive symptoms, and other behavioral and emotional problems of youth

associated with the complexity of the acculturation process with a parent. The results indicated that higher levels of a youth's host culture assimilation positively related to higher rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, as well as acceptance of dating and sexual behaviors. However, the acculturation gap between mother and youth does not relate to youths higher rate of alcohol and substance use, and dating and sexual behaviors. Furthermore, evidence of higher levels of depressive symptoms occurred in youth when mother displayed stronger connections to heritage culture.

Previous research explores the challenges of acculturation from the child's perspective, whereas Jannati and Allen (2018) study from the perspective of parent and child. They explain how different elements of the first-generation American (born in Iran, moved to America) identity, such as "socioeconomic status, years of U.S. residency, education, parent's age during immigration, and religion" (p. 110) can affect the parent-child relationship and the severity of the acculturation gap conflicts. They also recognize the bicultural element where "they consciously or unconsciously adopt or reject aspects of American culture...immigrants may adopt the host culture while retaining aspects of their heritage culture" (p. 111). In addition to the bicultural element of acculturation, the difference of acculturation rates of parent and child creates tensions and furthers the gap in the familial relationship. They also present results of different studies relating to the intergenerational gap, and mental health issues from the familial conflicts (p. 111). This article focuses on the relationship between Iranian adolescents and their parents. Challenges occur as the adolescent begins to explore and define who they are in relation to their ethnic and personal identity. Researchers state, "when parents and adolescents are influenced by different cultures (Iranian vs. American), conflict may ensue or increase" (p. 113). Parents and children experience a new culture differently, different social environments, interactions, activities,

media, etc., often leading to different expectations of identity, values, and behaviors. They each respond differently to the host culture. U.S. born children often do not feel connected to the Iran culture, for example, and struggle whether to identify with their heritage culture or the host culture, whereas parents want to hold on to their heritage culture. These conflicting approaches to acculturation contribute to the gap and increase conflicts between parent and child.

Basáñez, Dennis, Crano, Stacy, and Unger (2014) examined an instrument used to measure conflicts experience as part of the acculturation gap between parent and child, called the Acculturation Gap Conflicts Inventory (AGCI). Defining acculturation as the “process of psychological and behavioral change individuals and groups undergo as a consequence of long-term contact with another culture” (as cited in Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003, p.1728), researchers examined Hispanic young adults and their parents. Previous studies conducted examined the acculturation gap through self-reporting of an individual; however, the current study examines the root of the acculturation gap, which is not necessarily the gap itself, but the stress of acculturation on families. Assessing previous literature about acculturation stress, researchers acknowledge that previous measures developed did not fully capture the conflicts within the acculturation gap specific to families rather than individual challenges. An earlier version of the AGCI questionnaire related to acculturative conflicts between parent and child increase symptoms of depression and lower self-esteem. As time progressed and young adolescents aged to young adults, researchers recognized that the conflicts between parent and child, regarding differences in values and expectations, persisted and even increased as the child acculturated more to the American culture (p.1732). The results of the study identified three factors of stress on the acculturation gap between parent and child as issues of autonomy values, preferred culture, and dating/being out late at night (p. 1738). With each of the factors, Hispanic

young adults felt pressure to acculturate, whether from their parents, peers, or both, which positively correlated to family conflicts, lower academic engagement, increased depressive symptoms, and conflicts with psychosocial adjustment (p. 1741). Researchers recognize that most families experience intergenerational conflicts; however, the acculturation process affects each member differently and can intensify the common familial conflicts (p. 1729). The need for the study was not to measure the acculturation gap, but to discover the source of the conflicts, which they focus on the themes of autonomy, preferred culture, and dating/being out late. Although the results of the study express negative effects on individuals and families, there is no assumption that all acculturation conflict results in depressive symptoms, challenging academic performance, and low self-esteem.

Similarly, Pasch et al., (2006) examined the effects of intergenerational conflict in the acculturation process of Mexican American families and the adjustment of adolescents. Researchers address the ample amount of evidence that supports links between acculturation, family conflicts, and negative adolescent adjustment. Adolescents acculturate faster than their parents do. Therefore, like many previous studies, the researchers hypothesized families with a higher acculturation gap, defined as “adolescents are relatively high in acculturation and their parents are relatively low” (p. 77), will experience high levels of familial conflict. In turn, the high levels of conflict equate to higher risks of negative emotions, behaviors, and academic conduct. However, the results of the research display an interesting contrast. Pasch et al., collected reports from both mothers and fathers, as well as the adolescents; those reports indicate the outcomes from the perception of conflict between each parent and child. For example, “when the father and adolescent were both high in acculturation, fathers reported more conflict with their adolescent” (p. 80). Furthermore, the adolescents of fathers reporting high levels of conflict

report higher levels of anxiety, depression, and anger. Correspondingly, mothers perceiving higher conflict with their adolescent, the adolescent reports more anxiety and school misbehavior. Moreover, an adolescent's perception of conflicts with parents' reports increased amounts of negative outcomes, such as anxiety, anger, depression, school misconduct, and substance use (p. 80). Interestingly enough, the results of the study indicated that families experiencing the acculturation gap are not likely to report more familial conflict, and adolescents were not likely to display negative adjustment outcomes. In fact, families with higher levels of acculturation report greater conflicts. Pasch et al. (2006) suggest, "Perhaps when both father and child are acculturated, it is more acceptable to express family conflict" (p. 82). Researchers continue suggesting that less acculturated families appear less confrontational amongst family members, whereas more acculturated families choose to openly express conflict (as cited in Flores, Tschann, VanOss Marin, & Pantoja, 2004, p. 82). This research supports the concept that higher acculturation of parent and child predicts the function of the family (i.e. level of familial conflict) and adolescent adjustment.

### **Effects of Storytelling**

A family story aids the construction of family identity. An individual family members' perception of these stories influence an individuals' personal identity development. McLean (2005) conducted a study exploring adolescent identity development through narrative meaning-making of memories. One guiding theory in this study is the life story theory of identity. This theory recognizes that "life stories serve to make sense of one's past, present, and anticipated future and are partly constructed by making meaning of past experiences" (p. 683). Although identity development is a lifelong process, in late adolescence, life stories begin to form in order to explain different aspects of self, otherwise known as the meaning-making process. This study

reviews meaning making with adolescents using self-defining memories as the narrative, identifying two specific kinds of meaning, lesson learning and gaining insight; lesson learning denotes a specific moral learned from an event with possible influence on future behaviors, whereas gaining insight often infers a transformation of self or others (p. 684). Previous research identified the construction process of life story as internal. Others describe the function of narrative memory as either personal or social. This study takes the perspective of personal and social functions as inseparable; as memories are individual and personal, the narrative aspect, which is the storing and communicating of memories, is social. In understanding the importance of narrative identity, the social aspect of memory telling is the core of the identity development process. Therefore, identifying and acknowledging the telling functions “help to define the memory-telling contexts as stories change based on the intent of the person telling them” (p. 684). The two most common functions are entertainment and self-explanation. The study found that memories told for self-explanation contained more meaning than for entertainment, stating, “telling for self-explanation...allow one to develop, strengthen, and to confirm insights about the self” (p.688). Sharing memories for self-explanation requires more intimacy and self-disclosure with peers. This social aspect is a crucial part of one's internal representation, as well as self-representation to others. In conjunction with the self-explanation function, the entertainment aspect of memory telling "allow connection with others without the work of communicating meaning or engaging in deeper kinds of personal disclosure that may be more risky" (p.688). Another factor addressed in the study is the influence of the recipient of these narratives. McLean observes that “peers were increasingly likely to be the recipients of self-defining memory telling across adolescence, whereas parents were audiences at earlier ages” (p.688). However, parents and peers did influence the telling functions. Interestingly, McLean infers that

in early adolescence parents may have played a role in developing the stories, which helps form new relationships with peer audiences in late adolescence. That suggests that the parent-child relationship does not lose importance, but may be one way to maintain the connection.

Family stories contain information about family dynamics and an individual's perception of their own family. Researchers Vangelisti, Crumley, and Baker (1999) conducted two studies evaluating the themes of family stories individuals tell that describe their family, how they perceive their family relationships, and the standards individuals' characterize as part of the ideal family. In the first study, participants described stories that describe their family and their relationships, and retold those stories reflecting family standards or ideals. Researchers recognize, "Some family stories may depict, very clearly, how an individual feels or thinks about family members, whereas others may reflect an unclear, clouded picture" (p.337). In order to make a clear distinction, researchers compared the stories describing family relationship and the ideal family stories. The ideal family stories represent the standards held by individuals for the family relationships and influence how the individual evaluates family relationship. Findings of this first study positively relate the themes in family stories describing an individuals' family with the individuals' satisfaction within the family. The presenting themes within family stories are care, disregard, togetherness, hostility, adaptability, chaos, reconstruction, humor, divergent, and personality attributes (p. 350). Findings indicate themes individuals' stories reflecting their own family were personality attribute, care, adaptability, divergent values, and togetherness. Themes describing the ideal family were care, adaptability, personality attributes, togetherness, and humor, which, other than personality attributes, positively link to familial satisfaction. Consequently, themes of disregard, hostility, chaos, divergent values, and personality attributes negatively relate with familial satisfaction (p.353). The findings support family therapists idea

that “there is a core set of characteristics that typify ‘healthy’ family functioning” (p. 362). Overall, none of the themes describing an individual’s ideal family stories correlated to the individuals’ feelings about their relationship with their family (p. 359). The second study examines themes of family stories and family satisfaction, and an individuals’ perspective on the likelihood that their own family stories will change meeting their family ideals (p. 362). Many individuals that shared themes of care, adaptability, togetherness, humor, and reconstruction sustained optimism about the possibilities of familial change towards their ideal, whereas individuals who shared stories containing contrasting themes were less confident of change towards the ideal family. However, those perceptions of change may be challenging to recognize for individuals with a pessimistic view of their family. These individuals with a pessimistic perception of their family can identify characteristics of an ideal family, however they often “feel powerless to alter interactional patterns and ways of thinking to make their family more ‘ideal’” (p. 363). Individuals with positive sentiments regarding family relationships generally contain high satisfaction with relationships, and an optimistic perception for positive change, regardless of negative experiences with the family relationship. Analyzing family stories offers insight on “individuals’ perceptions of their family [and] allows access to an intimate view of respondents’ family life” (p. 365). Furthermore, understand an individuals’ perception of family aids in understand the overall dynamic of a family and challenges they may face.

Additionally, a family develops their collective identity through sharing family stories publically and with each family member. Huisman (2014) addresses the importance of sharing family stories, stating, “narrative is a unique form of communication that gives families opportunities to construct their collective history and identity through telling events and experiences about the family” (p. 146). These stories reveal an abundance of information about

the family, as a unit, and each individual member. Huisman recognizes that the construction of family identity occurs through communication with each family member and the public (p. 145). Continuing, quoting Langellier and Peterson (2004) Huisman affirms the belief that “family narratives preserve ethnic, relational, and social history of the family and its members. The stories were a means of understanding and constructing identities as families and members of a larger immigrant community” (p. 146). Sharing these family stories add to the larger narrative of the immigrant community, as they relay information about the ethnic culture and how the family expresses that culture as a unit. Similarly, for individual members, these stories have implications on the internalization of culture and experiences in shaping their identities. Although, “Family members must negotiate the private, internal and public, external performance of family storytelling in order to present itself as a kind of family that meets the criteria for acceptability” (as cited in Galvin, 2006, p. 146), families have the opportunity to identify themselves and shape their own narratives and history. Huisman’s study argues that storytelling in the family is important as it helps families define themselves in relation to their culture and the public familial norms. The results of the study identified a few broad themes in family stories relating to the family group and cultural identity memberships. For example, a theme described the family as a unique group “separated from the world, but not isolated from it” (p. 149). On the other hand, another theme highlights the families’ identification and memberships to various cultural groups, such as world events, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. With this understanding, families with memberships in different cultural groups remain unique from each other. Although families may share cultural memberships, they are unique in their expression of the culture and its expectations. Lastly, another theme resulting from the study describes the ancestors’ involvement in building the family’s identity. Huisman cites Williams

and Nussbaum (2001), reporting the value the older and younger generations place on passing down family information, and general interaction across generations (p. 150). Each member shares the task of telling ancestor stories as a way of honoring the ancestor and perpetuating the family history multi-generationally. This builds a long-term family identity, preparing the current generation to preserve and continue the family narrative. Additionally, sharing family stories allows understanding of the family in a cultural context, in terms of their membership to specific cultural groups, overall expressing family identity as unique within the cultural groups.

When analyzing family stories, many themes arise. These themes often explain the identity of each member as well as the family dynamic as a whole. For many immigrants, transnationalism is a theme in many family stories describing the familial and individual identity development. Researchers, Stone, Gomez, Hotzoglou, and Lipnitsky (2005), explore transnationalism as an overarching theme within family stories. Family stories of immigrants who came to America pre-1965 prescribed assimilation. American society, at that time, did not welcome culture pluralism and transnationalism as they do now. The drive towards assimilation often created “a deep wedge between the generations and making the second-wave child feel at home nowhere” (p. 385). Researchers recognize that newer immigrants, post-1965, experience a more accepting society of cultural pluralism and transnationalism, speculating that their family stories may be “freer of the need to endorse the ‘melting pot’ ideology and might instead make the case for transnationalism” (p. 382). Furthermore, the study explores the role family stories play in the expression and preservation of transnational identity. Family stories build self-esteem among immigrants, as the narratives display the family’s identity. Researchers, or author-participants, identified themes within the family stories that advocate for transnationalism, such as home remedies, denigration of “enemies” of country of origin, historical and current

knowledge of country of origin, endogamy or disapproval of exogamy, condescending characterization of America and Americans, and idealization of the country of origin. Each theme interprets as advocacy for transnationalism within the family stories. As the research concludes, “Many feel that a slow drift in the direction of assimilation is likely, even inevitable, but there is no consensus that it will happen in a predictable or uniform fashion” (p. 392). Although not immediate, humans adapt to their environment. Therefore, many believe it is inevitable for immigrants to assimilate slowly to the American culture, often after several generations and not necessarily relinquishing ethnic cultural connections. However, prior to the inevitable assimilation, transnationalism plays an initial role as part of the acculturation process. Transnationalism looks different for everyone; “There are various indices of transnationalism, and the strength of one factor...is not necessarily predictive of the strength of another factor” (p.392). Moreover, the way one expresses transnationalism in the present day may change in the future. Despite individual development and processing of one’s own expression of bicultural adaptation, a parents’ transnationalism, especially cultural knowledge of the country of origin, is useful to the entire family structure. As shared in family stories, parents feel empowered and valued as they hold knowledge of valued past and valuable present, overall easing different areas of tension in the family structure.

Researcher Sherman (1990) conducted a pilot study using family genograms to elicit and analyze family narratives. The foundational theory of the study utilizes Reiss (1989) model of the family, which analyzes through two perspectives, the represented family perspective and the practicing family perspective. This study mainly focuses on the represented family perspective, described as “an individual’s internal representations of significant family relationships” (p. 254). This theory extends to analyze Main and Kaplan’s (1985) multigenerational attachment

pattern; furthermore, influencing Bretherton et al., (1989) development of the Parent Attachment Interview, which aided in the structure of the interview process of the study. However, previous research conducted on this study analyzed dyadic relationships, such as mother and child; most of those researches focused on attachment issues. Sherman acknowledges attempts to study the family narrative, however their approach “[highlights] the more positive contributions of family stories in maintaining and defining family culture” (p. 255). The results displayed six different elements of the study of family stories and the use of genogram interviews. First feature recognizes the effectiveness of genogram interviews. The interviews were effective in that they aided in eliciting family stories and provided a structure and timeline. The second feature emphasizes the parallel between the emotional themes of the parents’ stories of themselves as a child and their own child. Next, few fathers and one mother were unable to recall stories told about them as a child. The mother then struggles to read their child’s emotional cues, whereas the fathers’ struggle to establish themselves as a parent to their child. Additionally, few parents struggled to identify family stories that address family identity concerns, which indicates familial fragmentation or “significant emotional cutoffs had occurred between various branches of the family” (p. 256). Lastly, in a few families, the wife/mother plays the role of the keeper of family stories for herself and her family, and the husband/father’s side of the family. Although the study requires further research, the initial findings surfaced interesting data on the absence of family stories and the effect on current parent-child relationships. Absent family stories of parents as a child foreshadows parental challenges developing a positive relationship with their own child. Although less clear, the results of the study infers that the absence of family identity stories, either positive or negative, harmfully influences the child’s individual identity development. Overall, Sherman states, “Eliciting family narratives or stories in the context of a structured,

relatively brief interview gives a rich view of the family's representation of past and current relationships" (p. 257).

### **Discussion**

Acculturation is a process all immigrants experience as they settle into a new culture other than their own. Parents and children alike experience the acculturative challenges, which influence individuals' identity development. Many theorists recognize identity development as a lifelong process; therefore, an individual's identification within a culture varies as time changes. For first generation Americans, such as myself, there is a sentiment of belonging to neither the host nor family heritage culture when adopting the bicultural approach to acculturation. There is pressure from family to maintain their heritage culture; however, outside of family the individual must navigate through the dominant culture. Findings indicate when adolescents have the freedom to explore different aspects of their identity, such as ethnic and personal identity, they reduce individual acculturative stress. Furthermore, results indicate the more families discuss ethnic culture, the more positive ethnic pride develops, which influences lasting ethnic identity development for individuals and increase positive family dynamic.

Like many previous researchers, this research hypothesized that parent-child conflicts occur due to an acculturation gap. However, many findings indicate there is little relation between the acculturation gap and parent-child conflict. Instead, conflict arises due to different approaches to acculturating to the host culture, as well as differing values. Further research indicates that families that experience an acculturation gap are not likely to report family conflict more than families not experiencing an acculturation gap. Additionally, some parents with high acculturation rates, along with their child, report greater conflict. Therefore, the acculturation gap

is not necessarily the cause of familial conflict; however, an intergenerational difference in values and acculturative stress influences higher family conflicts.

After reviewing literature about the process of ethnic identity development and acculturation influence on familial conflict, conclusive implications propose storytelling as an effective intervention in mediating and understand the family dynamic, as well as grounding ethnic identity amongst individuals. Many previous studies explore the importance of family stories, each analyzing a different role they play in families. Some researchers explore how shared family stories display the individuals' perception of their family and their sentiments regarding their family relationships. Others explored how families' stories help develop the family identity. Additional research explores the relationship between family stories and individual and familial ethnic identity. Overall, research indicates that sharing family stories provides further information about the family dynamic and the relationships individuals have with different members. Sharing a family narrative eases tension in different areas within the family, as well as empowering parents and youth alike when identifying oneself in a bicultural environment.

Further research around parental identity development during their acculturation process is important as it can shed light on the immigrant family dynamic from a different perspective. Findings indicate that both the parent and child's acculturation process affects the family dynamic. The child often struggles with the challenge of balancing the two different cultures. However, there is not much research conducted about the parents' experience with their own acculturation process and its influence on their identity. The overall purpose of the presented research is to open a dialogue about the bicultural immigrant family experience. Additionally, conducting further research about storytelling and the effects on individual identity and the

family dynamic, specifically with immigrant families, can shed light on the immigrant experience. As people continue to immigrate to different countries, more and more individuals and families experience bicultural and acculturative challenges. As a contribution to the helping profession, understanding the bicultural and acculturation challenges serves ourselves in knowledge and providing better care for the families we serve.

### **Afterword: An Artistic Response to My Bicultural Expression**

Do you want to hear a testimony about my life?

Who I am, or more accurately, who I claim to be?

You don't know this, but it's hard for me, to pinpoint my true identity.

My culture means so much to me, but as of late, I have been questioning.

How do I express my culture? Do I even express my culture? Do you know what my culture is?

Do any of you? Am I just another black girl to you? Let me tell you all something.

Yo soy Cubana. Mi abuelo nació en Cuba. Claro qué no puedo hablar bien español pero yo entiendo muy bien.

Mwen se Haitian. Mwatye nan fanmi m te fet nan Ayiti; manman m, papa m, ak deux gran sé m.

I am AmeRican. I was born here in Boston, MA. Me, my older brother, and my two little sisters.

But what is my true Identify?

Now that you know there is more to my black girl magic, look at me and tell me what you see.

See me.

I guess my biggest question is, can I claim all Three?

Am I more one than the other? I mean, all three are In me, right?

Sí, oui, yes.

Cubana, Haitian, American is mE. C.H.R.I.S.T.I.E.

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***THESIS APPROVAL FORM***

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In the judgment of the following signatory, this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

**Thesis Advisor:** Vivien Marcow Speiser