



# Redemption and Well-being in Turning Point Narratives for U.S. and U.K. Emerging Adults

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## INTRODUCTION

- Turning point experiences significantly alter one's understanding of self. They are central to narrative identity (McAdams, 2003; McAdams & McLean, 2013).
- Adverse experiences may be especially salient as turning point memories (Mansfield, 2023; Mansfield & McLean, 2010).
- Redemptive structuring - turning the negative into positive - is a culturally dominant way of narrating adversity in the U.S., which predicts well-being (Adler et al., 2015; McAdams, 2003; McLean et al., 2020).
- Little empirical work has examined redemptive narration and its relationship to well-being in other nations. Recent work argues that 'recuperation' – gradual lessening of symptoms over time and the ability to cope with lasting emotional and physical scars – may be culturally dominant in the U.K. when narrating trauma (Blackie et al., 2020).

Our cross-national exploratory study asks:

- Are U.S. and U.K. emerging adults equally likely to tell redemptive narratives of adverse turning points?
- To what extent is recuperative narration present in U.S. and U.K. emerging adults narratives these events?
- Is redemptive narration predictive of well-being in both nations?

## PARTICIPANTS AND MEASURES

- 156 emerging adults recruited from the Psychology Subject Pool at Weber State University (Ogden, Utah, Mage = 24, SD=8.1, 63.2% female)
- 50 emerging adults recruited from The University of Hertfordshire (Hatfield, England, Mage = 23.3, SD = 6.6, 63.6 % female)
- All participants completed consent, a battery of measures in a Qualtrics survey (e.g., the Big 5 Inventory, John et al., 2008; Psychological Well-being), wrote a turning point narrative (prompt below), and then repeated some measures (e.g., Psychological Well-being,  $\alpha = .96$ ; Ryff (1989), 9-item subscale version).

## TURNING POINT PROMPT

(adapted from McAdams' Life Story Interview)

- In looking back over your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life wherein you went through an important change of some kind. For this event please describe what happened, where and when it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling during the event. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life. You have unlimited space to write. Please provide a full story of the event.*

## CODING

- The 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> authors met and trained on sample narratives from a similar dataset to code redemption. We followed the McLean et al. (2020) beginning and ending protocol. Once acceptable agreement was met (above 80%), the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> author coded all narratives for redemption (I.C.C. = .87). Disagreements were discussed and the 3<sup>rd</sup> author adjudicated consensus codes that were used in final analyses.
- Recuperation coding followed suggestions by Blackie (2020; personal communication with 2nd author, Oct. 2022)

## RESULTS

**Question 1:** U.S. participants appear more likely to write redemptive narratives.

**Question 2:** Both express recuperative narratives but the relative presence of the recuperative theme is higher in the U.K. sample.

Nature of Narrative	Sample	
	U.S.A.	U.K.
Redemptive	79 (72.4%)	16 (57.1%)
Recuperative	7 (6.4%)	4 (14.3%)
Neither Redemptive nor Recuperative	23 (21.3%)	8 (28.6%)

**Question 3:** Redemptive narration is predictive of well-being in both nations, but more so in the U.S. than the U.K.

- U.S. Sample  $r(109) = .26$ ,  $p < .01$
- U.K. Sample  $r(28) = .16$ ,  $p = .42$

Post Narrative Mean Well-being by Sample and Redemption		
	U.S.A.	U.K.
Redemptive Narrators	<sup>a,b</sup> 4.38 (.64)	<sup>a</sup> 3.96 (.57)
Non-redemptive Narrators	<sup>b</sup> 4.05 (.61)	4.11 (1.00)

Note: <sup>a</sup> Redemptive narrators in the U.S. report significantly higher well-being post narration than redemptive narrators in the U.K. (note uneven cells however),  $F(1,133) = 5.26$ ,  $p = .02$ .

<sup>b</sup> Redemptive narrators in the U.S. report significantly higher well-being post narration than non-redemptive narrators in the U.S.,  $F(1,133) = 5.62$ ,  $p = .02$ .

## NARRATIVE EXAMPLES

### REDEMPTIVE NARRATIVE

*"A turning point in my life was when I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes almost 4 years ago at age 16...My mom and siblings were in the room when I was diagnosed, but my parents stayed in the hospital with me. I was terrified and went through a sort of grieving process over what could have been. Because of this event, however, I have grown immensely as a person. I have matured, become more patient, understanding, and have become more independent. Looking back on it, I'm grateful for this diagnosis, because it has helped me to become who I am today."*

### RECUPERATIVE NARRATIVE (see note under limitations)

*"A key turning point in my life is when my parents got divorced. I remember them having the final fight and being scared, nervous, thinking it was my fault that they were having problems. I was nine years old when this happened and had to keep my younger brother with me in our room while we listened to our parents argue. After the argument ended I remember watching as my dad packed a couple bags and left and saw my mom crying. It was at that moment that I had the thought that I needed to be the man of the house and be strong for my mom and brother. It changed me by forcing me to have a "hard" attitude. To carry the weight of the world on my shoulders. I felt like I had to do everything I could myself so that I could take stress off of my parents. I think this event showed, in a somewhat unhealthy way, that I am a caring person and don't like when people argue. It shaped my personality to be a peacekeeper, to try and not "make waves."*

## DISCUSSION and ONGOING QUESTIONS

- U.S. sample appears highly homogenous relative to U.K. sample. Does this increase the likelihood that we would see redemptive structuring in adversity turning point narratives among the U.S. sample? We believe that is likely.



- Self-reported well-being is (once again) tied to redemptive narration of identity-salient autobiographical memories.
  - We need more work on understanding *why and how* redemption matters. Is it because it falls in line with the cultural master narrative or because of the validation and/or social support individuals receive after a redemptive retelling? When is there value in contending against this narrative structure (Mansfield et al., 2023; Syed & McLean, 2022)?
- Members of the U.S. sample are already relying on redemptive master narrative in emerging adulthood (see also Perlin & Fivush, 2020). When in the lifespan, and for whom in the U.S., does this begin?
- A minority of participants engaged in recuperative narration. Can recuperative narration be adaptive among a U.S. sample?
- Blackie et al. (2020) argue that recuperative narration refers to storying how one has learned to live with the negative and cope with lasting negativity, but not necessarily gain or grow from adversity. How does that differ from 'return redemption' proposed by Perlin and Fivush (2021)?
- Unexpected 'finding' - U.K. participants were very hard to recruit for this study and many completed self-report measures but would not share turning point narratives. Why? Is it less culturally acceptable to share intimate personal stories with strangers in the U.K. than the U.S.?

## LIMITATIONS

- U.S. and U.K. sample sizes were drastically different.
- Self-reported well-being may not be the same as actually experiencing a high-quality life and we did not include a measure of socially responsive reporting.
- There is not a published coding manual for recuperative themes. We relied on personal communication with Blackie and her recent manuscript. Reliability was not assessed as it typically is quantitative narrative work (e.g., Syed & Nelson, 2015). All info. on recuperation in this work needs further verification.