


Spring 2024

How Was I, Mom? A Study of the Impact of Prenatal Narratives

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Recommended Citation

Komoroff, Aria Esther, "How Was I, Mom? A Study of the Impact of Prenatal Narratives" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 157.

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How was I, Mom?

A Study of the Impact of Prenatal Narratives

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Science, Math, and Computing of Bard College

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sarah Dunphy-Lelii for helping me every step of the way with my senior project, and being such an amazing support system for me throughout this year- I don't know where this project would be without you.

Most importantly, Thank You to my mom who inspired me to do this project. You couldn't be a better mama. This is for you. I Love You !

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Abstract

This senior project investigates the enduring impact of prenatal narratives on individuals' lives, particularly focusing on the transmission of maternal experiences from mother to daughter. The study explores how these narratives persist throughout a child's life and how the story of the mother's pregnancy experience influences the daughter's self-esteem and perceived closeness to her mother. Daughters and mothers were asked to share either lived or heard experiences of pregnancy through a free write. Daughters then completed self-report instruments assessing their self-esteem and feelings of closeness to their mother.

The research begins with a review of recent theories and research on life stories, emphasizing their role in self-understanding, self-worth, and autobiographical narratives. The primary objective is to investigate the relationships between individual development and external influences, particularly the input from others in shaping one's self-development. Existing literature underscores the pivotal role of the mother-daughter relationship in shaping a daughter's self-worth, especially within the realm of pregnancy narratives. The study aims to determine how the positivity or negativity of mothers' narratives correlate with daughters' self-esteem and perceived closeness to their mother.

The results did not show a correlation between the positivity or negativity of maternal narratives and daughters' self-esteem and perceived closeness to their mother. Additionally, consistency between the narratives did not correlate with higher self-esteem and perceived closeness scores. That being said, given most of the stories were coded as being consistent, and daughters did have particularly high scores in Self Esteem and MAD, a correlation may in fact exist that we did not detect, due to small sample size. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the developmental implications of prenatal narratives, shedding light on the dynamics between maternal storytelling, daughters' self-esteem, and their perceived level of closeness in their relationship.

Intro

Narratives

There has been an upsurge of interest in research surrounding autobiographical recollections, life stories and narrative approaches to understanding human behavior and experience. In particular, the method of narrative should be considered. What defines narrative as a method is the way it is used to articulate life experiences in a meaningful way. Particularly, narrative psychology approaches a person's life story as a form of identity. In other words, how one chooses to reflect on, integrate and relay the story and events of their life, shapes who they are as well as the content of the story itself. It is a social constructivist approach that studies the implications of these stories for individuals and societies.(Crossley, 2002) As a result narrative psychologists use interviews to provide an opportunity for a person to give a detailed account of their life or particular events.(Murray, Michael, 2015) More recently, narrative psychology has sought to study narratives as a way to obtain empirical data about human social cognition and adaptation (János, 2008).

Dan McAdams “ Life Story Model of Identity” (1985) asserts that people living in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalized and evolving narratives of the self. (McAdams,F2001) This model of identity argues that identity itself takes the form of a story. “Young adults living in modern societies begin to reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present and anticipate the future in terms of an internalized evolving self story”. (McAdams, 2001) Narratives are thus a human tool for understanding self concept.

In line with Dan McAdams definition of narrative, understanding the impact it has on one's identity, becomes clear. In “The Stories We Tell About Ourselves Understanding Our

Personal Narratives' (McAdams cited by Mufarech, 2022) McAdams begins by acknowledging how people are natural storytellers. He claims that humans are constantly revising and editing the ways in which they talk about the past and future through the act of narrativizing their lives. It is through storytelling that we, as social creatures, make sense of the world. Life story model is the belief that beginning in adolescence people start to become historians of the self, that we form these stories indeed independently but also through what we are told. Since we are storytellers of the self, narrative identity, that either we create or internalize, stays with us throughout our lives and the significance of it persists. The literature on how influential narratives are on one's development and self perception is expansive and insightful.

The Pregnancy Narrative Internalized

The pregnancy narrative, defined throughout the current study, is the story your mother shares with you about her experience being pregnant. It is a story that is told throughout one's life; however, it is simultaneously a story that addresses an experience that only occurs once. The reality of this story being a narrative typically told numerous times in your life, and at any point in your life, while also being told most frequently by the same person every time, allows for a unique shape to form; one that is different than other narratives. Storytelling becomes a mechanism for building relationships, connecting with your past and your understanding of it. Pregnancy stories are a particularly intriguing type of autobiographical narrative because although they are not consciously remembered events being the child, they are always the beginning point of one's life; the beginning of the story. Thus, the ways in which adolescents tell these stories reflects both how it has been told to them, and how the narrative has been internalized.

Stories help us make meaning of the past and influence our future. Internalization can be defined as the deepest level of conformity and a result of social influence. To quote Freud internalization is “the process by which individuals adopt the values, beliefs and attitudes of others into their own sense of self. Typically the process begins in early childhood but continues through life” (Freud, 1856) This quote nicely sets up the studies framework for why the pregnancy narrative can be used as a way to measure levels of internalization.

There is limited research dedicated to addressing whether the internalization of narratives may be linked to one's self esteem and their feelings towards their mother. However Hayden's et al., who specifically looked at narratives through their degree of conveyed positivity, did just this. More specifically her study collected data surrounding the use of ‘positive vs negative’ dialogue and detected how the “elaborateness of a mothers reminiscing style in conversation with her young child becomes a major determinant of that child's future capability of understanding self” (Hayden et al, 2006)

The usage and quantity of certain words (i.e positive vs negative) in Haydens et al. study was used as a tool to understand the connection between one's self esteem and the way in which the narrative was internalized. Quantity of positive language vs negative language gives insight into the more abstract feelings conveyed in this story; instead of the literal instances or experiences of it. Hayden et al., suggests that “use of positive vs negative dialogue shapes the daughters overall feelings of self worth. The ways in which a mother feels about her daughter become verbalized in how the mother characterizes those memories carrying her daughter [...] The factual details of the birth story are stored in the mother's mind at the moment her child is born; however the emotional significance of the story will change.” (Hayden et al.,2006)

The meaning behind significant emotional events develops over time as individuals reflect on the story's personal importance. Meaning “as mothers process the meaning of the birth, some factual elements are lost but the emotional elements that are retained and reinforced by the intensity of feeling invoked by their recollection over time become the salient aspects of narrative account.” (Hayden et al, 2006) These moments of communicating remembered experiences, which indeed are a mix of factual and emotional information, remain huge bonding moments for both mothers and daughters.

Moreover, these narratives wield the power to influence the stories we create later in life. It is a well-established fact that the narratives we craft about ourselves frequently diverge from objective reality. For instance, the discrepancy between one's perception of a bad interview and the interviewer's perspective highlights the subjective nature of these self-stories. The journal article "Stories can Influence the Self-Concept" emphasizes the importance of understanding narratives as representations rather than absolute realities. While stories may be narrated by others, their impact on an individual's sense of the world lies uniquely in the hands of the receiver in how they internalize what is being shared.

Memory of Pregnancy Narrative

The telling of stories that describe women's experiences of giving birth and being pregnant is a common and important social practice in many cultures" (Carson, et al., 2017). Anna Carson interviewed 81 mothers aged 15-24 in hopes to analyze their shared birth stories as a way to seek understanding about how their telling of the birth stories “served to make meaning out of their experiences.” This study is embedded in the theory of narrative inquiry which concentrates on the stories that people tell as it poses these told stories as “ having central roles

in identity formation and in contextualizing and explaining the significance of key life events.” (Carson, et al, 2017) Throughout the study, Carson positioned birth stories as a social practice for many cultures, however she specifically examines birth stories told by early age mothers and how that interconnects with bigger narratives regarding social stigmas.

Through mothers' shared stories, the researchers were able to interpret what types of pressure, and experience they endured and then internalized as a result of being young mothers. As they write “The way one tells a story helps to reveal its meanings”(Carson et al, 2017) For example they write “stories where apprehension concerns feature strongly, particularly among Indigenous participants, tended to position the mother and her family history as a co-produced protagonist facing unreasonable thresholds in terms of the production of a healthy child. Revealing the combined impacts of ageism, racialisation, and overall high child apprehension rates.”(Carson et al, 2017) It’s fascinating that from tone and language, the implications and perspective of the experience is understood. Regardless of the actual reality or objective experience the way the story is told is vital to its implications.

This leads me to discussing another factor that determines the language used when sharing this story. The gender differences in how a child interprets the pregnancy narrative is addressed in a study titled “Gender Differences in Adolescent Birth Narratives” (Andrews, et al, 2015) where they examined the different ways a birth story is shared depending on the child's gender. The objective was to investigate whether gender differences in narrative styles would extend to birth narratives, and whether or not narrative styles specific to birth stories would correlate with levels of family expressiveness and knowledge about family history. The study looked into 61 mostly white, broadly middle class adolescents from two-parent families, between the ages of 13 and 16 where they then coded birth narrative on elaboration, coherence, internal

states, and connectedness. Female narratives were higher on all of these variables than were adolescent males' narratives.

This particular study raises the critical argument that when unpacking the internalization and outcomes of narratives on identity we can not ignore the factor of gender. This study exposes how females report more coherent, elaborated narratives that are focused on social connection and contain an increase in language related to both interbal thoughts and emotions.

Acknowledging how these differences are socialized during early parent child reminiscing connects to gender as well, for “both mothers and fathers are more elaborate and emotionally expressive when reminiscing with daughters than with sons and also share social events, emotions and feelings towards relationships more often with their daughters.” (Andrews, et al, 2015) This study demonstrates why examining daughters' internalization of narratives is appropriate and linked to understanding the significance of stories on perception of self and relationship development.

This study suggests that forming a life story is just as important based on gender as it is on the events experienced. “In adolescence, when identity becomes a major developmental task, gender differences in autobiographical narratives may contribute to a gendered sense of self.”(Erikson, 1968, cited by Kroger, 2003) Erikson states two reasons for why adolescents' birth narratives differ by gender. First daughters are exposed to more elaborate and frequent stories, and second, “generally females engage in a more coherent, emotional and expressive way of communicating, expecting that mothers are the ones who generally share this story in specific, we can predict that mothers share this story in a more coherent way.” (Erikson, 1968, cited by Kroger, 2003) Therefore, analyzing mother daughter dyads seems more efficient.

“*Gender Differences in Adolescent Birth Narratives*” study exemplifies how examining birth narratives has the potential to yield information important to understanding the development of identity as it is tied to the familial context. The story of one's birth, makes an invaluable contribution to the process of constructing a self (Reese, 1996) The study also examined whether or not birth narratives related to broader measures of family knowledge and family expressiveness, defined as the extent to which families experience and express both positive and negative emotions during everyday interactions. Interestingly, tone is included here in the analysis. As in how the use of certain language and tone surrounding the stories, indeed influences self identity on its own.

Erikson in “*Gender Differences in Adolescent Birth Narratives*” confirms and furthers previous findings on gendered autobiographical narratives. “A great deal of evidence has accumulated to show that females tell stories about their lives differently than males.” (Hudson, 2013) Specifically for birth narratives being shared, the same differences with females telling more coherent, elaborated, and connected narratives, that include more internal thoughts and emotions, than do males were found when they relayed their own mothers pregnancy experience. It suggests that these differences are both partly a reflection of how events may be experienced, and also a reflection of how life stories are reconstructed through a gendered lens.

This study emphasizes an important component to how narratives become integrated into our perceptions of self. The way a story is told, connects to how one internalizes their gendered identity, because the telling of the story is “gendered”. This provides compelling reasons to further examine these particular kinds of unique narratives which are ones that as they write, “are not personally remembered events but instead received knowledge through the art of storytelling.” (Hudson, 2015) Girls internalize this narrative more than boys simply because of

the way in which it is communicated to them, and not necessarily because of any biological factors to the pregnancy experience itself.

Ultimately, this study serves as a valuable reference for my own research especially as it provides evidence for this study's decision to focus on less objective aspects of the pregnancy experience. By emphasizing the significance of less literal representations in the mother's narratives about her pregnancy, the current study diverges from merely collecting factual details like physical symptoms. Instead, it seeks to unravel the subjective and nuanced layers of the mother-daughter relationship, highlighting the importance of emotional and interpretative aspects over concrete, tangible experiences.

Storytelling as a Form of Transmission

Baird (2002), examined the direct and indirect effects of parent-child connection and parental self disclosure. Precisely how parent self disclosures about their own feelings and experiences, relate to their child self esteem and social initiative. The study proposed and tested the hypothesis that parental disclosure would have positive outcomes on relationship satisfaction, child self esteem and social skills. The research demonstrated how “a healthy parental connection, operationalized as a level of self disclosure, is related to positive outcomes such as, social development, academic achievement, prosocial behavior and self esteem are all used as a proxy for detecting levels of closeness.”(Baird, 2002) In this study, self esteem is listed as its own positive outcome, yet the three other benefits listed correlate with high levels of self esteem as well. The study is embedded in the belief that a healthy functioning parent-child relationship prepares children for broadening their interpersonal relationships and self concept development. It looked at both genders of children and both father and mothers, as well as examining a wide

variety of school aged children. This study too concluded that differences in the effect of self disclosure depend on the gender of the parent. Fathers' self disclosure had a positive and direct effect on children's social initiative, whereas mothers' self disclosure only had a direct effect on self esteem on children but not effect on overall connection. Disclosure as a means of building strong relationships, touches on the idea of mutual trust and reciprocal honesty. This interactive aspect of communication between parent and child has been neglected in literature as benefiting child development.

In the realm of communication through storytelling, parental self-disclosure, as described in Baird (2002), illustrates how this specific form of dialogue (parent-to-child disclosure) enhances the parent-child relationship. Put simply, when parents share personal experiences with their children, it can be perceived as a confirmation of trust and confidence, reinforcing the emotional bond between them. The study suggests that a child who internalizes the act of parental self disclosure, as a symbolism of transparency and honesty, has a higher perception of their own self worth, then a child where this communication does not exist. That is because disclosure here is a mechanism to portray a certain level of intimacy and trust. The outcomes of this study provide helpful insight into the mother-daughter relationship as it found that this form of communication elicited a foundation of trust and honesty in this relationship. The positive impact parental self disclosure had on the interviewed children, revealed that the act of relaying stories, especially ones that give insight into how you personally feel/felt, supports higher levels of self esteem in the child.

Furthermore, Richter and Colleagues (2014), examined the influence of stories on the self concept through the lens of one's femininity. "Self-reported femininity was assessed after reading a story that featured a protagonist with a traditional gender role (focused on motherhood) or a

control story.” The traditional story given in the experiment increased femininity only among readers who were more “deeply transported into the story world” of the read story. The experimental story increased femininity only among respondents who had no children of their own. This effect was demonstrated by “measuring feminine gender roles portrayed in a written narrative on the gender roles compared to adult female readers attributed to themselves as part of their self-concept.” (Richter et al, 2014)

“According to social comparison theory individuals are motivated to gain self-knowledge” (Festinger, 1954). A large body of research has shown that nonfictional as well as fictional stories can alter beliefs that recipients hold about the world. (Richter et al., 2014) Richter, acknowledged that a growing body of evidence indicates that “mass-mediated stories can not only influence how we judge features of the outside world but also affect how we perceive ourselves.” (Richter et al, 2014) “Stories can influence the self-concept” Journal article, explains how psychologically, when people see people similar to them, they subconsciously act as comparison standards because individuals who are similar to oneself provide diagnostic information for the self-evaluation. (Richter et al 2014) Thus, this study found that as daughters are often categorized as being similar to their mothers, as well as being the protagonist of this pregnancy narrative, constructing a sense of self and a perception of yourself in response, is not only normal, but a critical aspect of the transmission..

The study by Richter et al. (2014) shows that exposure to a story can make the reader's self-concept more similar to both the plotline or the protagonists' characteristics. Richter also discusses how even fictional stories can influence readers, as they often compare themselves to

the main character. The capability people have to blur the line between how one is perceived by others and how one perceives oneself is fundamental for understanding the power of storytelling.

Effects of Parental Self Disclosure On The Parent/Child Relationship and Child's Self

Esteem

In drawing parallels to the study, "The Effects of Parental Self-Disclosure" (Baird, 2002) where communication, specifically self-disclosure, was a focal point, my exploration of the Pregnancy Narrative as a form of communication, adds a unique dimension. Despite the commonality of pregnancy narratives, their significance is often underestimated, especially when viewed from the perspective of the child.

The study by Baird (2002), sheds light on the vital role of mutual trust, demonstrated through the disclosure of personal information, in shaping the quality of parent-child relationships. This insight resonates with the current study, emphasizing the importance of understanding the bidirectional relationship between mother-daughter closeness and narratives. The closeness measured through narratives becomes a key metric in evaluating the levels of self-esteem in daughters, suggesting that their sense of self-worth is intricately tied to the perceived closeness with their mothers. Recognizing the theoretical significance of these narratives, particularly within the mother-daughter dyad, underscores the foundation of my hypothesis. By examining how narratives contribute to the perception of closeness and connection, the current study not only addresses a gap in existing research but also delves into the intricate dynamics of familial relationships and their impact on individual self-worth.

The conceptualization of closeness in this study, specifically through comfortability around open communication, adds an additional layer to the understanding of relationships. By focusing on self-disclosure as a means to detect communication patterns and studying its impact on self-esteem, my findings highlight the significant role of communication in shaping developmental outcomes.

The Relationship Between Storytelling, Self Esteem and Attachment Theory

In an attempt to now connect narrative internalization to one's self identity, a study done in 2006 titled "*The Transmission of Birth Stories from Mother to Daughter: Self-Esteem and Mother-Daughter Attachment*" suggests why the birth story holds so much value in one's identity formation. This study examined the "relationship between self-esteem and the internalization of the birth story by late adolescent (college-aged) daughters." (Hayden et al., 2006). Haydens et al., study looked into how the relationship between the internalization of the childbirth narrative by daughters and the strength of the daughters' attachment to their mothers are related ultimately to self esteem. Furthermore, it was of interest to examine whether there would be a, "correspondence and cohesiveness between the daughters heard stories and the mothers understanding of what she has communicated to her daughter about her pregnancy" (Hayden et al., 2006). Detecting the similarities between the experienced narratives gives insight into why certain narratives are internalized in the way they are and why they are often so different.

The first part of the study, "sought to explore the relationship between a young woman's self-esteem and attachment to her mother and the narrative she expressed about her own birth based on the information her mother had told her about this event." (Hayden et al., 2006). The

results of this study indicated that “firstly daughters who had heard their birth stories more times wrote significantly more descriptive ($r=0.45$, $p<0.001$) and more positive ($r=0.32$, $p<0.01$) accounts than did daughters who had heard the story fewer times.” (Hayden et al., 2006). Secondly, “it was found that daughters whose stories were high in positivity, implying that their mother must have communicated positive stories throughout their life, had higher self-esteem but no effect of attachment;” (Hayden et al., 2006) and lastly, “daughters who had heard the stories of their births more times displayed higher self-esteem and also indicated more secure relationships with their mothers”(Hayden et al., 2006). Study 1, showed a clear connection between the narratives that daughters wrote about their perception of their own birth, self-esteem, and attachment to their mothers. Birth stories that express cohesiveness and elaborativeness may signal an individual who is more connected to the familial past and the assumption is that this also makes for a child who feels more connected to a sense of self, influencing one's level of self esteem.

Leading me to study 2, Hayden et al. (2006) explored the transmission of birth stories from mother to daughter, “in an attempt to see if the implications remained the same from the findings in study 1” (Hayden et al., 2006). The assumption here was that mothers who wrote more descriptive and positive childbirth narratives would have daughters with higher levels of self-esteem and mother daughter attachment and this was in fact supported. As well “descriptiveness of the mothers’ narratives was correlated with the daughters’ levels of mother–daughter attachment, and lastly the positivity of the mothers’ narratives was associated with daughters’ self esteem as well” (Hayden et al., 2006) The study indicated that “mothers’ narrative positivity and daughters’ narrative descriptiveness were the best predictors of daughters’ self-esteem.

Hayden's et al. study reinforces this notion by suggesting that as mothers process the meaning of childbirth, certain factual details may be lost over time. However, the emotional elements retained and reinforced through recollection become the salient aspects of the narrative. This insight underscores the subjective and interpretative nature of storytelling, emphasizing the emotional resonance that shapes our understanding of events and experiences. The emphasis on family narratives aligns with the broader understanding of their importance in various aspects of development, including language acquisition, emotion regulation, attachment processes, and the socialization of a child's identity.

"As daughters begin to acknowledge that they share the capacity to give birth, the transmission of such a story from mother to daughter is of particular interest" (Hayden et al., 2006). For mothers, this narrative is meaningful as well, but for a different reason than it is for daughters. The creation of a childbirth narrative allows the daughter to process the implications of giving birth through the lens of her own mother who carries a lot of influence over her. (Hayden et al., 2006). For mothers, however, this "creation of a childbirth narrative" provides a framework for understanding the changes in identity brought on by giving birth and becoming a mother (Hayden et al., 2006). The multifaceted and dual effect this narrative has on both parties adds to its importance, as the sharing of this story impacts each individual, separately and their relationship. Specifically, Hayden et al. address how mothers may create childbirth narratives as a way of "ritualizing their experiences and making memories of particular personal meaning and even spiritual awakening" (Hayden et al., 2006). Narrative memories provide a medium for self-expression and identity formation, offering a way to make sense of the events in our lives (Hayden et al., 2006).

Daughters should hear a positive story surrounding the pregnancy because she herself one day may be pregnant. For this reason alone, “the internalization of this particular narrative paves a way of imagining one’s entry into the world; and the kind of acceptance this arrival received factors in on one's self esteem.” (Hayden et al., 2006.) Another layer to this narrative is that uniquely for daughters, it can provide an image of how a vital role in womanhood is enacted and experienced emotionally by your primary role model. A daughter’s level of attachment to her mother may affect how she views childbirth and motherhood in general.

Hayden et al. 2006, concluded that as it follows, hearing a positive story about one’s coming into the world would lead to positive feelings about oneself, as the opposite was established by Wrye’s (1996) finding where a “negative birth stories have the potential to lower an individual’s self esteem significantly.” (Hayden et al., 2006) “All together the findings of Study 1 and Study 2 suggest that daughters’ birth stories are connected to lower self-esteem and their relationships with their mothers.” (Hayden et al., 2006)

The findings from Hayden et al. (2006), further emphasizes the importance of these maternal narratives in shaping daughters' self-esteem and maternal attachment. These narratives not only provide insights into a vital role in womanhood but also play a role in reflecting the offspring's sense of self-worth and the integrity of the mother-child bond. This holistic approach to understanding the mother-daughter relationship highlights the multifaceted impact of narratives and attachments, underscoring the intricate interplay between past experiences and current perceptions.

In order to truly understand the impact narratives have on relationships and self identity, we must analyze the nature of certain bonds. In regards to the effect that the pregnancy narrative can have on a daughter when told by her mother, unpacking the attachment theory becomes crucial. British psychologist John Bowlby was the first attachment theorist, and he described attachment as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Hayden quoting Bowlby, 2006). Attachment theory focuses on relationships and bonds (particularly long-term) between people, as it is the basic motivation of human life. Attachment theory, from a more psychological perspective, proposes how the early caregiver-child relationship influences social, emotional, self-regulation, and brain development. Children who maintained proximity to a strong attachment figure were more likely to receive comfort and protection throughout their childhood.

John Bowlby's Attachment theory (created in 1950) acknowledged that a child has an innate need to emotionally connect to one main attachment figure. Bowlby further suggested that the primary caregiver serves as a template for how children internalize future relationships. This initial primary bond serves as a prototype for later relationships that child will form. This is referred to as the internal working model, which is a cognitive framework which uses mental representation for understanding the world, self and others. Specifically it addresses how a child bases their information about the world, other people, and themselves as an individual, through or based on the ways in which their caregiver has socially and emotionally responded to them. A securely attached infant is an infant secure about its world in general, present and future. Furthermore, children who achieve attachment to at least one caregiver are more comfortable venturing out into the world and exploring it. Bowlby did not rule out the possibility of other attachment figures for a child, but he did believe that there should be a primary bond which was

much more important than any other (usually the mother because she is typically primary caregiver). Children do behave in ways that elicit contact or proximity to their caregiver (in this case mother). When a child experiences heightened arousal, they signal to their caregiver. Crying, smiling, and locomotion are examples of these signaling behaviors. Instinctively, mothers respond to their children's behavior and this interaction occurs often, naturally creating a reciprocal pattern of engagement between one another. On the other side of this healthy attachment is what Bowlby calls maternal deprivation which refers to the separation or loss of the mother as well as the failure to develop an attachment.

Bifulco, et al. (1992) studied 250 women who had lost mothers, through separation or death, before they were 17 and found that the loss of their mother through separation or death doubles the risk of depressive and anxiety disorders in adult women. Separation here can be thought of as the lack of forming this monotropic attachment during the "critical period," which is before age 2; the outcomes it has are similar to the death of a parent. Although attachment theory provides a foundation for interpreting emotional development, not everyone experiences the same type of attachment.

Mary Ainsworth, Bowlby's student, labeled three types of attachment styles. Ainsworth was most notably known for an experiment named the Strange Situation test. During this procedure the mother was asked to leave the room, leaving her infant alone with an unfamiliar face. Minutes later, the mother was asked to return. The coding was around how the baby responded to their mother's return as this was how she determined their type of attachment style. She identified three attachment styles: secure attachment, and two insecure attachment styles including avoidant attachment and resistant/ambivalent attachment. This study provides a visible way to see how a child has developed their working model based on their response to their

mother leaving. For instance, “an avoidant child has an internal working model of a self which is not worthy of care.” (Bowlby cited by Li, 2023). The internal working model attempts to describe the development of mental representations, such as trusting others, sense of self worth, particularly within relationships, and the ways in which you feel others see you and your own worth. A secure child will develop a positive internal working model because it has received sensitive, emotional care from its primary attachment figure. A secure child is one who receives from their primary caregiver both a sense of independence and support. It is the combination of both that enables a child to feel safe and also brave. An insecure-avoidant child will develop an internal working model in which it sees itself as unworthy because its primary attachment figure has failed to provide during the sensitive period for attachment formation.

“The tie between mother and daughter is very important for a girl’s development throughout her whole life” (Tyson, 1991 as cited by Onaylı, 2013). Theories on mother-daughter relationship from a psychoanalytic perspective have been studied. The psychoanalytic perspective on this bond, adds a new and more abstract layer to why this relationship is so impactful. “Psychoanalytic theory claims that a daughter's primary love object is her mother.” (Rastogi, 1995). And affirmed that all phases of a daughter’s development throughout her life are affected by her attachment to her mother (Wisdom, 1990, as cited by Onaylı 2013). This theory claims that “daughters’ unconscious internalization of maternal values and behaviors explain why daughters become like their mother” (Boyd, 1989, as cited by Onaylı 2013). Chodorow states that the “process of the Oedipus complex or Electra complex for girls is more difficult and more confusing than boys because a mother constitutes the primary object of love but also forms a rival as the first model for a daughter” (Onaylı,2013). If a daughter experiences a conflict between differentiation, developing self and maintaining the attachment with her mother, which

is extremely common, the relationship between the mother and the daughter is often put in jeopardy. Yet, “even this ambivalent type of relationship still remains significant in a daughter’s life” (Notman, 2006, as cited by Onaylı 2013). This relationship is believed to be “a source of strength for a woman or a source of weakness” (Walters & Davie, 1988, as cited by Onaylı 2013).

The relationship between a mother and her daughter is an extremely complex bond. The unpacking and examination around the mother-daughter connection has gained a lot of attention over the years. As it relates to it being an “exclusively feminine relationship” the implications that surround it involve attention to detail (Boyd, 1989). In an essay titled “Mother and Daughters: A discussion of Theory and Research examines” (Boyd and Carol, 1989) examines the unique features of a mother-daughter relationship that pertain specifically to why so much research is placed on what it means to be a mother. The essay expresses how there have been two predominant theories in our world, one being psychoanalysis and the other is in social learning. In relation to mother-daughter “the psychoanalytic theorists tend to emphasize daughters’ unconscious internalization of maternal values and behaviors, as well as the meaning of these values and behavior” (Boyd, 1989) and the “social learning theorists suggest that girls learn to mother, and to be like their mothers, by consistently and positively being reinforced when they imitate their mothers’ behavior” (Boyd, 1989). Both of these two frameworks address the underlying concept of identity, particularly as it is formed through this relationship.

Boyd (1989) provides a framework for understanding the mother-daughter relationship, emphasizing personal identification over positional identification. In Western cultures, where the mother is the primary caregiver, she naturally becomes the “source of identification for all young children.” Unlike young boys whose identification eventually shifts to their fathers, young girls continue to identify with their mothers throughout their lives. This ongoing identification with

the caregiving mother allows daughters to maintain the mother-daughter relationship while also establishing their own identity. However, Boyd suggests that this balancing act can sometimes lead to developmental challenges for daughters.

“Mothers and daughters are in this game of always identifying with each other”(Boyd, 1989). According to Boyd there's a continuous cycle of identification between mothers and daughters. It's not just daughters learning from their mothers and then projecting that learned identity onto the world. Daughters often believe that the desire for identification is one-sided, originating only from them. However, Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983) argue otherwise, stating that mothers also identify with their daughters, contributing significantly to this cycle of attachment. This mutual identification intensifies the emotions surrounding the mother-daughter relationship, creating a cycle of influence between both parties.

There are three major components to the mother-daughter bond. For starters, the most obvious and important one is that they share a gender, allowing for the feeling that the mother has reproduced herself. Secondly, within this relationship the mother projects feelings she has about herself onto her daughter, suggesting the failing to differentiate herself from her daughter. And Lastly, the mother unconsciously behaves toward her daughter as she internally acts towards the daughter part of herself, implying that when a mother has a daughter she instinctively lives through her daughter. Identifying with her daughter and her life, the mother now becomes both her own mother and her own child. This creates a complicated dichotomy of roles. All these three factors that exist within this dyad, conclude that women by nature form a sense of self in communication with their mothers identity because the separation between the two becomes very small.

This leads me to the next major section of this study by Boyd (1989). Boundaries, and therefore the lack of them, established between a mother and her daughter, for all the reasons listed above, adds to the emotional weight of this relationship. Chodorow (1978), has argued that the mother-daughter relationship “fails to foster separation and individuation, often leading to a daughter's perception of overwhelming enmeshment” (Boyd, 1989). The social pressure for daughters to differentiate from their mothers is severely less than the pressure put on boys to stand out, to ‘be their own man’. As a result of “blurred boundaries, daughters struggle all of their lives to separate from their mother.” (Boyd, 1989). However, because these dynamics are universal in many ways, these dynamics have become expected and normalized. Understanding the projection that occurs from a mother to her daughter is rare because we, culturally, have accepted it to be this way and now we are accustomed to it. Mothers fall into these habits subconsciously, as their mothers did it to them. A daughter’s level of attachment to her mother may affect how she views childbirth and motherhood in general.

The classic trope of daughters feeling trapped, unseen, overly coddled, and expected too much of, is not arbitrary, it is embedded in this framework; which is that in periods of conflict and avoidance between mother and daughter what is being displayed is this frustration around this feeling of “mutual and intense identification of mothers and daughters” (Boyd,1989). “Research time and time again has provided us with this understanding that conflicts over autonomy and nurturance are actually what characterize the mother-daughter relationship,” (Boyd, 1989), allowing for this sense of normality to persist. Conflict often arises between a daughter's sense of a separate "I" and her perception of a collective "we". (Boyd,1989). As the separation between the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ continues to be so obscure, the daughter's ability to balance her own self narrative and the one their mother has created about her becomes

increasingly harder. Understanding this concept, offers insight into the root for why a mothers narrative tone becomes internalized in her daughter as though it is her own self narrative.

Despite the overwhelming love mothers often feel for their daughters, “it is often expressed in a patriarchal context” (Gilligan, 1982 as cited by Onaylı 1996). This level of attachment they feel towards one another can manifest in unhealthy ways as a result of a sense of individuality getting ignored. Mothers feel as though they can live through their daughters, thus the pressure that surrounds the actions of the daughter can be detrimental to their relationship. For a daughter, her relationship with her mother also influences different outcomes; some lead to positive ones and others negative, but both can be traced back to this specific bond.

One way the significance of this relationship can be understood is through the measured correlations it has to self esteem, life satisfaction and levels of healthy current relationships. Unpacking the mother-daughter relationship from a Psychoanalytic Perspective allows for a deeper understanding of why it manifests itself in ways that influence how daughters view their own worth. “The correlation between a daughter's self esteem and her relationship with her mother are contingent on one another. Mothers and daughters have a stronger attachment and greater intimacy than any other parent/child relationship” (Onaylı, 1996). “Many studies have shown that mothers play the most significant role in the development of their daughters’ self esteem.” (Green, 1990, as cited by Onaylı 1996).

“The Relation Between Mother-Daughter Relationship And daughters Well-Being”, is a study done in 2013 by Selin Onayli, where the mother-daughter relationship is measured with respect to the connectedness, interdependency and trust in hierarchy between them, while wellbeing was measured with respect to the self esteem and life satisfaction of the daughters.”

(Onaylı,2013). The sample consisted of 426 female university students with a mean age of 21.62. The scales which were used in the study were the Adult Daughter Questionnaire (MAD) (Rastogi, 1995) and The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). In this study they used correlation analysis to examine the relationships between the mother daughter questionnaire's subscales (connectedness, interdependency and trust in hierarchy) and the two indicators of well-being, life satisfaction and self-esteem.

“Connectedness, interdependency, and trust in hierarchy were significantly related to the self-esteem scores of participants, showing how mothers indeed play the most significant role in terms of improvement of the daughters' self esteem” (Green, 1990). The nature of the mother-daughter relationship carries a determining role in the life of the daughters in their social and psychological well-being. “Within a mother-daughter relationship, girls who reported having difficult communication with their mothers, were measured as having lower self esteem” (Levin & Currie, 2010 cited by Onayli 2013). Moreover, the study discusses how parental connectedness (mother-daughter) has an importance in decreasing the risk of negative psychological and behavioral outcomes in adolescents leading to an improvement of self-esteem.

Specifically looking into literature on self-esteem of the adult daughter as it relates to their relationship with their mother, the study begins by claiming why this relationship is important in the formation of self worth, as “women's self esteem, role and life satisfaction are observed to be significantly related to the relationship with one's mother.” (Onayli, 2013). “First, mothers are the main caregiver” and “mothers are always models for their daughters when they make big life decisions” (Onayli, 2013). Secondly “mothers are often responsible for transferring values and preparing their children to be functioning members of society, thus the

absence of this bond can lead to a child lacking social skills” (Onayli, 2013). And third, more generally “attachment styles to mothers (secure, ambivalent, avoidant) predict the quality of future relationships, particularly romantic ones” (Bowlby, 1988, cited by Onayli 2013) .

The results of the study showed that the “three indicators of the mother-daughter relationship that they used (connectedness, interdependency, and trust in hierarchy) and the two indicators of wellbeing (self-esteem and life satisfaction) were interrelated.” (Onayli, 2010).

In conclusion, this study showed how daughters' communication patterns with their mother have a stronger association with self worth than the type of communication they engage in with their father. Furthermore, this study revealed how mothers and daughters who form secure bonds early on reap many psychological benefits (Klockars & Sirola, 2001). And a daughter’s level of attachment to her mother may affect how she views childbirth and motherhood in general, emphasizing the importance of this narrative because of the influence a mother has on her daughter.

The concept of self-esteem has been studied for many decades, and has a direct relationship with mental health and levels of success in individuals. Western culture has emphasized this desire for a strong sense of self. Self-esteem expert Morris Rosenberg defined self-esteem; as quite simply one’s attitude toward oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). He described it as a “favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self” (Roseberg, 1965). Interestingly, Rosenberg noted that “high-self-esteem people do not necessarily feel that they are better than others, but they do not consider themselves to be worse than others. People with low self-esteem express self-rejection, self-satisfaction, and self-contempt” (Rosenberg 1965). “Those with

low-self-esteem do not respect themselves and wish that they could evaluate themselves more favorably.” (Rosenberg, 1965). Self esteem is an attitude that you carry about yourself.

A great deal of psychological theorizing has focused on the motivation to protect and, if possible, enhance self-esteem. Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, D.Vohs (2003) discusses an overview of the implications surrounding this “household” word “ self esteem” and delves into the nuances that surround this term. Indeed, self esteem has become something that teachers, parents and therapists have invested energy into. Finding ways to boost your self esteem has become a major topic, as the assumption is that it has many positive outcomes.

"Does High Self-Esteem Cause Better Performance, Interpersonal Success, Happiness, or Healthier Lifestyles?" by Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) addresses the increasing societal concern regarding the need for high self-esteem over the past few decades. North American society in particular has come to embrace the idea that high self-esteem is not only desirable in its own right, but also the central psychological source from which all manner of positive behaviors and outcomes spring.” (Baumeister, 2003). Nathaniel Branden, a leading figure in the self-esteem movement, stated that “self-esteem has profound consequences for every aspect of our existence” (Branden, 1994). And more pointedly he adds, that he “cannot think of a single psychological problem—from anxiety and depression, to fear of intimacy or of success, to spouse battery or child molestation—that is not traceable to the problem of low self-esteem” (Branden, 1984). He adds that “virtually every social problem can be traced to people's lack of self love” (Davis 1988).

The study primarily addresses the different impacts of having high self-esteem vs lower self-esteem. Beginning with school performance, “the modest correlations between achievement

and self-esteem do not indicate that high self-esteem leads to good performance, instead we see how high self-esteem is contributing to or the result of good performance.” (Baumister, 2003). Furthermore, job performance is sometimes related to self-esteem however the correlations vary widely and the direction of causality has not been established. Occupational success may boost self-esteem, but laboratory studies have generally failed to find connections between self-esteem and good task performance. That said, “studies have shown that self-esteem does facilitate persistence after failure” (Baumister, 2003), which may be the root for why self-esteem is helpful only within certain contexts. It is possible that people high in self-esteem have better relationships and make better impressions on others in comparison to people with low self-esteem. Secondly, self-esteem has not been shown to predict the quality or duration of relationships, but individuals with high self-esteem perceive themselves as more likable and attractive. Additionally, high self-esteem correlates with increased prejudices but also with a greater willingness to speak up (Baumeister, 2003).

Most notably, self-esteem strongly correlates with happiness. High self-esteem is associated with greater happiness, while low self-esteem is often linked to depression. Therefore, self-esteem is an important topic to address because individuals are unable to remain indifferent to information that affects their self-esteem, such as being told they are attractive or incompetent (Baumeister, 2003)."

The study mentioned above by Baumeister (2003) is making the claim that self-esteem is not permanent or part of one's identity, rather it fluctuates and is more a state of being, one that often coincides with major successes and failures in life. For they state “Subjective experience creates the impression that self-esteem rises when one wins a contest, solves a problem, or gains acceptance to a social group, and that it falls with corresponding failures. However, the current

studies approach to self esteem is interpreting it as the opposite. That in fact self-esteem is a characteristic that is a part of someone and developed due to one's upbringing and state of life rather than envisioning it as something that is constantly “coming and going” based on your job for instance .

“To show that self-esteem is itself important, research would have to demonstrate that people's beliefs about themselves have important consequences regardless of what the underlying realities are” (Baumister,2003). “People's beliefs of themselves shape their actions in many important ways, and these actions in turn shape their social reality and the social realities of the people around them.” (Baumister, 2003).

The Current Study

When contemplating the differences between human beings and other species, one finds few fundamental differentiators. We all engage in essential activities such as procreation, eating, sleeping, forming relationships, and ultimately experiencing death. However, the art of storytelling, with all its implications, appears to be a uniquely human trait. How do we precisely define terms like "story" or "narrative"? In the context of this paper, I encourage you to approach narratives as Richter, Appel & Calio did in their journal review titled "Stories Can Influence The Self Concept"—namely, as linguistic and often biased representations of events (Abbott, 2002). The scientific and theoretical methodologies surrounding the psychology of narratives have gained popularity, leading many to perceive the narrative as both a study of thought and a method of psychological investigation. In this study, I aim to support the assertion that a holistic understanding requires the integration of both scientific and theoretical approaches to narratives. By combining these perspectives, we can better comprehend the intricacies of human cognition and the developmental processes that shape us.

The overarching question emerges: Do narratives hold more influence than tangible realities, especially in terms of internalization? If so, what is the source of these narratives, especially when they diverge from immediate experiences? The suggestion is that women's realities are deeply rooted in affiliation and a sense of connection, particularly within the mother-daughter relationship (Boyd, 1989). In this context, the narrative surrounding pregnancy becomes a tool for gauging the daughter's connection with her mother. Do maternal narratives alter the individual's self-perception after the interview, aligning it more closely with external observations rather than the narrative itself? This will indeed be a question circulating the current study, as I am unpacking the results.

To explore this connection, this study employs the Mother-Adult Daughter Questionnaire (MAD) alongside the analysis of the written narratives. By examining the ways in which consistency and patterns appear between responses in the MAD survey, Rosenberg survey and the written narratives, the current study aims to support the credibility of potential correlations between these three concepts. In doing so, this study seeks to unravel and expose the intricate interplay between individual narratives, maternal influences, and the construction of self-perception. As it also sheds light on the complex web of factors shaping personal understanding and interpersonal connections.

Stories play a profound role in shaping self-narratives, which individuals often internalize and embrace. The complex interaction between external narratives and personal interpretations makes it difficult to discern the differences, resulting in a fusion of narratives from others and those we weave about ourselves. This fusion underscores the importance of communication in both storytelling and relationships, linking personal narratives to relationship quality, self-esteem, and overall development. Understanding how narratives function as communication enriches our insight into relationship dynamics and personal development.

Even though my current study doesn't directly assess the level of attachment individuals feel towards fictional stories, the study "Stories Can Influence The Self-Concept Journal", remains relevant as it contributes to the broader understanding that humans possess the capacity to connect with and internalize narratives. While the specific results of this study may not perfectly align with the hypothesis regarding how mothers' birth narratives influence their daughters' self-perception, the overall findings do support the overarching idea that stories wield significant influence.

The fact that the protagonist in the pregnancy narrative is the daughter herself, aligns with the current study, allowing for a meaningful connection between the two. Both studies shed light on the power of narratives, emphasizing how the receiver, often synonymous with the protagonist (as seen in the pregnancy narrative), internalizes and connects with the stories they encounter. This natural connection underscores the pervasive impact that narratives can have on individuals, shaping their perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

The act of storytelling holds a profound significance for human beings, and the exact nature of this weight and its origins remain enigmatic. One plausible explanation may lie in the way stories are often perceived as fiction—a means of elucidating experiences and events that extend beyond our personal involvement. In many cultures, storytelling is compartmentalized as a separate realm from personal life, contributing to this perception.

However, both lived experiences and shared stories can be woven into the narrative fabric of one's life. Both types of stories possess the potential to exert a significant influence on our understanding of self, as we internalize the perspectives of others. The innate human desire to internalize external perceptions plays a pivotal role in shaping our self-image. As Clandinin argues in "The Handbook of Narrative Inquiry - Mapping a Methodology," the stories we construct about our lives are crafted from the various influences of family, community, literature, art, and media" (Clandinin, 2006). Those in close proximity to us, such as family and friends, wield substantial power in shaping our social and emotional selves.

The current study recognizes the interconnectedness of personal experiences and shared narratives, emphasizing their role in self-understanding. The act of storytelling is deeply interwoven with personal life, playing a crucial role in the ongoing construction of identities.

Building upon foundational theories of Bowlby and Ainsworth, particularly regarding secure attachment, the current study takes a unique approach by assessing the mother-daughter relationship through the lens of communication comfortability in adulthood. This departure from an objective stance aligns with the broader understanding that narratives are not just about factual events but also about the emotional and interpreted aspects. By recognizing this, the current study is poised to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the attachment dynamics between mothers and daughters in adulthood. This goes beyond the critical period of early attachment which focuses on early infancy attachment styles and their connection to later forms of communication. This provides a nuanced perspective of the complexity of this relationship. The belief that adult daughters' communication with their mothers is linked to their early childhood attachment styles underscores the enduring impact of these formative experiences. The Mother-Adult Daughter (MAD) scale becomes a valuable tool in evaluating this complex relationship.

My current study recognizes the biological differences in how daughters may hear their mothers explain pregnancy narratives, especially when viewed through the lens of potentially becoming mothers themselves. This unique dynamic adds a layer of complexity, as daughters internalize these narratives in a way that reflects their future roles in womanhood. The connection between the mother's attitude, as shared with the daughter, and its influence on self-perception is a significant aspect of this research project.

The current study delves into a fundamental aspect of human psychology and development—how the narratives we've been told about ourselves, the stories we internalize, and the decisions we make based on these narratives influence our self-esteem and overall

self-perception. The focus on the pregnancy narrative between mothers and daughters adds a unique dimension to this exploration.

The idea that the mother's perception of her daughter is revealed through the pregnancy narrative aligns with Hayden's et al. findings which suggest that this particular narrative is reflective of the daughter's self-esteem and quality of mother-daughter relationship. This reinforces the current study's general hypothesis that the pregnancy narrative significantly shapes the daughter's self-esteem and attachment to her mother. Moreover, the notion that the story of one's birth anchors adolescents in understanding their self-purpose underscores the importance of these narratives in shaping identity. This study aims to unpack the origins of these self-perceptions, questioning the weight of these narratives. While physical experiences like morning sickness add complexity to the analysis, the focus remains on the emotional content of the narratives rather than judging experiences as positive or negative. By factoring in the language around these literal experiences and correlating them with self-esteem and the closeness between the mother-daughter dyad, the current study recognizes the nuanced and subjective nature of these narratives. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how the stories we tell ourselves and others contribute to our self-perception and the intricate dynamics within relationships, particularly between mothers and daughters.

Incorporating tone into the analysis of the pregnancy narrative adds a valuable dimension to understanding the mother-daughter relationship. Examining the use of positive versus negative language provides insight into what the daughter internalizes. Hayden's et al., study, which focuses on the frequency of positive and negative language in the pregnancy narrative, aligns with this approach, suggesting that linguistic aspects shape the daughter's self-worth. Moreover, the emphasis on the elaborateness of a mother's reminiscing style underscores the significance of

language choices in shaping a child's self-perception, contributing to the development of theories and methods within this study.

Hayden's et al. study raises the broader question of whether the pregnancy narrative influences a daughter's opinion on motherhood, adding depth to the exploration of this bond. Moments of reminiscing and the experience of giving birth are significant bonding moments for both parties, and understanding how these moments are internalized is critical to comprehending the mother-daughter relationship. Hayden's et al.,(2006) findings align with the current study's hypothesis, emphasizing that the transmission of the pregnancy narrative reflects the daughter's feelings about herself and the quality of the mother-daughter relationship. This connection between narrative, language, and self-esteem reinforces the central role of the pregnancy narrative in shaping perceptions and emotions within the mother-daughter dyad.

The exploration of self-esteem is complex, with implications and effects that can be challenging to detect. Baumeister's study on "Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles?" suggests that while individuals with high self-esteem may claim benefits such as better relationships, objective measures may not always confirm these beliefs. Understanding the indirect effects of self-esteem is intricate, and uncovering direct benefits can be elusive. However, the current study focuses on pregnancy narratives as a unique angle to explore the root of one's ability to lead a happy life.

Defining self-esteem as how much a person likes, accepts, and respects themselves overall complements the measurement of self-esteem as an outcome. This shared understanding further solidifies the relevance of exploring the nuanced dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship. By delving into pregnancy narratives and their potential influence on self-esteem,

this project aims to unravel how self-perception, shaped by these narratives, contributes to individuals' overall well-being and happiness. This approach adds depth to the understanding of self-esteem, emphasizing the role of internalized stories and narratives in shaping one's sense of self and, consequently, their ability to lead a fulfilled life.

The current study's emphasis on distinguishing between self-esteem as perception and reality adds a crucial layer to its methodology. Given that one's level of self-esteem contributes significantly to their self-perception, understanding this distinction becomes imperative. The connection between storytelling and self-esteem becomes apparent as we dissect the language used throughout the actual narratives shared in this study. Moreover, the recognition that narratives, including those about oneself and their self-esteem, are embedded in how we perceive and interpret life, underscores the inherent ambiguity in measuring their influence. As they are in constant flux with one another, separating one's self esteem level from how they communicate is challenging. In other words both self-esteem and narratives are dynamic aspects influenced by various factors, necessitating a nuanced approach to this study.

By focusing on the narratives mothers share about their pregnancies, this study acknowledges the importance of both factual and emotional aspects of these stories. By exploring the subjective and emotional dimensions embedded in these narratives, the methodology is well-positioned to unravel the intricate connection between storytelling, self-esteem, and the complex web of emotions and perceptions that shape one's sense of self.

This unique approach to self-esteem marks a departure from conventional research that often explores self-esteem as a predictor or determinant of various life outcomes. Instead, the study positions self-esteem as the outcome itself, viewing it as a reflection of the daughter's

relationship with her mother. This perspective aligns with the idea that self-esteem emerges from strong relationships and attachment styles to primary caregivers, in this case, mothers. By treating self-esteem as the dependent variable, my methodology explores how it is influenced by the narrative created by the mother about her pregnancy. Emphasizing the language used and how the narrative is communicated is crucial for understanding its impact on the daughter's self-esteem. This approach not only contributes to the understanding of self-esteem as a complex and dynamic outcome but also highlights the enduring influence of narratives and attachment styles in shaping an individual's self-perception from an early age. The acknowledgment that the first time a daughter hears her pregnancy narrative doesn't necessarily coincide with the first time she experiences the effects of high or low self-esteem adds a layer of complexity to the current study. The implication is that the language and communication style used in sharing the pregnancy narrative at any point in the daughter's life have lasting effects on her self-esteem.

It is important to reference studies like "The Relation Between Mother-Daughter Relationship And Daughters Well-Being,"(Onayli, 2010) which suggest that self-esteem plays a crucial role in the onset and maintenance of internalizing problems because that directly aligns with the current study's focus on attachment theory. The inference that a daughter's process of internalizing the pregnancy narrative is intertwined with her relationship with her mother underscores the early formation of self-esteem within the context of the mother-daughter relationship.

The current study's focus on linking the origins of one's feelings of self-worth to the narrative of entering life is significant. It acknowledges that the person sharing the narrative matters, as the narrator's language, emotional tone, and attitude contribute to the overall impact of the narrative. An important distinction made in this study is that specific details shared by the

mother, such as experiencing morning sickness, do not inherently imply a "bad" pregnancy. Instead, the study considers the emotional language and tone used in describing these details, recognizing the subjective and emotional aspects embedded in the narrative.

In an attempt to explore the emotional implications of the narrative, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the psychological and emotional impact of language seen through storytelling within the mother-daughter relationship. This study's approach recognizes the significance of not just the content of the narrative but also the outside context of that daughter's life that shapes the daughter's perceptions of herself and her relationship with her mother. Understanding the implications of both low and high self-esteem, as well as the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and pregnancy narratives, and how we measure them, let's reconnect with my specific research questions. Combining these three concepts, the current study has six hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Positivity of the mothers' narratives shared with the child, will be correlated with daughters' self-esteem which will be tested through the Rosenberg self esteem test.

Hypothesis 2: Negativity of the mothers' narratives shared with the child, will be correlated with daughters' self-esteem which will be tested through the Rosenberg self esteem test.

Hypothesis 3: Positivity of the mothers' narratives shared with child, will be correlated with daughters' score on the MAD test

Hypothesis 4: Negativity of the mothers' narratives shared with child, will be correlated with daughters' score on the MAD test

Hypothesis 5: Consistency between the narratives will correlate to a higher self esteem score

Hypothesis 6: Consistency between the narratives will correlate to higher MAD score

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were ten Bard undergraduate female students and their mothers, for a total of 20 participants. The age of the daughters ranges from 20-24, and their mothers range from 50-70 years old. All daughters were the biological offspring of their mothers.

For the current study the instruments I used were two standardized surveys, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by Morris Rosenberg, and the MAD Survey by Mudita Rastogi. In order to measure the narratives and the level of positivity vs negativity within the story, I invented my own instrument called the Personal Narrative Instrument (PNI). In addition to the three main instruments (described below) that I used, I used Jamovi to record my data and analyze it.

Procedure

After receiving approval from Bard Institutional Review Board on February 13th, 2024 (*Appendix A*) the ‘daughters’ were invited to participate through primarily snowball sampling. I began by asking undergraduate women that I knew personally if they and their mothers might be interested in participating. Students who answered yes were sent an email in which I confirmed their interest and asked them to provide a contact email for their mother. The ‘mothers’ were then contacted via email, where I let them know how I received their information and confirmed their interest. Finally, we set up a time to meet over the phone later that week. I shared with all participants that they would receive a gift card in May, from me, as a thank you for their participation.

I began with the ten ‘mothers’ interviews. Prior to the call, I sent each a consent form, which the ‘mothers’ signed and sent back to me. During this phone meeting, I explained the prompt for their 3 minute “free write”. I set a timer for 3 minutes and asked them to free write to the prompt:

“Describe your experience being pregnant with your daughter (XX name)”. Some other participants have written about the joy, nerves, excitement, stress or pain they felt during the pregnancy. Feel free to include as much detail in regard to how you personally remember feeling - physical, mental, and emotional feelings and thoughts are all great. I’ll let you know when the timer is up, and if you need more than 3 minutes no worries, just let me know and keep writing. Lastly please do not indicate your daughters name directly, instead say “my daughter”- this way all identity stays confidential”

After I received the ‘mothers’ writing via email, I sent them the debriefing form and reminded them to keep an eye out for their gift card in May. This phone call lasted around 15 minutes.

Within the next week I held in person interviews with the ‘daughters’, since they all attend Bard. I provided them with the consent form in hard copy, and ‘daughters’ handed the signed consent form back to me. For the ‘daughters’, this narrative portion of the study includes having them free write for 3 minutes to the prompt:

“Describe what you have heard from your mother about her experience being pregnant with you. To the extent you’re able, include words for emotions and feelings that really explain how you understand her to have felt. Feel free to include as much detail in regard to how you personally remember feeling - physical, mental, and emotional feelings and thoughts are all

great. I'll let you know when the timer is up, and if you need more than 3 minutes no worries, just let me know and keep writing. Lastly please do not indicate your mothers name directly, instead say "my mom"- this way all identity stays confidential"

After 'daughters' were done with writing their PNI and filling out the RSES and MAD, I handed them the debriefing form and reminded them to keep an eye out for their gift card in March. The duration of this in person portion of study was around 15 minutes.

Materials

PNI (Personal Narrative Instrument)

PNI is an instrument of my own design that measures the narrativized or written out story of a mother's experience being pregnant with her daughter, and the daughter's heard understanding of her mothers experience. The hope is to gather a sense of the overall attitude conveyed to the daughter and experienced by the mother of the pregnancy journey.

Structure

After I collected a narrative from each mother and daughter, these were scored for (1) consistency and (2) positivity/negativity.

Scoring For Consistency

To reduce the potential for bias, this scoring was done by two undergraduate coders who were naive/unaware of the study's hypotheses. My advisor connected me with these two students - both Psychology majors who received an hourly pay rate for their work. After exchanging

emails, we arranged a meeting where I briefed them on the task without revealing too many details about my project. I instructed these coders this way:

Hello coders,

Thank you so much for helping me out with my senior project.

In order to maintain unbiased results I will not share too much about my study besides the instructions for this portion of coding my data. That being said, I have collected a bunch of narratives (some are from daughters, some are from moms) and I have paired them together randomly. After you read the narratives, I would like you to score “consistency in valence of emotion” between paired narratives.

There are 10 pairs total.

In order to score the pairs on consistency of emotion valence, you’ll give each pair a score ranging from 1 to 3. A score of “1” means the pairs are highly INCONSISTENT (that is, one of the narratives is overall positive and the other is overall negative) . A score of “3” means the pairs are highly consistent (i.e consistently neg or positive OR both are equally mixed in valence would mean a 3 as well. A score of “2” means that one of the narratives is mixed, and the other is overall more negative or positive.

Please write your score for each pair on the bottom of the first page of that pair (pairs are stapled together).

Thank you again for agreeing to help me out. Please let Sarah (sdl@bard.edu) know how long the scoring took, and she will help arrange payment through Payroll.

Please let me know if you have any questions for me before we move forward!

I then provided each of the coders with hard copies of all 20 narratives, with each daughter’s narrative stapled to her mother’s. A week later, we reconvened, and they returned their scored assessments. However, we found discrepancies in four of the scores, meaning that

the two coders have different scores on these four narratives. To ensure consistency in my data collection, we met again and reached a consensus on the scores for each narrative.

Then, after we came up with final scores I put that data into Jamovi to run correlation analysis between consistency and self esteem scores and MAD scores.

Descriptives

The average score of consistency within these 20 narratives were 2.30, implying that the majority of the results came back consistent, as we decided that a score of 3 meant that both stories were consistent with each other (whether both positive or both negative). In line with my scoring key, the max was 3 and the minimum score was 1.

Scoring for Positivity and Negativity

I myself scored the narratives for positivity/negativity. Each participant gets a score which represents the number of positive words they used, and the number of negative words they used. Also a ratio of positive words compared between the two narratives and the same with negative words.

In coding for positive and negative words, I employed a methodology that considers both the strict emotional connotations of individual words and their contextual usage. Positive words were quantified by counting their occurrences, and if a particular word (such as "happy") is repeated 60 times, it is treated as equal to using 60 different positive words, reflecting the intensity of positivity. This principle is similarly applied to negative words. Before reading any of the narratives, based on my research and own insights, I constructed a list of words that could be mentioned, that would signal a positive sound, and the same with words that would count as

potentially negative. That being said, some of the words that appeared in peoples narratives I had not accounted for prior, so everytime I would find a new positive word I would add it to my list.

(Appendix B)

Additionally, a proportion ratio was computed, representing the percentage of positive words to the total word count, as well as the ratio of positive words to negative words. This approach ensures a nuanced evaluation of the emotional content of the text, capturing both the frequency and intensity of positive and negative expressions within it. (Appendix B)

Step 1: Each narrative was reviewed without knowledge of the pairs or their authors. Positive words related to pregnancy or the story of the mother's pregnancy were highlighted in red, and the count was recorded.

Step 2: The same process was repeated to identify negative words within the narratives.

Step 3: Upon revisiting the positive phrases, specific positive words were highlighted. It was observed that while individual words might not inherently convey positivity, the context of the phrase did. However only individual positive words were counted for in running correlations.

Step 4: A similar analysis was conducted for negative words found within negative phrases. Occasionally, phrases were identified as negative even if no individual negative words were present. For instance, "not sure if I had an easy or difficult pregnancy" conveyed a negative sentiment despite the absence of negative words counted individually. However only negative words were accounted for when running data to find possible correlations.

Step 5: The word count of each narrative was recorded and inputted into Jamovi.

Step 6: The percentage of positive words to the overall word count was calculated.

Step 7: Similarly, the percentage of negative words to the overall word count was calculated.

Descriptives

The pregnancy stories ranged in length from 81 to 491 words, with a mean of 205 words. The number of positive words used by 'mothers' had a mean of 9.40, with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 17. The number of positive words used by 'daughters' had a mean of 5.50, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 9. This shows that generally 'mothers' were more likely to record positive words than their daughters shared. Furthermore, when looking at the number of negative words, the number of negative words used by 'mothers' had a mean of 4.60, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 7. Lastly, the number of negative words used by 'daughters' had a mean of 3.00, with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 6. Again, we see how mothers also included more negative words than 'daughters' however It might be that moms used more positive words, but their stories were also longer, so proportionally there wasn't a difference between them and their daughters.

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

Structure

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale evaluates an individual's perception of their own self-esteem level. It comprises ten Likert-Scale items, each rated on a four-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" (4) to "strongly disagree" (1). These statements pertain to one's overall feelings of self-worth and approval, with higher scores indicating greater self-esteem. Total scores were calculated by summing up all the individual item scores. (Appendix C)

Scoring

The scoring system is structured as follows: For items 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7, "strongly agree" corresponds to a score of 4, "agree" to 3, "disagree" to 2, and "strongly disagree" to 1. Conversely, for items 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10, which were reversed in valence, "strongly agree" corresponds to 1, "agree" to 2, "disagree" to 3, and "strongly disagree" to 4.

Total scores were calculated by summing up all the individual item scores (once half of them have been reverse-scored according to the above rules). The total score ranges from 10 to 40. In a study done by García, Olmos, Matheu, Carre (2019) titled "Self-esteem levels vs global scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale." They recorded how Scores between 15 and 25 were considered within the normal range, while scores below 15 may suggest low self-esteem. (Garcia, 2019)

Descriptives

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem test had an average score of 32.7. The daughters in our sample demonstrated particularly high self-esteem, as evidenced by the lowest score of 24 and highest score being a 40.

Mother-Adult Daughter Survey

Following the self-esteem survey the 'daughters' then were asked to manually fill out "The Mother-Adult Daughter Questionnaire (MAD): Developing a Culturally Sensitive Instrument" which has 25, primarily fill in the blank questions and 3 subscales. (*appendix D*)

The MAD survey measures the adult daughter's perception of connectedness, interdependence, and trust in hierarchy as the subscales to determine her relationship with her mother." (Rastogi, 2002) MAD aims to target closeness, dependency, and hierarchy in intergenerational relationships." (Rastogi, 2002). Each item is answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale and to avoid a response set, items were worded in both a positive and a negative way" (Rastogi, 2002) For Connectedness, scores can range from 9 to 45. The Interdependence subscale has a possible range of 3 to 15, and the Trust in Hierarchy scores range from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating greater connectedness, interdependence, and trust in hierarchy, respectively." (Rastogi, 2002). The MAD survey, daughters who scored lower on this subscale were likely to feel uncomfortable with and display less connectedness behavior "(Rastogi, 2002) Whereas higher scores for each subscale represent greater closeness and dependency towards their mother.

Structure

The survey comprises a structured format consisting of multiple-choice and Likert-type scale questions. Among these, eight questions are multiple choice, while 17 questions utilize a 5-point Likert-type scale. Specifically, questions 6 to 22 utilize the Likert-type scale, where responses range from 1 for "very false" to 5 for "very true." Nine of these questions, namely 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, and 23 (with a reverse score for 23), are tailored to gauge connectedness. Additionally, three questions (13, 14, and 22) are aimed at measuring interdependence, while six questions (16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21) are designed to assess trust in the hierarchy. Notably, seven questions (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 24, and 25) do not align with these three subscales; instead, they provide valuable information concerning demographic factors and other circumstances affecting the mother-daughter relationship. These questions delve into aspects such as years lived with the mother, current geographical distance from the mother, the comparison between actual and ideal

communication frequency, frequency of in-person interactions with the mother, overall perception of the mother-daughter relationship, and how this perception compares to others' relationships. It's worth noting that these inquiries are influenced by cross-cultural variations, as highlighted in the literature. (Rastogi, 2002) For the purposes of the current study I calculated a simple sum score of items 6-22 across the three subscales, as this study is defining a strong relationship between mother and daughter as connectedness, hierarchy and interdependence.

Scoring

To calculate the participant's score, I summed up all the numerical responses provided for questions 6 through 22. The highest attainable score is 85, which suggests a very intimate relationship with the mother, whereas the lowest achievable score is 17, indicating that the participant selected '1' for all their answers.

Descriptives

In the present study, the MAD survey mean was Mean = 66.0, with the highest score possible being an 85 and Lowest possible score being a 17. In my sample the min score was 46 and max score was 79, indicating they scored themselves relatively high on their connection/relationship with their mother.

Results

The first hypothesis posited that the positivity of mothers' narratives shared with their children would correlate with their daughters' self-esteem, as assessed by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem test. However, the data revealed no correlation between either the number of positive words ($r(8) = -.0358, p = 0.310$) and the percentage of positive words ($r(8) = -.0358, p =$

0.310) and daughters' self-esteem scores. Thus, there was no evidence supporting a relationship between the positivity of maternal narratives and daughters' self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg survey. The second hypothesis posited a correlation between the negativity of maternal narratives and daughters' self-esteem, also assessed by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem test. However, analysis of negative words showed no correlation between these two ($r(8) = -0.002, p = 0.997$), and neither was the percentage of negative words correlated ($r(8) = -0.579, p = 0.080$). Therefore, there was no significant relation between maternal negativity on daughters' self-esteem scores. My third hypothesis posited that positivity of the mothers' narratives would be correlated with daughters' score on the MAD test. This was not supported when looking at positive words, $r(8) = -0.174, p = 0.631$ nor when looking at percentage of positive words. $r(8) = -0.425, p = 0.221$. Thus, maternal positivity did not appear to be related to daughters' MAD scores. Similarly, the fourth hypothesis posited that maternal negativity would correlate with daughters' MAD scores. However, neither the number of negative words ($r(8) = -0.235, p = 0.513$) nor the percentage of negative words ($r(8) = -0.188, p = 0.602$) showed a correlation with daughters' MAD scores.

Furthermore the current study looked at consistency of narratives as a possible indicator of scores on surveys. My fifth hypothesis posited that consistency between the narratives will positively correlate to a self-esteem score. This was not supported, because the data revealed no significant relationship between daughters' self-esteem scores on the Rosenberg survey and consistency ($r(8) = -0.070, p = 0.849$). Finally, the sixth hypothesis explored the relationship between narrative consistency and daughters' MAD scores. However, no significant correlation was found ($r(8) = -0.166, p = 0.640$). This indicates that narrative consistency was not associated with higher MAD scores in daughters.

For additional analysis, I explored whether there was a relationship between daughters' MAD scores and their self-esteem scores, as I assumed a correlation based on the belief that one's self-esteem comes from their relationship with their mother. Naturally, as self-esteem scores go up so would one's score on the MAD. However, no correlation was found between the two variables ($r(8) = 0.225, p = 0.532$). This unexpected result may be attributed to a "ceiling effect," wherein both measures exhibit high averages, leading to insufficient variability to detect a correlation. This issue can be further discussed in the subsequent sections, particularly in the Discussion, to explore potential reasons for the lack of correlation.

In summary, none of the hypotheses were supported by the data, suggesting that neither the positivity nor the negativity of maternal narratives, nor their consistency, was significantly related to daughters' self-esteem or MAD scores. (Figures can be found in Appendix E)

Discussion

This senior project delves into the lasting effects of prenatal narratives on an individual's existence, with a particular emphasis on the transmission of maternal experiences from one generation to the next. At its core, this research seeks to answer the following question: In what ways do prenatal narratives persist over the course of a child's life, and, more precisely, how does the narrative surrounding the mother's pregnancy experience shape the daughter's sense of self-esteem and perceived relationship between them from the perspective of the daughter. Many studies have explored the impact or symbolic interpretations of birth experiences, however very few have looked specifically at the stories shared about the entire journey while being pregnant.

What struck me most about studying this particular narrative is its unique nature and distinctiveness, which is that the pregnancy story is not only familiar to many but also holds the potential to highlight the impact of prenatal care. I am of the belief that we often underestimate the importance and significance of the prenatal experience and its implications. The nurturing of a child does not commence upon birth but rather begins within the womb, where the mother's experience profoundly influences both her and her child's journey. Secondly, this study has shown me that, at least for daughters based on the current study, they hear sporadic accounts of their mothers' pregnancy experiences, rather than having one moment where the mother shares her experience and then never again. This continuous story in which we hear throughout our lives contributes to this formulation of how daughters understand their connection to their mothers and to themselves. This adds another unique element to the influence of this narrative, as the interpreter of these narratives, I recognize that the information presented in the daughter's narrative is based on internalization and storytelling rather than direct experience. Lastly, I have found the dynamic between mothers and daughters particularly intriguing for many of the

reasons that this study has emphasized. Particularly, as highlighted in Hayden's et al.'s (2006) study, due to the fact that “mothers and daughters share the capacity to give birth, the transmission of such a story from mother to daughter is of particular interest” (Hayden et al., 2006). This dimension adds significant complexity to how daughters interpret and internalize the pregnancy narrative throughout their lives, even if on a subconscious level.

In many respects, this study aimed to uncover the subconscious influences of language within pivotal relationships as individuals develop and mature. Existing literature and this study's findings underscore how language carries significant weight, particularly by influential figures in our life. Within the mother-daughter relationship, the language exchanged shapes our perception of ourselves.

Furthermore, the existing body of literature consistently highlights the significant impact of the mother-daughter relationship on a daughter's perception of her own value. Within this context, pregnancy narratives play a crucial role, serving as a lens through which daughters internalize their sense of self-worth. This emotional resonance is shown through the narratives shared.

In this study, I hypothesized that the positivity of maternal narratives shared with the child will correlate with the daughter's self-esteem, as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Test. Additionally, I expected that the positivity of maternal narratives will correlate with the daughter's score on the Maternal Attachment Device (MAD) test. Furthermore, I predicted that consistency within the narratives will be associated with higher self-esteem scores on the Rosenberg survey and higher scores on the MAD test for daughters.

The study's findings did not align with the notion that a negative transmission of pregnancy narratives from mother to daughter is associated with daughters' self-esteem and their perceptions of their relationships with their mothers as shown through the MAD survey. However, analyzing the data and the individual responses were fascinating and worthy of interpretation because what we did see was that not only were many of the responses positive and consistent within the pairs, the daughters also ranked highly in self esteem and mother daughter connection. Unpacking this correlation is important.

For the majority of participants, recalling their mothers' pregnancy experiences was not immediate, nor did it consist of a single memory. Rather, participants reported difficulty recalling specific instances of their mothers sharing their pregnancy experiences, at least at first. Recognizing this potential challenge, I am happy with my decision to employ a free-writing approach instead of direct questioning, allowing participants to freely associate and express their thoughts. This methodological choice aimed to uncover subconscious associations and implications within the narratives and it indeed did; the narratives were deeply meaningful and informative.

Despite initial uncertainty from the daughters, primarily about what to write in response to the prompt, they always ended up engaging in the full three-minute free-writing exercise, sometimes even more. This suggests that the content of their narratives was influenced not only by factual recollections but also by their current relationship dynamics with their mothers. The free-writing element was essential in understanding how stories are transmitted and stored, influencing perceptions of oneself and others. Both mothers' and daughters' narratives were found to be both powerful in their depth and unique in that no two stories contained similar tone

or information, revealing the ongoing dialogue between them, albeit sometimes challenging to recall initially.

Utilizing the concept of "freewriting" to delve into the manifestation of internalized emotions, alongside the influence of reminiscing on perception, it's imperative to acknowledge the procedural structure. Each daughter participant was directed to document their narrative independently, devoid of prior insight into their mother's response, albeit they were informed about their participation in the study. Following this, they were asked to complete the surveys in no particular order. It is true that due to snowball sampling and targeting a specific population, I ended up gathering a group of daughters with noticeably high self esteem and hence all who have relatively strong relationships with their mothers. However, it is possible that the additional process of daughters reminiscing about what their mother has shared with them about their experience being pregnant, based on the extensively positive narratives, have brought forth feelings of love and respect for their mother. It is possible that this subconsciously boosted their self esteem, even momentarily, without any realization, resulting in higher scores on the Rosenberg Self Esteem scale.

I think this is an important potential implication or hypothesis to point out because if so, this in some ways still proves my original general question which approaches how the communicated story about the mother's experience during pregnancy influences the daughter's self-esteem and perceived closeness. This recognition does not imply that my data would have been different; however it gives insight into the psychological process that might have occurred for the daughters when engaging in the current study. Despite my goal trying to encompass a life long generalizable feeling of self esteem and relationship between dyads, it is possible that due to the reminiscing of positive memories and language impacted the responses that were given

right after. Perhaps in the future, in an attempt to remove this potential factor I could change the order in which I gave out the instruments. Possibly for some daughters I could give the PNI first and for others the RSES survey first. I could then see if there is a difference in language both within the narratives and scores on the surveys depending on the order in which they filled them out.

In addition, a study titled "Damaged Self-Esteem is Associated With Internalizing Problems" by Creemers et al. 2013, reaffirmed the critical role of self-esteem in the onset and persistence of internalizing issues. This relationship presents another potential consideration for the current study. A simultaneous effect occurs, making it challenging to determine which factor precedes the other: low self-esteem may influence how individuals perceive their mother's pregnancy narrative, or the mother's narrative may impact the individual's self-esteem. While it's conceivable that a mother might share both positive and negative experiences of pregnancy, my hypothesis suggests that daughters with low self-esteem will naturally share narratives with a higher proportion of negative content, irrespective of the actual experiences conveyed by the mother. The current study rather naturally encompasses the question of causality, however it is not what I chose to analyze in the end, yet worth recognizing now. Indeed the current study's focus lies on identifying correlations rather than determining their direction. However, directing future inquiries toward understanding the directional correlation between internalization (as reflected in the narrative) and self-esteem could provide more conclusive insights.

I wonder whether negative experiences shared by the mother contributes to the daughter's low self-esteem, in that order or vice versa- in other words what is the independent variable? After much review I have come to the realization that, at the very least for the current study, it is not only irrelevant to distinguish between these influences but also impossible because these

factors are constantly in relation with one another. It is worth noting that self esteem, as well as our relationship to our mother and the “pregnancy narrative”, hold no definitive end. They are in constant evolution and relationship with one another.

Furthermore, the mothers' narratives may be influenced by their current relationship with their daughters as well. Regardless of the actual pregnancy experience, a mother's recollection may be colored by the present dynamics of their relationship with their daughter influencing not only her story but also the results of the daughters MAD score and RSES. However, looking at my data, this was likely not the case because all participants had outstandingly high scores on self esteem and MAD.

It's crucial to note that the daughters' narratives were not evaluated based on factual accuracy regarding their mothers' experiences, but rather on the significance attributed to these narratives by the daughters themselves. The study aimed to explore potential correlations between the daughters' narratives, their self-esteem levels, and their relationships with their mothers. The outcomes of the study present two potential interpretations. Firstly, a daughter may recount her mother's pregnancy experience as negative, unrelated to her own self-worth or relationship with her mother. Alternatively, a daughter may internalize her mother's negative pregnancy experience, resulting in lower self-esteem and a strained relationship with her mother. The study hypothesized potential manifestations of these internalized narratives, such as high self-esteem and a positive relationship with the mother, or conversely, low self-esteem and a challenging relationship, as potential mediators of how this pregnancy narrative influences a daughter's life.

In line with Haydens et al.'s (2006) study, daughters who were exposed to their birth stories more frequently exhibited higher self-esteem and reported more secure relationships with their mothers. Similarly, my research revealed a correlation between higher self-esteem, higher scores on the MAD, and longer word counts among participants. Generally mothers had higher word counts, reflecting their firsthand experience of the pregnancy, nevertheless suggesting a potential link between communication frequency, positive maternal narratives, and self-confidence within relationships. Furthermore as Haydens et al. (2006) suggests, mothers tend to highlight positive aspects of the birth experience when recounting it to their daughters, potentially shaping a positively biased perception of the pregnancy experience. However, my hypothesis accounts for this variance, focusing solely on shared and remembered information rather than the logistics of pregnancy. The PNI instrument ensures this focus as regardless of what the daughters share, it will be based on what they have been told rather than experienced.

The insignificance of my results can be attributed to several factors, primarily stemming from limitations in the study's design. One prominent issue was the small sample size, resulting in insufficient statistical power to detect meaningful effects. With a larger and more diverse sample, there would have been greater variability in the data, potentially leading to more significant findings. Statistical significance is important because it indicates whether or not the results of a study are likely to reflect a real or genuine effect in the population, rather than being the result of random fluctuations. In this study's case statistical significance would have been incorporated if we got more fluctuation in the responses, which only a larger and more diverse sample size could have accounted for.

A noteworthy observation was the relatively high self-esteem levels among my participants. It appears that I unintentionally recruited a cohort of young women who exhibited a strong sense of confidence. This factor likely contributed to the lack of variability in the data, thereby diminishing the potential for detecting significant relationships between variables.

Particularly, when comparing the results of the current study to existing literature, particularly regarding the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), noteworthy differences emerge. For instance, in a study conducted by Sinclair et al. (2010), the average self-esteem score among adults was reported as 22.62. This stands in contrast to the findings of the current study, where the mean RSES score was 32.7. Another relevant study titled "Damaged Self-Esteem is Associated With Internalizing Problems" by Creemers et al, 2013 utilized the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to assess global explicit feelings of self-esteem among 95 women. Their reported scores ranged from 18 as the lowest recorded score to 40 as the highest, with a mean of 30.65. Comparing this mean with the findings of the current study, where only female participants were included, suggests that the observed mean of 32.7 may not be unreasonably high in comparison to other studies employing the Rosenberg scale. It could be that women rank themselves higher on these scales generally, however that doesn't mean they actually have high self esteem. It could also be that in the modern world people generally have higher self esteem, both men and women and thus the old scoring key and average could just be outdated.

An additional factor contributing to the insignificance of the results was my approach to scoring the Maternal Attachment Device (MAD) survey. Specifically, I did not calculate each subscale of the MAD survey separately or individually. Instead, I aggregated all the scores into a single sum. This method was more efficient given the small sample size, as it allowed for a higher likelihood of detecting any correlations. However, this approach meant that I did not analyze the daughter's scores for hierarchy, connectedness, and interdependence separately. In essence, due to low statistical power, I was unable to analyze how hierarchy scores individually related to narrative tone, or how interdependence related to self-esteem, for example. However, if I had scored the MAD survey differently, there may have been the potential to detect

relationships between specific subscales and narrative tone. In future studies with larger sample sizes, I would be interested in examining the individual scales of the MAD survey more closely and exploring their relationships with one another, as well as their correlations with the narratives shared by participants.

These comparisons underscore the variability in self-esteem scores across different populations and research contexts, emphasizing the necessity of considering various factors that could influence self-esteem assessments. It's important to note that the current study exclusively involved Bard students, who are all well-educated and have a significant relationship with their mothers, as evidenced by their willingness to participate in the experiment. This suggests a certain level of comfort and familiarity in their relationship, thereby encompassing a relatively specific or homogeneous group of women. As a result, while individual participants may vary, they collectively represent a similar population, which could explain the consistency of the results observed in the current study- that being high self esteem scores, high MAD scores and generally consistent stories shared between mother and daughter.

The consistency observed in the narratives, where many were similar or somewhat consistent, likely influenced the study outcomes. Participants shared similar experiences and perspectives, potentially inflating scores on measures like the MAD RSE scale. While transparency is generally valued, there may be instances where withholding information is beneficial for the mother-daughter relationship. In what situations might holding back some information be beneficial? This was a big question at the start of the current study however now looking back with the understanding that this particular narrative is rarely ever shared one time all the way through and then never again, rather more casually mentioned and referred to throughout one's life, the intentional choice to lie about your experience to your daughter seems

unlikely. That being said, it is possible that due to other implications of this relationship the tone and language used in the conveying of the experience may differ from the reality of the experience. What I mean by this is that it could be that your mother was during her pregnancy not happy and rather upset about the changing of her body, however now because of her wonderful relationship with her daughter, she doesn't care that she gained weight looking at it now even though the mother really did while pregnant. For this study it is more important and interesting to me to look at what was intentionally chosen to convey, and what has as a result been internalized by the daughter.

While consistency in narratives may symbolize honesty and transparency, a total positive sharing of the experience may not be any more healthy for the relationship and self esteem than a total negative one. Contrary to my initial thinking which was very much concerned with all the implications of an inconsistent story and specifically one that is neither fully positive nor fully negative, I have come to realize that in fact maintaining a balanced narrative with mixed emotion driven language seems to be the healthiest approach. In fact many narratives received a score of 2 for consistency, meaning at least one of the narratives was sharing a story in which it was neither fully positive nor fully negative. Perhaps this may have been a contributing factor to my higher self-esteem and MAD scores. This balanced and thus honest approach to storytelling may make daughters resilient, as they are exposed to all aspects of the real experience. Relating this finding back to Baird (2002) study on parental self disclosure, this multifaceted in its emotion story that was shared by the daughters symbolizes trust and healthy communication patterns. Also honesty in regards to pregnancy experience is important particularly as they one day might experience similar emotions as they are pregnant one day.

It's important to acknowledge the limitations imposed by the snowball sampling method utilized in this study. The recruitment of participants through social networks, predominantly friends within a similar socioeconomic status (SES) who share favorable views of Bard College, potentially introduced biases into the sample. This group may possess similar perspectives and experiences, leading to a lack of diversity in the participant pool. While this method facilitated data collection within a close-knit community, it may have restricted the generalizability of the findings. Thus, the impact of snowball sampling on the study's results should be considered when interpreting the outcomes.

The analysis of the narratives and the identification of specific terms unveiled intriguing patterns, notably in the frequency of certain phrases. However, the challenge of interpretation was apparent, especially in phrases that contained both positive and negative elements, as well as those that lacked clear polarity. Ambiguity arose in coding sentences such as "I just knew" and "No idea how to be a parent," making it challenging to ascertain their overall positivity or negativity. For example, expressions like "I wanted her out" from the perspective of the mother, or phrases such as "I was ready to have her out" and "Finally," both from the mother's perspective, underscored the complexity inherent in these narratives. Contrasted with statements from daughters such as "I don't remember too much" or "She was excited to meet me," focusing on the latter phrase posed challenges. Despite containing no individual positive words, it conveyed a sense of positivity within the narrative context. Although fascinating to analyze and interpret individually, due to the subjectivity of certain phrases, I opted not to include them in the analysis. Perhaps with coders who were better trained to interpret subjective phrases, a more thorough analysis could have been conducted. In other words, I am under the belief that the real intriguing insights often reside within ambiguous phrases, thus their exclusion from the analysis

may have contributed to the lack of significant results. Unfortunately much of the equivocal phrases contain valuable data that went unexplored in the results.

The process of coding for positivity and negativity within the narratives was complex, particularly when phrases contained overlapping words that conveyed mixed sentiments. For example, recurring phrases like "I knew I wanted to be a mom" and "I was ready" consistently featured positive words like "wanted" and "ready." However, in Participant 8A's narrative, where such overlap was absent, coding became more intricate.

Participant 8A's story highlighted the nuances of interpreting positivity and negativity within narratives. For instance, the mother's statement "Slept a lot, went to a movie and fell asleep in the theater during it" presented a coding dilemma. Despite lacking individual positive words, the context suggested a positive tone within the broader narrative. While in another participant's narrative, this phrase might have been coded differently, I felt inclined to interpret it positively within this specific context.

Similarly, phrases such as "Liked the attention from the world" posed challenges in deciphering their overall sentiment within the narrative context. Additionally, sentences such as "Even despite the trauma of such an invasive surgery... having me was the best thing" underscored the nuanced interplay of positivity and negativity within narratives. These instances served as reminders of the need to consider the entirety of the narrative when determining underlying sentiments, despite the presence of contrasting emotions within a single narrative.

That being said, the methodology for coding positivity and negativity remained fluid, allowing for a nuanced examination of each narrative. While this approach made it challenging to identify overarching or generalizable correlations and patterns, it enabled a thorough analysis

of each participant's story in relation to their self-esteem and relationship scores. Ultimately, this individualized approach provided insights into the complexity of narrative interpretation and its implications for understanding maternal influence on daughters' perceptions and self-esteem.

Interestingly, daughters often echoed these expressions in their own responses. However, in both narratives, such disclosures couldn't be unequivocally categorized as positive or negative. Hence, I deemed them as phrases open to interpretation. For instance, the phrase "it was an emotional process," used by the daughter in Pair 5, presents an intriguing analysis. While describing something as emotional doesn't inherently imply negativity, the daughter might have internalized her mother's characterization of her pregnancy as "emotional" in a negative light. This stems from societal norms in Western culture, where emotions are often associated with negativity. Despite this, I recognize that an emotional experience doesn't necessarily equate to a negative one. Therefore, I refrained from labeling this phrase as either negative or positive.

Understanding the distinction between terms such as "ready" and "finally" in narratives posed a challenge, particularly in determining their inherent positivity or negativity. While I initially regarded "ready" as a marker of positivity, akin to "finally," the latter's nuanced connotations made it difficult to categorize definitively. This complexity prompted me to label "finally" as a neutral term, recognizing its potential to appear in both positive and negative contexts.

However, upon closer examination, the disparity between "ready" and "finally" became apparent. These words could markedly alter the tone of the narratives, despite their seeming similarities. Yet, upon deeper reflection, I realized that "ready" and "finally" could overlap in

meaning, conveying similar messages within different contexts. Hence, I adopted the process of counting the entire phrases alongside individual words to discern the intended meaning.

Given the intricacies of language within the narratives, I choose to seek external validation from coders who were naive to my hypotheses. I asked them to code for overall consistency in emotional valence and this proved invaluable. This approach bridged the gap between potential interpretations of specific terms. Ultimately, I used outside coders because I did not want the results to be skewed based on my own interpretation, thus having coders be naive to the study allowed for more validity. For example, a term such as "finally" to me could have been perceived positively, however when the coders read it they could have regarded this term in a negative way influencing the overall score on consistency. Looking at their scoring often compelled me to reevaluate my assumptions about certain terms' connotations for the future.

This study has presented numerous challenges but has prompted deep questions for consideration. Initially, I expected more definitive outcomes, hoping for clear distinctions between positive and negative experiences conveyed in the narratives. However, I now recognize the complexity of human emotions and interpretations, which surpassed my initial expectations. My primary goal in undertaking this study was to explore the unique dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and its impact on individual lives. As a daughter myself, I am aware of the profound significance this bond holds in shaping one's identity yet we often are not explicitly taught about how and where this relationship manifests in our daily life. Moreover, I am fascinated by the prenatal period and its potential long-term effects on individuals. And finally, I am intrigued by the role of language and parental reinforcement in shaping our self-worth, particularly within same-gender parent-child relationships. I am grateful that I was

able to construct a study that I believe to have incorporated all three of these passions. Through this project, I have gained valuable insights into these interconnected themes and their implications for understanding human experiences and relationships.

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Appendix A - IRB

Bard College

Institutional Review Board

Date: 2/14/2024
To: Aria Komoroff
Cc: Sarah Dunphy- Lelii; Nazir Nazari
From: Ziad M. Abu-Rish, IRB Chair
Re: How was I? A study of the impact of pre-natal narratives

DECISION: APPROVAL

Dear Aria Komoroff:

The Bard IRB committee has reviewed your proposal. Your application is conditionally approved, on the basis of the below requested modification, through February 13, 2025. Your case number is 2025FEB13-LOM.

Please notify the IRB if your methodology changes or unexpected events arise.

We wish you the best of luck with your research.



Ziad M. Abu-Rish, Ph.D.
IRB Chair
Associate Professor of Human Rights and Middle Eastern Studies
Bard College
zaburish@bard.edu

Appendix B - List of words

Positive Words:

- Happy
- Excited
- Lively
- Fulfilling
- Beautiful
- Hopeful
- Creating life
- Bringing someone into the world
- Loving
- Euphoric
- Excellerating
- Peace
- Unity
- Wholeness
- Smile
- Loved
- Easy
- Important
- “Big News”
- Ready
- Wanted
- Perfect
- Amazing
- Incredible
- Special
- Complete
- Lucky
- Blessed
- Smile
- Best
- I knew I wanted to be a mom

- Powerful
- Hopes
- Connection
- Relaxed
- Positive
- Overjoyed
- Joy

Negative Words

- Nervous
- Anxious
- Scared
- Fat
- Annoyed
- Moody
- Alone
- Can't do this
- Not ready
- Concerned
- Painful
- Insecure
- Impossible
- "Don't know much about pregnancy"
- Struggles
- Pain
- Jealous
- Weight
- Pressure
- Unclear
- Weight
- Regret
- Worried
- Scared

Appendix C- Self esteem Survey

Using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale | *SOCY1 Sociology Department | University of Maryland.*

(n.d.). Retrieved October 19, 2023,

<https://socy.umd.edu/about-us/using-rosenberg-self-esteem-scale>

		1	2	3	4
		STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
1	I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	SA	A	D	SD
2	I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	SA	A	D	SD
3	All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.**	SA	A	D	SD
4	I am able to do things as well as most other people.	SA	A	D	SD
5	I feel I do not have much to be proud of.**	SA	A	D	SD
6	I take a positive attitude toward myself.	SA	A	D	SD
7	On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	SA	A	D	SD
8	I wish I could have more respect for myself.**	SA	A	D	SD
9	I certainly feel useless at times.**	SA	A	D	SD
10	At times I think I am no good at all.**	SA	A	D	SD

Appendix D- MAD Survey

Rastogi, M. (2002). The Mother-Adult Daughter Questionnaire (MAD): Developing a Culturally Sensitive Instrument. *The Family Journal*, 10(2), 145–155.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480702102004>

(c) = Connectedness; (t) = Trust in Hierarchy; (i) = Interdependence; * = reverse scored. To begin with, I would like to ask you some questions about the relationship you have with your mother right now. Please answer all questions and choose the answer that applies best to you. Keep in mind your CURRENT relationship with your mother.

For questions 1 through 5, circle the best answer.

1. I have lived with my mother:
 - More than 25 years
 - Up to 25 years
 - Less than 15 years

2. To visit my mother, I have to travel:
 - 3 miles or less
 - 30 miles or less but more than 3 miles
 - 200 miles or less but more than 30 miles
 - 800 miles or less but more than 200 miles
 - 3,000 miles or less but more than 800 miles
 - More than 3,000 miles

3. I see my mother:
 - Almost everyday
 - About once a week
 - About once a month

- About once every few months
 - Once or twice a year
 - Less than once a year
 - Never
4. I communicate (call, write/recieve letters) with my mother at least:
- Daily
 - Weekly
 - Monthly
 - Less than monthly
 - Never
5. If cost were not an issue, I would communicate(call/write) with my mother
- About the same as now
 - A little more
 - Much more

For questions 6 through 22, refer to the scale below and choose the answer that describes you best.

1 = Very false 2 = Somewhat false 3 = Maybe 4 = Somewhat true 5 = Very true

6. I can share my intimate secrets with my mother. _____ (c)
7. My mother can share her intimate secrets with me. _____ (c)
8. I can share my personal feelings with my mother. _____ ©
9. My mother can share her personal feelings with me. _____ (c)
10. I can share my opinions and values with my mother. _____ ©
11. My mother can share her opinions and values with me. _____ ©
12. 12. If my mother ever needs anything, I help in whatever way I can even if it means making huge sacrifices. _____ ©

13. If I ever need any kind of help, I do not hesitate to ask my mother for advice. _____ (i)
14. I often depend on my mother for advice. _____ (i)
15. My mother will always love me regardless of what I do. _____ (c)
16. My mother always knows best. _____ (t)
17. My mother always knows what is good for me. _____ (t)
18. I do what my mother suggests because it takes away the hassle of having to figure it out for myself. _____ (t)
19. I always trust my mother's judgment. _____ (t)
20. I feel I can use my mother's wisdom as a resource when making decisions. _____ (t)
21. Sometimes I will give in to my mother out of my respect for her. _____ (t)
22. I feel the need to consult my mother when making a hard decision. _____ (i)

For questions 23 through 25, choose the answer that describes you best, and circle your response

23. I consider my mother and I to be: ©

- a. Very close
- b. Somewhat close
- c. more close than others
- e. About the same as others

25. My overall relationship with my mother is:

- a. Very satisfying
- b. Satisfying
- c. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfying

Scoring Key

1. Connectedness Subscale Items 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, and 23

Reverse score item 23.

Add all scores to obtain a total.

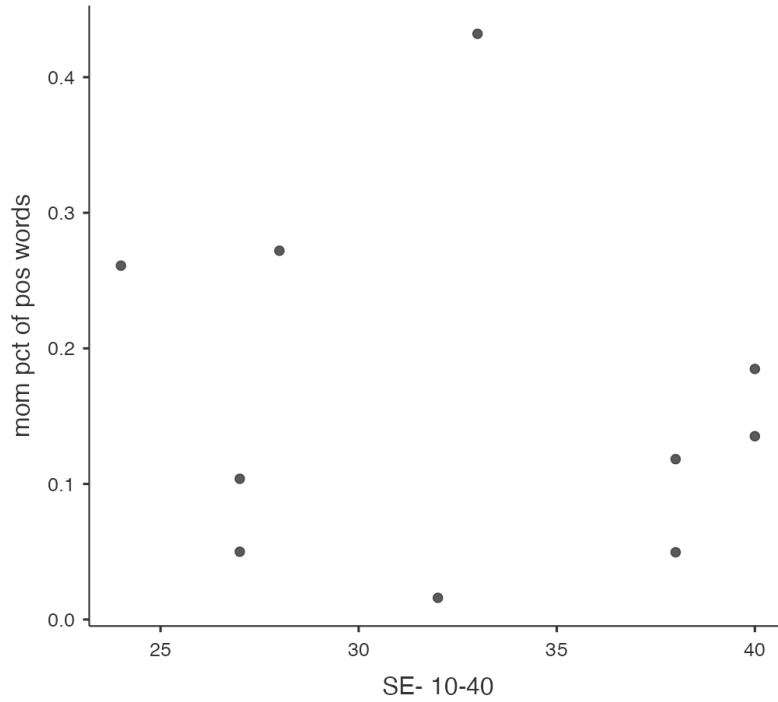
2. Interdependence Subscale Items 13, 14, and 22

Add all scores to obtain a total.

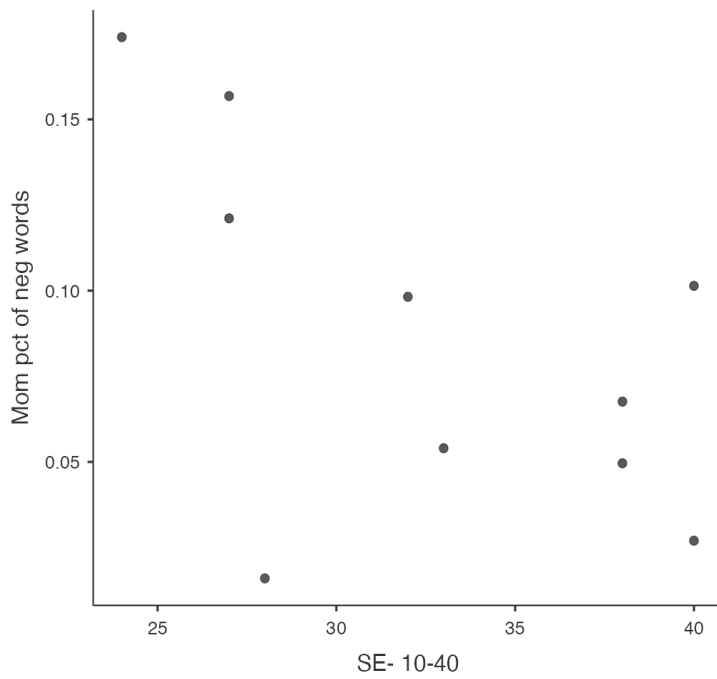
Trust in Hierarchy Subscale Items 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 Add all scores to obtain total.

Appendix E- Data Figures

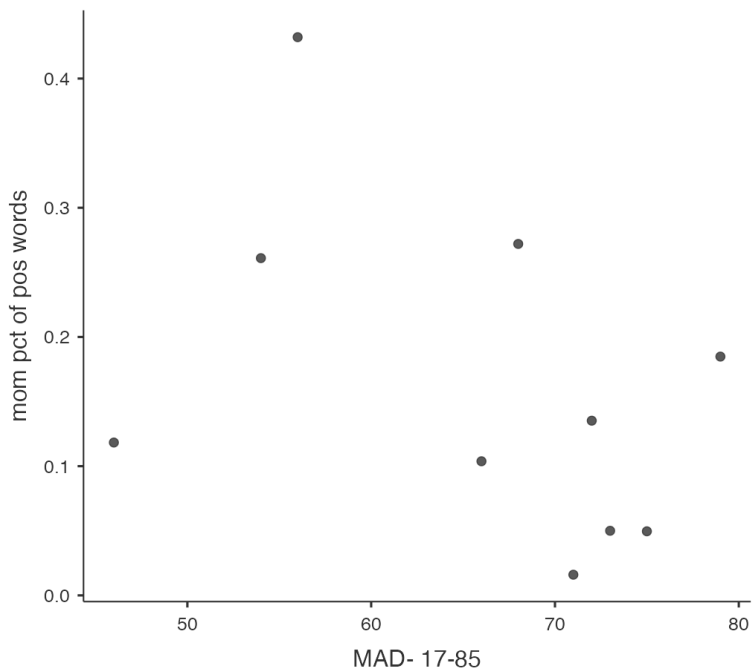
Scatterplot



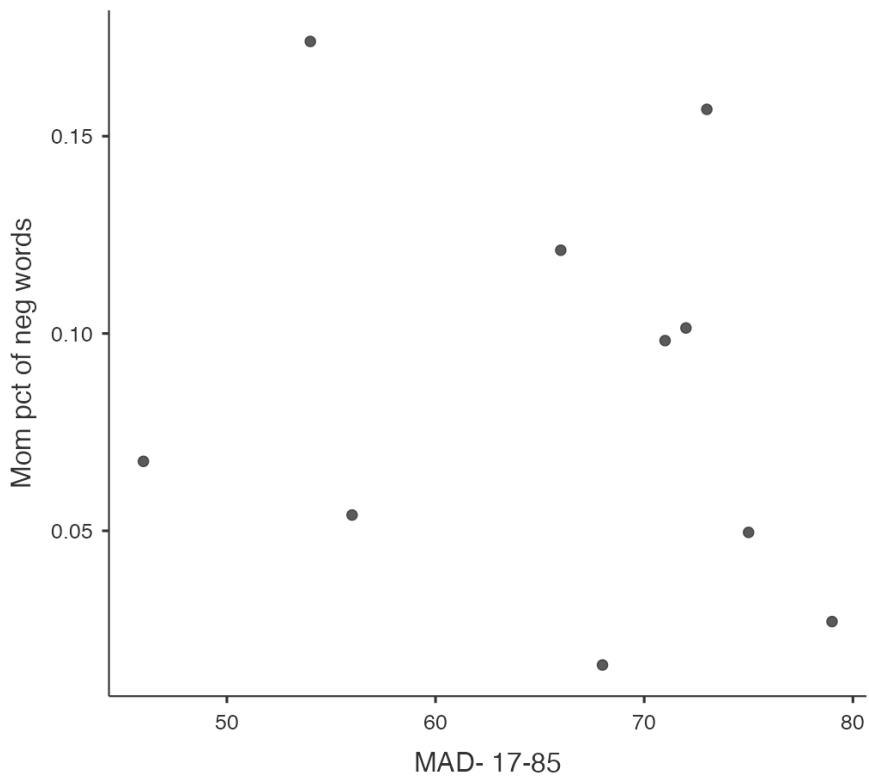
Scatterplot



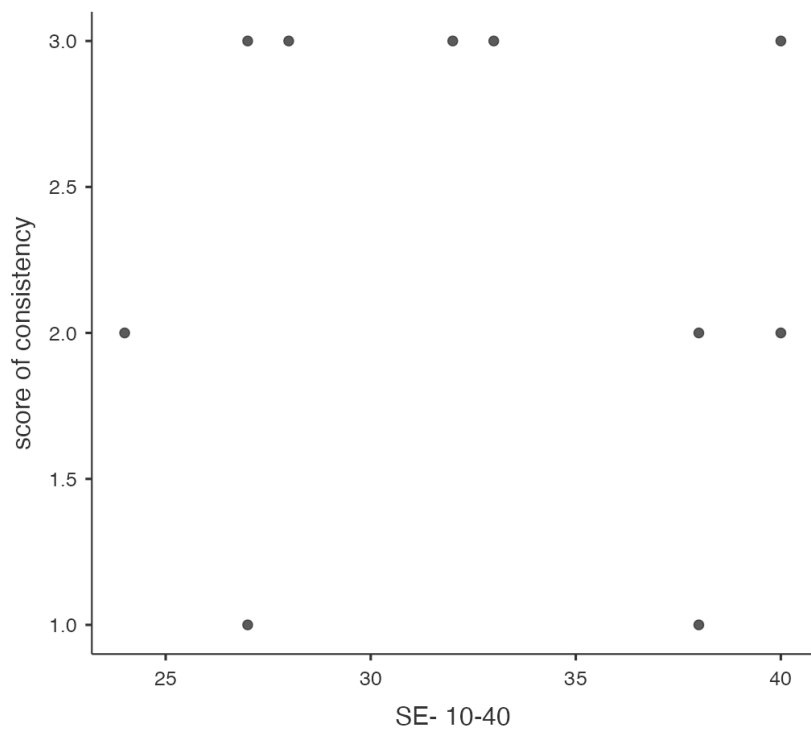
Scatterplot



Scatterplot



Scatterplot



Scatterplot

