

Narratives of COVID-19 Experiences: Relations to Mental Health and Identity Development

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Introduction and Methods

Final Research

- Traumatic experiences negatively influence identity development (David, 1992), and mental health.
- Expressing trauma through the usage of language, such as speaking and writing, allows individuals to feel more in control of their emotions, understand the events that they have experienced and themselves, and promotes overall better health (Pennebaker & Beugel, 2008).
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, however, during Health & Wellness (2020) reported that college students without preexisting mental health issues have suffered more academic stressors in 2020 compared to 2019.
- Thus, it is important to understand how the disruptions to normal life has negatively contributed to mental health problems, as well as trauma to identity development for college students.

Current Study

- The goal of this study was to assess if college students' narratives of the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to mental health and identity development.
- We hypothesized that more elaborative narratives and narratives with greater resolution would be positively correlated with greater well-being, less identity distress, along with greater identity development.

Participants

- Data was collected from 202 majority 18-22 year old, majority female college students, 12% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic, 9% African American and 6% Asian American.

Results

One writer has made me have kind of what day it is and has made me more than I have after several depressive episodes in some more often than they used to, I had a first one in a while before a pandemic. Other classes are also making school unenjoyable as I am not an active person. I am no longer motivated in completing tasks. I have found that my anxiety has increased significantly throughout COVID-19.

Results

1. Gender Differences in Elaboration but not Resolution

2. The High Positive Relationships, Perceived Growth and Purpose in Life all positively correlated with Elaboration but not Resolution.

Discussion

Summary

- Results indicate that elaboration in Covid-19 narratives is moderately related to different aspects of well-being, including positive emotions, positive relationships and purpose in life.
- On the other hand, elaboration was also related to more depressive symptoms and longer identity distress.
- There were no relations between narrative resolution and any of the well-being or mental health outcomes.
- There were no relations between narrative elements and identity development.

Implications

- Providing elaborative details in narratives are a way of making sense of one's experiences, particularly when those experiences are negative. These also indicate more one expending more effort in processing their negative experiences of Covid-19, thus leading to overall better well-being.
- On the contrary, the pandemic is still ongoing, and most people are still stuck at home, making it impossible to completely process. Hence, greater narrative elaboration may indicate an attempt to make sense of an ongoing negative event which may cause about, be a mental health consequence.

Limitations

- The fact that the pandemic is ongoing makes it impossible to completely process and come to terms with through narratives.
- This study was correlational in nature.
- Future research will explore more extended research when it is over.

[VIDEO ABSTRACT](#) [REFERENCES](#) [CONTACT AUTHOR](#)

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Past Research

- Traumatic experiences negatively influence identity development (Good, 1992), and mental health.
- Expressing trauma through the usage of language, such as speaking and writing, allows individuals to feel more in control of their emotions, understand the events that they have experienced and themselves, and promotes overall better health (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999).
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, Hamza, Ewing, Heath, & Goldstein (2020) reported that college students without preexisting mental health issues have suffered more academic distress in 2020 compared to 2019.
- Thus, it is important to understand how the disruption to normal life has negatively contributed to mental health problems, as well as issues in identity development for college students.

Current Study

- The goal of this study was to examine college students' narratives of the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to mental health and identity development.
- We hypothesized that more elaborative narratives and narratives with greater resolution would be positively correlated with greater well-being, less identity distress, along with greater identity development.

Participants

- Data was collected from 100 majority 18-23 year old, majority female college students. 51% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, 8% African American and 6% Asian American.

Questionnaires

- DIDS - Dimensions of Identity Development
- IDS - Identity Development Scale
- The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being: autonomy, environmental mastery and personal growth (Ryff et al., 2007)
- The Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al., 1961)
- Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1988)

Narratives

- Participants were asked to provide free responses to 9 narrative prompts.
- E.g., Describe your experiences of being quarantined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discuss your feelings and thoughts, the difficulties that you encountered, and how the quarantine process has affected you both positively and negatively. Give as much detail as possible.

Narrative Coding

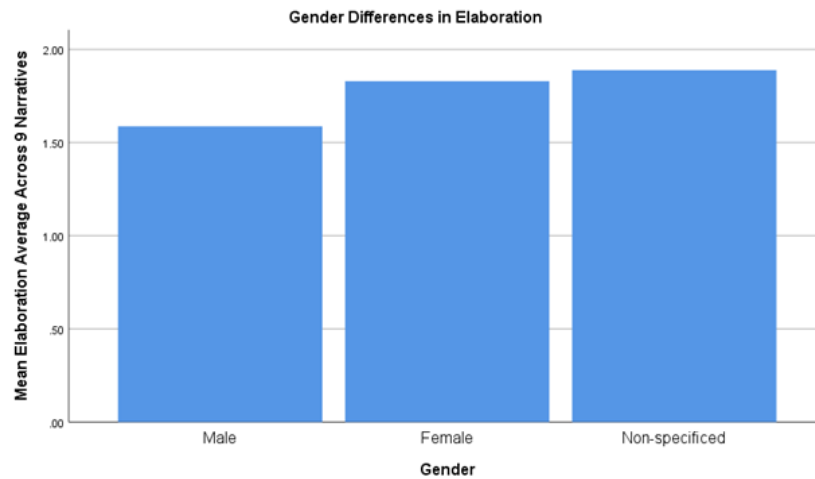
- Elaboration was coded from 0 to 4 with 0 being no narrative present and 4 being a highly elaborate narrative.
- Resolution was coded from 0 to 3 with 0 being a factual narrative with no reflection and 3 being steps taken to resolve the negative situation that ends with insight.

RESULTS

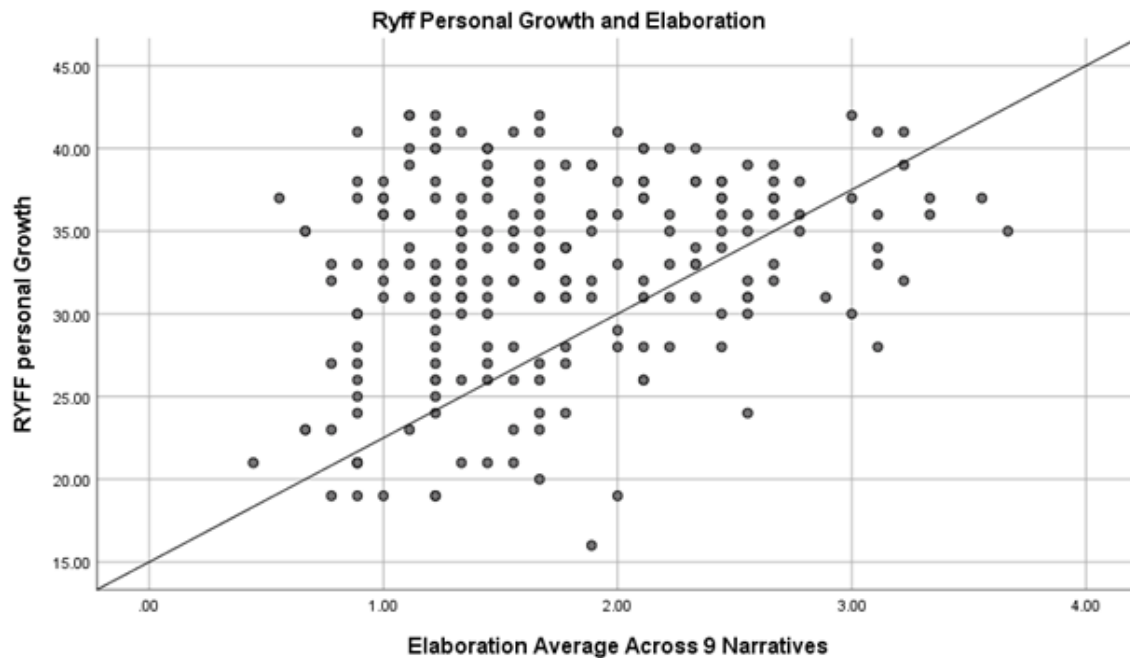
Quarantine has made me lose track of what day it is and has made me even lazier. I have also noticed depressive episodes to occur more often than they used to, I hadn't had one in a while before quarantine. Online classes are also making school undesirable as I am not an online person. I am no longer motivated to complete tasks. I have found that my screen time has increased significantly throughout COVID-19.

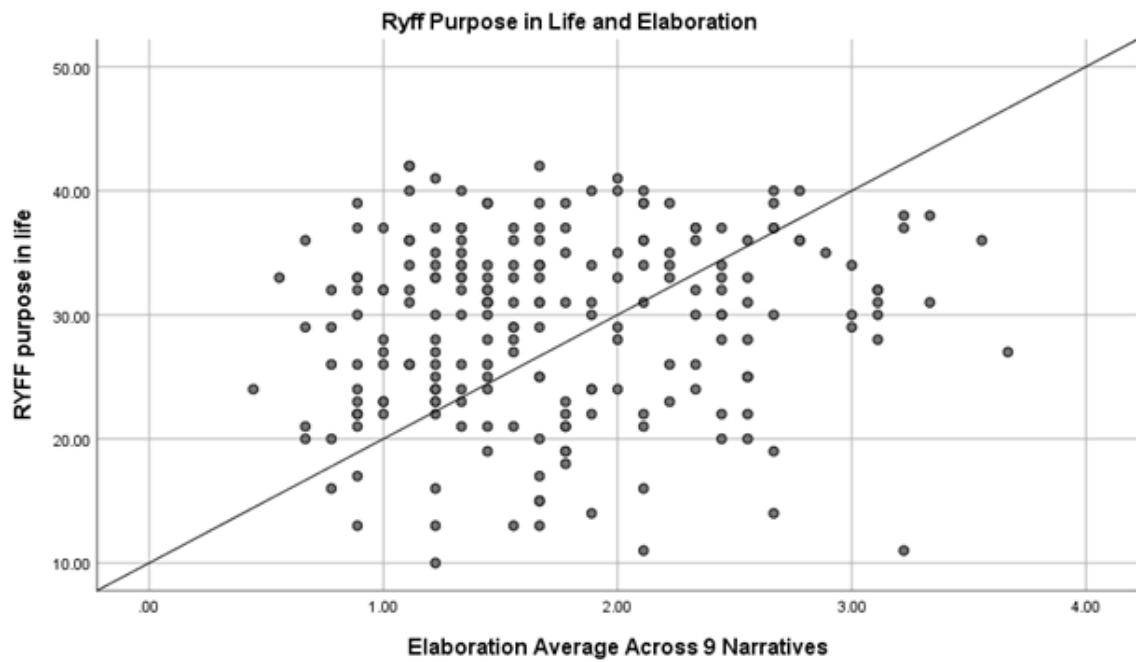
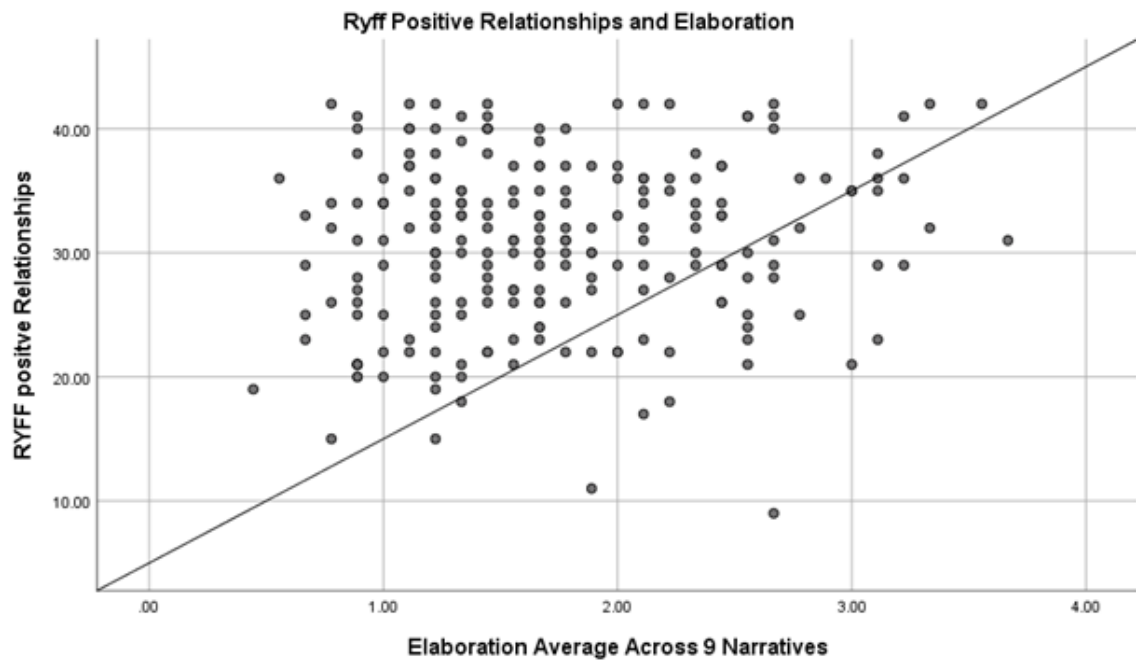
Results

1. Gender differences in Elaboration but not Resolution

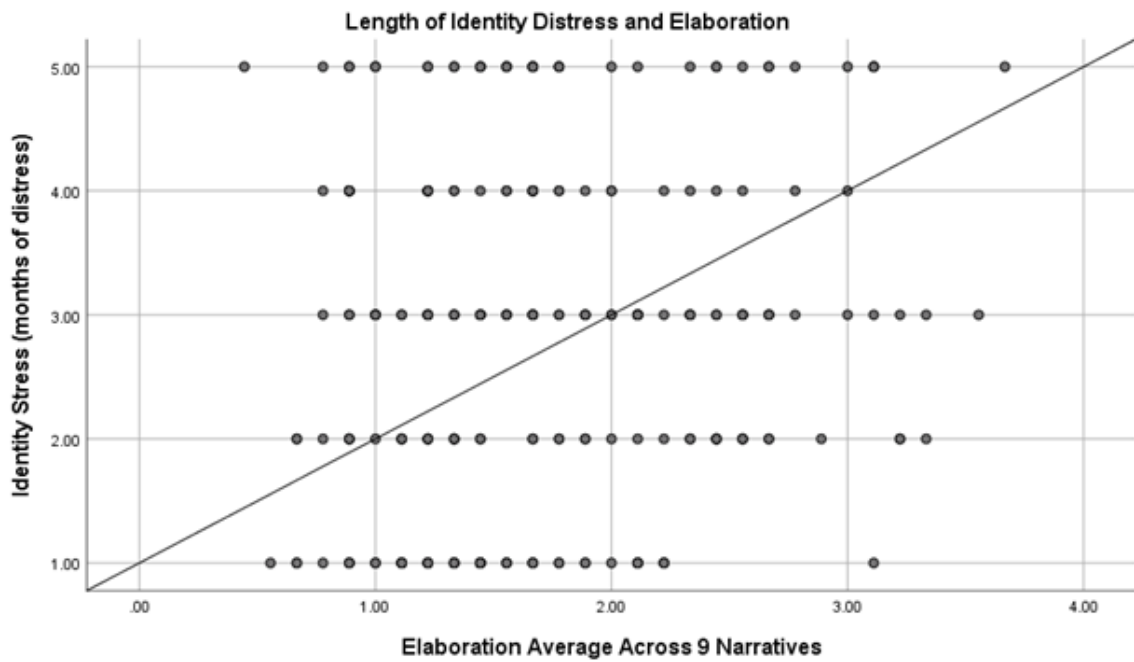
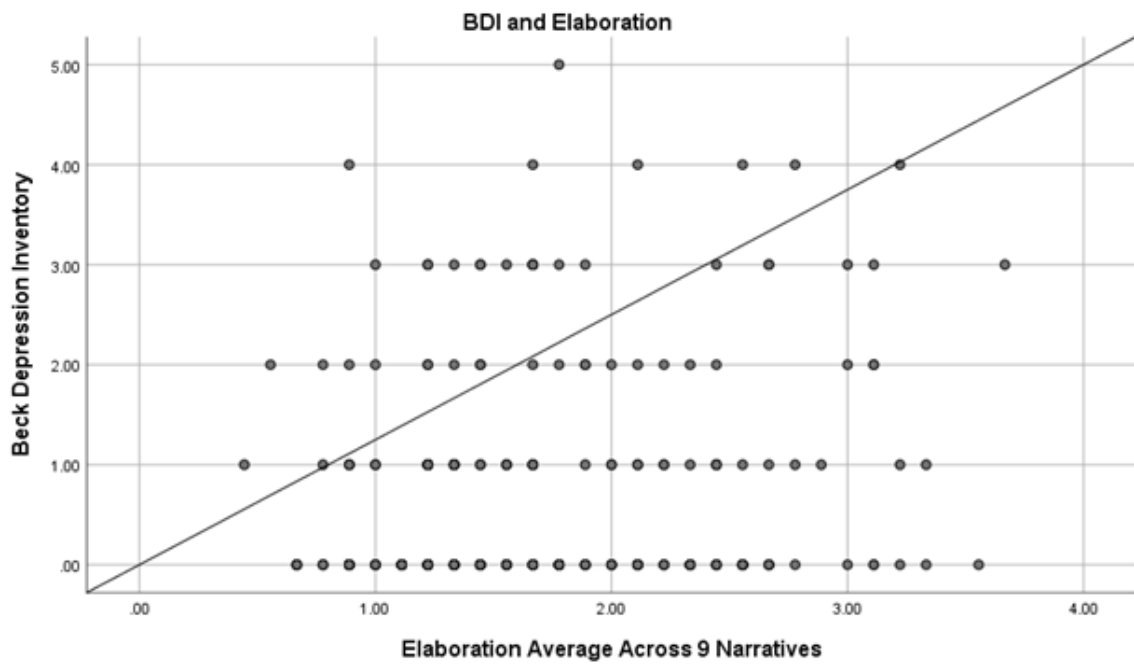


2. The Ryff Positive Relationships, Personal Growth and Purpose in Life all positively correlated with Elaboration but not Resolution.





3. BDI and Identity Distress positively correlated with Elaboration



DISCUSSION

Summary

- Results indicate that elaboration in Covid-19 narratives is moderately related to different aspects of well-being, including positive outcomes, positive relationships and purpose in life.
- On the other hand, elaboration was also related to more depressive symptoms and longer identity distress.
- There were no relations between narrative resolution and any of the well-being or mental health measures.
- There were no relations between narrative elements and identity development.

Implications

- Providing elaborative details in narratives are a way of making sense of one's experiences, particularly when those experiences are negative. Those who elaborate more are expending more effort in processing their negative experiences of Covid-19, thus leading to overall better well-being.
- On the contrary, the pandemic is still ongoing, and most people are still stuck at home, making it impossible to completely process. Hence, greater narrative elaboration may indicate an attempt to make sense of an ongoing negative event which may have short-term mental health consequences.

Limitations

- The fact that the pandemic is ongoing makes it impossible to completely process and come to terms with through narratives.
- This study was correlational in nature.
- Only young college students were sampled. Research should assess younger age groups as well.

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