

Narrative Identity Predicts Borderline Personality Disorder Features in Inpatient Adolescents up to Six Months after Admission

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Abstract : Narrative identity is the dynamic and evolving story individuals create about their personal pasts, presents, and presumed futures. This storied sense of self develops in adolescence and is crucial for fostering a sense of self-unity and purpose in life. A growing body of work has shown that several characteristics of narrative identity are disturbed in adults suffering from borderline personality disorder (BPD). Very little research, however, has explored the stories told by adolescents with BPD features. Investigating narrative identity early in the lifespan and in relation to personality pathology is crucial; BPD is a developmental disorder with early signs appearing already in adolescence. In the current study, we examine narrative identity (focusing on themes of agency and communion) coded from self-defining memories derived from the child attachment interview in 174 inpatient adolescents ($M = 15.12$, $SD = 1.52$) at the time of admission. The adolescents' social cognition was further assessed on the basis of their reactions to movie scenes (i.e., the MASC movie task). They also completed a trauma checklist and self-reported BPD features at three different time points (i.e., at admission, at discharge, and 6 months after admission). Preliminary results show that adolescents who told stories containing themes of agency and communion evinced better social cognition, and lower emotional abuse on the trauma checklist. In addition, adolescents who disclosed stories containing lower levels of agency and communion demonstrated more BPD symptoms at all three time points, even when controlling for the occurrence of traumatic life events. Surprisingly, social cognitive abilities were not significantly associated with BPD features. These preliminary results underscore the importance of narrative identity as an indicator, and potential cause, of incipient personality pathology. Thus, focusing on diminished themes of narrative-based agency and communion in early adolescence could be crucial in preventing the development of personality pathology over time.

Keywords : borderline personality disorder, inpatient adolescents, narrative identity, follow-ups

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