**IEREST**

**Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers**

**Module 1 - Activity 3**

**Exploring narrative in intercultural mobility contexts**

1. **Introduction**

The aim of this activity is to explore in depth narratives in the context of intercultural mobility, and more specifically, of study-abroad experiences. In this activity, students explore examples of narratives and confront the challenges and questions surrounding them within their own (future, present or past) Erasmus mobility perspective.

The focus of the activity is on the differences between two types of story-telling: on the one hand, ‘essentialising’ narratives which reduce their subject to a ‘single story’ and, on the other hand, complex narratives which are more subjective, participatory and open-ended (see *Attachment 6* for teacher guidelines).

The narrative activity is split up into four tasks. Each task addresses a central question regarding narrative in mobility and intercultural contexts. Every task is in turn comprised of a set of subtasks to be undertaken by students, individually or in a group, and is accompanied by a follow-up discussion session with an instructor.

The estimated overall time for completing the activity is 11 hours.

1. **Learning objectives and outcomes**

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|  | **Learning objectives**This activity aims to enable students to: | **Learning outcomes**Learners will be able to: |
| **5** | Explore the role of power in dominant discourses (media, political, institutional) and reflect on how these discourses lead to perceiving people from other backgrounds in certain ways. | Recognize how their subjective worldview may be influenced by dominant discourses (media, political, institutional); and how their worldview influences their perceptions of themselves and (their interactions with) others. |
| **6** | Understand that what people say about their culture may be interpreted as what they wish others to see about themselves, and which may not be applicable to others from that culture or group. | Interpret what people say about their culture as a personal observation, and possibly as evidence of what they wish others to see about themselves. |
| **7** | Understand how key concepts such as stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising, and prejudice can lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of people from other horizons. | Recognise when misunderstandings may be the result of stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising and prejudice. |
| **8** | Reflect on some of the myths about study abroad and interculturality (interaction, language learning, identity, culture, etc.) in order to (re)frame expectations about the mobility period. | Set realistic objectives in relation to intercultural encounters, including language and communication expectations, for their stay abroad. |

1. **Overview and description of tasks**

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| ***Task 1.*****Exploring intercultural narratives** | * Introduce the activity and its objectives.
* Ask students to read the beginning of the transcript of Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story* (*Attachment 1*) in pairs, and complete the table (*Attachment 2*).
* Discuss the students’ answers in plenary, introducing some specific aspects of narratives (narratives as subjective, dynamic, and open-ended).
* In small groups, ask the students to read *What is your single story?* (*Attachment 3*), to discuss and note down the differences between ‘story’ and ‘narrative’, and comment on their reflections in plenary.
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| ***Task 2.*****Reflecting on intercultural narratives**  | * Show the video *The danger of a single story* and ask students to complete the accompanying table in pairs or groups (*Attachment 4*).
* Discuss the students’ answers and bring out the dangers of the ‘single story’ referring to the teacher guidelines in *Attachment 6*.

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| ***Task 3.*****Collecting intercultural narratives** | * Before class, ask students to find a narrative or story about their own country.
* Ask the students to share their stories/narratives and invite them to identify common features found in the stories.
* In small groups ask the students to find videos/texts of Erasmus students from their own country who tell stories or narratives about their destination.
* Explain to the students the concept of ‘community’.
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| ***Task 4.*****Constructing a balance of stories** | * Ask the students to consider which communities they feel they belong to, and invite them to think about a single story linked to one of these communities.
* In groups, have students produce a video/scenario for a video/written narrative which would avoid the ‘single story’ about one of the

communities they feel they belong to. |

***Task 1******. Exploring intercultural narratives***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview: In this task, students will be introduced to the problems of ‘essentialistic narratives’ and the ‘single story’ by analysing a transcript of the first part of Chimamanda* *Adichie’s TED talk “The danger of a single story”. In the second part of the task, they will try to identify what makes the difference between a ‘single story’ and a ‘full’ narrative.*

1. Briefly introduce the activity to the students in terms of topic and learning objectives. Ask students to read the beginning of the transcript of Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story* (*Attachment 1*) in pairs, and complete the table (*Attachment 2*).
2. Discuss the students’ answers in plenary, providing a brief explanation of the specific aspects of narrative (narratives as subjective, dynamic, open-ended, etc.), which the students will need when they analyse the video. See teacher guidelines in *Attachment 6* and *Slides 36-41*.
3. Divide the students in small groups. Ask them to read *What is your single story?* (*Attachment 3*) and then to discuss and write down what they see as the differences between a ‘single story’ and a ‘full’ narrative, around the following questions:
	* What does this ‘single story’ have in common with Adichie’s one?
	* Can you think of other examples of a ‘single story’?
	* What is typically lacking from a ‘single story’?
	* Why do people have these ‘single stories’?
	* How can a ‘single story’ become a more complete narrative?
	* What would you say are the main characteristics of a ‘full’ narrative?
4. Ask groups to share their reflections in plenary. Use this discussion to introduce any necessary theoretical background, mentioning again the specific aspects of narratives introduced earlier.

***Task 2. Reflecting on intercultural narratives***

Time required: 2 hours

*Task overview: In this task, students watch the whole of Chimamanda Adichie’s TED talk and examine the characteristics and the dangers of the single story, as compared with the multi-dimensional nature of non-essentialistic narratives. Using the Adichie video as a starting point, they reflect on the features of narrative voice, narrative community and narrative power.*

1. In class, students watch Chimamanda Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story* (<http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html>) and complete the accompanying table in pairs or groups (*Attachment 4*).
2. In plenary, discuss the students’ answers, raising the students’ awareness about how narratives can become essentialistic. These are the dangers of the single story: the single story is a kind of trap, which lures by making the complexity of narratives into something easy and negates key aspects of narrative, i.e. of voice, community, and power. See also teacher guidelines in *Attachment 6* and *Slides 36-41*.

***Task 3. Collecting intercultural narratives***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview: In this task, students identify an essentialistic narrative or single story about their country and one about their destination country.*

1. Before class, ask students to find a narrative or story (in video or written form) about their own country told by an Erasmus student and which may contain elements of essentialising/ stereotyping. If needed, students can visit the *European Cultural Foundation’s Narratives* (<http://www.narratives.eu>), where they can find examples of narratives about Europe - not limited to Erasmus.
2. In class, ask the students to share the story/narrative they found. If you have a large group, this can be done in groups of 3-4 students so as not to take up too much time. With the class, draw up a list of common features and elements which the groups found in the videos/texts.
3. In small groups, either in class if there is access to the internet, or out of class, ask the students to find videos/texts of Erasmus students from their own country who tell stories or narratives about their destination. Do these contain the same features/elements? Or are they different in any way?
4. Explain to the students that in this task the reference has always been to the countries (i.e., national communities). However, there are many other types of communities to which people feel they belong (professional communities, ethnic communities, team supporters, student associations, etc.). See in particular *Slide 14*.

***Task 4. Constructing a balance of stories***

Time required: 3 hours

*Task overview: Having considered other communities they belong to, different from their national community explored in the previous task, the students produce a narrative which avoids the single story about one of their communities.*

1. Considering the observations made about the stories identified during the previous task, ask the students to consider which communities they feel they belong to. Then ask them to think about a single story linked to one of these communities. Ask students to reflect on the following questions:
* What is influential about this single story about your community?
* What is appealing about this single story about your community?
* What ignored elements of culture might overturn or undermine this single story about yourself and your community?
* Where to go from here? Is there a way to construct a non-essentialistic narrative? What would it look like? Does Adichie give us any indications?
1. As a final assignment, the students in their groups produce a video, a scenario for a video, or a written narrative which would avoid the single story about the community they decided to focus on.
2. Invite students to self-assess their learning with the support of *Attachment 5*. Invite students to share with the class their reflections about their own learning.
3. **Assessment methods**
* Peer assessment, asking groups to comment on each other’s tables in *Attachment 2* (*Task 1*).
* Teacher assessment of students’ analysis of Adichie’s TED talk as collected through *Attachment 4* (*Task 2*).
* Self-assessment using the form (see *Attachment 5*) provided at the end of the activity (Task 4).
1. **Suggested readings**
* Holliday, A., Hyde, M., & Kullman, J. (2010). *Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book.* *Second edition*, London: Routledge, pp. 92-134.
* Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (1996). Narrating the self. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 25*, 19-43.
* Shafak, E. (2010). The politics of fiction, *TED talk* <http://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_politics_of_fiction?language=en>.
1. **Materials and resources**
* A computer, access to the Internet, a projector.
* Video cameras/mobile devices for video-recording.
* The IEREST slides.
* Six IEREST attachments:
	+ *Attachment 1*: Transcript of Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story* (*Task 1*).
	+ *Attachment 2*: Table for the analysis of the transcript in *Attachment 1* (*Task 1*).
	+ *Attachment 3*: Text *What is your single story?* and relative questions (*Task 1*).
	+ *Attachment 4*: Table for the analysis of Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story* (*Task 2*).
	+ *Attachment 5*: Self-assessment grid (*Task 4*).
	+ *Attachment 6*: Teacher guidelines for this activity (all tasks).

**Attachment 1 (*Task 1. Exploring intercultural narratives*)**

Read the beginning of the transcript of Adichie’s talk *The danger of a single story* below. The entire talk is available on TED here: <http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en>

*I'm a storyteller. And I would like to tell you a few personal stories about what I like to call "the danger of the single story". I grew up on a university campus in eastern Nigeria. My mother says that I started reading at the age of two, although I think four is probably close to the truth. So I was an early reader, and what I read were British and American children's books.*

*I was also an early writer, and when I began to write, at about the age of seven, stories in pencil with crayon illustrations that my poor mother was obligated to read, I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples, (Laughter) and they talked a lot about the weather, how lovely it was that the sun had come out. (Laughter) Now, this despite the fact that I lived in Nigeria. I had never been outside Nigeria. We didn't have snow, we ate mangoes, and we never talked about the weather, because there was no need to.*

*My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books I read drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was. (Laughter) And for many years afterwards, I would have a desperate desire to taste ginger beer. But that is another story.*

*What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify. Now, things changed when I discovered African books. There weren't many of them available, and they weren't quite as easy to find as the foreign books.*

*But because of writers like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, I went through a mental shift in my perception of literature. I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized.*

*Now, I loved those American and British books I read. They stirred my imagination. They opened up new worlds for me. But the unintended consequence was that I did not know that people like me could exist in literature. So what the discovery of African writers did for me was this: It saved me from having a single story of what books are.*

*I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. So, the year I turned eight, we got a new house boy. His name was Fide. The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. My mother sent yams and rice, and our old clothes, to his family. And when I didn't finish my dinner, my mother would say, "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing". So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family.*

*Then one Saturday, we went to his village to visit, and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. I was startled. It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family could actually make something. All I had heard about them was how poor they were, so that it had become impossible for me to see them as anything else but poor. Their poverty was my single story of them.*

**Attachment 2 (*Task 1. Exploring intercultural narratives*)**

Read the beginning of the transcript of Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story* (*Attachment 1*) and complete the table below.

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| **Central themes of narrative** | **Narrative questions** |  |
| **Narrative Voice** | What seems *subjective* (personal or individual in its perspective) about Adichie’s narrative?  |  |
| In what sort of mood or attitude is the narrative given, and what sort of mood does it create? |  |
| In what ways could Adichie’s ‘story’ go on? How might she add to the narrative? |  |
| **Narrative Community** | How does Adichie’s narrative collect or contain other narratives within it? |  |
| How does Adichie refer to and try to engage the listeners? |  |
| **Narrative Power** | Does the narrative seem like a very common sort of story or one that is unusual to you? |  |
| Does the narrative go along with or run counter to other narratives you may have heard? |  |
| What makes this narrative appealing or unappealing to you as an individual? |  |

**Attachment 3 (*Task 1. Exploring intercultural narratives*)**

Within your group, read the following text and answer the questions below. The text is titled *What is your single story* and it can be found at <http://blog.notanendive.org/post/2011/01/17/what-is-your-single-story> (accessed 23 June 2015).

*A few weeks ago, I watched a fantastic talk by Chimamanda Adichie about "The Danger of A Single Story". The talk is a year old, but the message is ageless. It made me think about what my stories of ‘single stories’ are. I have a few, actually, here is one that particularly struck me.*

*When I left for the US in 1987, I was hosted in an American family for a night. My English at the time was rather bad, not to say inexistent, and I struggled trying to understand what was going on around me. The family had taken me and another girl, K., to host us for the night, while waiting for the schoolbus to come and get us in Albuquerque. It was a family of 4, with two daughters, one our age (I was 15, K. was 16 or 17 at the time and I think the daughter was 16). K. was from Bulgaria. I was, obviously, from France. The 16-year old daughter was somehow studying Eastern Europe (or had a strong interest in it) and was thrilled at the idea of having a Bulgarian (remember, this is 1987) in her house. She didn't seem to give a damn about France, which was great, because she kept on asking K. questions about her country, and left me alone. Given that we both had been travelling around 18 hours, and my English being what it was, I could only feel for K. who was being bombarded with questions about Eastern Europe. Anyway. In the course of the conversation, the girl turned to me and asked me "Is there electricity in France?". I had to rub my eyes (red from lack of sleep) and make sure I had understood the question before I could answer a feeble... "yes". No words to argue, the question was so out of line from someone who had been debating the whys and whens and hows of Eastern Europe, that I was just left completely dumbstruck by the enormity of it. Off we went to sleep. The day after, the daughter took us to a Safeway (one of those big American supermarkets). I still remember K.'s wide open eyes who was, it seems, rather amazed at the display of so much ‘stuff’ in one place. The American girl turned to me with a smug smile and asked "Do you have that in France?". I mastered the best English I could and answered "Bigger ones".*

*This girl had a single story. She was studying Eastern Europe and for her, Europe was that. The rest of Europe may have been a Middle-Age kind of place, without electricity or supermarkets. She didn't know. I wasn't at all knowledgeable on Eastern Europe (but kind of had an idea), and was amazed at the hundreds of questions she asked K. because I couldn't have asked such questions. But those she asked me were just... weird, she had no perspective.*

*It is interesting so many years after to be able to frame what was one of my first culture shocks ever. I can only urge you to watch the video. It's fun, and it's so true. And I'm curious, what is Your single story?*

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| 1 | What does this ‘single story’ have in common with Adichie’s one?  |  |
| 2 | Can you think of other examples of a ‘single story’? |  |
| 3 | What is typically lacking from a ‘single story’? |  |
| 4 | Why do people have these ‘single stories’? |  |
| 5 | How can a ‘single story’ become a more complete narrative? |  |
| 6 | What would you say are the main characteristics of a ‘full’ narrative? |  |

**Attachment 4 (*Task 2. Reflecting on intercultural narratives*)**

Watch Adichie’s TED talk *The danger of a single story*, here: <http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html>. Then, complete the following table, in pairs or groups.

| Central themes of narrative | Specific aspects of narrative | Narrative questions | *The danger of a single story* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Narrative Voice | Narratives are subjective | How does Adichie refer to the *subjective* side of narrative in her own narrative? |  |
| Narratives are dynamic | In what sort of mood or attitude does Adichie offer her narrative? Why so? |   |
| Narratives are open-ended | How does Adichie refer to the ways narratives could go on? |  |
| Narrative Community | Narratives are transferable  | How does Adichie show how narratives collect or contain other narratives within them? |  |
| Narratives are participatory | How does Adichie refer to and try to engage the listeners? |  |
| Narrative Power | Narratives are dialectical | How does Adichie explore the power or dominance of narratives? |  |
| Narratives are influential | Where does Adichie refer to reinforcing or subversive narratives? |  |
| Narratives are seductive | Where lies the appeal of narratives for Adichie?  |  |

The following table is meant for teachers and should not be distributed to the students. It reports some elements teachers can suggest if students do not mention them in their own tables.

| Central themes of narrative | Specific aspects of narrative | Narrative questions | Suggested answers for *The danger of a single story* |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Narrative Voice | Narratives are subjective | How does Adichie refer to the *subjective* side of narrative in her own narrative? | Adichie’s subjective voice is evident when she speaks of her origins (e.g., “I come from a middle class Nigerian family”). |
| Narratives are dynamic | In what sort of mood or attitude does Adichie offer her narrative? Why so? | She appears defiant, mocking, surprised, proud, etc. |
| Narratives are open-ended | How does Adichie refer to the ways narratives could go on? | She uses phrases like “endless stories”, “what if we”, etc. |
| Narrative Community | Narratives are transferable  | How does Adichie show how narratives collect or contain other narratives within them? | There are many examples: the story of John Locke about Africans; airlines announcements; ginger beer; mother’s story about the houseboy. |
| Narratives are participatory | How does Adichie refer to and try to engage the listeners? | Using irony; explaining things without anger; being inclusive towards others even when they had a single story of her; etc. |
| Narrative Power | Narratives are dialectical | How does Adichie explore the power or dominance of narratives? | The stories that are supposedly “authentically African”; the narrative that Africans listen to “tribal music”. |
| Narratives are influential | Where does Adichie refer to reinforcing or subversive narratives? | “I too would think that Africa is about …”; ginger beer; talking about the weather. |
| Narratives are seductive | Where lies the appeal of narratives for Adichie?  | On the one hand, single stories are seductive and have a ‘surface’ appeal, in their simplicity and ease of retelling. But in this form, they quickly become stupid, as they lose their subjective and dynamic features. On the other hand, Adichie speaks of the appeal of more complex narratives, a “paradise regained”.  |

**Attachment 5 (*Task 4. Constructing a balance of stories*)**

This is a self-assessment grid to evaluate what you have learnt throughout this activity and how you learnt it. What do you think you have learnt to do? Taking the expected outcomes as a reference, identify both the positive points in your learning, and the aims you believe you still need to reach.

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| Outcomes | I have learnt… I have learnt it thanks to… | I still have to learn… because… |
| 1. Recognize how their subjective worldview may be influenced by dominant discourses (media, political, institutional); and how their worldview influences their perceptions of themselves and (their interactions with) others.
 |  |  |
| 1. Interpret what people say about their culture as a personal observation, and possibly as evidence of what they wish others to see about themselves.
 |  |  |
| 1. Recognise when misunderstandings may be the result of stereotyping, ethnocentrism, essentialising and prejudice.
 |  |  |
| 1. Set realistic objectives in relation to intercultural encounters, including language and communication expectations, for their stay abroad.
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**Attachment 6 (Teacher guidelines: all tasks)**

The following guidelines are meant for teachers and should not be distributed to the students. They support teachers in introducing the concept of ‘narrative’ to students throughout the activity.

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| **Premises of the Activity**There are two premises behind this activity.* First, as is currently crucial in sociological and psychological research (McAdams & McLean, 2013), narratives are the stories we tell ourselves and others about ourselves and others, and they “are a central component of social life” (Jacobs, 2012, p. 205). This is also the case in mobility contexts such as study abroad, during which students may be faced with questions of their own social and cultural identity. “Individuals depend on the existence of shared stories – or collective narratives – in order to express their sense of self” (Jacobs, 2012, p. 206). The idea in this activity is thus the following: since students will have to construct and share their own narratives during their Erasmus mobility, as well as listen to, share and understand the narratives of others, it will be valuable to make students aware of the importance and the complexities of narrative.
* The second premise behind this activity is rooted in the non-essentialist theoretical approach to culture and the intercultural which is adopted here. In general, after everything is taken into consideration concerning stereotyping and generalisation, what can still be said about each other, and about ourselves? Is there anything left to be said at all? How can we find a way through and out of all the questions of identity and culture, in order to remain confident in our own voices? The idea behind this activity is to tackle this challenge head on, by giving students the opportunity to explore their voices for narratives in light of the questions and complexities of culture and the intercultural.

**Theoretical Approach to Narrative within the Activity**The activity as a whole adopts a certain perspective on what narratives are and how they relate to intercultural contexts and student mobility experiences. In the following, this theoretical viewpoint on narratives is laid with respect to the different characteristics or aspects focused upon throughout the tasks of the activity.The activity as a whole adopts the view that narratives are not just stories, where stories may be understood as a sequence of events. Within the activity, the focus is upon three dimensions of narratives that distinguish them from stories, as well as from the more impersonal and abstract concept of ‘discourse,’ namely, the dimensions of *voice*, *community*, and *power* in narratives. Each of these dimensions proves crucial when it comes to the need and challenges of forming and sharing narratives in intercultural and student mobility contexts.* The dimension *voice* encapsulates the subjective, dynamic, and open-ended characteristics of narratives. Narratives are not just stories because they are defined by an individual perspective on the world; a narrative gives voice to the *subjectivity* of the individual having a certain experience. Narratives are *dynamic* in that an essential condition for any narrative is the subjective unpacking or telling of a certain experience; they require that one actively take up a standpoint on an experience, by symbolically framing it in one fashion or another. Narratives are also *open-ended* in that they are never completed. Something can always be added to them or subtracted from them, changing their shape and meaning, and even their beginning point may turn out to be a construction amenable to change and reframing.
* The dimension *community* emphasizes the participatory and transferable traits of narratives. Narratives are not just shared in the sense that every narrative requires a (passive) listener. Rather, they are *participatory* in the sense that every active unpacking of telling of an experience through narrative correlates with an equally active unpacking of the narrative on the part of the listener, thereby creating a new version of the speaker’s narrative if not a whole new narrative in its own right. Narratives are *transferable* in that the sharing of a narrative allows the recipient, and not just its creator, to lay claim to it. Sharing narratives is much about the being dispossessed of a narrative as it is about the right to lay claim to a certain telling of an experience in the first place.
* The dimension *power* highlights the dialectical, influential, and seductive aspects of narratives. Narratives may in the first place be *dialectical* in that they are subject to political and historical values and fashions, meaning they come to be either dominant (valorised) or subordinated (de-valorised) through their sharing within and between communities. Narratives are *influential* because they can either reinforce or subvert either their own dominance/subordination or that of other narratives through the act of being shared and re-shared within communities. Narratives are lastly *seductive* in that they can be more or less appealing to individuals, allowing their impact and influence, once shared, to be harder to avoid in decisive ways.

References:Jacobs, R. (2002). The narrative integration of personal and collective identity in social movements. In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations* (pp. 205-229). Malwah, NJ: Lawrence Ehrlbaum Associates.McAdams, D. P. & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(3), 233-238. |