Transferable Strength: The Effects of Intergenerational Restorative Narratives on Student Resilience, Belonging, and Mattering

by

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ABSTRACT

The trend of increasing mental health issues for undergraduate students is a worrisome and important topic for research in higher education. College students become the backbone of society as they graduate, start families, and enter the workforce. To increase the mental health of students on campus, many institutions have implemented university-wide interventions that ask students to engage with written or visual models. I propose that this large-scale intervention that uses a one-size-fits all narrative is leaving behind important students on campus who do not relate to the written or video narratives that are often used in these settings. My current research employed a classroom-based intervention in which students were asked to discover intergenerational narratives themselves. This mixed methods design used pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys to investigate changes in levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering among a group of college students at a university in the southwest United States. My sample was predominantly young (m = 19.4, SD = 1.2) female students (85.7%) who identified as white (54%) and in their freshman year of college (48.6%). Additional qualitative thematic analyses were performed to investigate the adherence of student narratives to restorative elements and representative quotes were pulled to elaborate on the convergence and divergence of data. Although no statistically significant differences were found, individual students reported positive change and future research is warranted.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Elizabeth Rebecca Tryon, my second great grandmother, who at the age of 14 was among the first graduating class of the Gila Valley Academy (now Eastern Arizona College). She was a resilient educational pioneer for my family. I also dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful wife and children who continue that legacy of courage and resilience today.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a student of ASU, I acknowledge that the Tempe campus sits on the ancestral homelands of those American Indian tribes that have inhabited this place for centuries, including the Akimel O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) peoples. I also acknowledge, as a researcher at Northern Arizona University, that my home campus sits on ancient and sacred lands of the Hopi and Navajo peoples.

I am indebted to my dissertation chair, Andrea Weinberg, for her guidance during this process of making meaning and am extremely grateful for Drs. Stephanie Smith and Nora Dunbar for their support. I am also thankful for Dr. Leigh Wolf for showing me how to take care of an idea and Chloe Horowitz for her help with my coding.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Then all was in commotion. The second mate, who was a very rough man, both in language and action, opened the hatchway, and, at the top of his voice shouted, 'The ship is sinking and we are all going to hell together!'" (W. Atkin Sr., personal communication, 1800-1875). This journal entry by William Atkin, my fourth great-grandfather, was written concerning his arduous voyage between England and the United States in 1862. Traveling only two at a time, William, along with his wife and six children, crossed the Atlantic Ocean and eventually made their way 2,000 miles west using a hand-pulled cart loaded with the essentials. Although over 100 years old, this record, and many like it cataloging the unique struggles and triumphs of my ancestors, lends me strength and offers unseen comfort from those who have contributed to my own personal journey. If others, whom I am built from, could embrace hardship and persist, then so can I, and perhaps so can my students building upon stories from their own family or heritage. Henry Louis Gates Jr. an American Historian and professor at Harvard University ends each episode of the PBS program Finding Your Roots with this saying: "Receiving lost stories can be an act of restoration, not only of our ancestor's resilience, but of the resilience of the entire human community" (Gates, 2012 - 2022). It is with this concept in mind that I formulated the intervention focused on in this study. My research attempted to increase college student's reported resilience and feelings of belonging and mattering by providing an individualized intervention within a classroom that was targeted to help students connect to unique family and heritage narratives of triumph and struggle.

Mental health issues for college students are on the rise (Brown, 2016; Flynn & Chow, 2017; Kitzrow, 2003). The definition of mental health is dependent on the culture and setting in which it is being discussed (Galderisi et al., 2015) and therefore changes from context to context - including from one college campus to another. For the purpose of this dissertation, mental health, as it applies to undergraduate students, is defined as an internal equilibrium that allows a student to cope with external stressors, maintain a level of emotional stability, and make a meaningful contribution to their community (Galderisi et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2005). Regardless of differences in definitions across higher institution campuses, mental health, overall, has been on a decline (Brown, 2016; Kitzrow, 2003). Research has shown the majority of students on college campuses experience high amounts of stress and depression (Dixon & Kurpius, 2008; Lee & Sunghyun, 2015), the antithesis of emotional stability, and that the recent health pandemic has increased these feelings (Copeland et al., 2021). College settings and expectations can add to the instability of a student's internal equilibrium as students experience change in their environments, peer supports, and finances (DeRosier, et al., 2013).

Interventions related to mental health vary greatly across college campuses and are each built to match their local context and cultural definition of mental health. Some of the strategies used by institutions will be discussed in Chapter 2. Overall, there are two categories of mental health interventions on campuses. One group targets specific mental health symptoms (e.g. anxiety, depression, eating disorders etc.) while the other group targets proactive correlates to mental health (e.g. resilience, self-worth, belonging, and mattering) with the goal to increase them. Despite their differences, both of these types of

interventions are generally done at the institutional level by student support staff organizations with a single intervention that is applied to all students regardless of race, gender, or other defining features (Manning et al., 2013).

For this research project, I focused on interventions that target mental health correlates. One common type of intervention currently used to proactively change mental health correlates is a restorative narrative intervention (e.g., Martinez Tyson et al., 2016; Ray et al., 2019). This type of intervention, which will be explained further in Chapter 2, uses stories in the form of video or written vignettes as mechanisms of change. The term "restorative narrative" was created in 2016 by a non-profit organization called Images of Voice and Hope to describe media content that portrays human journeys through struggle (Tenore, 2016). In order to qualify for this narrative category, the content must highlight a meaningful progression through a struggle and provide an example of moving forward beyond the difficulty (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019). These narratives focus on the positive and growth that results from instances of trauma or tragedy. The goal of these narratives, aligning with Social Cognitive Theory discussed in Chapter 3, is to encourage students to identify with the vignette speaker and copy their positive behaviors related to the mental health correlates. For example, a student may hear from a previous student that joining a club on campus helped them to feel like they grew out of a state of negativity and feel that they mattered to their fellow students. As a result the narrative receiving student may copy this behavior by joining a club. Currently, narratives used by institutions are presented at the levels of the institution and the content are often built on a one-size-fits-all model (LaCosse et al., 2020; Logel et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020; Ray et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020). In other words, these restorative narratives are

created in the hope that they will apply to all students regardless of race, background, or experience. I believe these interventions cannot meet this goal in their current form. My intervention, the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) intervention, is distinct because students were asked to discover and write about their own restorative narratives in a classroom setting using family and heritage narratives rather than rely on an institutionally created narrative. This method was created to provide a unique intervention experience for each student. I focused on three correlates that are intertwined with student mental health (resilience, general belonging, and mattering) with my classroom-level intervention to provide a personalized experience for each student. Each student in my PSY 101 class was asked to discover restorative narratives for themselves within their family history or heritage and apply them to their own unique situation.

My research used an action research convergent mixed methods design. Action research, sometimes called practitioner-based research, is defined by the requirement that the researcher be a part of the group they are researching to create change rather than being an outsider looking in (Dick, 2014; Trunk Sirca & Shapiro, 2007). Educational action research seeks to benefit the researcher's immediate surroundings through identifying a problem of practice, consulting theory to solving that problem, and conducting change through a series of action based cycles (Mertler, 2020). This report represents the climax of a single research cycle that will continue beyond my dissertation as I work more in my context as a practitioner and scholar. This research falls under the category of a convergent mixed methods design due to both quantitative and qualitative

data being collected at the same time. This method allows the strengths of one form of data collection and analysis to offset the weakness of the other (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Resilience, Belonging, and Mattering

Resilience has traditionally been a difficult term to define within higher education (DeRosier et al., 2013), however, the majority of scholars believe it is an enduring personal characteristic or skill distinguished by the ability to recover or gain strength after adversity (Holdsworth et al., 2018). Resilience is strongly related to overall mental health (Hartley, 2013; Rogers, 2013) and is predictive of positive student outcomes such as higher GPA and achievement (Hartley, 2011). For this reason, many college interventions focus on increasing resilience as a way to address mental health issues on campus. Improving the resilience of my students could allow them to face challenges throughout their time at the university and hopefully beyond. I believe that mechanisms for that change are best situated within a classroom and rooted in individual models of resilience from family and heritage.

General belonging, for the purpose of this research, is defined as a general feeling of being valued and accepted (Masika & Jones, 2016) and a fundamental part of human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which draws students to feel and perceive they are involved in the system around them (Hagerty et al., 1992). It is not tied to a specific place or situation and is not a permanent state (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belonging focuses on belonging as a central personality trait that can promote other positive outcomes (Walton & Brady, 2017). In this way, a person's level of belonging promotes mental health in all situations in which they are put and

functions as a reaction to adversity (Walton & Cohen, 2011). Universities often focus on increasing the belonging of their students to the campus and community as a way to increase the mental health of their students. These interventions are created to help students feel a sense of belonging to their immediate context. Although I acknowledge the importance of this type of targeted intervention, I believe that an intervention focused on increasing a student's level of general belonging can have a domino effect and increase levels of context-specific belonging. Mechanisms to support this claim will be discussed in Chapter 2 and evidence will be provided in Chapter 5.

Similar to belonging is the concept of mattering. Mattering is defined as the feeling that we exist for a reason or that our lives are important to other people (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Mattering has been shown to be closely related to mental health (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981) and for this reason, it is a common topic of college interventions. Increasing the feeling of mattering for my students could have a long-lasting effect on their mental health. I believe the changes in beliefs about belonging and mattering will come about easier at the classroom level as students engage with narratives and examples that show strength and progression that are personal and similar to them in key ways.

Evidence points toward the fact that many interventions on higher education campuses, especially interventions that use fictitious restorative narratives, are unable to affect all students on campus equally (Arday, 2018; McNair et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020). This may be due, in part, to a lack of connection between the student and the narrative presented. For example, a White first-generation student explaining their hardship and growth as a freshman on campus will describe experiences that are very

different from those that a Black or Native American student goes through, even if they share the same first-generation label. To remedy this disconnect, restorative narratives used in my intervention were harvested from the student's own family or heritage providing a more direct connection to the speaker and therefore expected change.

Looking outside of the current classroom intervention, family history and heritage exploration and reflection in general have been shown to positively influence mental health (Bottero, 2015; Mitchell & Shillingford, 2017; Reiser, 2012). Family history and heritage research has become more and more popular in recent years with television programs and online databases (such as ancestry.com) gaining more attention. Many of these media sources make claims related to resilience, belonging, and mattering based on anecdotal evidence and personal experience. However, very few provide empirical evidence of a connection between exploring these stories and mental health correlates. Due to this lack of scientific inquiry, my current research was one of the first of its kind to use empirical research methods to investigate the effects of family history and heritage narratives on mental health correlates among people, let alone college students.

With the assistance of technology and DNA testing, family history or heritage work has become easier than ever. Compared to the hours my grandmother spent manually scanning microfilms into a microfilm reader in the 1980's, or cutting through seemingly endless mesquite brambles to collect chalk rubbing of headstones in a rural desert cemetery, the ability to upload and discover family stories today is faster and seen by many as more accessible. Does this mean that all college students need to climb through grandpa's attic to find ancient family records or become expert genealogists to see an increase in their own mental health? Of course not. In fact, the benefits of

connecting with heritage and family history can start with connecting to stories and experiences only a single generation back (Fivush et al., 2010). Unearthing a student's own family or heritage story and identifying with its characters can provide a more meaningful connection than what many institutions are currently providing and can increase what I will refer to as transferable strength (strength passed down from previous generations to help the student overcome obstacles and increase their overall feelings of belonging and mattering).

Personal Context

As a full-time lecturer within a state university, my primary responsibilities include teaching large 400-seat sections of Introductory Psychology (PSY 101). Engaging with an average of 1,200 students each year on a topic that has human wellness at its core has allowed me to naturally have conversations about anxiety, depression, stress, and other negative mental states in class and hear from my students on these same topics. I teach a large percentage of a diverse undergraduate study body at my university and this places me in a unique position to have my finger on the pulse of mental health at my institution and the opportunity to influence it.

My research and teaching philosophies are grounded in a post-positivist and constructivist paradigm. I hold to the idea that absolute truth exists, although we, as imperfect humans, are unable to fully discover it (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Krauss, 2005). I believe meaning and knowledge are created through engaging in our surroundings and are biased by our own context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In aligning my constructivist paradigm with my current work, I have a goal of constructing meaning and themes from the data alongside my students and expect my own inherent values to

influence my work (Manning & Stage, 2014). My work emphasizes the unique nature of each student's knowledge and rejects a one-size-fits-all model for education and research (such as the one-size-fits-all narratives often used in higher education). Many unique factors also influence my own bias within my research. I belong to a traditionally defined family (although eight of my siblings are adopted and identify as Hispanic/Latinx) and easily have access to family stories and experiences. Further, I belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which places high emphasis on family relations and connecting to those who have gone before me. These characteristics have altered my own research lens as I analyzed the data and discussed the effects of the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection intervention on student resilience, belonging, and mattering.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the need for mental health interventions within the larger higher education system as well as limitations to currently used interventions. I will provide additional information about resilience, belonging, and mattering and situate the need for my current research within my local context. Lastly, I will present the research questions guiding my current project.

Larger Context

My current research proposal sought to address the problem of low mental health among college students at my institution by targeting students in my classroom with a unique intergenerational restorative narrative intervention built to increase levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering. The higher education setting has changed dramatically since its conception and with it the variability of college students' needs (Kitzrow, 2003). Evidence of this can be found in how the American College Health

Association has altered questions on its National College Health Assessment between 2000 and 2019. Within the last 19 years, questions have been added regarding veteran status, disability status, race, alcohol, sexual partners, and gender identity (American College Health Association, 2021). These changes show a growing acknowledgement of diversity on campus.

Congruent with this change, recognition of college student mental health needs have also evolved (Cohen & Sherman, 2014; Kitzrow, 2003). Specifically, the diversification of college campuses requires educators to focus more on mental health components such as belonging and mattering (Flett et al., 2019) and how these terms are defined by students coming from different backgrounds and experiences (Frost et al., 2020). In fact, the transition to college has been reported as one of the most stressful periods of a person's life (Flynn & Chow, 2017) and with an increase in people choosing to enter higher education (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019), the need for mental health resources on campus has increased. This need has increased institutions' attention to mental health needs on campus due to the understood relationship between mental health status and retention (Kitzrow, 2003). It is important to note that the diversification of college campuses is not the cause of the increase of mental health concerns; rather, my point is that as college campuses become more diverse there is a greater need to provide interventions that are unique and effective for students with different backgrounds and experiences.

Prior research has shown interventions focused on mental health components such as resilience, belonging, and mattering are effective in college due to the unstable nature of students' identities brought on by the drastic change of entering college (Azmitia et al.,

2013). However, the majority of the interventions that use narratives are conducted at the level of the institution by student services or staff and limited to whom they can best apply due to the diversity of a college campus (Martinez Tyson et al., 2016; Vaccaro, 2015). I believe a more effective way of influencing student mental health starts within the classroom itself with personal and unique narratives. As discussed previously, my current focus was on only three factors related to overall student mental health: resilience, belonging, and mattering. Increasing these three factors of mental health through a personal intervention within my classroom could have the ability to affect students throughout their time in college.

Resilience, Belonging, and Mattering

Resilience, as a concept in education, lacks a specific operational definition by scholars (Southwick et al., 2014). However, most agree the term is generally defined as a personality trait or skill that mitigates the negative effects of stress and allows the person to easily adapt to adverse circumstances (DeRosier et al., 2013). According to the American College Health Association (2020), the score for students in fall of 2020 on the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale was 5.91/ out of 8 (*SD* = 1.47). This is slightly lower than the previous semester and year, showing a slight decrease in resilience. Higher education institutions and students are motivated to find interventions that will increase this important skill or trait (Ray et al., 2019). I believe that an effective place to increase resilience is within the college classroom through individualized mechanisms such as the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) intervention.

Belonging, broadly defined, is a sense of being accepted and valued (Masika & Jones, 2016) and a feeling of connectedness (Lee, 2018). The majority of research done

at higher education institutions focuses on belonging within the relationship between the student and the university. However, when examining the relationship between a sense of belonging and mental health scholars have pointed out the need to consider broader definitions of belonging including feelings of being accepted, valued, and connected to larger systems such as the human family or past/future ancestors (Hagerty et al., 1992, Harris, 2017). In 2020, a nationally representative survey of United States college students contained a measure of belonging for the first time. Overall, most students feel they belong to their respective institutions (Gopalan & Brady, 2020). However, levels of belonging among first-generation students and underrepresented racial minorities were lower than their peers.

Some universities may use a deficit model to discuss these findings and place the burden of not belonging on the students themselves, saying that minority students feel they do not belong due to their own actions and backgrounds. I propose that the system is instead at fault and that the university should provide more targeted and individualized interventions for students. Researchers also found that many students entering college believe their feelings of not belonging are permanent and uncommon among other students (Walton & Cohen, 2011). This feeling of being alone can lead to a lack of retention. Universities are motivated to develop interventions that will influence levels of general belonging as well as help students understand that feelings of estrangement, like adversity, are common and temporary. Despite institutional interventions to increase belonging, I believe the most effective place to influence belonging is within the classroom.

Mattering, or the feeling that we exist for a purpose and people depend on us is tightly connected to self-worth and mental health (Dixon & Kurpius, 2008; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). As a student transitions into college life, they question their own level of mattering and whether they will be important to the new people around them as well as maintain their importance to the people they are leaving behind (Rayle & Chung, 2007). When a student feels that they matter to other people (whether in their immediate surroundings or not) they become more involved in their environment and this involvement can create a new awareness or sense of belonging (Schlossberg, 1989). The classroom environment and activities that are unique to that setting provide, in my opinion, the best opportunities to increase feelings of mattering.

Situated Context and Problem of Practice

The institution in which this research was focused is a mid-sized university serving over 30,000 students across multiple campuses in the southwest United States. In fall 2021, there were just under 20,000 degree-seeking undergraduates on the main campus (Institutional Research Analysis, 2022). This places the university as one of the smallest government-funded public schools in its state in terms of enrollment. I attended the institution myself as an undergraduate student and graduate student, and have been teaching courses as a full-time lecturer since 2014. During my time as a teacher, I have interacted with thousands of students within an introductory psychology course. This course placement has allowed me to discuss resilience, belonging, and mattering as normal parts of my course. I conduct regular mental health check-ins within my class either orally in class or through virtual surveys to better understand my students and how I can help them be successful. Congruent with my constructivist epistemology, I believe

my responsibility as a teacher is to create learning opportunities for students to engage in and create their own understanding of the content as it applies to their own life. This lens also has an impact on my research practices in general and this current project.

In the past few years, I have anecdotally noticed shifts that could be attributed to a decrease in mental health among my students. The amount of crisis-related office hour visits have increased and more students have reported lower mental health in my monthly check-ins. In response to these observations, I began having deeper conversations with colleagues across campus. Consequently, the earlier cycles of Action Research focused on better understanding these shifts. For Cycle 0, I interviewed a campus administrator about current university initiatives to encourage student belonging. For Cycle 1, I interviewed transfer students who explained mental health and belonging issues are magnified within the transfer student population, with an emphasis on non-traditional students in terms of age or experience. I engaged in a cycle of action research dedicated strictly to belonging and engagement on campus that included two surveys and focus group interviews. Through this process, I discovered that despite average levels of a sense of belonging on campus for most student groups, restrictions brought on by the recent pandemic (e.g., mask wearing, social distancing, and fully remote classes) had caused students to feel that belonging is more difficult to achieve than it was in the past and that they cannot engage on campus like before, prior to the pandemic. Most of the students (76.4%) reported that social distancing on campus has affected their ability to engage with the campus, and 49.5% of these same students claim social distancing has negatively impacted their sense of general belonging (n = 217). Further, half of all students surveyed reported they believed levels of belonging on campus are not likely to

change over time. In another recent survey of 314 undergraduate students from across my institution (Schmuelling et al., in progress), over 72% reported struggling a moderate or great deal with their mental health and 32% believed it would not change during the next year. This suggests a need for an intervention focused on increasing aspects of mental health. The current cycle of research, focused on how the implementation of the IRNR intervention (which will be further explained in Chapter 3) affected students' perceived levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

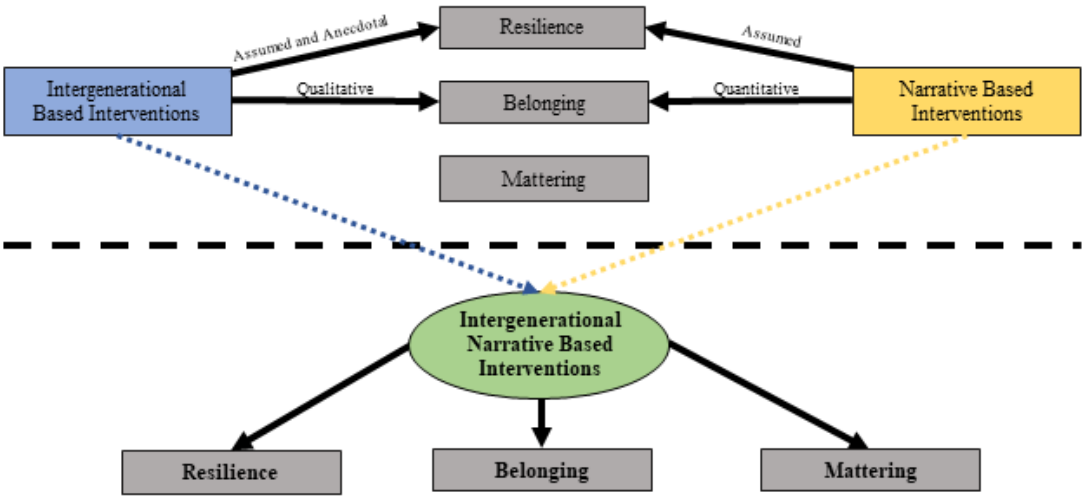
An investment in the mental health of college students today will shape the future of our society as these students leave higher education and become the leaders and builders of our world. A student's mental health, as defined earlier, is closely linked to their identity or how they perceive themselves (Azmitia et al., 2013). By influencing a student's levels of resilience, belonging and mattering, higher education interventions can potentially increase the mental health of a student. Many of the recent interventions focused on mental health correlates struggle to capture the individual needs of diverse students (Bouris & Hill, 2017; Eisenberg et al., 2013; Frost et al., 2020; McGee & Stovall, 2015). For example, information or advice presented by a cisgender student about relationships may not apply or transfer well to a student who identifies as non-binary. This disconnect is due to an inability to provide a single intervention script that applies to all students. I believe that diverse leaders help to create a richer community and currently the mental health of these types of students are not being supported through large-scale interventions. Further, as successful as many of these interventions have been, it is important to note that interventions of this type are generally implemented by outside

researchers. Yeager and Walton (2011) wrote that most educational interventions would be much more effective if conducted by actual teachers or educational practitioners. My own action research intervention suggested using unique intergenerational restorative narratives and reflections within my own class as a method of increasing resilience, belonging, and mattering and thereby affecting mental health as previously defined. Overall, the mental health of the students in my own class could have a large positive impact on the campus as a whole due to the large number of students who are enrolled in my class.

My current research also fills in a gap within the literature. As shown in Figure 1 and discussed previously, there is a lack of empirical evidence connecting either narrative or intergenerational-based interventions to resilience. Further, among the research findings that do connect narrative and intergenerational interventions to belonging, there is room for growth. There is very little written on mechanisms of change for feelings of mattering on a college campus. The current study sought to combine the effects of intergenerational based and narrative based interventions into a single intervention and measure its effects on resilience, belonging, and mattering through quantitative and qualitative methods.

Figure 1

Previous Research on Resilience and Belonging Interventions and Current Plans



Note. Figure depicts previous research using intergenerational or narrative based interventions and current plans to combine two intervention types into a single intervention. Connections between previous intergenerational interventions and resilience have been assumed and based on anecdotal information (Driessnack, 2017; Fivush et al., 2010; Reiser, 2012). Similarly, there is an assumed connection between restorative narrative based interventions and resilience (Ray et al., 2019) but a lack of directly measuring it. Limited research has been conducted that connects belonging to intergenerational interventions (Reiser, 2012) and narrative interventions (Wolf et al., 2017; Yeager et al., 2016) and mattering has not yet been explored using either of these intervention types.

For this dissertation project I used an action research convergent mixed methods design to explore the following research questions:

1. To what extent do students' reported levels of **resilience** change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Intervention?
2. To what extent do students' reported levels of general **belonging** change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Intervention?
3. To what extent do students' reported levels of **mattering** change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Intervention?
4. To what extent do students describe a narrative that includes restorative elements?
5. What is the relationship between the adherence of a narrative to the restorative elements and students' levels of change in resilience, belonging, and mattering?

CHAPTER 2

PERSPECTIVES AND KNOWLEDGE

The trend of increasing mental health issues for undergraduate students is a worrisome and important topic for research in higher education. As discussed previously in Chapter 1, college students provide future social capital to society and therefore the impacts on their health go beyond campus boundaries and into our society (Cuijpers et al., 2019). Interventions focused on mental health are common topics of study within research literature (Alan et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2006; Louis, 2011; Van Waes et al., 2018) and a common intervention mechanism that is used is called a restorative narrative. These narratives are strength-based and show meaningful progression (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Predominantly, the restorative narratives that are currently being used in higher education interventions use a one-size-fits-all model that creates a single narrative meant to be applied to all students (Manning et al., 2013). The Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) Intervention discussed in this proposal offers a mental health intervention that is classroom based and uses narratives that are created by students from their own unique and personal family history or heritage. Thus, the restorative narrative being used to change behavior is personal and unique. This chapter will further discuss the current use of mental health interventions within higher education, especially the prevalence of restorative narrative based interventions. It will discuss how applied narratives work to change behavior and how the current project will harness and enhance those effects by using intergenerational narratives, also discussed in detail. The intervention was intended to increase levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering among college students. The current chapter will provide more detail on the

concepts of resilience, belonging, and mattering, through a discussion of current interventions being used within higher education to address these three concepts, and concludes with how the IRNR intervention will fit within what is currently being done.

Mental Health and Mental Health Interventions

The prevalence of mental health concerns among university students has been characterized as an important public health issue (Barkham et al., 2019) and is different from other age groups or young adults that are not in college (Karatekin, 2018). For the purpose of this research, mental health, as it applies to undergraduate students, was defined as an internal equilibrium that allows a student to cope with external stressors, maintain a level of emotional stability, and make a meaningful contribution to their community (Galderisi et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2005). Mental health interventions intended to affect this internal equilibrium vary greatly between college campuses both in their form and from where they disseminate. As mentioned in Chapter 1, mental health interventions are grouped into two categories: one, interventions that target specific mental health symptoms (e.g. depression, anxiety, etc.) and two, interventions that target correlates of mental health (e.g. resilience, belonging, mattering, etc.). Within the former category, almost all of the interventions surrounding mental health are conducted by outside organizations or student services organizations and are not facilitated within the classroom (Bamber & Morpeth, 2019; Breedvelt et al., 2019; Davies et al., 2014; Fenton et al., 2018; Fernandez et al., 2016; Halladay et al., 2019; Harrer et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2018; O'Driscoll et al., 2017). Further, these studies target specific mental health disorders with forms of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, mindfulness, or Acceptance and Commitment Training.

Within category two, there are interventions that focus on single elements of mental health such as resilience (Clark & Oehme, 2017; Houston et al., 2017; Padesky & Mooney, 2012; Ray et al., 2019; Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008), belonging (Binning et al., 2020; Hausmann et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2002; LaCosse et al., 2020; Logel et al., 2020; Renwick, et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2020; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Ruopp, 1993; Williams et al., 2020; Wolf et al., 2017; Yeager et al., 2016), or mattering (Flett et al., 2019; Gibson et al., 2019; Melguizo et al., 2019; Rayle & Myers, 2004; Stephens et al., 2015). However, again, the majority of these interventions were conducted outside of the classroom setting by people other than the teachers most involved with the students. A common type of intervention from this second category is a restorative narrative intervention.

Restorative Narratives

Narratives, which for the purpose of this research are synonymous with stories, are a natural part of the human experience (Rowland, 1989) and a fundamental part of communication (Fisher, 1987). Narratives are repeated throughout human history and are embedded in culture, media, and religion (McAdams & Jones, 2017). To help distinguish between narratives we hear every day and narratives that are designed to change future action, researchers have developed the term restorative narrative (Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019; Tenore, 2015). To qualify for this category, a story must be focused on strength in overcoming an obstacle and meaningful progression. The story must emphasize a theme of strength and hope and highlight a process of coping or overcoming an obstacle. Often, these stories explore the rough emotions of a situation and are authentic to life experiences (Ray et al., 2019). A restorative narrative does not give a

false sense of hope or tell of a person immediately doing well in the midst of a challenge (Tenore, 2015). Further, the label of "restorative" is not focused on the effects of the narrative on the reader, but instead a title for a type of narrative. In other words, whether a narrative actually "restores" the reader in some way is not a qualifier for this label. These narratives are used in settings, such as higher education, and are designed to change student behaviors.

Individuals carry with them their own autobiographical narratives, which they add to throughout their life as they encounter new experiences, and the narratives of others (McLean, 2005; Pals, 2006). For example, a child who stands up for a friend at school will add this event to their own personal history of themselves and perhaps change their identity, or how they view themselves, to include being brave or compassionate. Therefore, the idea of using stories to teach lessons and change behaviors is not new, but rather, a normal part of making meaning out of life (Murphy et al., 2011; Ray et al., 2019). The stories that make the biggest impact on a person's narrative are those that appear emotionally significant (Pals, 2006; Ray et al., 2019) and align with personal experiences (Dahlstrom, 2014; McLean, 2005). Restorative narratives that are derived from an individual's own history and heritage would include both the emotional and personal components needed to potentially change their own narrative.

Restorative narratives have frequently been used as an effective form of changing students' actions and attitudes on campus (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013; Holdsworth et al., 2018). For example, a college might show, during a freshman orientation, video vignettes of students who highlight a struggle and provide an example of how they moved forward. (e.g. "*I felt overwhelmed when I came, but then I attended office hours and learned how*

to ask for help”). However, there are only a few studies that have attempted to examine the expected effects of these narratives, such as help seeking behavior, experimentally (Fitzgerald et al., 2020). In other words, very few researchers have looked at the characteristics of the narratives themselves or directly measured what elements of the narrative are connected to any change.

Institutions of higher education that have implemented restorative narratives as a form of intervention in the past have focused their methods using Social Cognitive Theory. This theory states that by watching or reading about characters’ behaviors in a narrative, humans form beliefs about the consequences of those behaviors and whether or not they will repeat them (Bandura, 1986). As in the example provided earlier, this usually takes the form of a video or vignette in which students watch or read about how prosocial behaviors on campus helped the student progress through a negative feeling or challenge. Administrators of the intervention hope that by interacting with the narrative and seeing how the student highlighted a struggle and solution, students will learn from the characters’ actions and change their own behavior. This form of intervention has been successful in altering a student’s desire to seek and share resources (Ray et al., 2019) as well as change ideas about adversity (Walton et al., 2015), health, happiness, (Walton & Cohen, 2011), and belonging (Yeager et al., 2016).

As stated earlier, the success of restorative narratives in changing behavior is dependent on the narratives' emotional significance and alignment with personal experiences (Dahlstrom, 2014; McLean, 2005; Pals, 2006; Ray et al., 2019). The current research proposed that current narrative mental health interventions can be magnified by increasing elements of emotional significance and personal connection to the narrative.

The more a person connects with the narrative, the more likely they are to act on the information (Murphy et al., 2011). Therefore, it makes sense that increasing the connection a student has to a narrative by procuring that narrative from their own family or heritage, could thereby increase the power the narrative has to change behavior. By combining restorative narratives with intergenerational self (discussed below), this project sought to increase the resilience, belonging, and mattering of college students.

Intergenerational Self

Intergenerational self is described as "a self that is defined as much by one's place in familial history as a personal past" (Fivush et al., 2010, p. 132). A person's identity and understanding of self is determined not only by their own autobiographical memories, but also by their understanding of *who* they come from and their place within a larger familial group (Driessnack, 2017). This larger sense of self can help ground an individual and provide a framework for dealing with life's challenges (Fivush et al., 2008). Individuals with a higher level of intergenerational self often gain a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves and develop a sense of "home" or grounding no matter where they are and what obstacles they face (Driessnack, 2017; Reiser, 2012).

Autobiographical Reasoning and Family Narratives

In order to fully understand how a person develops a sense of intergenerational self, it is important to return to the concept of autobiographical reasoning mentioned earlier. Autobiographical reasoning is the process of creating a personal life story and sense of self through comparing past memories with present experiences (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). This reasoning revolves around a person's own autobiographical memories

and is influenced by outside cultural or familial frames. Autobiographical memory is a memory network built from experiences in life (Williams et al., 2008). These memories consist of events, objects, or people (called episodic memories) or facts about the world and person's surroundings (called semantic memories) (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Williams et al., 2008). As an adolescent creates their own life narrative, they combine both their own experiences with their understanding of other's life experiences (Fivush et al., 2010; McLean, 2005). The ability to develop a strong sense of intergenerational self is dependent on a person's autobiographical reasoning and connection to family or heritage narratives. Returning to my previous example of the young child who stood up for a friend: if instead of *the child* standing up for a friend and changing his own narrative and identity the child instead *hears a story of his parent* doing this behavior, according to the idea of intergenerational self and social cognitive theory, this story can have similar effects on the child as if they did the behavior themselves. Our own narrative and identity can potentially be changed when learning about our family and heritage (Merrill & Fivush, 2016).

The sharing of family and heritage narratives and experiences is as old as civilization itself (Lima, 2019). However, within our modern society there is great variability in who tells and hears these types of stories. Many children grow up hearing about the hardships and triumphs of their culture or family while others rarely talk about the past (Bohanek et al., 2006; Graci & Fivush, 2017; Merrill & Fivush, 2016). This variability results in differences in the level of intergenerational self among students as they enter college classrooms such as the setting for the current project. Intergenerational self is built within individuals through an interpersonal and intrapersonal process of

learning and sharing family and heritage narratives. The act of sharing creates a collaborative interpersonal experience between members of a family or community despite distance and time (Ferring, 2017) and is a form of negotiation between generations in how the family or community as a group chooses to portray themselves (Barclay & Koefoed, 2021). Persons also experience an intrapersonal process of looking inward to reflect how these external narratives change how they perceive themselves (Barclay & Koefoed, 2021). Each person may have a different interpretation of a family or heritage narrative that affects their sense of self differently and how they construct who they are. As humans learn of these narratives and portrayals from their family and heritage, they have the opportunity to incorporate the story into their own sense of who they are (Barclay & Koefoed, 2021; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). This concept adds to the need for students in a narrative-based intervention to have the freedom to choose and reflect on narratives that are aligned with how they perceive themselves and who they want to be in the future. This choosing, reflecting, and changing based on narratives happens, as mentioned previously, through the process of autobiographical reasoning. However, labeling and investigating this process in action has been difficult for researchers to do and will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Prior Research on Intergenerational Self

Researchers studying the topic of intergenerational self have developed and used a 20-question assessment entitled the “Do You Know Scale” (Duke, 2013). This instrument aims to determine intergenerational self by tallying the amount of information a person knows about their family. Although this is an indicator of familial influence, it is not a gauge of how a person’s identity, or how they see themselves, is intertwined with

this influence. Currently, there are no other self-reported or direct measures of intergenerational self. Instead, research has concentrated on how the knowledge of, and reflection on, a person's family narratives can influence outcome variables. Previous research has uncovered direct relationships between familial knowledge and identity development, internal locus of control, belonging, and self-worth (Fivush et al., 2010; Merrill & Fivush, 2016; Reiser, 2012). Additional research has shown that reflecting on the lives of ancestors, whether personally known or not, can increase expected and actual intellectual performance, close school achievement gaps (Fischer et al., 2011), and is correlated with improved overall health (Driessnack, 2017). The current research proposal focuses on how resilience, belonging, and mattering are increased using intergenerational or heritage focused narratives. The rest of this chapter will discuss the outcome variables of resilience, belonging, and mattering, previous research being conducted on these variables in higher education, and how the current study was built upon these concepts.

Resilience and Resilience Interventions

The word "resilience" has changed meaning as it has been applied within different contexts, however, its roots are in the Latin verb "resilire" which means to rebound (Masten, 2015). Originally described within the field of medicine, resilience was focused on the ability of an individual's body to rebound or bounce back from disease (Garmezy, 1973). Later, within this same medical context, the term resilience focused on outside factors and systems that affected a person's ability to recover from illness (Garmezy & Streitman, 1974). Within these contexts, resilience is seen as not only a learned behavior or skill, but also a method of thinking about negative circumstances that could change

from situation to situation or over time (Holdsworth et al., 2018; Southwick et al., 2014). It was not until the early 1990s that resilience was applied to college student behaviors (Alva, 1991).

Still, within academia, the definition of resilience has been difficult to standardize (DeRosier et al., 2013). For the purpose of this study, resilience is defined as a trait or skill that can be increased or decreased in students related to their ability to adapt to stress and adversity (Robbins et al., 2018; Waxman et al., 2003). "Resilience has become accepted within the educational community as an essential capacity for a student to fully thrive within a higher education context." (Robbins et al., 2018, p. 44). Lower levels of resilience have been correlated with depression (Hamdan-Mansour et al., 2014), substance abuse, and suicide ideation (Robbins et al., 2018) while higher resilience and has been correlated with retention (Hartley, 2013), social support (Hamdan-Mansour et al., 2014), physical health, (Robbins et al., 2018), optimism, and quality of life (Bowen et al., 2003).

Previous research focused on resilience in college students found that resilience can be predicted by levels of self-esteem, parental relationships (Robbins et al., 2018), intrinsic motivation, and internal locus of control (McMillan & Reed, 1994). However, assessing the level of resilience of a student after an intervention, even using self-report, is very rare in the literature. Indeed, even intervention programs, such as the "Student Resilience Project," formed at Florida State University and mirrored in universities across the United States, lack a mechanism to gather student resilience scores after completing the online workshops (Clark & Oehme, 2017; Ray et al., 2019). Similarly, there is a lack of resilience interventions that take place inside the college classroom. This is most likely

due to the continued knowledge gap between faculty and student services that exists in most institutions (Nesheim et al., 2007; Roberts, 2012) wherein the perceived, albeit incorrectly, responsibility of maintaining student mental health falls outside the classroom. As per Chapter 1, it is important to note that research conducted on intergenerational self likewise has neglected to measure resilience although the term is often mentioned within reports (Driessnack, 2017; Fivush et al., 2010; Reiser, 2012). Many genealogists claim that taking part in investigating family history has increased their own resilience, but these reports rely on anecdotal evidence only and appear in national and international conference presentations and discussions that are not reviewed. The current proposal measured the impact of an intergenerational self intervention on students' self-reported resilience through the use of unique student-discovered restorative narratives. This project also made similar claims with respect to levels of belonging and mattering.

Belonging and Belonging Interventions

Similar to the concept of resilience, there are few consistent definitions of belonging within education (Allen & Bowles, 2012). For the purpose of this research, belonging is defined as a sense of being valued and accepted (Masika & Jones, 2016) and a general feeling of being connected (Lee, 2018). Belonging can be subjective and vary based on context. For example, a person's feeling of belonging may be different for their workplace versus their home. However, as originally defined by Baumeister and Leary (1995), general belonging is a central part of an individual's personality or identity (Lee, 2018) and transcends their surroundings. This way of discussing belonging, as a connection to a larger system than one's immediate context, has been highlighted as

especially important when looking at how belonging influences mental health (Hagerty et al., 1992).

Belonging is a central trait that can be used to facilitate positive outcomes from a person's surroundings (Walton & Brady, 2017). A general sense of belonging is different than, but influenced by, feelings of belonging to a specific group or place (Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). Therefore, this research introduces the idea that belonging can come in two different forms: belonging to a specific location, organization, college, or place, and a sense of general belonging to the world or the human family. The former is the definition most often used in educational research as student support groups attempt to increase the belonging of their students to their campus and community. However, taking part in an organization does not necessarily produce a feeling of belonging in general (Lambert et al., 2013). The latter is also supported by the work of Abraham Maslow (1943) which discusses the need to belong as a goal humans have "great intensity to achieve" (p. 381) and the work of Hagerty et al. (1992) that discusses belonging as psychological, sociological, and spiritual. Both the psychological and spiritual senses of belonging do not rely heavily on outside references, but instead allow the students to feel a sense of belonging to the universe or other larger referents (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Hagerty et al., 1992).

Another support for the idea of general belonging can be found in the emerging concept of genealogical consciousness. Genealogical consciousness is a transgenerational way of thinking and behaving based on a sense of belonging to your past and future ancestors (Harris, 2017). As we feel a deeper sense of belonging to the past and our future, our behaviors and, I believe, mental health are affected. This way of thinking is

also mirrored by other scholars such as Layla F. Saad, who discusses her desire to “be a good ancestor” (Saad, 2020, p. 4) as a driving force for her behavior and change in thinking. This concept supports the idea of having a sense of belonging that is larger than a specific context.

The current research proposes that by focusing on increasing a student’s level of general belonging, the feeling of being valued, accepted, and connected to society and their past and future heritage, their specific place-based belonging will also increase (Parr et al., 2020). Through the process of reading and applying self-identified and personally meaningful narratives within the classroom students could feel a greater sense of general belonging and therefore an increased sense of institutional belonging. Connecting with family and heritage can create a sense of “home” no matter where a person is (Driessnack, 2017; Reiser, 2012)

The benefits of belonging within a specific context are well documented among the higher education student population. Students who report feeling high levels of belonging within their environment also report higher overall well-being, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Walton & Cohen, 2011). Further, levels of belongingness have also been shown to correlate with cognitive functioning, test performance, intellectual achievement, and other positive student behaviors (Layous et al., 2017; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Wolf et al., 2017). Interventions focused on general levels of belonging not tied to a location have, to the author’s knowledge, not yet been fully explored. However, as discussed in this section, this may be due to the lack of variety in instrumentation and interventions meant to influence belonging. Further, the current research proposed that affecting a student’s

level of general belonging through the IRNR intervention will subsequently affect their level of institutional belonging.

Institutions of higher education are seeking interventions that will increase undergraduate students' levels of belonging to their specific campuses (Hoffman et al., 2002; Slaten et al., 2016). These interventions differ across the United States in their form and effectiveness and there is a disconnect between the research literature's attempts to define belonging as a term and put it into day-to-day practice (Allen & Bowles, 2012). In other words, although the importance of belonging and its correlates to positive educational outcomes are frequently discussed, there are only a few different methods (discussed below) being used to increase levels of belonging within higher education. This problem is magnified when looking at interventions focused on general belonging. Literature points to the idea of general belonging, but outside of the current research, there are no interventions that are explicitly focused on the general belonging and college students. Overall, there are two methods currently being used to increase belonging: the building of communities and applied narratives.

The building of communities on campus have been shown to increase levels of belonging to specific contexts (Masika & Jones, 2016; Renwick et al., 2019). The main method of creating communities places students into groups with similar characteristics and encourages their interaction. There is an expectation that students within these groups will form a collective identity and therefore a higher sense of belonging (Barlocco, 2010; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Ruopp, 1993). Another method of community building is the flooding of a student's inbox with organization messages and merchandise. This was effective in previous studies for White students, but not Black students (Hausmann et al.,

2009) thus showing another example of a single intervention meant for all students falling short. The expectation of this method is that students will affiliate more with their current environment than other social ties and therefore increase their level of belonging (Hoffman et al., 2002).

The second method primarily used to increase students' belonging on campus, and the method being used in the current study, is the use of narratives (Binning et al., 2020; LaCosse et al., 2020; Logel et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020; Yeager et al., 2016). One growing example focuses on teaching students that feelings of not belonging on campus are common and temporary (Walton, 2014; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Walton et al., 2015; Yeager et al., 2016). Students who internalize these concepts, after reading or watching student vignettes, show dramatic increases in retention, GPA, and other positive academic outcomes (Walton et al., 2015; Wolf et al., 2017). However, these narratives are built on a one-size-fits-all idea creating only a few narratives that are attempting to change the belonging of a diverse student body. The current research proposed that the effect on belonging will be increased if these restorative narratives are harvested from family and heritage and focus on increasing intergenerational self.

Mattering and Mattering Interventions

Related to the concept of general belonging is the concept of mattering. Mattering is a concept only recently applied to education and is defined as "the feeling that others depend upon us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experiences as an ego-extension" (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165), a feeling that we exist for a purpose (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981), or a feeling of being valued and adding value (Prilleltensky, 2014). This concept allows us to better understand the connection between

belonging and mental health (Stebleton et al., 2014). When a student feels that they matter to or are valued by those around them, it increases their feelings of belonging and thereby increases their mental health (Rayle & Chung, 2007; Schlossberg, 1989). Students' sense of mattering changes throughout their lives as their roles change (Schlossberg, 1989). As they enter the new environment of college, they need to re-evaluate their level of mattering to those in their new environment. However, despite these changes, a large majority of a student's feelings of mattering, no matter the environment, is dependent on family and culture (Elliott, 2009; Rayle & Myers, 2004). With this in mind, educational interventions focused on increasing students' feeling of mattering have primarily focused on connecting students to groups larger than themselves.

Despite a growing body of literature focused on the importance of mattering within higher education, especially in light of growing diversity on campus, the concept of mattering has been overall neglected in interventions. Many institutions use campus-wide slogans such as, "you matter" or "you belong," however, these mantras can be destructive to students who feel that they don't have a purpose or are not adding value (Flett et al., 2019). The dissonance caused by a student's experiences and what they perceive to be the norm for other students can further decrease their level of mattering. Interventions that have been successful at increasing a student's feeling of mattering focus on connecting a student to a group larger than themselves or giving them a voice. Interventions that have connected a student to their ethnic heritage (Gibson et al., 2019; Rayle & Myers, 2004) or social-class backgrounds (Stephens et al., 2015) have been successful in increasing levels of mattering. Other interventions that connected students

with a mentor have also shown an increase in mattering (Melguizo et al., 2019; Yomtov et al., 2017). Again, when narratives are used within these contexts, they are general and assumed to apply to all students. The current intervention sought to use the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) intervention as a means of connecting students to larger groups that are their unique family or ethnic heritage as a way to affecting mattering on an individual level.

Research Questions

The purpose of the current study was to understand the effects of an in-class intervention, created and facilitated by the teacher that used intergenerational or heritage restorative narratives as a strategy intended to affect student's mental health through increasing mental health correlates, specifically, levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering. Prior research has successfully used narratives to change behaviors and attitudes on campus (Figure 1) however; these narratives were broad and did not apply to all students. This research attempted to affect the effectiveness of restorative narratives by asking students to discover and reflect on narratives of struggle and triumph within their own family or heritage. In doing so, this research answered the following questions:

1. To what extent do students' reported levels of **resilience** change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Intervention?
2. To what extent do students' reported levels of general **belonging** change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Intervention?
3. To what extent do students' reported levels of **mattering** change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Intervention?
4. To what extent do students describe a narrative that includes restorative elements?

5. What is the relationship between the adherence of a narrative to the restorative elements and students' levels of change in resilience, belonging, and mattering?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

My research explored the effects of the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) intervention on college students' resilience, belonging, and mattering. As discussed in Chapter 1, these elements were previously shown to be correlated to a student's personal mental health and the goal of improving the mental health of students can have long lasting effects on society as a whole. Chapter 2 explained the conceptual frameworks that undergird my work by showing the connections between intergenerational self, restorative narratives, and my outcome variables. This chapter will discuss the methods used to investigate how the IRNR intervention influences levels of resilience, general belonging, and mattering. The following chapter describes the setting, the intervention in detail, instrumentation, data collection procedures, analyses used to understand my collected data, and discusses research ethics, validity, and trustworthiness.

I conducted a convergent mixed methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) that allowed me to conduct and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to answer my five research questions. I analyzed each separately and then investigated how they compare to each other. My research questions are presented in Table 1, along with their data source, and proposed analysis. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire administered at the beginning and end of the semester. Qualitative were collected from the intervention assignment (the restorative narrative itself).

Table 1

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question	**Data Source and Sampling**	**Data Analysis**
1-3 To what extent do student's reported levels of (resilience, general belonging, mattering) change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) Intervention?	Pre/Post intervention survey • Brief Resilience Scale • General Belonging Scale • General Mattering Scale	Dependent samples *t*-test
	Self-reported effectiveness of intervention for each construct • Resilience • General Belonging • Mattering	Descriptive Statistics Representative Quotes
4 To what extent do students describe a narrative that includes restorative elements?	Random narratives from IRNR Intervention (50, with criteria of 75 words or more).	Thematic Analysis for restorative elements. Coding criteria in Appendix F Computed sum for each narrative
5 What relationships between the adherence of a narrative to restorative elements and students' levels of change in resilience, belonging, and mattering?	Summed restorative alignment (from RQ 4) Change score on survey constructs: Resilience, General Belonging, and Mattering	Spearman's Correlation Test between alignment and change score for each construct

	Change Score = (Post-intervention average) - (Pre-intervention average)	

Setting

The setting of this study was an Introduction to Psychology (PSY 101) course at a state university in the southwest United States. This face-to-face class was one of two courses on this topic offered in the spring semester over a 16-week period. Topics in the course included research methods in psychological science, motivation, neuroscience, lifespan development, and many others. Historically this class includes a high number of non-psychology majors and may be students' only interaction with the science of human cognition and behavior. As a teacher, my philosophy includes a focus on student mental health and the need for students to gain skills related to resilience and belonging early in their undergraduate education. I believe these skills can assist students throughout the rest of their academic and professional career. Therefore, during the planning of this project I felt that the placement of an intervention focused on increasing these skills within this course, often taken by students from across campus and within the first year of college, would be ideally placed.

Participants

All students enrolled in one section of my PSY 101 course were introduced to the concepts of intergenerational self and restorative narratives before being asked to complete an assignment that combines these into a single intervention. Due to this assignment being built into the course as part of my semester curriculum, all students enrolled were eligible to participate. However, due to age restrictions related to

conducting research and the personal preferences of students, it was expected that a portion of students' data would be excluded from my analysis. In other words, students were able to decline participation and any student under the age of 18 were not eligible to participate despite completing the assignment. This resulted in three levels of participation for each student. They were able to be a full participant that completed the assignment, allowed me to use their data, and allowed me to quote from their narrative, a student could be a partial participant which means that they complete the assignment, allow me to use their data, but not allow me to quote from their narrative, or a student could opt to complete the assignment but not participate in any research.

The credibility of qualitative research often comes from rich descriptives of who the participants are in a study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Therefore, to increase the transparency of my work and best understand the limitations of my research I collected a number of demographic data. Using the pre-intervention survey, I collected data related to age, sex, race, year at ***, parental income, transfer status, relationship status and housing. This information allowed me to situate my research findings in the context of who the students are that are reporting these narratives.

Due to the discrepancy in who completed the entire study (all three parts) and those who completed only the pre-intervention survey, there is also a difference in the demographic information collected. For the purpose of this research, I will report the demographic information for only those students who completed all three parts of the study (n = 33). Out of this group, 85.7% were female and one student reported they were non-binary. Fifty-four percent of students reported their race as "white" while 28.6% reported they were Latino/Hispanic, and 5.7% were Native American. The average age of

participants was 19.4 (*SD* = 1.2) and the majority (48.6%) were freshmen. A large majority (85.7%) of students reported their relationship status as single and only a quarter were transfer students.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the research was that of Process Facilitator as described by Wittmayer and Schäpke (2014). Within this role, I initiated the intervention, selected participants, and facilitated concrete short-term actions. As a teacher, was able to interact with participants on a personal level whilst helping students engage in the IRNR intervention and collect their responses. The benefit of this position allowed me to adapt my intervention for future cycles of research after my dissertation. Yeager and Walton (2011) wrote that most interventions in educational settings would be much more effective if conducted by actual teachers or educational practitioners compared to outside entities that use college courses as convenience samples. As discussed in previous chapters, most mental health-based interventions currently used in higher education are disseminated from outside the classroom setting.

However, being so close to the study and its participants also could lead to biases in participant self-selection, participant responses, and in how I interpreted the results. I recognize that my own experiences with students, passion for family history, and epistemological viewpoints as a college educator may influence how I disseminated my intervention and explain my findings. I also recognize that conducting research with my own students placed me in a position of power. I hope that my explanation further in this chapter on the topic of trustworthiness and validity will be sufficient to maintain credibility and general transferability of my results to other similar college settings.

IRNR Intervention

The proposed IRNR intervention consisted of two parts: 1. a brief lecture on the intergenerational self and a description of a restorative narrative and 2. a written reflection assignment. The lecture (which is included in its entirety in Appendix E) asked students to consider their lives and identity as a conglomerate of stories and to identify how their family or heritage influenced that identity. The word "heritage" has historically been difficult to define (Blake, 2000; Harrison, 2010). Heritage is socially constructed and therefore is not possible for me, as the teacher, to fully understand its meaning for each student. For some students, heritage is not bound by blood or legal ties. I attempted to help students move beyond a focus on traditional families and into the idea of kinship, which included cultural or friendship connections as well (Kramer, 2011). In this way, family and heritage was not defined linearly from generation to generation but through other connections and group negotiations (Barclay & Koefoed, 2021; Nash, 2002).

After I received feedback from students on how their heritage had influenced their own sense of self, I defined the concept as the intergenerational self and explained it as a newer concept in psychology that proposes we are defined as much by our place within the history of our family as we are our own past (Fivush et al., 2010). We discussed what a family is and the variety of ways it can be defined. I explained that most of us have a family history that is fraught with struggle and triumph, whether we are familiar with it or not. These experiences can act as guideposts in helping us understand our own current experience (Ferring, 2017; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013) and provide models of resilience, belonging, and mattering (Fivush et al., 2010). I provided examples from my own life and shared examples from recent media highlighting personal changes due to

discovering family history. I then discussed the power of intergenerational narratives and how their sense of self can further be changed as *they*, the students, discover new stories of struggle and triumph. I taught students how to define and identify appropriate restorative narratives in their family and heritage according to the parameters of the study. I gave examples of restorative narratives and identified characteristics that define a narrative as restorative (See Appendix F). I also discussed how the effectiveness of family and heritage narratives are based on how involved the individual becomes in the story (Ray et al., 2019). I explained that researchers who have studied how college students develop their identity and personality have found that the three most important factors are family, personal history, and social context (Reiser, 2012). Therefore, it was likely that an intervention using narratives presented, either in person or vicariously, by a family member should hold more weight to a student than a vignette of a stranger and therefore increase the likelihood of change. I introduced the IRNR intervention assignment (Appendix D) and walked through its instructions.

The purpose of the IRNR intervention assignment was to guide students through the process of finding and reflecting on their own family or heritage restorative narrative. The IRNR Intervention assignment was assigned six weeks into the semester immediately after the lecture on the concept and value of intergenerational narratives described above. The assignment itself took the form of two completion based assignments within my Learning Management System (LMS), Blackboard Learn. One assignment for the narrative itself and one for the reflection questions. After a student completed the assignments they were automatically given grades in the gradebook. This enabled me to give students completion grades on their assignment but not open the data

myself until after they had left my course. Students were instructed to "Find a story within your own family or heritage of a person or people who overcame a struggle." Resources were provided to help students discover and apply these stories and students were given a space to write their found narratives. As mentioned previously, a portion of these were analyzed to better understand the alignment of narratives to restorative qualifier (RQ4) and thus look at the relationship between alignment and change after the intervention.

Along with re-telling their narrative, students were also asked to answer six questions pertaining to their experience finding an intergenerational narrative and how it could be applied to their current situation as a student. A previous version of this assignment was created in fall 2020 and previewed by PSY 101 students. During that semester 67.74% of students (*n = 31)* found the assignment to be "very" or "extremely" effective and suggested edits for it to be improved. These edits included providing more resources and clearer instructions on length and expectations.

Data Collection/Instrumentation

Two sources of data were used to answer my research questions regarding the impact of the IRNR intervention on resilience (RQ1), belonging (RQ2), and mattering (RQ3), the alignment of narratives with restorative elements (RQ4), and the relationship of restorative narrative alignment and change to these same variables (RQ5). As discussed previously, in order to investigate change due to the intervention I implemented a survey at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester. This allowed me to compare changes in scores before and after the intervention. However, due to the survey only being disseminated in my own class it is probable that any changes to

resilience, belonging, and mattering were due to many other factors within the semester in my class and not due exclusively to the intervention. For this reason, I also asked students to report on how effective *they* believed the intervention was in changing their resilience, belonging, and mattering.

Quantitative Instrumentation

Students' levels of resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) developed by Smith et al., (2008). This six-item instrument assesses a single construct, a person's ability to bounce back from stressful situations, and has been used across cultures and situations as one of the leading indicators of resilience for all ages. Students were asked to rate statements such as "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times" on a 5-point scale between strongly disagree to strongly agree with an option for neutral. This instrument includes three reverse-coded questions that were transformed in my data before calculating the average. A higher average score indicates a higher level of resilience. The instrument is included within Appendix A. Prior studies using this instrument reported Cronbach's alpha reliability between 0.81 and 0.9 (Smith et al., 2008).

General Belonging was assessed using Malone et al.'s (2012) General Belongingness Scale (GBS). This scale, located in Appendix B, is a 12-item instrument measuring the single construct of belonging as defined previously in this project. The instrument has shown high levels of convergent validity with measures of social connectedness and loneliness, discriminant validity against measures of the need to belong, and is predictive of life satisfaction, happiness, and depression. Students were asked to rate statements such as, "When I am with other people I feel included" on a 5-

point scale between strongly disagree and strongly agree with an option for neutral. This scale includes six reverse-coded questions that were transformed in the data prior to calculating the average. A higher average score indicates a higher level of belonging. Prior studies using this instrument reported a high reliability score ($\alpha = 0.95$).

Mattering was determined using a five-item instrument developed by Marcus (1991). Included in Appendix C, this instrument asked questions such as, "How important do you feel you are to other people?" and "How much do you feel that other people pay attention to you?" to measure the single construct of mattering. Students were asked to select answers from a four-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much." A mean score for each student was calculated and a higher score indicates a higher feeling of mattering.

Similar to the fall 2020 pilot discussed earlier, the post-intervention survey asked students to rate the effectiveness of the intervention on their levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering. For example, when asking about resilience, students were asked, "How effective do you believe the discovery and re-telling of a family or heritage narrative activity was in increasing your level of resilience this semester (Resilience is a trait or skill distinguished by the ability to recover or gain strength after adversity)?" Options included a 5-point scale ranging from not effective at all to extremely effective.

Demographic questions were also included at the end of the pre-intervention survey only. Students were asked to indicate their age, gender (male, female, gender non-conforming, not listed, or prefer not to answer), race (participants had the option to select more than one) (White (non-Hispanic), Black or African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native American/Alaska Native, Asian/Asian American, Pacific Islander, Prefer not to

answer/I don't know, and other), year in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and post-baccalaureate), parental income, transfer status, and housing (on campus, off-campus). Students were asked to provide unique identifiers that allowed me to connect their pre-intervention surveys, post-intervention surveys, and narrative assignments. Both the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey questions, aside from demographic questions, were randomized so that the effects of question order was mitigated.

Qualitative Instrumentation

Qualitative data was gathered from the written narratives of students as a part of the IRNR intervention assignment. The assignment was downloaded into an excel file and opened after the quantitative analysis was completed on the surveys given at the beginning and end of the semester. Due to the intervention being disseminated as a completion-based assignment within my LMS, I was unable to access the names of the students that completed the reflection. Therefore, students were asked to provide the same unique identifier selected for their surveys to enable me to connect the narratives and survey data of students. Examining the data, there were only 33 students who completed all parts of the study (pre-intervention survey, intervention narrative, and post-intervention survey). Each narrative coded had an average of 240 words with the smallest narrative having 110 words.

To foster autobiographical reasoning and influence levels of intergenerational self, students were asked as part of their assignment to list similarities between the narrative they found and their own lives as well as how the narrative could provide strength to them during college. These questions were designed to help students make deeper connections with the narrative and mirror the types of questions that universities

use when presenting restorative narratives in larger settings. After the course ended and these data could be reviewed, I reviewed the information using both top-down and bottom-up processes. First, I read through the entirety of entries and created memos of recurring themes. This bottom-up process allowed me to let the data speak for itself with limited constraints. In doing this I discovered themes that will be discussed in chapter 4. I also used a top-down process of looking for key words and phrases related to the instruments used to measure resilience, belonging, and mattering. For example, the General Mattering Scale remarks that "attention" is an important part of mattering. I therefore looked within the qualitative data for mentions of "attention." Data were put aside for two weeks and I completed the process again. After a third round of these two types of coding I felt that I had reached saturation and organized my data under the themes that I discovered and looked for representative quotes for each theme. These will be discussed in future chapters. There were themes and ideas that were discovered that were outside the scope of this current project, however, to maintain the integrity of my current plans, these themes were not fully analyzed and will not be discussed.

Research Plan

This project used an action research convergent mixed methods design to investigate the effects of the IRNR intervention on college student's levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering. Change and making meaning as an educator is at the heart of action research (Noffke, 2009; Trunk Sirca & Shapiro, 2007). Educational action research is a passion-guided process in which practitioners or groups of practitioners become scholars by using experimental methods to change and benefit their own context (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action research requires that the researcher embed themselves within

the group they are studying to enact change (Dick, 2014; Trunk Sirca & Shapiro, 2007) and in this sense becomes the intersection between a researcher's personal and professional life (Noffke, 2009). Unlike more traditional forms of research, educational action research does not maintain a goal of generalization, but instead seeks only to advantage the researcher's immediate surroundings. This is primarily due to the inability that a blanketed theory has to understand the individual nuances of a researcher's context (Dick, 2014) and focuses on the unique needs of the population the researcher is working with. Action research is a cyclical process that relies on the reflection of each process as a form of assessment on whether the practitioner's intervention is effective (Trunk Sirca & Shapiro, 2007). In this way, the work of educational action research is never complete but instead a process of never-ending beginnings (Trunk Sirca & Shapiro, 2007). Action research is guided by theory and attempts to align research questions, methods, and analysis through larger epistemological or methodological frameworks as well as smaller conceptual or political frameworks (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Noffke, 2009). Action research is appealing to me due to its cyclical nature and embeddedness in my passion for teaching. Further, action research fits well within my epistemological lens of constructivism, which embraces the idea that knowledge is built with others and absolute truth may exist, but can only be measured imperfectly due to our own imperfect perception (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Krauss, 2005). This perspective allows me to explain how a student can seek a collective absolute truth, such as the ability to be resilient or to belong, while remaining cognizant of his or her own background and position. I do not need to fully understand another person's relationship to their heritage

in order to study if strengthening this relationship will increase their own resilience, belonging, and mattering in college.

My choice to investigate the effects of the IRNR intervention using a convergent mixed methods design allows me to investigate both quantitative and rich qualitative data to support my findings (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This places equal emphasis on the qualitative narrative and reflection data and quantitative survey data. The mixed methods nature of my research provides information that is more comprehensive, more pragmatic and dialectical, and uses the power of reflective practice (Ivankova, 2015).

Data Analysis

This mixed methods research produced both quantitative and qualitative data. The purpose of the quantitative data was to examine the self-reported measures of resilience, general belonging, and mattering before and after the IRNR intervention and will be collected using two surveys described previously. Qualitative data was gathered from the IRNR Intervention itself in the form of narratives from students. This section will describe the analysis used for both of these data by exploring my research questions in order.

Research Questions 1-3

In order to understand to what extent the IRNR Intervention increased levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering (RQ1-3), I used a paired *t*-test to investigate differences between the means of each of the constructs at the beginning and end of the semester in my PSY 101 course. This test fits best with the goals of my research due to its ability to analyze changes between the pre-intervention and post-intervention

measures of the same group of students. The post-intervention survey included a question related to the perceived effectiveness of my intervention. I was able to analyze these data using descriptive statistics to explore the percentages of those who found the intervention to be very/extremely effective and not effective. I also analyzed and will report in Chapter 4 on demographic data and interesting findings related to race. Further, collecting this information will be important in future analysis and cycles of research.

Research Question 4

To investigate how aligned students' narratives are to the restorative elements described previously, all student narratives who also completed the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys will be analyzed using thematic analysis. Narratives were downloaded from my LMS and uploaded into an excel spreadsheet. I deleted narratives for students who elected to not allow me to use their research and copied the stories into SPSS along with all other data. Using the sort cases function I was able to identify only narratives that were from students who completed all parts of the study. These narratives were copied back to excel and able to be coded using thematic analysis and the Restorative Narrative Elements rubric (Appendix F).

To create a rubric for assessing the level of adherence to the restorative narrative category I looked at previous research done on this topic by Ray et al. (2019) and Fitzgerald et al. (2020). These projects used restorative narrative interventions and discussed categorization. I then created a 0-2 rubric for each element that ranged from the element not being present to being fully present. During my third research cycle I used this rubric and found that many students received scores of 2, but within this group only some reported the affect/emotion of the person. Previous research suggested that emotion

plays a key role in restorative narrative interventions and so I added an additional category (3) that allowed me to code for emotion words or affect in the narratives. The end result was the rubric used in the current study. It fit very well with the narratives and there was little discrepancy between coders in its interpretation.

To assist in my coding and in an effort to increase the reliability of my analysis, a copy of the narrative spreadsheet was given to a separate coder for analysis. Together, we coded sample narratives using the Restorative Narrative Elements rubric (Appendix F) and discussed how to best align our coding. Over the course of three weeks we then independently coded each narrative. This process resulted in two summed scores for each narrative (0 - 12) signifying the restorative nature of the story based on Ray et al.'s (2019) suggestions.

Together, my secondary coder and I discussed discrepancies between my codes and theirs and established research consensus. This means that we ultimately agreed on each code given to the narratives. This secondary coder was a recent graduate of a bachelor's program in psychology and had prior experience in coding similar data.

Research Question 5

In order to answer my fifth research question related to the relationship between the adherence of a narrative to the restorative elements and students' levels of change in resilience, belonging, and mattering I planned on comparing the restorative alignment number computed from research question four and a change score calculated from the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys. I subtracted the mean of a student's pre-intervention survey on each variable from their post-intervention survey, giving me an amount of change. For example, a student scoring an average of two on their pre-

intervention belonging survey and a four on their post-intervention survey, was assigned a change score of two. I computed this score for each variable (resilience, belonging, and mattering) and planned to compare it with the restorative alignment score given to that same student's narrative. However, after plotting this relationship on a scatter plot it was clear that there was not a monotonic relationship between the variables, or frankly any discernible relationship (see Chapter 4, Figure 2).

Research Ethics

Due to the nature of my study, in that I collected personal stories from students, achieving full anonymity for participants was not possible. Further, my role as a process facilitator and teacher placed me in a position of power over my participants. For these reasons I put procedures in place to decrease the connection between the research and my role as the teacher. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at Arizona State University and site authorization from my own institution, I used my course's LMS to gather data before and after the IRNR intervention. The survey mechanism within the LMS hides personal information while simultaneously giving students a grade for completion. After explaining the intervention in class as a part of my curriculum and intervention, I invited those who agreed to have their narrative and reflection to be used in my research to give consent within the LMS assignment. This left the option for students to still complete the assignment as it relates to my class, but not have their personal stories used within this project. Further, I did not open the completed assignment LMS files until after my course had ended, final grades were recorded, and I finished my quantitative analysis.

A second important factor in my research was the issue of confidentiality. Students relayed to me personal family stories of struggle. These personal narratives introduced sensitive topics and disclosed identifiable information about participants. I assured my students that the accounts they shared with me would be kept on my password-protected computer and pseudonyms will be used within my research. Further, in compliance with my institution's review board for research ethics, the name of my university remains confidential. Finally, participants who shared personal stories were given the option within the LMS assignment to select whether they would allow me to quote directly from their materials.

Finally, because this study asked students to investigate their own personal familial and heritage-based history, there was an expectation that the assignment might trigger negative emotions that some students have not dealt with for some time, if ever. I believe that although this process was difficult for some, the co-construction of knowledge was worth the difficulty. However, counseling resources were made available for students who choose to engage in the struggle.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Along with research ethics, the level of validity and trustworthiness of my data was important. In order to increase the validity of my quantitative research I selected well-known scales that had been used in previous studies. In an effort to increase the trustworthiness or methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017) of my qualitative data, I employed Tracey's (2010) "big-tent" criteria for qualitative research. According to Tracey, a qualitative study is of high quality when marked by having a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful

coherence. The following information provides evidence of the fidelity and utility of my research according to these criteria.

My research focuses on intergenerational self and mental health. These are both topics that are growing in popularity and I believe are currently relevant. I attempted, with both my participants and in their report, to maintain a high level of transparency and self-reflexivity. I attempted to recognize, understand, and vocalize my own biases in relation to my research and the position of power that I had in collecting data from my own students. I positioned my data collection within my own class and understand that the nature of my qualitative data (as a class assignment) may have changed the responses I received from students. To help mitigate this influence I engaged in reflexive journaling when coding and recorded instances of students discussing the data as an assignment or as a grade. This language did not appear in any of the data that I looked at. Finally, Tracey (2010) proposes that meaningful coherence is required for a trustworthy study. Thus I have aligned my research questions, data types, and analysis in order to meet this requirement.

Timeline

The current research project was conducted in seven phases. During phase one, I disseminated a survey within my PSY 101 course. This survey contained the instruments measuring resilience, belonging, and mattering discussed above as well as questions pertaining to student demographics. During phase two, six weeks into the semester starting, I presented information within my lecture on intergenerational self and narratives. Appendix E contains a full lesson plan of this lecture. This phase also included giving students the IRNR intervention assignment discussed above. Students completed

the assignment within their LMS and were given a grade for completion. The assignment was not opened until phase six. At the end of the semester, during phase three, I disseminated an identical survey as in phase one but replaced the demographic questions with questions related directly to the students' belief that the IRNR intervention increased levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering. Phases four through six consisted of data analysis and integration. During phase four, I compared the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey data. This included performing inferential statistical analysis on the quantitative data. Phase five allowed me to open narratives and select those that matched my criteria. During stage six I coded narratives for alignment with restorative elements and matched them with their pre/post intervention change scores with plans to conduct a Spearman's Correlation test. Finally, during phase seven I drew conclusions from both my survey data and findings from phase six.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the effects of an Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) intervention on college students' reported resilience, general belonging, and mattering within a college classroom setting. Previous efforts to affect the variables of resilience, belonging, and matter on college campuses were done at the institutional level with narratives that were meant to apply to and affect all students. The current project was instead conducted in the classroom by myself, the teacher, and used narratives generated by students who were asked to examine their own family history. To assess the research questions, I engaged in a convergent mixed methods study and gathered data from a pre-intervention survey (quantitative data only), post-intervention survey (quantitative and qualitative data), and students' completed assignments (quantitative and qualitative data). Details on how each research question was assessed was included in Chapter 3. In this chapter I present evidence collected from quantitative and qualitative measures to answer each research question. I present both the results of descriptive and inferential statistics and use representative quotes drawn from the post-intervention survey and student assignment to demonstrate points. Additional inferences and conclusions will be presented in Chapter 5.

Research Question 1: To what extent do students' reported levels of resilience change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) Intervention?

A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine the effect of the IRNR intervention on students' self-reported levels of resilience. The results indicated there was not a significant difference between students' self-reported score before the intervention (M = 2.94; SD = 0.95) and after the intervention (M = 3.11; SD = 0.93); [$t(38) = -1.37$, $p = 0.18$], and a small effect (using Hedge's correction) was found ($d = 0.22$, *95% CI* [-0.53 - 0.10]).

Although there was an increase in student reported levels of resilience after the IRNR intervention, this difference was not significant and leads me to believe that the intervention was ineffective in changing student's levels of resilience as a whole. However, this contradicts other data sources. First, when asked directly about the interventions' efficacy, the majority of students (57.7%) believed that the intervention was "somewhat" or "very" effective in changing their levels of resilience and only 7.6% believed the intervention had no effect. Also, further evidence of the individual impact on resilience that the intervention had can be found in the answers given to the open-ended questions in the post-intervention survey. One student wrote,

> "I think that the project caused me to see that I am not the only person that goes through hard things. My person went through something so difficult and managed to make it to America and get a degree and do something that she loves. She got to openly be and express who she was. I can take a piece of her strength to remember but I still need to apply it to myself for it to be fully and very effective."

Although this student did not use the word "resilience," the application of strength to do hard things is at the heart of resilience. Another example of this can be seen in this student's response:

> "I can draw resilience and determination from the story of my heritage… My heritage lets me know that I can handle more than I think and that despite whatever life throws my way I can find a way to get to success."

Overall, although there was not a significant change in levels of resilience at the end of the semester, individual students reported meaningful change within their own experience and credited the intervention for a part of that change. However, there were also students who reported that there was no change to their level of resilience. One student reported, "I think I'm already a resilient person, so writing about my family didn't change that." Another wrote,

> "I feel like my level of resilience is still the same now as it was before. It took me a long time to build up the resilience I have and I don't think there is a lot that could change it."

Ideas related to these different effects will be discussed in chapter 5.

Research Question 2: To what extent do students' reported levels of general belonging change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) Intervention?

A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine the effect of the IRNR intervention on students' reported levels of general belonging. The results indicated there was not a significant difference between the students' self-reported score before the intervention (M = 3.48)(SD = 0.86) and after the intervention (M = 3.59)(SD = 0.93); [$t(38) = -1.58$, $p = 0.12$], and a small effect (using Hedge's correction) was found (d = 0.25, *95% CI* [-0.56 - 0.67]).

Similar to results found for research question one, there was no significant change in levels of general belonging for students after the intervention. However, only a small percentage of the class (18.6%) believed that the intervention was not at all effective in

changing levels of belonging. The answers to open-ended questions give some explanation as to why this could be and will be discussed in Chapter 5. The following are quotes from open-ended questions in the post-intervention survey providing evidence that, for some, the intervention influenced change: “This project made me see that people really do care about me, I would say that after this project, I have felt more of a general belonging within my culture but also within the *** community.” This student mentioned that the intervention helped them belong more to their immediate surrounding. Another student mentioned a more global feeling of belonging: “After thinking back on the lecture and assignment, I feel like I have a greater sense of belonging in the world around me. I know that there will always be a place for me in any situation I'm in.” Finally, some students wrote about other facets of belonging such as the longevity of belonging: “This narrative made me realize that no matter what mistakes I make in my life, my family will always be there for me and will help me bounce back. I will always have a place with them.”

Similar to results related to resilience, some students reported a stability or decrease in levels of general belonging. One example of this is a student who wrote, “I felt that because I didn’t really know the people I wrote my story about and it did not have a lot of ‘meaning’ to me, that it did not change my general level of belonging.” Further examples and explanations of the divergence of my qualitative and quantitative data will be shared in Chapter 5.

Research Question 3: To what extent do students' reported levels of mattering change after the Intergenerational Restorative Narrative Reflection (IRNR) Intervention?

A paired samples *t*-test was conducted to determine the effect of the IRNR intervention on students' reported levels of mattering. The results indicated there was not a significant difference between the students' self-reported score before the intervention (M = 2.55)(SD = 0.72) and after the intervention (M = 2.61)(SD = 0.74); [t(38) = -0.89, p = 0.38]and a very small effect (using Hedge's correction) was found (d = 0.14, *95% CI* [-0.45 - 0.17]).

Student reported levels of mattering were affected the least by the intervention with a very small nonsignificant change after the intervention. Similar to previous results, there was a discrepancy between change reported in the quantitative data collection through surveys and change reported in the qualitative data in the post-intervention survey and intervention itself. According to the post-intervention survey, 45.8% of students reported the intervention was effective and a number of students reported personal change to their levels of mattering. When asked if the intervention was effective in changing levels of mattering, some students described a change in understanding their own story is important or matters to others:

> "That assignment played a very big role in understanding how I'm different but also that my story is important. It was very emotional to write and it gave me a sense that I was important and that my life mattered and that someone wanted to hear my story."

Other students talked about a new sense of mattering to their immediate family:

> "I believe the intervention was effective in changing my level of mattering. It helped me switch up the way I was thinking and realize I am not worthless. That there are people who care for me and how I speak and act are valued."

Finally, some students mentioned a sense of mattering to the world or a "greater purpose:"

> "Looking back on what my family had to overcome gave me a sense of mattering to a greater purpose above myself. Looking at my family as a whole allowed me to appreciate every person who has got me to where I am today."

On the contrary, other students reported that the exercise did not change their level of mattering. One student wrote about a sense of mattering, "I feel like intervention did not change my sense of mattering because I feel that mattering is based off your achievement and how much you are depended on." Another student pointed out that the story was not their own and therefore it was unable to change their feelings of mattering: "My experiences are personal from that of my great grandfather's so, I don't think the intervention was successful in changing my level of mattering." Additional examples and comparisons will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Question 4: To what extent do students describe a narrative that includes restorative elements?

This question was investigated through the thematic analysis of student submitted narratives. My secondary coder and I investigated each narrative from students who completed both the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys. This resulted in the need to code 33 narratives averaging 240 words per narrative. To review the categories used to code these narratives, please refer to Appendix F.

On a scale of 0 to 12, each narrative was given a summed score based on the four narrative categories: obstacle/weakness, response, overcoming, progression. After my

secondary coder and I rated each narrative, we discussed discrepancies and came to agreement on each code. Out of the 33 narratives, two were given a rating of 12. This means that two narratives fully met all of the requirements of a restorative narrative and included emotion. Nineteen narratives received a score between 8 and 11. These narratives had all of the characteristics to be qualified as a restorative narrative and included details which strengthened their characterization. Nine narratives received a score between 4 and 7, showing that the narrative had the elements of a restorative narrative and three received a score less than 4. These numbers mean that over 60% of the narratives examined met the qualifications to be considered "restorative" according to Ray et al.'s (2019) and Fitzgerald et al.'s (2020) categorizations.

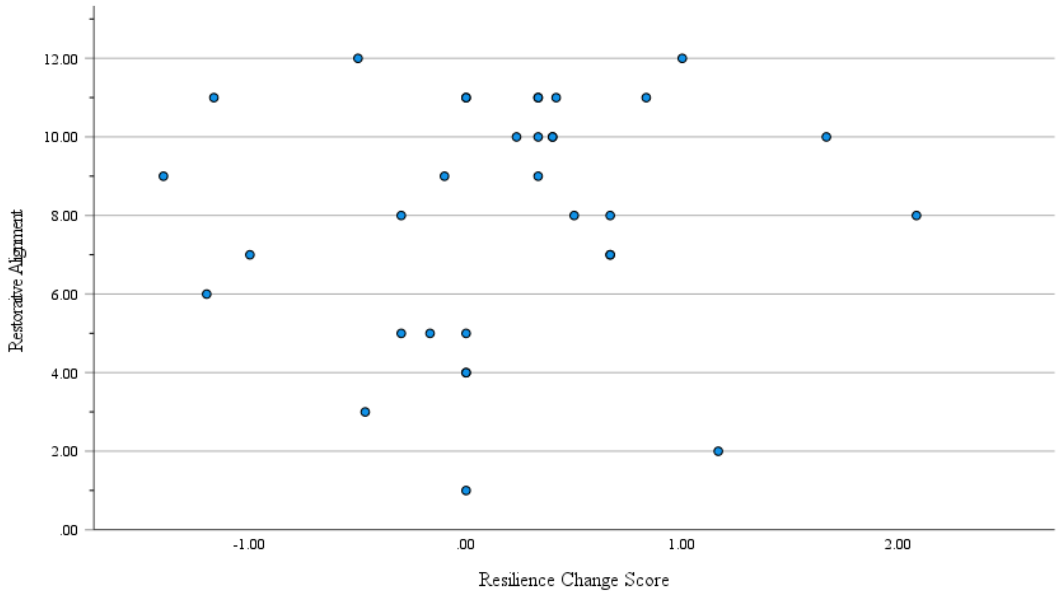
During my initial examination of the narratives during the coding process and simultaneous memo writing, I noticed that some students wrote about their own experiences rather than the experiences of a family member. After a break of two weeks, I returned to the narratives to review my codes and noticed that 17 students wrote about their own parent(s) or immediate guardian while only 14 discussed a more distant relative. The remaining students wrote factual information about their family or culture but didn't focus on a single story as requested. Additional categorization of these narratives will be discussed in Chapter 5. Deeper examination of these narratives, their elements, and relationship with restorative elements is beyond the scope of the current project, but merits future research.

Research Question 5: What are the relationships between the adherence of a narrative to restorative elements and students' levels of change in resilience, belonging, and mattering?

This question was attempted to be answered by comparing the sum score of alignment from research question four and a change score for each mental health correlate created by subtracting the pre-intervention score from the post-intervention score. For example, one student's narrative was given an alignment score of 11 by both myself and the secondary coder. This means that their narrative qualified as a restorative narrative and included affect. When comparing this student's pre-intervention and post-intervention scores, I discovered change in resilience (increase of 0.33), belonging (increase of 0.33), and mattering (increase of 0.20). To answer my fifth research question, I planned to look at the relationship of each student's alignment and three change scores. However, there was a lot of variability in change that occurred with students experiencing both increases and decreases in resilience, belonging, and mattering. For example, another student, who also received an alignment score of 11, reported a decrease of resilience, belonging, and mattering. In the end, the planned statistical analysis was not completed. After graphing the relationship between alignment and change on a scatter plot (Figure 2) it was obvious that there was no correlation between these two variables.

Figure 2

Sample of Scatter Plot Showing Relationship between Alignment and Change in Resilience.



Note. This figure shows the lack of relationship between the alignment score given to each narrative and the change reported in resilience from the pre-intervention survey and post-intervention survey. Similar charts were created for changes to belonging and mattering.

Overall, through the use of inferential and descriptive statistics, representative quotes, and thematic analysis I was able to answer the five research questions that drove this research project. Although the intervention implemented did not have a significant effect on the mental health correlates that I chose to study, there were important realizations and changes that happened in the lives of individual students. Further, important lessons were learned related to research methods and data collection. These lessons and future directions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effect of an intergenerational restorative narrative reflection intervention among college students. Specifically, I investigated the effects of the intervention on students' reported levels of resilience, general belonging, and mattering. Previous chapters have offered a comprehensive literature review, described the methods used, and presented the findings. The current chapter will discuss discrepancies and strengths in the data, review restorative narrative findings, connect these findings to previously discussed theories and concepts, highlight limitations of the current project, and make recommendations for future research and implementation.

Discrepancies and Strengths

As discussed in chapter 4, within the findings for RQs 1-3, there was no significant difference in the resilience (research question one), general belonging (research question two), or mattering (research question three) scores before and after the intervention when comparing the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys. However, many students reported that the intervention was effective for them personally, even though the assessment of their resilience, mattering, and belonging did not significantly change. This discrepancy was very interesting to me and I believed it warranted additional investigation. The open-ended questions on the post-intervention survey and the reflection sections of the intervention itself added a richness to the difference between what students believed about resilience, belonging, and mattering and

their self-report data. These data also provided evidence why the intervention may have not been effective.

I also discovered that in the retrospective data collected in the post-intervention survey and within the intervention reflection itself most students wrote about additional strengths they gained through this intervention that were not examined as part of this study. In my analysis, these were coded as additional adjectives mentioned in open-ended questions or as applications to their personal life discovered in their heritage reflection. Below I discuss the rationale for why the discrepancy in self-reported levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering and the belief that the intervention was effective might exist, evidence as to why the intervention may not have been effective, and additional strengths and lessons that students reported.

Discrepancy and Ineffective Intervention Evidence

There are many possible reasons why there was a difference between what students believed about the intervention and their actual change scores as well as why the intervention was ineffective in producing change. The most obvious of these being the difference in data collection methods. When presented with an opportunity to discuss and write about the intervention and its effects (both on the post-intervention survey and within the intervention itself) students wrote more positively about their experience and the belief they had that changes were made. However, when encountering pre-designed instruments within the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys students were more constricted in their answers and not given the opportunity to explain their answers. Also, when completing the post-intervention survey, students were not given their pre-

intervention levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering, and therefore unable to discuss any change.

Outside of my data collection methods, I was able to discover within reports evidence for four additional possible explanations. First, students were challenged by the assignment itself and were unable to complete it. Second, some students reported they already knew information or already had a high level of the concept being studied. Third, the intervention induced negative feelings and fourth, students believed their levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering were impervious to change.

Challenging Assignment. Some students wrote about difficulties in completing the assignment citing that it was "challenging" or "hard to find information." Other students struggled in making a connection between the relative(s) they wrote about and their own life. One such student wrote

> "I don't feel like anything has changed in reference to my level of mattering. People don't necessarily care about someone they don't know. I know that I matter to myself however, I may not matter as much to someone else."

Another student cited that they did see an immediate change in their level of resilience, but "the effect didn't last long."

I Already…A common response from students that showed little or no change between the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys was that their mental health was already high and therefore unaffected: "I think that I've always been somewhat resilient so this assignment didn't drastically change that but it was very inspirational" Similarly, other students wrote that the stories they used for the intervention were stories that they already knew and therefore they were ineffective:

> "I already know a lot about my family history mainly to the grandparent to great-great-grandparent level which I think is more than what most people know. This made this assignment a bit less impactful for me because the story I shared is one I have known for a long time and I know other family stories that have been shared with me."

Negative Feelings. Another explanation as to why students varied in their change between the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey was due to the intervention inducing negative feelings about family or self. I had expected, and prepared for, instances of students experiencing intergenerational trauma. However, I did not expect or prepare for the intervention to induce feelings of homesickness, guilt, or heritage based longing such as those expressed by students. One wrote that the intervention was isolating: "All the intervention really did for me was reflect on how people act around me compared to other people and how they seem so much closer to other people." Another mentioned the concept of white guilt as a reason the intervention was ineffective: "As a white person, my culture is basically always associated with atrocities committed like slavery, which makes it difficult to feel pride or want to be related to my previous generations." Another student reported that a focus on their family resulted in feeling more disconnected from their heritage:

> "I feel like the intergenerational restorative narrative helped me understand the story and struggles of my past but I also believe that it made me feel sad that not a lot has changed and my family is still struggling. I feel less connected with my German culture and old ways of life."

Finally, another student wrote that the intervention triggered feelings of conflict between them and their family: "I don't feel as if I belong anywhere because I am disliked by my family and have not adjusted well into college socially because of several reasons."

Cannot be Changed. Finally, some students reported the belief that their levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering cannot be changed. Some believed that the concepts themselves are unchangeable: "Resilience is something you are born with and it can't be changed." Others believed that the intervention was not powerful enough to invoke change, either due to the nature of the concept:

> "I feel like my level of resilience is still the same now as it was before the lecture and assignment. It took me a long time to build up the resilience I have and I don't think there is a lot that could change it,"

or due to the weakness of the intervention :

> "I feel like the assignment did not have an effect on my general belonging. I feel like I got my feelings out but at the end of the day, my story does not change the way other people accept me."

Additional Strengths and Lessons

Additional evidence of change in individual students' perceptions after the IRNR intervention can be found in the reported strengths gained from the activity that did not fall under the categories of resilience, belonging, and mattering. Many students in their intervention reflection response and post-intervention open-ended question responses listed attributes gained through participation in the intervention. Further, many students wrote about lessons that they learned and changes they wanted to make moving forward. Together, these responses provide evidence that the intervention did induce change, just not change that was manifested in my current empirical tests.

Strengths. When asked if the intervention affected students' levels of resilience, belonging, and mattering, many students wrote about additional attributes that were affected. Among those listed were: inspiration and encouragement (e.g., "Having the knowledge of where you came from and maybe depending on the hardships you went

through, provides a sense of encouragement,") strength and determination

> (e.g., "Learning about stories of my ancestors making it through difficult times provides me with a sense of strength and determinism. I know that I am capable of more than I sometimes feel like I am,")

being cared for

> (e.g., "It helped me switch up the way I was thinking and realize I am not worthless. That there are people who care for me and how I speak and act are valued,")

feeling proud (e.g., "This project also allowed me to learn more about my family. From that I have learned to be proud of where I came from and for the life I have that my Papa fought for,") feeling appreciative (e.g., "Looking at my family as a whole allowed me to appreciate every person who has got me to where I am today,"), and increasing familial closeness

> (e.g., "I would say that this story in particular has strengthened the relationship I have with my parents. After this whole ordeal, I realized just how strong my parents actually are because before this, I never really knew what they struggled with. I would say that learning about my family heritage in a more broad sense has overall made me feel closer to my entire family.")

Other students mentioned an increase in maturity, hope, patience, courage, drive, willpower, and motivation. Overall, for many students the IRNR intervention was effective in increasing levels of various attributes related to mental health.

Lessons Learned. The IRNR intervention itself asked students to discuss what they learned from the intergenerational/heritage narratives that they discovered. Data from these submissions provide evidence that the intervention was effective in changing

individual students' perception of themselves and concepts related to mental health. For example, many students wrote about a change of perspective due to the intervention. One student wrote:

> "My grandfather went through things that I can't even imagine! I take a lot of things for granted and just hearing his story changes my whole perspective on things. Hearing his story gives me hope that there's better days ahead and not to take anything for granted! His story also inspired me to persevere through my own challenges! I also tend to give up and take the easy way out of things but hearing his story makes me feel like a coward! I am hoping I can start persevering through my challenges."

Another student wrote about a change to their perspective related to life's problems:

> "It makes me think that if I can read about someone else's struggles that I'm connected to, it's easier to detach from my own struggles and look at the big picture rather than just thinking of my problems as a forever issue."

Finally, many students made direct comparisons between the lives of their ancestors and their own lives with "if they, then I" statements:

> "The strength that I draw from the story is work ethic and I apply it by saying if he could work hard enough to get where he is now from where he was then I can work hard on whatever obstacle I'm facing."

Understanding Restorative Narratives

My fourth research question asked how closely students' narratives adhered to the restorative qualifiers described by Ray et al. (2019) and Fitzgerald et al. (2020). Chapter four reported that 21 (63.6%) narratives met all the qualifications to be labeled "restorative." A previous cycle of research conducted in Fall of 2021 resulted in the creation of additional categories of narratives outside of those labeled "restorative." During this cycle of research I conducted a brief survey at the beginning of my Fall 2021 course asking students questions about their heritage and to retell a family story. Purposely, in contrast to my current study, there were not a lot of qualifiers given to

students. I wanted to know the types of stories they would report without having restorative elements as their guide. To follow up this survey I also conducted three interviews with students in which I asked them to retell the story and elaborate. Both of these data results were downloaded into a word document to be further analyzed. The purpose of this small study was to understand the types of stories students tell without significant prompting or guidance. In other words, I was interested to know how natural restorative narrative telling was. I collected and re-coded 85 narratives, out of which only 10 qualified as “restorative” according to Fitzgerald et al (2019). From this process I separated other narratives into five additional categories. The additional 12 narratives in my current dissertation project (those not categorized as restorative) fit into four of these categories.

Hollow narratives described obstacles (in varying levels of detail) and eventual progression without explaining how the obstacle was overcome. Eight of the narratives I examined in my current study fit under this category. An Incomplete narrative describes an obstacle and how it was overcome, but does not include the element of progression that is key to a narrative being described as restorative. One narrative from my current study was placed in this category. The author describes the hardship of immigrating to America and not having work. The author describes how the relative got a job at the railroad but then moves to another relative's story without explaining how the railroad job eventually led to the problem being overcome and the person progressing on. Two narratives were categorized as “Thriving.” A Thriving narrative is missing the obstacle and only focuses on the progression and good parts of the story. One student wrote about their relative’s proselytizing mission trip in detail, but did not describe any hardship or

weakness to be overcome. The final categorization that fit within my current project was historical. This type of narrative lacks all elements of a restorative narrative and instead describes historical events or cultural practices without telling a story. One narrative fit into this category and described Native American beliefs and practices. The categorization that did not appear in the current project was "troubled." A Troubled narrative describes only a weakness or obstacle without a response or progression.

Overall, the majority of students in the current project presented narratives that fit into the categorization of "restorative" as described in Appendix F. The other narratives fit into groupings used in a previous cycle of research. With additional guidance and instruction from a teacher, I believe that all students can discover and write narratives that include all restorative elements.

Connections to Theories and Concepts

In this section I will discuss how my investigation of intergenerational restorative narratives affected students' levels of resilience, general belonging, and mattering informed my understanding of the major concepts discussed in chapter two. First, this information changes how mental health among college students is understood and defined. Second, the current study adds to the base of knowledge surrounding the use of restorative narratives. Finally, the data gathered helps to better understand the influence of intergenerational self on resilience, belonging, and mattering.

Mental Health

Mental health, for the purpose of this study, has been defined as an internal equilibrium that allows a student to cope with external stressors, maintain a level of emotional stability, and make a meaningful contribution to their community (Galderisi et

al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2005). Although this definition could be interpreted as vague, I believe that specificity of what is counted or not counted as positive mental health for a student could potentially leave out student populations that experience mental health differently from their peers. As I continue in future cycles of research beyond my current dissertation project and focus more on specific groups on campus, I expect my definition of mental health to change alongside my student sample. As mentioned in Chapter 1, interventions related to mental health have been divided into two categories: first, interventions that target specific mental health symptoms (e.g. depression, anxiety, etc.) and second, interventions that target correlates of mental health. The focus of my intervention was in the second category as I attempted to use intergenerational restorative narratives to affect the mental health correlates of resilience, belonging, and mattering. As discussed previously, I was unable to provoke significant perceived change to these concepts among my undergraduate students. However, through this process I have learned valuable information about the mental health of my students.

I chose resilience, belonging, and mattering as the mental health correlates to focus on. This choice was made by examining previous literature and finding these topics to be frequent targets of interventions in higher education. Further, these concepts also had intersections with intergenerational self. However, the current research enforced the previously mentioned idea from Chapter 1 that mental health is dependent on the culture and setting in which it is being discussed (Galderisi et al., 2015). Due to students' defining mental health differently, it is possible that the students' mental health was affected by the IRNR intervention in ways that were not empirically measured. In fact, many students mentioned mental health changes in their reflections such as this student:

> "I see many similarities between the narrative and my current life. I have had to overcome many obstacles in my life so far, some of which include mental health struggles and financial struggles. I see similarities in how I try to deal with these obstacles and how my grandpa did many decades ago. We both have stayed dedicated to what we believe in and work hard for what we have."

Restorative Narratives Lead to Action

Chapter three explained that a common intervention used within higher education institutions is the restorative narrative. These stories must focus on strength in overcoming an obstacle and highlight progression (Ray et al., 2019). Previous research has found that this type of intervention is effective in changing student behavior (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013; Holdsworth et al., 2018). Further, the ability for restorative narratives to change behavior is dependent on the emotional significance of the narrative and its alignment with personal experiences (Dahlstrom, 2014; McLean, 2005; Pals, 2006; Ray et al., 2019). The goal of my current project was to investigate if student derived restorative narratives, which were assumed to have higher emotional significance, had similar effects in changing behavior.

Although there was no statistically significant change reported by students through the comparison of pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys, many students wrote about changes they wanted to make in the future because of the intervention. One student wrote:

> "I used to loathe going to family events or having to travel to see my relatives (most of my dad's side lives in Alaska and most of my mom's lives in Minnesota so we have to travel to see relatives), but now it is one of the things I look forward to the most."

Others wrote about their desire to have more perseverance or to fight harder, writing,

> "I can draw a lot of strength from my family's stories as most of them had to move from Mexico to the United States to try to live a better life. Just knowing

> how much they struggled to get here to be able to give me a better life makes me feel strong and proud. I am a first gen student and also first gen American and it makes me proud to know that I am living the life that my ancestors were praying for for the future generations to live. It makes me fight harder for everything in life to make those around me proud and accomplishes knowing that they were able to provide me with a good life."

These reports provide evidence that student behaviors and ideas were changed in response to the intervention. This evidence supports the concept that restorative narratives influence change.

Intergenerational Self Increases Resilience and Belonging

Intergenerational self, as described in previous chapters, is "a self that is defined as much by one's place in familial history as a personal past" (Fivush et al., 2010, p. 132). Chapter 2 discussed that previous research point to relationships, either directly or indirectly measured, between the level of intergenerational self a person has and resilience (Driessnack, 2017; Fivush et al., 2010; Reiser, 2012), and intergenerational self and belonging (Reiser, 2012). Previous research had not explored the correlation between intergenerational self and mattering. The current research attempted to explore these connections by investigating the effects of increasing intergenerational self (through the IRNR intervention) on the resilience, belonging, and mattering of college students.

Previous sections of this chapter have discussed the effects of the narrative on resilience, belonging, and mattering with evidence relying primarily on representative quotes from students' reports. However, as will be discussed in the next section, there was a significant limitation of not directly measuring intergenerational self due to a lack of measurement tools.

Limitations

This action research dissertation had a number of limitations that affected my ability to fully answer my research questions. In an effort to be transparent in my research methodology and therefore create an accurate report for readers, I discuss three categories of limitations. First, there were issues in my sample size and sampling technique. Second, I discuss the validity of my measures. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of my own research lens.

Sampling

The primary limitation was related to class size and the completion rate. Out of a class of almost 400 students, only 33 completed all three parts of the intervention and made their data available to me. This small sample size affected my ability to accurately assess the statistical significance of change from pre-intervention survey to post. Further, there are concerns about the biases related to who chose to participate in all three parts of my study (pre-intervention survey, intervention, and post-intervention survey. All students had access to all three parts but yet only a very small portion self-selected to engage in all three. Although key demographics of my sample, such as sex, race, and age, were very similar to their peers who did not participate in my research, I am sure that there were key differences among those who chose to persevere through all three requirements and those who completed only some or none. Future research would benefit from additional follow up among students to ensure that all parts of the study were completed.

Measurement Validity

The second limitation was an issue of measurement validity. There is a significant lack of previous research related to intergenerational self and college students. As far as I understand, this research project was the first to investigate restorative narratives using student derived intergenerational stories. Although previous research investigated restorative narratives and intergenerational self as separate concepts, I was unable to find instances of using both concepts to change behavior. This created a limitation in my ability to choose appropriate measurements. As mentioned earlier, I did not directly assess intergenerational self and therefore I am unable to report whether the activity that my students completed increased or decreased intergenerational self. Similarly, this research is built upon the idea that restorative narratives that come from intergenerational stories result in an increased level of emotional significance for the student. This also was not measured and in fact some students reported that they had no connection at all to the person in their story.

As mentioned previously, the definition of mental health is dependent on the culture and setting in which it is being discussed and differs from person to person (Galderisi et al., 2015). This was made clear in this research as many students commented on aspects of mental health within their responses that were not connected to the concepts I directly measured (resilience, belonging, and mattering). This discrepancy between differences in definitions of mental health decreased the validity of the measurements I was using to research mental health.

Researcher Lens

The final limitation was my own research lens. As mentioned previously, I have experienced an increase of my own mental health through the discovery and exploration of familial stories. However, growing up with access to these stories has made this transformation simple. In my mind, there was a simple connection between family and mental health benefits. Although I completed smaller cycles of research leading up to this dissertation and asked students to review my materials, questions, and expectations, my own bias of family ties influenced how I presented the project and also how I assessed the results. This lens influenced many parts of my research. It is also important to mention that "qualitative analysis can lead to multiple solutions" (Levitt, 2020, p.87). Another reader of my qualitative reports could discover equally rigorous findings on the same or additional topics.

Future Cycles of Research and Practice

One of the foundations of action research is the concept that a single research project is only a part of a larger path, each cycle informing the next (Trunk Sirca & Shapiro, 2007). This current dissertation project was preceded by previous cycles of research discussed earlier and will inform future research projects and in-class applications. First, future research will look more widely at other institutional programs and courses such as classes on campus that focus on resilience as a part of their curriculum or are populated by students who initially struggle with mental health correlates. Second, research will look deeper into the intervention output to better understand its effect and racial differences in my data. Third, this project informs changes

to in-class assignments in future semesters. Finally, I will discuss additional opportunities to use student narratives to benefit students.

Looking Wider

The research was founded on the idea that current interventions using restorative narratives to change behavior were limited due to the broadness of the narrative. I proposed that strengthening the emotional connection a student has to a narrative by using intergenerational stories would have a greater impact on levels of mental health correlates. Naturally, the next step in my research would be to add more comparison groups. Future research would benefit from comparing the IRNR intervention with current restorative narrative interventions at my institution. Further, there are additional research projects being conducted on the use of restorative narratives that would benefit from my own findings on intergenerational self. A major component of action research, especially in examining wicked problems such as mental health, is the involvement of additional stakeholders within the organization (Jordan, Kleinsasser, & Roe, 2014). With this in mind, it will be important to discuss my findings with other student focused organizations and faculty on campus for the benefit of my local context.

Looking Deeper

This research warrants additional exploration of the narratives that students submitted. Although this work was beyond the scope of my current project, future research would benefit by exploring narrative themes more closely. For example, what type of obstacles or weaknesses are most common among students' stories? Are there themes in how these weaknesses are overcome and do those themes relate to the amount of change that students reported? Better understanding the restorative elements of a

narrative has the potential to clarify how to use the intervention more successfully in the future.

Further, future research would also benefit from additional exploration of racial or cultural differences within the results of the IRNR intervention. Previous research attempting to increase mental health correlates has often focused on a single or only a few races (e.g. Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Wolf, Perkins, Butler-Barnes, & Walker, 2017). Similarly, in my own experience talking with students about their family and culture I have found that there are differences in the importance of family and heritage between students based on their culture. I have also discovered that there are limitations to what can be discussed about family among some cultures. For example, one student in a previous cycle of research wrote in response to asking for a heritage based narrative that they were only able to speak about their ancestors when "there is snow on the ground." Understanding these differences will help me to better target my intervention to groups that may benefit from it the most.

Changes to Class Assignments

Moving forward, my course will incorporate the IRNR intervention as a normal part of the course. I believe there were enough individual benefits to students that this experience should continue for those who want to participate. However, learning from this cycle of research I will make changes to how the lesson and assignment are presented and how it is assessed. Rather than incorporate this lesson into a current lecture it will become a separate breakout session for students to attend. This will allow more time to discuss the concepts of intergenerational self and restorative narratives. Further, moving forward I will not require all students to participate in this project as a graded assignment.

In examining the responses within the current project, students who were engaged in the assignment reported more impact. Limiting this project to only those students who have a desire to learn and discover may result in a more positive result.

Additional Opportunities

Moving forward past this current dissertation experience I hope to continue my work with students and their discovery of restorative narratives. Henrikson and Mishra (2019) discuss that there are two pathways of research engagement and dissemination. These two pathways are scholarly and practitioner. There is a gap between research and practical applications that is often increased by researchers only participating in narrow types of engagement. I feel that my research project has value for both of these groups and I can play to the strengths of certain types of knowledge mobilization within both of these categories. On my scholarly path I will implement additional studies within my local context and present a poster at a local student success conference. As a practitioner I will create a student narrative based podcast and contribute to the international RootsTech conference in 2023. Within each of these experiences I will need to gather stakeholders, design specific goals, and create a mechanism for assessment. Overall, I hope to keep my passion for student mental health and intergenerational narratives alive through these future projects.

Conclusion

The trend of increasing mental health issues for undergraduate students is an often-discussed topic in higher education research. College students become the backbone of society as they graduate, start families, and enter the workforce. In an effort to increase the mental health of students on campus, many institutions have implemented

university-wide interventions that ask students to engage with written or visual models. I have proposed that this large scale intervention that uses a one-size-fits all narrative is leaving behind important students on campus who do not relate to the written or video narratives that are often used in these settings.

My research was built upon the foundation that one, restorative narratives can spur change among college students and two, increasing intergenerational self-knowledge can increase mental health correlates. With these two principles in mind I created an intervention that hopes to increase the emotional connection a student has to a restorative narrative (to increase its effectiveness) by asking students in a classroom setting to discover intergenerational narratives. Although I was unable to find statistically significant changes for the group of students that I worked with, I was able to find individual positive changes that made a difference in the lives of some students. Moving forward, this dissertation research will inform future cycles of research in investigating comparisons to other restorative narrative interventions as well as look deeper into the reported narratives of students.

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APPENDIX A

BRIEF RESILIENCE SCALE

Please respond to each item by marking one box per row		1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
1	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times					
2	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.					
3	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.					
4	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.					
5	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.					
6	I tend to take a long time to get over set-backs in my life.					

Scoring: Items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse coded. Add the responses varying from 1-5 for all six items giving a range from 6-30. Divide the total sum by the total number of questions answered.

Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: assessing the ability to bounce back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 15*(3), 194-200.

APPENDIX B

THE GENERAL BELONGINGNESS SCALE

Please respond to each item by marking one box per row		1 - Strongly Disagree	2 - Disagree	3 - Neutral	4 - Agree	5 - Strongly Agree
1	When I am with other people I feel included.					
2	I have close bonds with family and friends.					
3	I feel like an outsider.					
4	I feel as if people don't care about me.					
5	I feel accepted by others.					
6	Because I do not belong, I feel distant during the holiday season.					
7	I feel isolated from the rest of the world.					
8	I have a sense of belonging.					
9	When I am with other people, I feel like a stranger.					
10	I have a place at the table with others.					
11	I feel connected with others.					
12	Friends and family do not involve me in their plans.					

Scoring: Items 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 12 are reverse coded. Add the responses varying from 1-5 for all 12 items giving a range from 12 - 60. Divide the total sum by the total number of questions answered.

Malone, G. P., Pillow, D. R., & Osman, A. (2012). The general belongingness scale (GBS): Assessing achieved belongingness. *Personality and individual differences*, *52*(3), 311-316.

APPENDIX C

GENERAL MATTERING SCALE

Aside from specific individuals…		1 – Not at all	2 – A little	3 – Somewhat	4 – Very much
1	How important do you feel you are to other people?				
2	How much do you feel other people pay attention to you?				
3	How much do you feel others would miss you if you went away?				
4	How interested are people generally, in what you have to say?				
5	How much do people depend on you?				

Scoring: Add the responses varying from 1-4 for all five items giving a range from 5 - 20. Divide the total sum by the total number of questions answered.

Marcus, F. M. (1991). Mattering: Its measurement and theoretical significance for social psychology. In *annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Association, Cincinnati, OH*.

APPENDIX D

INTERGENERATIONAL NARRATIVE ASSIGNMENT

Research has shown that students who have knowledge and connections to their family and cultural heritage have better outcomes in life and school. We are going to examine this connection through exploring your own familial and/or cultural history. My hope is that as you engage in this process you will discover models of resilience and belonging in your own family or culture.

Instructions:
Find a story within your own heritage of a person or people who overcame a struggle. Use the space below to retell the story, answer questions about your process, and how this activity influenced you as a student. **Not all of us know about our biological family**. However, each of us has a heritage. Finding a story in your heritage can also include struggles and triumphs experienced by your culture or race. You are welcome to use stories from biological, adopted, or ethnic ancestors for this assignment. Knowledge, reflection, and connection to each of these events can have a positive impact on you while in college. The more personal the story is to you, the better.

As discussed in class, the type of story we are looking for should fall under the category of a "restorative narrative." This means that your story should include the following characteristics:

1. The narrative included an obstacle or weakness to overcome. The obstacle or weakness is listed and given sufficient detail to understand why it is an obstacle.
2. The narrative showed how a person responded to challenges they faced during this event, listing specific actions the person took in immediate response to the obstacle
3. The narrative showed how the person was successful in overcoming or resolving the challenge(s) described. The narrative shows how the obstacle or weakness was solved and what actions were taken.
4. The narrative showed progression or moving forward past the obstacle or weakness. The narrative includes information about the future of the person beyond the challenge, and how the obstacle or weakness changed the person moving forward.

Finding a Story:
Some of us can recall stories from our heritage easily. We've grown up learning from relatives or caregivers about our ancestors, their trials, and triumphs. Others need to dig a little in order to connect with our past. Below you will find a few activities that will help you discover stories that you can use for this assignment.

- Interview a family member or caregiver.
    - A simple Google search can lead to a large amount of interview questions that you could ask a grandparent or caregiver. Try to focus your questions to discover examples of struggle.
- Explore ancestry websites such as familysearch.org, FindMyPast.com, MyHeritage.com, or Ancestry.com

    - The largest common family tree can be found on the free site: www.familysearch.org. This site will require that you make an account and enter in information about the family you know about. Once you have connected to the shared family tree you can access a lot of information that will help you find narratives. (https://www.familysearch.org/discovery/explore/).
- Take a tour of an older relative, caregiver or ancestor's home
    - Many people in our heritage hold on to items of significant value. Many of these items are tied to stories. By asking a family member or member of your cultural heritage to show you these items may lead to stories you didn't know.
- Read the journal or writing of a member of your family or racial history
- Search for stories online using your last name and "story"
    - You may be surprised what you can find out about your family through a simple Google search. Although you might not find direct ancestors from this method, the narratives and experience you find will be based on people you have connections to

In the space below, retell the story. Please be as detailed as possible. Focus on how the person in your story experienced struggle and what they did to overcome this struggle. Focus your story more on experiences and less on location. You may discover that your grandmother emigrated from Germany in 1944, but learning about her experience traveling during WWII or how she was accepted in American culture will benefit you more than knowing where she lived. Your story may vary in length, but the more detail provided the better.

Answer the following questions about your experience:

1. Tell me about your process. How did you discover this story? What barriers did you find in this process?

2. What similarities do you see between what you learned from your narrative and your life today?

3. What transferable strengths can you draw from your heritage story? In other words, how does reading about your family or heritage give you strength in your own challenges?

4. What did you learn about **resilience** that can be applied to your life as a student? Resilience is a trait or skill distinguished by the ability to recover or gain strength after adversity

5. What did you learn about **belonging** that can be applied to your life as a student? Belonging is defined as a sense of involvement in the environment or the world around you and is not tied to a specific place or situation.

6. What did you learn about **mattering** that can be applied to your life as a student? Mattering is defined as the feeling that we exist for a purpose and people depend on us.

7. How can this activity be improved for use in future courses?

APPENDIX E

INTERGENERATIONAL STRENGTH AND NARRATIVES LECTURE

Outline

- Ask students to think of their lives as a conglomerate of stories
    - Autobiographical Reasoning
        - We look back on our life and our present experience and create our own story
    - How has your family or heritage influenced these stories?
- Define Heritage
    - What is heritage?
- Define Intergenerational Self
    - The idea that when we think of who we are, we not only include information from our own lives, but also the lives of our ancestors
        - Those we know and those we don't know
        - Most people have some evidence of where they came from in the color of their skin, who their parents are, grandparents, last names, etc.
        - We are not independent people, we are the result of thousands of years of genetic history and culture
    - So how can we increase our intergenerational self?
        - Ancestor effect
        - Do you know scale
        - Example from finding your roots
    - These types of stories are called restorative narratives
- Define Restorative Narratives
    - Specific label given to stories that show how people progressed through and overcame an obstacle
        - Example from Student Resilience Project
        - Example of family history
            - Red flaggers
            - Example from previous semester narratives
    - Show rubric for identifying restorative narratives
        - The narrative included an obstacle or weakness to overcome. The obstacle or weakness is listed and given sufficient detail to understand why it is an obstacle.
        - The narrative showed how a person responded to challenges they faced during this event, listing specific actions the person took in immediate response to the obstacle
        - The narrative showed how the person was successful in overcoming or resolving the challenge(s) described. The narrative shows how the obstacle or weakness was solved and what actions were taken.
        - The narrative showed progression or moving forward past the obstacle or weakness. The narrative includes information about the future of the person beyond the challenge, and how the obstacle or weakness changed the person moving forward.

- Where do we find narratives?
    - Asking questions
        - “What struggles have our family faced in the past?”
        - “Can you tell me more about...?”
            - When you went through a hard time?
            - When you faced an illness
            - When you started college
            - When you started your first job
            - When our family immigrated
    - Family documents or heirlooms
    - Family history sites
    - Reading a book about your heritage or culture
    - Google your last name and “family story”
        - Do this in class and find a story
- Intergenerational Trauma
    - Currently, the American Psychological Association describes it as “a phenomenon in which the descendants of a person who has experienced a terrifying event show adverse emotions and behavioral reactions to the event that are similar to those of the person him/herself.”
    - Where there is trauma there often is progression
        - Focusing on this
        - Re-writing the trauma
- Introduce Assignment
    - How to find your own narratives
    - How to complete the assignment through Blackboard Learn
        - Turn in two separate assignments
            - Narrative
            - Survey within Blackboard
    - How student data will be used
        - Options within assignment to decline
            - Full participant
            - Partial
            - Assignment only
- Answer Questions
- Get Feedback on Lecture

APPENDIX F

RESTORATIVE NARRATIVE ELEMENTS AND CRITERIA

1. The narrative included an obstacle or weakness to overcome. The obstacle or weakness is listed and given sufficient detail to understand why it is an obstacle.
    - 0 - Obstacle or weakness is not named
    - 1 - obstacle or weakness is named, but no additional detail is provided
    - 2 - obstacle or weakness is named, detail is given describing obstacle but not how it affected person in narrative
    - 3 - obstacle or weakness is named, detail is given describing obstacle and how it affects person in narrative
2. The narrative showed how a person responded to challenges they faced during this event, listing specific actions the person took in immediate response to the obstacle
    - 0 - no immediate response is recorded
    - 1- an immediate response is recorded, but there are no additional details
    - 2 - an immediate response is recorded, details are given but emotion related words are missing
    - 3 - an immediate response is recorded, details are given and emotion words are used
3. The narrative showed how the person was successful in overcoming or resolving the challenge(s) described. The narrative shows how the obstacle or weakness was solved and what actions were taken.
    - 0 - narrative does not include the person overcoming or resolving the obstacle

- 1 - narrative includes the person overcoming or resolving the obstacle, but no additional details are given
- 2 - narrative includes the person overcoming or resolving the obstacle, additional details are given on how it was accomplished but does not discuss how the resolution affected the person
- 3 - narrative includes the person overcoming or resolving the obstacle, additional details are given on how it was accomplished and how the resolution affected the person

4. The narrative showed progression or moving forward past the obstacle or weakness. The narrative includes information about the future of the person beyond the challenge, and how the obstacle or weakness changed the person moving forward.
    - 0 - narrative does not include progression past the obstacle or weakness or a focus on moving forward
    - 1 - narrative includes mention of person moving forward past resolution of obstacle but not details are given
    - 2 - narrative includes mention of person moving forward past resolution of obstacle and contains details without emotion related words
    - 3 - narrative includes mention of person moving forward past resolution of obstacle and contains details including emotion related words

Restorative Narrative alignment can range from 0 to 12.

This rubric is adapted from Ray et al.'s (2019) and Fitzgerald et al.'s (2020) descriptions for restorative narrative categorization.

APPENDIX G

IRB INFORMATION

NAU NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY
Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board for the
Human Research Protection Program

525 S Beaver St
PO Box: 4062
Flagstaff AZ 86011
928-523-9551
https://www.nau.edu/IRB

To:	Jason Whetten
From:	NAU IRB Office
Date:	January 20, 2022
Project:	Transferable Strength: The Effects of Intergenerational Restorative Narratives
Project Number:	1858677-1
Submission:	Other
Review Level:	Ceded Review
Action:	APPROVED
Project Status:	ACTIVE - OPEN TO ENROLLMENT
Next Report Date:	

Arizona State University IRB: When an institution is the designated IRB of record, the NAU IRB will not review the project. The Northern Arizona University agrees that it will rely on the review, approval, and continuing oversight by the Institution IRB/ASU IRB of those protocols approved by the institution.

- Northern Arizona University maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #0000357).
- The Principal Investigator should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that affect the LOCAL protocol and report any LOCAL unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others. Please refer to Guidance Single IRB Review for more information.
- All research procedures should be conducted according to the approved protocol and the policies and guidance of the IRB of record.

This project has been reviewed and approved by an IRB Chair or designee.

Important

The principal investigator for this study is responsible for obtaining all necessary approvals before commencing research. Please be sure that you have satisfied applicable external and University requirements, for example (but not limited to) data repositories, listserv permission, records request, data use agreement, conducting University surveys, data security, international, conflicts of interest, biological safety, radiation safety, HIPAA, FERPA, FDA, sponsor approval, clinicaltrials.gov, tribal consultation, or school approval. IRB approval does not convey approval to commence research in the event that other requirements have not been satisfied.

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Andrea Weinberg
Division of Teacher Preparation - Tempe
-
Andrea.Weinberg@asu.edu

Dear Andrea Weinberg:

On 1/13/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Transferable Strength: The Effects of Intergenerational Restorative Narratives on Student Resilience, Belonging, and Mattering
Investigator:	Andrea Weinberg
IRB ID:	STUDY00015201
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Assignment Instructions, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Incomplete Site Authorization Form - Waiting for ASU IRB, Category: Off-site authorizations (school permission, other IRB approvals, Tribal permission etc); • Post-Intervention Survey, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Pre-intervention Survey, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Protocol , Category: IRB Protocol; • Recruitment Script , Category: Recruitment Materials; • Whetten CITI Completion 1, Category: Non-ASU human subjects training (if taken within last 3 years to grandfather in); • Whetten CITI Tutorial Completion 2, Category: Non-ASU human subjects training (if taken within last 3 years to grandfather in);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (1) Educational settings, (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 1/11/2022.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

REMINDER - - Effective January 12, 2022, in-person interactions with human subjects require adherence to all current policies for ASU faculty, staff, students and visitors. Up-to-date information regarding ASU's COVID-19 Management Strategy can be found here. IRB approval is related to the research activity involving human subjects, all other protocols related to COVID-19 management including face coverings, health checks, facility access, etc. are governed by current ASU policy.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Jason Whetten