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The past that shapes the future:

Intergenerational stories transmitted and remembered in the family

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David Baudet

Promoteur :
Dr. Christine BASTIN

Co-promoteur :
Dr. Aline CORDONNIER

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Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences

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David Baudet

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Member of the jury:

Christine BASTIN

Aline CORDONNIER

Arnaud D'ARGEMBEAU

Marie GEURTEN

Olivier LUMINET

Susan BLUCK

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"Avant, pourtant, je me suis bien rongé d'avoir l'air ridicule. Pas d'avoir l'air, d'être. J'ai toujours été ridicule, et je le sais, peut-être, depuis le jour de ma naissance. J'avais sept ans, peut-être, je savais déjà que j'étais ridicule. Après, je suis allé à l'école, après, à l'université, et quoi ? - plus j'apprenais des choses, plus je n'en apprenais qu'une, que j'étais ridicule. Si bien qu'à la fin, toute ma science universitaire, pour moi, c'était comme si elle n'était là que pour une chose, pour me prouver et m'expliquer, au fur et à mesure que je l'approfondissais, que j'étais ridicule."

Fiodor Dostoïevski,
Le Rêve d'un homme ridicule,
traduction André Markowicz

"In old days I used to be miserable at seeming ridiculous. Not seeming, but being. I have always been ridiculous, and I have known it, perhaps, from the hour I was born. Perhaps from the time I was seven years old I knew I was ridiculous. Afterwards I went to school, studied at the university, and, do you know, the more I learned, the more thoroughly I understood that I was ridiculous. So that it seemed in the end as though all the sciences I studied at the university existed only to prove and make evident to me as I went more deeply into them that I was ridiculous."

Fiodor Dostoïevski,
The Dream of a Ridiculous Man,
translated by Constance Garnett (1917, public domain)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Mais elle m'avait décrit cet incident longtemps auparavant. Était-ce en provenance de sa mémoire, ou simplement la reconstruction que j'en avais faite ?
≪ Ma mémoire. Je pense. Ou peut-être ma reconstruction. Tu sais, la moitié du temps, quand je t'ai raconté quelque chose qui m'est arrivé avant notre rencontre, le souvenir de la narration est devenu bien plus vivace que l'événement proprement dit. Presqu'au point de prendre sa place. ≫".

Greg Egan,
"Plus près de toi", dans *Axiomatique* (p. 463)

If you were asked to write your autobiography, where would you begin? At your birth, before it, or with your oldest memory? And what would readers take away from your story? Would it be the same story if you wrote it for your friends, your family, or a general audience? Our daily lives are made up of countless moments, which we have to make sense of and organize. We daydream about past (and future) events in an effort to connect the finite yet innumerable experiences that make up a lifetime into a coherent whole. This active effort may not always be conscious, but it is essential for our identity.

What eventually becomes our autobiography (our memories, the meaning we make of them, and the ways we narrate and weave them into a broader story) is, like most things, deeply inherited. Stories heard early in life can stay with us for decades. Their meaning may evolve with new experiences, changing needs, or different stages of life, yet the stories themselves persist, shaping how we understand the world. The way we perceive ourselves and our surroundings is influenced by large systemic factors, such as sociocultural context, social class, or historical time period, as well as by smaller-scale influences, such as early friendships, and, of course, family. In this work, we focus on the latter: the family. We

explore what memories older generations transmit to younger ones, and which memories are preserved, transformed, or perhaps forgotten by those who follow.

Of course, an autobiography is not meant to unravel every factor that has shaped who we are by the time we tell our story. Yet, some external influences seem meaningful enough to be acknowledged. Suppose someone asked, "Why do you cycle to work?" Many answers could come to mind: "It's better for the environment and improves my mood" or "Public transport in Liège is a nightmare." Still, another answer would quickly follow: "I grew up watching my father cycle to work every day, and one of the few things I know about my grandfather is that he used to travel across France on his bicycle." These stories about my grandfather fascinated me as a child and left a mark on why I now enjoy cycling. The life stories of our parents and grandparents often intertwine with our own autobiographies, prompting us to wonder how much of "our story" truly belongs to us.

Stories about my paternal grandfather being threatened by Nazis to reveal his father's hiding place and later sent to fight resistance forces in Algeria also shaped my political views. They offered me a scope to better understand social events occurring around me and bridged the historical to the personal. Even though we know such stories from the past are often romanticized, their value does not depend on factual accuracy. The purpose of creating a narrative is not precision, but coherence: the ability to give meaning to experiences and connect them into a sensible whole.

This coherence often comes together through inner dialogues or through discussions with others. Memory plays a central role in our social lives: it fuels conversation, helps us get closer to one another, and shapes where and with whom we feel we belong. For groups as much as for individuals, shared stories can become something that marks who is part of the group and what being part of it means. In any conversation, the person telling a story has their own reasons for choosing that particular memory and for telling it in that particular way. The person listening brings their own worries and interests and may walk away with a very different version of what the story was about.

Yet, even though we share memories all the time, we actually know surprisingly little about how stories travel across generations within families. We do not fully understand which memories older generations decide to tell, nor what younger generations keep from those stories. Parents might repeat the same episode again and again as a kind of life lesson, like the time they were attacked by seagulls on the beach and now refuse to walk with food near the sea, but what stays with us could simply be the image of our mother running away from a flock of birds.

There is still much to learn about the kinds of events parents and grandparents feel are worth telling, and about how these stories change as they are passed on and reinterpreted. Just as importantly, we do not yet know enough about what children and grandchildren really take from these narratives. This thesis seeks to address several open questions. Do people perceive intergenerational transmission of memory as frequent in their familial life? What motivates parents and grandparents to share their stories, and what leads children or grandchildren to remember them? Beyond these motivations, we also ask how such memories are emotionally experienced by both transmitters and receivers, and which features (phenomenology, elaboration, centrality, functions, emotions) make a story more likely to be transmitted and remembered across generations.

This thesis adopts a functional approach (in its adaptive sense) to memory, emphasizing its constructive nature and the central role of narration. Far from being a passive archive of past events, memory is an active process shaped by motives, social contexts, and relational needs. Like other cognitive processes, autobiographical memory is inherently adaptive: it helps individuals make sense of their experiences while responding to socially shaped expectations. In my view, autobiographical and intergenerational memories play a crucial part in this process: they do not simply preserve what happened, but continuously reshape how we understand who we are and where we come from.

The thesis is organized into two main parts: a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical introduction, spread over three chapters, adopts this functional perspective on autobiographical memory to argue for expanding the concept to include vicarious memories. The first chapter presents autobiographical memory, outlining its main characteristics, models, and uses, and arguing for a dynamic and constructive view. The second chapter explores remembering through others, highlighting vicarious memory and the foundational role of family relationships in shaping narrative identity. The third chapter turns to the act of transmitting, examining storytelling as a social and generative process that sustains intergenerational bonds and contributes to individual and collective well-being.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the empirical part of this thesis comprises four studies, each addressing a distinct aspect of intergenerational memory transmission. Study 1 examines how frequently memory transmission is perceived across generations, distinguishing between parents and children on the one hand, and grandparents and grandchildren on the other, while also contrasting personal and public events. Study 2 investigates the functions of these transmitted memories, comparing how transmitters and receivers

perceive the purpose of these narratives. Study 3 turns to the emotional dimension of transmission, analyzing how stories are experienced and remembered in terms of intensity, valence, and discrete emotions across generational roles. Finally, Study 4 integrates these perspectives by examining the phenomenological qualities, centrality, functions, and emotions of memories to identify the predictors of successful transmission. Together, these studies offer a portrait of how memories circulate within families, the roles they fulfill, and the bonds they strengthen between generations.

Chapter 2

Theoretical introduction

Stories of my father crossing the Sahara by car and of my mother's early days working in logistics for a crooked boss have long shaped how I picture their lives and my own. Such family narratives show how the past continues to echo through our everyday experience. In both life and science, we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us.

2.1 Chapter 1: Autobiographical memory

2.1.1 Defining autobiographical memory

The study of autobiographical memory (AM) has a long and varied history. Early on, William James laid the groundwork for modern conceptions of AM by underscoring memory's central role in sustaining personal identity (James, 1890). Yet it was not until the late twentieth century that AM acquired its contemporary definition. Early cognitive theories, particularly Tulving's account of episodic memory (Tulving et al., 1972), initially described AM as a subset of episodic memory. However, as psychological and social perspectives on cognition and identity evolved, contemporary models have shifted toward a more dynamic and integrative perspective.

In this section, I focus on the adaptive function of AM. Whereas episodic memory relies on the capacity to "mental time travel through subjective time from the present to the past, thus allowing one to re-experience, through autonoetic awareness, one's own previous experience" (Tulving, 2002), and thus serves the function of reliving past events as if one were there, AM serves a different adaptive function: it constructs coherent narratives about what is happening to the self. This particular function filters self-affirming, self-relevant information into a relatively stable, yet goal-dependent, interpretative story. As will be discussed below, this is key to understanding how AM has come to incorpo-

rate more than strictly personal memories and, more broadly throughout this manuscript, the essential contribution of intergenerational family memories to the development of an autobiographical narrative.

The influential Self-Memory System (SMS) model (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000) provides one of the most widely accepted frameworks for defining autobiographical memory. In this view, AM forms a knowledge base of personal information that encompasses both specific episodic memories of past events and more abstract, conceptual knowledge about the self. Autobiographical remembering is understood as a dynamic process, guided by self-related goals and mechanisms of selective retrieval (further discussed in section *2.1.2 Constructing a narrative and the Self*). The model later evolved to emphasize the challenge of maintaining a fragile balance between *adaptive correspondence* (the need to encode information that remains closely tied to lived experience) and *self-coherence* (the need to preserve a stable and coherent sense of self over time). Conway's view of memory as goal-driven also extends to his conception of episodic memory, which he describes as a system that stores "short time slices of experience" retaining information that serves current goals (Conway, 2009). These conceptions highlight the interdependence between self and memory and underscore the centrality of coherence in shaping one's life narrative.

Fivush offers a complementary perspective, defining autobiographical memory as "a form of memory that moves beyond recall of experienced events to integrate perspective, interpretation, and evaluation across self, other, and time to create a personal history" (Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011). This definition underscores the interpretative and narrative nature of AM, emphasizing that memory is not a passive record but an active, motivated process of encoding, interpretation, and recall. It also highlights the essential role of self-coherence in autobiographical remembering. Discussing the links between AM and narrative, Nelson (2003) even questions whether AM can exist without its narrative form. Fivush, Habermas, et al. (2011) further describe narratives as the primary means through which individuals both share and construct autobiographical memories, thereby shaping personal identity through storytelling. These narratives are inherently social: they arise within interpersonal interactions and are molded by broader cultural frameworks.

Reinforcing the notion of a goal-oriented memory system, research shows that while other memory systems (such as episodic and semantic memory) can be distinguished by their neural substrates (Schacter, Wagner, & Buckner, 2000), autobiographical memory stands apart as primarily a *functional* system. Rather than being localized in a single

neural structure, AM emerges from the integration of multiple cognitive, social, and cultural processes that together serve the purpose of constructing a coherent sense of self. This view aligns with the Sociocultural Developmental Theory proposed by Nelson and Fivush (2004), which posits that autobiographical memory develops at the intersection of biological maturation and social interaction. Although AM draws upon neural systems that support episodic and semantic memory, it becomes distinct through social exchanges, particularly through language and joint reminiscing. Nelson also stresses the cultural conventions that shape and legitimize narrative form, and notes that "in another, cognitive, sense it can be asserted that autobiographical memory is as imaginative as is future projection of the self" (Nelson, 2003).

Building on these perspectives, recent work has begun to challenge the boundaries of what counts as autobiographical. Research on vicarious memory, in particular, has proposed expanding the scope of AM to include recollections of events not directly experienced but transmitted through the accounts of others (Pillemer, Thomsen, & Fivush, 2024; D. B. Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015; Thomsen et al., 2025). This perspective invites a reconsideration of what is truly "autobiographical," suggesting that stories told by others may become integrated into one's own life narrative.

Yet the precise definition of vicarious memory remains debated. In their commentary on Pillemer et al. (2024), Bluck and Lind (2024) argue that vicarious memories should not be included within the definition of autobiographical memory, maintaining that AM, by definition, must involve direct personal experience. In contrast, I adopt a broader view. Here, personal memories refer to representations that individuals attribute with *mnemicity*, a mental quality that marks them as personally lived experiences (Mahr, Bergen, Sutton, Schacter, & Heyes, 2023). Vicarious memories, on the other hand, are representations not personally experienced but formed through others' narratives. Because AM is inherently reconstructive and driven by self-oriented goals, direct experience is not always necessary for such mental constructions to take shape.

Discussions surrounding the attribution of mnemicity suggest that, given that the adaptive function of memory is primarily to construct simulations of the future to guide behavior, it is not essential for these simulations to be recognized as "memory". However, according to Mahr et al. (2023), the adaptive function of mnemicity lies in the social purposes memory serves and particularly the communicative benefits of reasoning about whether a remembered event is one's own or another's. Beyond this, the authors argue that mnemicity enables individuals to engage deliberately in the act of remembering. Humans have

the capacity to intentionally generate mental representations of events believed to have occurred in their own past, an ability that reflects the motivational component of remembering. As discussed above, in the case of AM, the motivations for remembering (and narrating) are largely self-oriented. Moreover, Mahr et al. (2023) emphasize that mnemicity itself depends heavily on social learning, which is not a cultural invariant. Indeed, normative beliefs vary across cultures and shape how individuals interpret personal experiences and allocate attention when encountering novel events (see Leichtman, 2006, for a review).

In this thesis, I therefore adopt a broad conception of autobiographical memory that is grounded in both these empirical findings and a functional perspective. Accordingly, the thesis follows the etymological roots of the term *autobiographical*: *auto* ("self"), *bio* ("life"), and *graph* ("write")—that is, the writing of one's life narrative, whether drawn from direct experience or from the remembered experiences of others (Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Pillemer et al., 2024).

From this perspective, both personal and vicarious memories can be considered autobiographical when they attain a certain degree of relevance for the self and align with current personal goals. In other words, a memory (whether lived or received) becomes autobiographical if it contributes to one's sense of identity or coherence. For instance, when someone explains the importance of keeping promises by recalling a story their mother once told about her own father's broken promises, that inherited story becomes part of the listener's autobiographical narrative. In this conception, autobiographical memory comprises both personal memories (those that carry mnemicity) and memories that hold significance for current self-oriented goals.

While the motive of remembering accurately (central to mnemicity) primarily benefits episodic memory, I postulate that autobiographical memories do not assign the same importance to adaptive correspondence. Instead, AM serves foremost a self-coherence function, making accuracy less essential. Personal memories are therefore transformed over time, and others' memories are selectively incorporated and reshaped when they serve the narratives required by current goals. This is especially the case in sociocultural contexts where individuality and self-development are learned and expected through early socialization, parental guidance, and cultural norms (Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Reese & Fivush, 2008). As Nelson (2003) illustrates in her semi-historical account of narrative evolution, modern autobiographical storytelling increasingly mirrors these cultural shifts toward individualist orientations.

This expanded view of autobiographical memory (encompassing both lived and vicariously acquired experiences) highlights its fundamentally constructive nature. In this sense, the reliance on current self-oriented goals may be more crucial than the faithful recollection of past events. Whether a memory originates from direct experience or from the narratives transmitted by others, the key processes lie in interpretation, selection, and integration within a coherent life story. This thesis builds on these premises, aiming to deepen our understanding of how intergenerational memories function as active means through which transmitters and recipients shape their own autobiographical remembering. By sharing or receiving memories from significant relatives, individuals engage in a process that fulfills their need for self-coherence and continuity. The following section turns to the relationship between autobiographical memory, identity, and the construction of the self.

2.1.2 Constructing a narrative and the Self

Autobiographical memory is not a simple recording of past events as they were originally experienced. Rather, it reflects an ongoing effort to make sense of our lives and to create coherent representations of the world around us. These self-oriented goals are embedded in the sociocultural world in which individuals evolve and shape both the construction of identity and subsequent reflections on that identity (Fivush, Bohanek, & Marin, 2010).

From this perspective, I introduce several concepts that help illuminate how both transmitters and receivers may derive different benefits from engaging in intergenerational discussions, because their autobiographical memories respond to different self-related demands.

The Self-Memory System (SMS) (Conway, 2005; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000) highlights the close interconnection between AM and the self. This framework comprises two main components: the *autobiographical memory knowledge base* and the *working self*. The autobiographical memory knowledge base is the repository of personal knowledge that sustains the self. The working self, in turn, organizes the goals and self-representations that guide attention, encoding, and retrieval. These self-related goals influence which memories are retained, how they are constructed, and what information becomes accessible. The overarching aim of the working self is to create and maintain a coherent sense of identity. In striving for coherence, memory may adjust or reshape past experiences to better align

with current needs and goals. Such adjustments can introduce distortions (or *biases*) into the remembered past (Schacter, Greene, & Murphy, 2024).

In their review, Schacter et al. (2024) illustrate how the working self can give rise to different forms of bias. They describe three examples that serve distinct self-regulatory functions. The first is the *consistency bias*, which occurs when individuals reconstruct (or even imagine) past events in ways that align with their current perspective. For instance, German participants in one study were more likely to form false memories of fabricated news stories that portrayed positive stereotypes about their nationality (Delaney, Castillo, Friehs, Buttlar, & Greene, 2024).

A second form of self-motivated bias is the *self-enhancement bias*. This bias reflects a tendency to interpret past events in ways that favour the current self-image. While the consistency bias promotes coherence, self-enhancement serves the preservation and strengthening of self-esteem. For example, students who knew they had passed an exam later recalled experiencing higher levels of pre-exam anxiety, thereby amplifying their sense of accomplishment (Keuler & Safer, 1998).

Finally, the *positivity effect* reflects another consequence of memory's constructive nature. It manifests in the tendency to remember past experiences (and imagine future ones) in an overly positive light, a pattern that has been robustly demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Levine & Bluck, 2004). The positivity effect is closely related to the self-enhancement bias: focusing on positive aspects of one's memories facilitates their integration into a coherent and personally meaningful life narrative (Matlin & Stang, 1978).

Taken together, these biases further underscore the importance of *self-coherence* in AM. They filter and shape relevant information for the individual, ensuring that remembering remains aligned with current self-concepts and goals. However, the way these biases express themselves has rarely been examined when comparing the perspectives of tellers and receivers within the same family. In this specific social context, the memories selected for transmission by older generations may both benefit from and be constrained by these coherence-driven biases. Likewise, the vicarious memories of younger generations are subject to similar influences. As we will see later, these coherence-based biases also extend to vicarious memory. In particular, we will review how stories from past family members evolve across generations to better fit current self-views and moral frameworks (see the concept of "heroization" in section *2.2.3 Grandparent narratives: Linking generations and transmitting legacy*).

As previously noted, culture and socialization play a fundamental role in shaping the

development of autobiographical memory (Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Nelson, 2003; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). The process of constructing a sense of identity is deeply influenced by the cultural environment. Cultural frameworks determine which skills and experiences are valued for becoming a competent member of a community, and among these essential skills is the capacity to construct and communicate a coherent personal narrative.

To position themselves as functioning members of their community, individuals must learn to tell their own stories. From early childhood, parents and other family members model this ability by sharing their experiences and by embedding the child within the broader family narrative (Fivush & Merrill, 2016; Marshall & Reese, 2022; Reese, 2002). Through these early shared narratives, children learn to articulate their experiences, organize them temporally, and derive meaning from them. More important than the specific content of these stories, however, is the way parents transmit how stories should be told—and, by extension, how children should construct their own.

The connection between the narratives of older generations and the emerging autobiographical memories of children will be further explored in *Chapter 2: Receiving family stories*.

Culture also shapes autobiographical memory in later life. A striking example is the *reminiscence bump*, the tendency for older adults to recall a disproportionate number of memories from roughly ages 10 to 30 (for a review, see Munawar, Kuhn, & Haque, 2018). One influential account explains this pattern through *cultural life scripts*, that is, culturally shared expectations about when major life events (such as finishing school, starting work, marrying, or having children) typically occur (Scherman, 2013; Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008). Because these events are socially valued and identity-defining, they are more likely to be encoded, rehearsed, and later retrieved, shaping the temporal distribution of autobiographical memories across the lifespan.

Interestingly, the influence of culture and media on individual and collective memory has long attracted sociological attention. Numerous scholars have described how such cultural forces shape collective and individual memory. For example, Herman and Chomsky (1988) described media as powerful channels that filter information, influence public opinion, and instill normative principles, ideological commitments, and culturally sanctioned behaviors necessary for social integration. Subsequent empirical work has provided substantial support for this view of the model (see Mullen & Klaehn, 2010, for a review). Other authors have sought to integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives to examine the effects of ”implicit collective memory” on perception and action, that is, how media and social

contexts frame people's minds and everyday understanding of the world (Erll, 2022).

Taken together, these models underscore the close and reciprocal relationship between autobiographical memory and the self. Autobiographical memory provides a framework through which individuals construct and maintain a coherent and continuous sense of identity, organizing personal experiences in line with current goals and motivational priorities. These priorities can lead to reinterpretations of the past that satisfy self-coherence and support a positive self-image. In the context of family stories, where the self is particularly salient, such coherence-driven and self-enhancing biases are also at play. This thesis aims to trace their expression by comparing which stories are transmitted, how they are transmitted, which stories are remembered, and how they are remembered, in order to examine how narratives are filtered and integrated through self-motivations.

Supporting identity coherence, however, is not the only function of autobiographical memory[1]. Contemporary accounts generally distinguish three primary functions: the *self* function, which underpins identity and self-continuity; the *directive* function, which guides present and future behavior; and the *social* function, which facilitates communication and social connectedness (Bluck & Alea, 2002). The following section explores the directive function in greater detail, examining how autobiographical memory informs decision-making, problem-solving, and goal pursuit in everyday life.

2.1.3 Guiding the self and others: The directive function of AM

Beyond its role in constructing a coherent sense of self, autobiographical memory also serves to guide thought and behavior. This capacity, known as the *directive function* of autobiographical memory (Biondolillo & Pillemer, 2015; Bluck & Alea, 2002; Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; D. Pillemer, 2003), enables individuals to draw on their past experiences to adapt to new situations, solve problems, and make decisions that align with personal goals and values. Recent work distinguishes this *directive* function from a *predictive* function of memory: whereas directive remembering uses past experiences to guide current choices, predictive remembering uses them to construct and revise mental simulations of possible futures in light of new information (Ay & Gülgöz, 2024). In this sense, memory not only informs present decisions but also continuously updates future projections as circumstances and goals change, ensuring that future-oriented thinking remains grounded in real-world learning and supporting flexible, goal-directed decision-making.

[1]Here, "function" refers to the individual's use of autobiographical memory, not its *adaptive role*. Given that "function" can be used in both ways (Bluck & Alea, 2002), we will specify "adaptive function" for the latter.

The directive function is also thought to represent the primary adaptive function of autobiographical memory, that is, its evolutionary utility. Drawing on the neural basis of episodic memory, authors proposed that the constructive nature of remembering (the recombination of stored details into novel scenarios) was not merely a flaw of reconstruction but a design feature that supports the imagination of future experiences (Schacter & Addis, 2007; Schacter, Addis, & Buckner, 2007). In this view, memory's adaptive purpose lies less in replaying the past than in piecing together fragments of experience to simulate potential futures.

A similar guiding power has been attributed to autobiographical memory more broadly. Nelson (2003) argues that in Western, individualistic societies, autobiographical narratives serve both to define the self and to position the individual within a community. Culturally shaped storytelling practices teach individuals how to interpret and use their memories to guide future behavior and foster social belonging. Because self and memory are inherently intertwined, the predictive power of autobiographical memory allows individuals to project themselves into the future: representations of past and present selves influence what is perceived as possible for the future self, while imagined futures, in turn, shape the interpretation of past experiences (Conway, Justice, & D'Argembeau, 2019). Harris, Rasmussen, and Berntsen (2014) found that directive remembering operates alongside broader self-regulatory processes, such as emotion regulation, attitude formation, and meaning-making, all of which contribute to maintaining a coherent and adaptive self-concept. The guiding power of autobiographical memory is therefore inherently self-oriented: it selectively filters information relevant to personal goals and shapes the futures individuals envision.

Importantly, guiding functions are not limited to firsthand experiences. Vicarious memories (representations of events learned through the accounts of others) also play a directive role (Pillemer et al., 2024; D. B. Pillemer et al., 2015; Thomsen et al., 2025). Pillemer et al. (2024) highlights the adaptive value of vicarious memory, noting that learning from others' experiences provides access to a vast repertoire of information and consequences without direct exposure. Such vicarious guidance may be particularly useful at transitional developmental stages, such as early adulthood, when individuals face novel challenges (e.g., moving out of the family home, entering higher education, or beginning a career). While according to Pillemer et al. (2024), vicarious memories can originate from many sources (parents, siblings, peers, or colleagues), we follow Bluck and Lind (2024) in proposing that vicarious memories arise within close relational contexts. Although family storytelling has

been widely studied (e.g., Fivush, Duke, Candler, & Bohanek, 2010; Merrill, Srinivas, & Fivush, 2017; Pratt, Norris, Hebblethwaite, & Arnold, 2008; Sahin-Acar, Bahtiyar-Saygan, Alsancak-Akbulut, & Sagel-Cetiner, 2019), no investigation has directly compared the intentional use of storytelling by transmitters (parents or grandparents) to guide others with the actual directive use of these memories by recipients (children or grandchildren).

This individual-level directive role of memory connects closely to research on *collective memory*. Psychologists define collective memories as shared representations of the past that hold meaning for a group (J. Assmann, 1995; Halbwachs, 1992; Hirst & Manier, 2008). As Wang (2008) notes, collective memory serves directive functions not only at the societal level but also for the individual. Communities invoke their shared past to establish common goals, learn from historical events, celebrate group achievements, and ensure cultural continuity. On a personal level, older generations use autobiographical and collective memories to instruct younger members, transmitting values and behavioral norms through storytelling and shared reflection.

Autobiographical remembering can thus guide both personal and collective actions. D. Pillemer (2003), for example, demonstrated how large-scale events such as the September 11, 2001 attacks profoundly shaped how individuals and societies acted in their aftermath—from policy decisions to everyday practices like increased airport security. In a related vein, Thomsen et al. (2025) proposed the concept of *allobiographical memory*, describing memories people hold of others' experiences (including both vicarious and collective forms). Such memories, the authors suggest, help individuals not only draw lessons from others' lives but also project possible futures for those around them and for their social groups.

Across these different forms of remembering (personal, vicarious, and collective) the directive function underscores the prospective nature of autobiographical memory. Remembering serves not only to sustain continuity with the past but to inform action and adaptation in the present and future. Self-related memories define and constrain what is seen as possible for one's own life course, while memories learned from close others (particularly family members) extend these possibilities through intergenerational guidance. As subsequent chapters (Chapter 2: Receiving family stories and Chapter 3: Remembering through transmission) will examine, one aim of this thesis is to uncover whether the guiding power of transmitted memories explains why younger generations remember their families' stories and whether this aligns with the transmitters' intentions to guide.

The idea that older generations use memories to teach and connect with younger ones

directly anticipates the final major function of autobiographical memory: the *social function*. As we will see in the next section, remembering ultimately serves not only individual adaptation but also interpersonal understanding, communication, and intergenerational continuity.

2.1.4 Connecting through memory: The social function of AM

"However, one must not only have a life, but also present it effectively to other people" (Nelson, 2003, p. 134)

As we have seen, AM is inherently narrative in nature. Its aim is to forge a coherent story for the self, that is, one that sustains identity across time and supports future-oriented thinking and engage in future-thinking. Yet, while autobiographical memory is inseparable from the self, it is also intrinsically social. As Nelson (2003) suggests, people tell stories to family, friends, and other close others in order to connect and exchange meanings. In doing so, storytellers not only strengthen their relationships but also express who they are and affirm their values.

Building on this view, Alea and Bluck (2003) identified three primary social functions of autobiographical memory. The first, *fostering intimacy*, refers to initiating, maintaining, and deepening social bonds through the sharing of personal experiences. The second, *teaching and informing*, involves drawing on past events to illustrate lessons or convey guidance. The third, *eliciting empathy and reassurance*, captures how sharing personal memories can invite emotional support or communicate understanding toward others. Although these functions are conceptually distinct, they often operate simultaneously in everyday conversation. For instance, emotionally rich and detailed memories may simultaneously express vulnerability, strengthen closeness, and model adaptive coping strategies between transmitter and receiver.

Alea and Bluck (2003) also identified several factors that influence which social functions of autobiographical memory are activated in a given situation. Emotional and vivid memories tend to elicit stronger empathy and trust from listeners (e.g., Bastin & Geurten, 2026; Bluck, Baron, Ainsworth, Gesselman, & Gold, 2013), although replication studies have produced mixed results (Lind & Thomsen, 2018; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). The interpersonal context of sharing likewise shapes these dynamics. In particular, *familiarity* (the degree to which individuals know and trust one another) affects which communicative goals are prioritized. Within families, where familiarity is typically high, the exchange

of new information may be limited, yet the act of reminiscing together fulfills deeper social purposes: reinforcing emotional bonds, transmitting values, and maintaining a shared sense of identity.

Research on collective and vicarious memory further underscores the inherently social dimension of remembering. Beyond shaping shared understandings of the past and collectively accepted norms and expectations (Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Nelson & Fivush, 2004), memories recounted by others (what Thomsen et al. (2025) term *allobiographical memory*) play a crucial role in fostering connection with other people and groups. Stories heard from others help construct and sustain both stable and evolving aspects of the self. They also provide scaffolds for envisioning possible futures at the individual, vicarious, and collective levels.

Taken together, the social function of autobiographical memory situates remembering at the very heart of social bonding. Transmitting personal memories allows individuals to connect with others while simultaneously affirming their identity and values. Conversely, receiving others' memories fosters collective and vicarious understanding, enabling individuals to grasp others' perspectives, experiences, and aspirations. Among the various social contexts where these processes unfold, family storytelling stands out as particularly salient. Within families, where familiarity is high, stories acquire layered meanings and serve multiple social functions. Yet, despite growing evidence that intergenerational narratives support identity development and well-being in younger generations (e.g., Chen, Cullen, Fivush, Wang, & Reese, 2021; Fivush, 2013; Merrill & Fivush, 2016), most research has focused on children and adolescents, little is known about how these functions differ across generations, types of stories, or narrative qualities, or among young adults who no longer live with their parents.

The present thesis addresses this gap by jointly examining the perspectives of transmitters (parents and grandparents) and receivers (children and grandchildren) on intergenerational narratives that both generations perceive as important. It investigates what and why older family members choose to tell particular stories, and how these stories are subsequently remembered, interpreted, and used by the younger generation. In doing so, the thesis aims to clarify how autobiographical, vicarious, and collective memories function within families as a coordinated system for connection, guidance, and identity construction across generations.

The following chapter turns to the family as a central site for the social exchange of memory. It focuses on the receiving end of intergenerational storytelling, especially on

how younger family members reinterpret and incorporate the stories of their elders. We also examine how such intergenerational discussions contribute to identity construction and a sense of continuity within the family system.

2.2 Chapter 2: Receiving family stories

This chapter aims to highlight both the importance of intergenerational narratives and the gaps in the literature concerning these vicarious stories. The family constitutes a distinctive social context, situated between collective and individual memory. Its high familiarity, strong emotional bonds, and relevance to identity formation offer fertile ground for younger generations to develop their sense of self and belonging.

2.2.1 Intergenerational family stories

In everyday life, the sharing of family memories occurs naturally during informal interactions. Bohanek et al. (2009) observed that, during an average family dinner, a narrative about a past event emerged approximately every five minutes. Whereas most of these narratives concerned recent everyday experiences (e.g., the children's day at school or the parents' work-related activities), the second most frequent category involved parent–child interactions and family history. This included what Fivush and Kellas (2025) termed *intergenerational family stories*: stories told from an older generation to a younger generation (e.g., a parent recounting an episode from their own adolescence). Although these events were not directly experienced by the listener, their explicit reference to family identity and continuity grants them a special role in constructing a shared sense of family history.

While a few studies have examined how often family reminiscing occurs in daily life (Bohanek et al., 2009; Demiray, Mischler, & Martin, 2019), very few have investigated which specific stories parents choose to transmit about their lives and which of these stories their children actually remember. Gu, Tse, and Brown (2020), for instance, investigated factors that modulate memory transmission by asking Chinese parents whether they had experienced a set of common life events (drawn from a culturally normative list) and then assessing several characteristics of these events (e.g., importance, phenomenology, emotional intensity, self-relevance), as well as whether parents felt motivated to transmit them to their children.

The family can be understood as a social group. Some memories carry central relevance for such groups, helping to define who belongs (those who share these memories)

and who does not (Hirst & Manier, 2008). Families transmit memories that carry social identity, most often orally, through everyday conversation. These family memories fall within what Assmann defines as *communicative memory* (J. Assmann, 1995, 2011). This form of memory transmission relies primarily on everyday interpersonal communication, such as the informal sharing of stories within families. Communicative memory is dynamic, fluid, and typically limited to the lived interactions of a few generations. For example, in the case of World War II, Cordonnier, Bouchat, Hirst, and Luminet (2021) demonstrated that traces of communicative memory (although significantly transformed) could still be observed three generations later. This illustrates how family conversations and narratives sustain a living connection to the past, even when formal cultural frameworks fade. To date, however, no study has asked adult children which vicarious memories of public events they remember from their parents or grandparents, nor what factors predict such remembrance.

Fivush and Kellas (2025) also disentangle several key concepts essential to understanding intergenerational family narratives. They distinguish between the *products* of transmission (the *stories*) and the processes through which these stories are told, that is, the *storytelling* (see Figure 2.1). The former concerns *what* is remembered and passed down, whereas the latter focuses on *how* family members co-construct meaning through narration. Examining both dimensions reveals how families jointly build shared representations of the past and how these representations evolve as they are retold across generations.

These intergenerational family stories are closely related to the well-being of younger generations. Numerous studies have shown that knowing and integrating stories from older generations is associated with various indicators of psychological well-being (Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011; Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006). However, as we will see in the next section (*Parental storytelling and the development of AM*), most of the literature on parental vicarious memories focuses on young children and adolescents (e.g., Fivush & Kellas, 2025, for a review). So, we know little about the impact of memory transmission in adults.

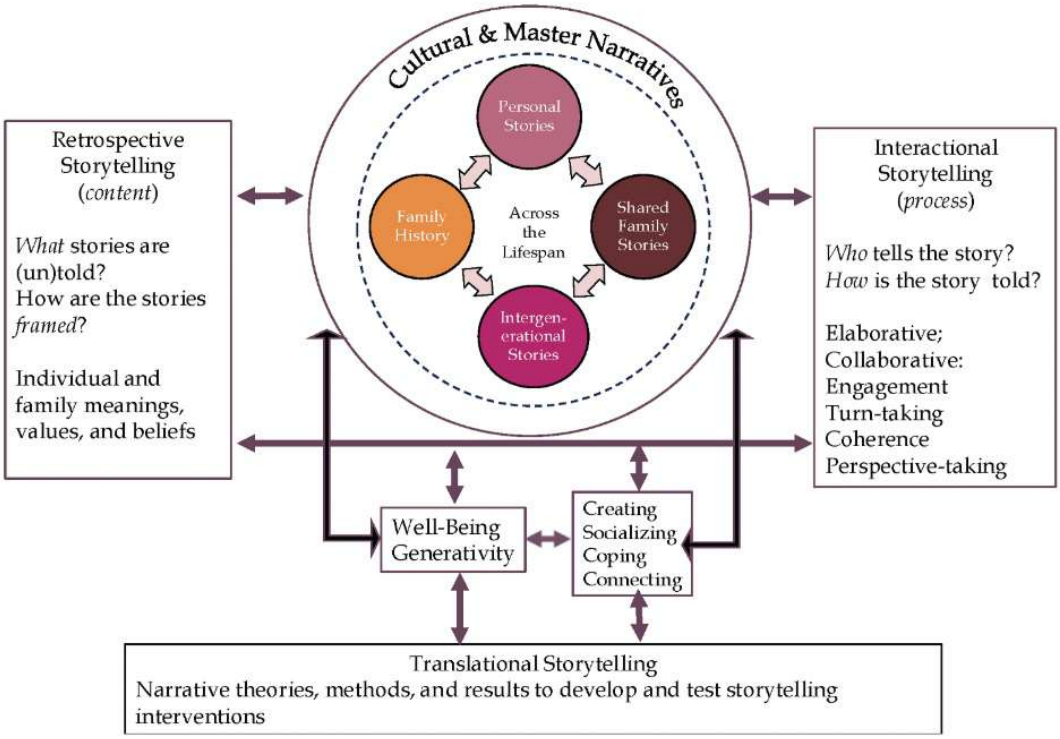

Figure 2.1: Model of intergenerational family storytelling, from Fivush and Kellas (2025). The thesis focuses on the products (left part of the figure), but will also discuss their integration in the storytelling (processes).

Most studies focus on the *products* of transmission (the stories) rather than on the *processes* of transmission (the storytelling). In this thesis, although the emphasis is placed on stories, the aim is also to show how intergenerational family stories are integrated into the narratives of the protagonists themselves. More specifically, when considering a dyad within the family, the question becomes: which stories are experienced as important by each member of the dyad, and what functions do these stories fulfill for them?

Although participants are not engaged in a joint reminiscing task, this work explores which stories are transmitted (the products) and their characteristics. By comparing the narratives of transmitters and receivers, it becomes possible to learn about the processes through which stories are reconstructed for one's own purposes. Moreover, the selection of which memories are treated as important sheds light on how these stories are incorporated into a coherent life narrative.

In the following sections, we turn more closely to the receiving end of these communicative memories: how they support the development of younger generations' autobiographical memory, how well they are retained, and what contributes to identity construction and well-being within the family across generations. The next section focuses

on memories received from parents, and the following section on memories received from grandparents.

2.2.2 Parental storytelling and the development of AM

Autobiographical memory does not emerge in isolation; it is born within social interaction. Stories told by parents play a foundational role in the development of autobiographical memory. Within families, parents are typically the first guides who model how to interpret, structure, and share experiences. These early exchanges form the roots of autobiographical remembering, providing children with the linguistic and conceptual tools necessary for constructing personal narratives (Fivush, 2019). Through such dialogues, children learn to organize events, link causes and consequences, and connect their own experiences to those of others. This early scaffolding sets the stage for which stories will later be experienced as meaningful and worth remembering.

A large body of research on maternal reminiscing demonstrates that parental narrative style predicts young children's emerging autobiographical competence (Farrant & Reese, 2009; Fivush et al., 2006; Fivush & Salmon, 2023; Merrill & Fivush, 2016; Wu & Jobson, 2019). Children of more elaborative mothers (those who encourage reflection, provide detail, and validate emotions) develop stronger autobiographical skills, clearer temporal organization, and a richer understanding of both self and others (Fivush, Berlin, McDermott Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Salmon & Reese, 2016). These benefits extend into adolescence, where elaborative and emotionally expressive storytelling continues to support narrative sophistication and self-understanding (Fivush, McAnally, & Reese, 2019; Mclean & Mansfield, 2011; Merrill, Booker, & Fivush, 2019; Reese et al., 2014; Reese, Fivush, Merrill, Wang, & McAnally, 2017; Zaman & Fivush, 2011). This work suggests that the way parents tell stories shapes not only children's ability to remember but also the narrative forms through which later, personally important stories can be integrated.

Adolescence and early adulthood are periods marked by active identity exploration, during which stories about parents' past experiences acquire particular relevance. In a recent study, Mazurek (2024) found that emerging adults (aged 19–22) frequently recalled value-laden stories from their parents' childhood. These narratives often conveyed life lessons, reflections on the course of life, universal and family-specific values, explanations for past hardships, or messages of advice, encouragement, and warning. Similarly, Merrill

et al. (2019) showed that adolescents recall their parents' stories not only to learn about their parents but also to understand themselves through the family's moral and emotional heritage. Other studies confirm that younger generations use parental narratives for guidance, emotional support, and insight into family history (Bakir-Demir, Reese, & Sahin-Acar, 2020; Reese et al., 2017). Elaborated and emotionally expressive storytelling is especially beneficial, fostering perspective-taking and empathy (Bluck et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2021; Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011; Merrill et al., 2017). Such exchanges are linked to higher self-esteem, stronger meaning in life, and fewer behavioral difficulties (for a review, see Fivush & Kellas, 2025). Adolescents who integrate both personal and vicarious experiences into coherent life narratives tend to show more stable identities and greater psychological well-being (Lind & Thomsen, 2018). Together, these findings highlight one of the central questions of this thesis: how the stories emerging adults regard as important serve as guides for behavior and as anchors for identity and well-being.

Beyond fostering memory skills, stories heard from parents also constitute a powerful form of vicarious experience. Vicarious memories allow listeners to construct mental representations of experiences they have never directly encountered (Pillemer et al., 2024; D. B. Pillemer et al., 2015). These memories can evoke vivid emotions and serve similar psychological functions as personal memories, though often with less intensity (D. B. Pillemer et al., 2015). Vicarious memories are frequently more negative in tone than personal ones, reflecting a bias toward transmitting cautionary or instructive experiences (Pond & Peterson, 2020). As Pillemer et al. (2024) notes, this asymmetry serves an adaptive purpose: individuals can learn from others' hardships and thereby avoid potential risks. Within families, such stories become vehicles for transmitting wisdom, resilience, and moral lessons across generations. In the context of this thesis, these characteristics (emotional intensity, valence, and function) are key candidates for explaining why certain parental stories are retained by emerging adults and how they are used.

Emotional and relational factors strongly influence which parental stories are remembered and how they are interpreted. For instance, Chen et al. (2021) found that adolescents recalled their parents' childhood stories more positively than negatively, suggesting a preference for identity-affirming content. When parents and children share a common understanding of a story's meaning, the transmitted memory tends to be more positive and emotionally salient (Gu et al., 2020). These findings underscore that storytelling within families is a reciprocal process: what is transmitted depends not only on the teller's intentions but also on the listener's interpretations, motivations, and emotional needs. In families, where

familiarity is high, storytelling serves not merely to convey information but to co-construct meaning, validate emotions, and reinforce a sense of belonging (Fivush, Duke, et al., 2010; Merrill et al., 2017). This reciprocal perspective is central to the present work, which compares parental accounts and emerging adults' recollections to understand how stories are selectively retained, reinterpreted, and incorporated into their own life narratives.

At a broader level, these processes of interpersonal remembering participate to the transmission of collective memory. Through intergenerational storytelling, family members link their personal histories to collective ones, bridging private life and public history (Cordonnier, Rosoux, Gijs, & Luminet, 2022). These narratives endure when they convey distinctive, emotionally charged experiences that resonate with family identity and values (Gu et al., 2020; Svob & Brown, 2012; Svob, Brown, Takšić, Katulić, & Žauhar, 2016).

In this way, parental storytelling operates simultaneously as a developmental scaffold for autobiographical memory, a medium for identity construction, and a mechanism for transmitting moral and values. The stories young people inherit from their parents thus serve as key resources for understanding themselves and their place within the family. Building on this work, the present thesis examines which parental stories emerging adults regard as most important, how they remember and use these stories in their own lives, and how story characteristics relate to their functions in guiding behavior, supporting identity, and contributing to well-being.

2.2.3 Grandparent narratives: Linking generations and transmitting legacy

Family vicarious memories are not confined to the parent–child dyad; they extend across other generations. With increasing life expectancy and greater intergenerational contact, grandparents now occupy a more central position in family storytelling (for a review, see Buchanan & Rotkirch, 2018). Through their stories, they transmit not only personal experiences but also broader historical and moral frameworks that shape family identity. Research shows that grandchildren frequently recall emotionally salient and value-laden stories shared by grandparents, often with content and themes that differ from those transmitted by parents (Pratt et al., 2008; Stephan, 2024). Whereas parental stories typically center on immediate developmental guidance or day-to-day family events, grandparent narratives often reach further back, evoking distant times and formative family experiences. In this sense, grandparental storytelling occupies a unique position within the family's communicative memory, bridging the personal and the historical.

Despite this, intergenerational stories involving grandparents have been studied far less than their parental counterparts. Existing work has examined how adolescents and emerging adults remember vicarious grandparental stories and how these narratives contribute to identity development (e.g., Lasota, 2015; Pratt et al., 2008; Pratt, Norris, Lawford, & Arnold, 2010; Taylor, Fisackerly, Mauren, & Taylor, 2013), but such studies often rely on methods that differ from those used in the broader literature on intergenerational family stories (for instance, Pratt et al. (2008) analysed intergenerational narratives in terms of value transmission, generativity, and relationship closeness, rather than using standard autobiographical memory tasks). Although these approaches offer valuable insights, they make it difficult to compare findings directly with what is known about parental stories and to build an integrated picture of family vicarious remembering.

Across these studies, authors have identified several core functions of grandparental storytelling for younger generations. Grandparent narratives strengthen emotional closeness with grandparents and with the family as a whole, transmit family history, and help preserve the memory of the grandparents themselves (Stephan, 2024). Compared to parents, grandparents tend to emphasize historical knowledge, moral lessons, and family values more than practical skills or everyday behavioral norms (Lasota, 2015). Through these accounts, grandchildren gain not only an understanding of their family's past but also a sense of continuity with earlier generations, integrating inherited experiences into their own autobiographical narratives. These functions directly resonate with this thesis's interest in how emerging adults use grandparental stories for identity, guidance, and a feeling of belonging.

Empirical evidence further highlights the centrality of grandparents in the family's narrative repertoire. When asked to recount a "meaningful family story," young adults most frequently recalled stories involving their grandparents (Taylor et al., 2013). These stories were not only emotionally positive but were also perceived as formative for the participants' development. The domains most strongly influenced were values and attitudes, followed by identity and behavior. Many respondents reported consciously drawing on these stories when reflecting on who they are and what they believe in, underscoring how grandparental narratives can shape moral orientation and self-understanding. Moreover, stories featuring grandparents were consistently described as fostering feelings of familial closeness and continuity. Taylor et al. (2013) identified three key reasons why grandparent stories held particular significance: they allowed participants to honor their ancestors, recognize shared traits or values, and carry forward a sense of family legacy. Together, these

findings suggest that grandparental memories are among the stories emerging adults consider most important and that they are closely tied to their uses in value formation, identity work, and perceived continuity.

As with parents, historical events that grandparents have lived through are especially likely to be remembered by younger generations. This is notably the case for World War II (Cordonnier et al., 2021; Pohn-Lauggas, 2021; Stone, van der Haegen, Luminet, & Hirst, 2014). Although much specific information is often lost, particularly details about personal experience, grandchildren are still able to retell some of their grandparents' stories about the war. In a qualitative study, Welzer (2005) interviewed forty families in which a grandparent had experienced World War II, as well as their children and grandchildren. Across generations, the authors observed what they termed *cumulative heroization*: a progressive transformation of family narratives into more positive and heroic versions. For example, a grandmother's account of refusing to shelter Russians and Jews after the war was later remembered by her son as a story of offering shelter, and retold by her granddaughter as a story in which the grandmother actively hid them and outwitted the Nazis. This cumulative heroization allows later generations to protect the image of the older generation and maintain a socially acceptable image of themselves. As with personal autobiographical memory, these transformations illustrate how self and memory work together to sustain a coherent and positive self-concept, here extended to the family as a moral unit.

Thus, grandparental storytelling plays a crucial role in connecting autobiographical and collective remembering, embedding the self in the family's historical narrative. Yet, although the existing literature highlights the importance and functions of grandparental stories, the methods used to study them remain heterogeneous. The present thesis contributes a first step toward a more systematic comparison of intergenerational family stories from parents and grandparents. By applying common psychological tools to both types of dyads, it becomes possible to compare which parental and grandparental stories emerging adults regard as most important, how they remember and use these memories, and how story characteristics relate to their functions for parents, grandparents, and younger generations alike.

2.3 Chapter 3: Remembering through transmission

2.3.1 Intergenerational memory transmission as generative action

In middle adulthood, individuals often experience a growing motivation to contribute to the well-being of future generations. Erikson (Erikson, 1963) described this developmental concern as *generativity*: a desire to guide, protect, and nurture those who follow. Within families, one particularly meaningful expression of this concern is the transmission of experiences, values, and lessons through storytelling. Adults who perceive themselves as generative (that is, who feel they are contributing to others) report greater life satisfaction, purpose, and psychological health across adulthood and into later life (An & Cooney, 2006; Grossbaum & Bates, 2002; Grossman & Gruenewald, 2017; Gruenewald, Liao, & Seeman, 2012; Herrera, Galkuté, Fernández, & Elgueta, 2022; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008; Scott, Nadorff, Barnett, & Yancura, 2023). From this perspective, sharing autobiographical memories with younger relatives can be understood as a generative act: it allows adults to offer part of their lived experience as a resource for the next generation.

Building on Erikson's work, McAdams and de St Aubin (1992) conceptualized generativity as a multifaceted psychological system organized around providing for the next generation. Central to this system is narration: adults make sense of their generative concerns and actions by weaving them into a coherent life story. Narrating oneself as a guide, caregiver, or ancestor reinforces self-continuity and translates abstract concern into concrete communicative practices. Through autobiographical storytelling, individuals enact generativity by transforming personal memories into shared narratives that convey meaning, values, and identity across generations.

Lifespan research on reminiscence provides complementary insight into how the functions of autobiographical memory evolve alongside generative concerns. A recent review by Marques, Dias, and Sousa (2023) revealed systematic age-related differences in why people engage in remembering: younger adults tend to reminisce for self-oriented reasons (such as emotion regulation, boredom reduction, or identity fostering), whereas older adults increasingly use memory for socially oriented purposes, including teaching, informing, and maintaining intimacy. Using the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS; Robitaille, Cappeliez, Coulombe, & Webster, 2010; Webster, 1993, 1997), large-scale studies have identified age-graded profiles in which younger adults more often engage in bitterness revival and boredom reduction, while middle- and older-aged adults show higher endorsement of identity, problem-solving, conversational, and teaching/informing functions (Graham,

Rahm-Knigge, & Conner, 2020). Overall, these patterns suggest a developmental shift from inward, self-regulatory uses of memory to more relational and communicative uses.

Complementary findings indicate that younger adults, faced with novel decisions and life transitions, tend to use autobiographical memories primarily for *directive* purposes (drawing lessons from the past to guide present action) whereas older adults rely more heavily on *social* and *identity* functions (Bluck & Alea, 2009; Vranić, Jelić, & Tonković, 2018). These age-related differences align with Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory (SST; 2006), which proposes that as people perceive their remaining time as increasingly limited, they shift from knowledge-seeking and novelty toward emotionally meaningful goals and close relationships. Under this framework, it is expected that younger individuals use memory to navigate possibilities and future options, while older adults emphasize reminiscence that reinforces bonds, consolidates identity, and transmits legacy. Taken together, these findings portray a developmental reorganization of autobiographical memory: with age, remembering becomes less exclusively self-focused and increasingly oriented toward social connection, communication, and intergenerational contribution, precisely the processes at stake in intergenerational memory transmission examined in this thesis.

This developmental shift in goals and memory functions forms a crucial interpretative context for the present thesis. As reminiscence becomes more socially and intergenerationally oriented, parents and grandparents emerge as key transmitters of life experiences, lessons, and values to younger family members. Through everyday conversations and storytelling, they convert their own autobiographical memories into potential tools for guidance, identity construction, and connectedness. The following chapters build on this framework by examining the transmitters' perspective and the meanings and roles that intergenerational stories hold for them.

2.3.2 Parental transmission: Guiding through storytelling

Generativity finds one of its clearest expressions within the family, particularly through the stories parents share with their children. While much research has explored what children remember from such exchanges, little is known about the memories parents deliberately choose to pass down and the motivations guiding those choices. Parental storytelling offers a valuable lens for observing how generative concern becomes action. Through narrative, parents do more than recall their past: they affirm who they are as parents, articu-

late the lessons and values they wish to leave behind, and position themselves within the family's history.

Most of the research on parent–child reminiscing has focused on young children and predominantly on the child's perspective (e.g., Marshall & Reese, 2022; Pavlova et al., 2019; Reese & Newcombe, 2007). To date, no study has directly asked parents what important experiences they wish to transmit to their adult children, why, and what phenomenological qualities those memories hold. Identifying the defining intergenerational family stories chosen by parents is essential for understanding the mechanisms of family memory: how stories originate, why they are told, and how they differ from those transmitted by other family members such as grandparents.

A notable contribution is the work of Gu et al. (2020), who asked Chinese parents to evaluate a set of commonly experienced life events in terms of their importance, memory characteristics, and motivation to transmit them to their children. Their findings showed that events jointly judged as important by both parents and children were those that produced more substantial material and psychological changes, highlighting concrete features that promote intergenerational transmission. This study represents an important first step in identifying factors that modulate parental transmission. Building on this approach, the present thesis allows parents to freely select the stories they consider most meaningful and examines both the phenomenological characteristics (e.g., emotionality, centrality, phenomenology) and perceived functions of these memories. Using the same standardized tools across parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads makes it possible to compare what different generations choose to transmit and how these stories are later remembered and used by emerging adults.

At the individual level, autobiographical storytelling constitutes a key expression of generativity and contributes to parental well-being. By sharing personal memories, parents link their own meaning-making with care for others, translating life experience into guidance and legacy (Merrill & Fivush, 2016). This process resonates with Erikson's (1963) conception of generativity as nurturing the next generation, and research consistently ties such engagement to higher life satisfaction, purpose, and psychological health (An & Cooney, 2006; Grossbaum & Bates, 2002; Grossman & Gruenewald, 2017; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). In this sense, family storytelling allows parents to transform self-knowledge into social and moral continuity. Within this framework, autobiographical storytelling can be understood as both an act of care and a form of legacy-building: by transforming lived experience into narrative, parents transform self-knowledge into communication, ensur-

ing that lessons, values, and identities are carried forward.

Studies of family reminiscing further illuminate the specific functions such narratives serve. Parents, particularly mothers, often recount personal experiences to entertain, maintain closeness, or teach moral and emotional lessons (Kulkofsky, Wang, & Koh, 2009). In Western contexts, elaborative and emotionally rich storytelling is associated with stronger child self-concepts and greater emotional understanding (Salmon & Reese, 2016). These practices scaffold both memory and emotion, showing how parental talk simultaneously supports cognitive development and emotional intimacy. Extending this work, the present thesis focuses on older parents and their emerging-adult children, exploring the motivations behind parental transmission and the ways these stories continue to guide and connect family members beyond childhood.

From a developmental perspective, these narrative practices map onto motivational changes across adulthood. Midlife parents often balance self-definition with other-orientation, a profile characterized by reminiscence functions of identity, problem-solving, and teaching/informing (Graham et al., 2020). As proposed by socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006), growing awareness of time limitations encourages adults to prioritize emotionally meaningful and instructive goals. Accordingly, parental storytelling reflects both directive aims (helping children navigate decisions) and generative aims that deepen family bonds. Through these narratives, parents act as memory keepers and moral interpreters, using autobiographical recollection to sustain relationships and convey values.

In sum, parental storytelling serves as a bridge between self and family, transforming individual experiences into shared heritage. It is through these stories that parents affirm identity, transmit care, and sustain family continuity. The present thesis investigates which memories parents regard as most important, the motivations for their transmission, and how the characteristics and functions of these stories compare to those shared by grandparents, thereby illuminating how autobiographical memories circulate and evolve across generations. The following section turns to grandparental transmissions, examining how grandparents' stories complement parental narratives by reaching further into the past and situating the family within a broader historical and emotional landscape.

2.3.3 Grandparental transmission: Family history, and continuity

Grandparenthood represents a significant and fulfilling life role in later adulthood. In their review of grandparental roles, Thiele and Whelan (2006) showed that grandparents

consider this role a highly valued and satisfying part of their identity. Generativity, originally conceptualized as a developmental task of midlife, thus extends into later life and continues to contribute to well-being and life satisfaction (Fisher, 1995). Through their engagement with younger generations, grandparents sustain this generative concern, transforming it into acts of care, advice, and autobiographical storytelling that connect past and present.

Despite this, intergenerational family stories from grandparents have rarely been examined with the same methodological tools as those used to study parent–child transmission. Existing knowledge about memory transmission from grandparents to grandchildren stems from diverse fields such as educational psychology (e.g., Bernal & De la Fuente Anuncibay, 2007; Kılıçoğlu, Ergin, & Ergin, 2023), social sciences (e.g., Quéniart & Charpentier, 2013), political science (e.g., Aguilar & Ramírez-Barat, 2019), and clinical psychology (e.g., Spalding & Carpenter, 2019). These studies underscore the importance of grandparental narratives but rely on heterogeneous methods, making it difficult to integrate their findings with what is known about parental stories. One aim of this thesis is to address this gap by asking grandparents which autobiographical memories they consider important to transmit to their grandchildren, and by assessing the perceived functions and characteristics of these memories (e.g., phenomenology, emotionality, centrality) using the same standardized tools as in the parent–child dyads. This design allows a direct comparison of what parents and grandparents choose to transmit, and how these stories are remembered and used by the younger generation.

Work on reminiscence and socioemotional aging helps clarify why grandparents occupy a distinctive narrative position. Older adults tend to recall and share memories for socially oriented purposes (such as teaching, informing, and fostering intimacy) more than younger adults, who more often use memory for identity work or problem-solving (Marques et al., 2023; Webster & McCall, 1999), consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006; Mather & Carstensen, 2005). They also exhibit stronger self-continuity across time than younger adults (Liao & Bluck, 2023; Peters, Kemper, Schmiedek, & Habermas, 2023; Rutt & Löckenhoff, 2016), partly due to personality traits and social roles stabilizing after early adulthood (Terracciano, McCrae, Brant, & Costa Jr, 2005), which reduces the novelty of self-defining experiences. Accordingly, grandparental storytelling serves dual purposes: preserving a coherent, emotionally resonant self-narrative and transmitting moral, emotional, and identity-relevant knowledge to younger family members.

Family conversational roles further highlight this privileged narrative position. In a

study of intergenerational discussions about World War II, van der Haegen, Stone, Luminet, and Hirst (2022) found that the oldest generation predominantly assumed the role of narrator, given their direct experience with the events, whereas the middle generation alternated between narrator and mentor, and the youngest generation mainly listened. Related work on historical events such as World War II shows that, although much specific information is lost, grandchildren can still retell aspects of their grandparents' experiences decades later (Cordonnier et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2014). These findings suggest that grandparents act as primary custodians of lived history, and that their stories constitute a durable part of the family's narrative repertoire.

Beyond their role as storytellers of major historical events, grandparents also view themselves as emotionally nurturing and morally instructive figures in everyday family life. Bernal and De la Fuente Anuncibay (2007) reported that grandparents frequently described relationships with their grandchildren in terms of affection, emotional support, and care, while also seeing themselves as sources of advice, knowledge, and moral guidance. These self-perceptions are consistent with the intergenerational stake hypothesis, which posits that older generations tend to feel more emotionally invested in younger relatives than the reverse (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971). Empirical studies confirm that grandparents often report greater closeness and involvement with grandchildren than grandchildren report with them (Harwood, 2001; Spalding & Carpenter, 2019). In this context, autobiographical storytelling becomes both an emotional and communicative strategy: a way to sustain intimacy, express care, and offer guidance across generational distance (Barker, 2007; Fowler & Soliz, 2010).

The emotional tone of grandparental memories is also shaped by age-related changes in motivation. As discussed earlier, autobiographical remembering in later life is marked by a *positivity effect*, with a greater focus on positive than negative experiences (e.g., Levine & Bluck, 2004). By selectively highlighting positive episodes, grandparents tend to share stories that are easier to integrate into a coherent and personally meaningful life narrative (Matlin & Stang, 1978). In intergenerational contexts, this positive selection supports emotional closeness and reinforces a sense of continuity, rather than dwelling on loss or conflict.

By transmitting life lessons and family narratives, grandparents fulfill generative needs for continuity and care, reinforcing their sense of purpose and belonging. At the same time, these narratives provide younger relatives with resources for understanding family history, values, and identity. In this thesis, grandparental stories are examined alongside

parental ones to determine whether there are generational differences in which memories are regarded as most important, how they are remembered and used, and how their characteristics and perceived functions contribute to feelings of continuity and connection within the family.

2.4 Chapter 4: Thesis overview

2.4.1 Aims of the thesis

As developed in *Chapter 1: Autobiographical memory*, this thesis adopts a functional conception of autobiographical memory in which remembering is viewed as a constructive, goal-driven activity serving self-coherence, guidance, and social connection rather than accurate replay. Building on this view, the thesis extends the functional approach to intergenerational memories, treating both personal and vicarious family stories as potential building blocks of the self and asking which of their characteristics make them more likely to be remembered and used. Although vicarious memory has recently attracted growing interest, relatively little is known about the kinds of experiences older family members choose to transmit, how they frame these stories, and how younger generations, in turn, remember and use them.

More specifically, as argued in *Chapter 2: Receiving family stories*, intergenerational narratives are central from an early age for anchoring autobiographical memory, a sense of self, and an initial understanding of the social world. Research has focused more on parental vicarious memories than on grandparental narratives, with the latter receiving almost no systematic attention within the framework of autobiographical memory. Existing work shows that parents' stories can convey values and provide information, but less is known about which parental and grandparental stories younger people themselves regard as important, how these memories are phenomenologically experienced, and which functions they fulfill in their lives. This thesis deepens this perspective by examining the characteristics and perceived functions of stories that emerging adults identify as important, and by doing so for both parental and grandparental narratives. To our knowledge, no prior work has directly compared vicarious stories received from parents and from grandparents within the same empirical program.

A second gap concerns the imbalance between the perspectives of transmitters and receivers. As discussed in *Chapter 3: Remembering through transmission*, most studies have

focused on what children or adolescents report remembering, whereas the intentions and experiences of parents and grandparents as storytellers are much less documented. Grandparental transmission has mainly been examined in clinical research, often outside the methods and concepts of autobiographical memory studies. Parental storytelling has been investigated somewhat more extensively, but rarely by asking parents to identify intergenerational stories they themselves consider important and to describe why they chose to transmit them. By inviting both parents and grandparents to select important transmitted memories and by measuring their features, this thesis offers a more systematic account of what makes a story likely to be told and of how intergenerational narratives matter for older generations.

Overall, the thesis aims to examine both sides of the intergenerational "coin": how and why parents and grandparents decide to share important events they have lived with younger family members, how and why younger people remember stories from their parents and grandparents, and how parental and grandparental narratives differ. By directly comparing these two generations of transmitters, the studies highlight how storytelling responds to different developmental needs and relational goals across the lifespan. Taking the theoretical stance that family represents a core domain of identity, the thesis further examines how younger generations may transform inherited stories to maintain a coherent sense of self, even when this involves reinterpreting or reshaping the narratives they have received.

2.4.2 Empirical studies

The empirical part of this thesis comprises four studies that together provide an integrated picture of intergenerational memory transmission within families. Taken as a whole, these studies document how often intergenerational storytelling is perceived to occur, which types of events are transmitted, how these stories are emotionally experienced and functionally used, and which features predict whether narratives are elaborated and remembered in similar ways across generations.

Study 1 is an online questionnaire designed to investigate how frequently intergenerational storytelling is perceived to occur in families. Grandparents report how often they tell stories to their children and grandchildren; parents indicate how often they perceive receiving stories from their own parents and transmitting stories to their children; and younger participants report how often they receive stories from parents and grandpar-

ents. This study examines whether intergenerational discussions are perceived as a common part of family life and whether these conversations are seen as focusing primarily on personal versus public events, and on relatively recent versus more distant experiences.

Using direct interviews with family dyads, Study 2 focuses on the reported functions of intergenerational stories. Dyads of grandparent–grandchild and parent–child are invited to recall important personal and public memories that the older member has transmitted to the younger one, and to rate the functions of these memories (for example, why they chose to tell or to remember these stories). Within each dyad, the perceived functions reported by transmitters and receivers are compared, and additional comparisons are made between grandparental and parental dyads, and between grandchildren and children. This study sheds light on how intergenerational narratives operate both as shared knowledge structures and as relational tools whose meanings may diverge between those who tell and those who listen.

Study 3 uses a similar paradigm but concentrates on the emotional dimension of transmitted personal memories. Again relying on within- and between-dyad comparisons, it examines emotional valence, intensity, and discrete emotions associated with important memories selected by transmitters (parents or grandparents) and receivers (children or grandchildren). By mapping emotional patterns across generations and roles, this study clarifies how intergenerational storytelling conveys not only events but also emotional meanings, and how these emotional profiles may contribute to the stories' roles in value transmission, identity development, and the maintenance of family bonds.

Finally, Study 4 combines data from the previous two dyadic studies to investigate which characteristics predict narrative elaboration and within-dyad similarity. For this purpose, participants select important stories within the dyad and also narrate the stories of the other family member. Narratives are coded for elaboration and for similarity between transmitter and receiver versions. Models including centrality, emotions, phenomenological qualities, and functions are then used to identify which features predict elaboration and similarity. This study integrates the different dimensions examined throughout the thesis and offers initial steps toward a more comprehensive model of how intergenerational family stories are selected, told, and carried forward across generations.

Overview of the design and participant characteristics of each of the four studies is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Overview of the design and participant characteristics across the four studies.

Study	Paradigm	N	Participants
Article 1			
Perception of frequency of family memory transmission	Online individual questionnaire	351	G1 ($n = 129$): $M_{age} = 71$ (6), 55% women
			G2 ($n = 153$): $M_{age} = 56$ (10), 69% women
			G3 ($n = 63$): $M_{age} = 24$ (3), 70% women
Article 2			
Functional analysis of intergenerational memory transmission	In-person or online interview of dyads	226	Parents ($n = 64$): $M_{age} = 50.9$ (6.0), 79.7% women
			Children ($n = 64$): $M_{age} = 20.5$ (2.5), 85.9% women
			Grandparents ($n = 49$): $M_{age} = 74.2$ (5.9), 74.5% women
			Grandchildren ($n = 49$): $M_{age} = 20.1$ (2.5), 75.6% women
Article 3			
Comparing emotional content in transmitted vs. remembered memories	In-person or online interview of dyads	222	Parents ($n = 57$): $M_{age} = 53.1$ (5.3), 73.7% women
			Children ($n = 57$): $M_{age} = 22.6$ (3.0), 68.4% women
			Grandparents ($n = 54$): $M_{age} = 77.0$ (5.1), 75.9% women
			Grandchildren ($n = 54$): $M_{age} = 21.3$ (3.5), 53.7% women
Article 4			
Predictors of elaboration and similarity in vicarious memories	Secondary analysis of Studies 2 and 3	436	Parents ($n = 120$): $M_{age} = 51.8$ (5.8), 74.1% women
			Children ($n = 120$): $M_{age} = 21.6$ (3.0), 80.0% women
			Grandparents ($n = 98$): $M_{age} = 75.5$ (5.7), 74.5% women
			Grandchildren ($n = 98$): $M_{age} = 20.5$ (2.9), 63.2% women

Note. Samples of Article 1 to 3 are independent. N = total sample size; n = subgroup sample size; M = mean age; SD = standard deviation.

Chapter 3

Empirical work

Memory

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From one generation to the next: perception of frequency of family memory transmission

David Baudet, Aline Cordonnier, Olivier Luminet & Christine Bastin

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From one generation to the next: perception of frequency of family memory transmission

David Baudet [a], Aline Cordonnier [b], Olivier Luminet [b,c] and Christine Bastin [a,c]

[a]GIGA Research, CRC Human Imaging, University of Liège, Liège, Belgique; [b]Research Institute for Psychological Science, University of Louvain, Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium; [c]Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS), Brussels, Belgium

ABSTRACT

Family serves as a crucial context for intergenerational memory transmission. From an early age, younger generations hear stories from older family members, fostering a sense of belonging, identity, and a deeper understanding of the world. However, the frequency of this intergenerational exchange in daily life remains underexplored. In an exploratory online study, we asked parents and grandparents how often they perceive sharing memories with younger generations (top-down) and how often children and grandchildren perceive receiving these memories (bottom-up). We assessed the perception of the transmission frequency for public and personal events across various timeframes. Our findings indicate that intergenerational memory transmission is perceived as relatively frequent. Notably, grandparents perceived sharing more memories with their children than the children perceived receiving from them. Transmission was also more common between parents and children than between grandparents and grandchildren. Additionally, personal memories were shared more frequently than public events, particularly when both transmitter and receiver had lived through the events. Correlations between perceived transmission frequency and the feeling of closeness suggested that grandparent-grandchild relationships benefit more from memory transmission than other pairs. These results highlight the varied ways in which individuals within families perceive memory transmission, emphasising the complex nature of intergenerational communication.

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How much do we know about our parents' early adulthood? How much did Grandma tell us about her teenage years? From a very young age, stories are part of our lives. We are told stories of the past through tales, books, songs, and history classes, but also through personal memories from family members. These descriptions of past events might take the form of testimonies recounting important public events, like the stories of mom describing how she felt when she was watching the Berliners proclaiming their freedom on 9 November 1989, or of lighter funny anecdotes like stories of dad's mischiefs told by grandad. These stories are part of how we understand ourselves and the world. However, while these narratives are thought to contribute to the development of autobiographical memory (Reese, 2002), few studies have investigated the frequency of occurrence of their transmission within the family.

Autobiographical memory (AM), traditionally defined as a system storing "specific, personal, long-lasting, and of significance to the self" memories (Nelson, 1993), serves a large range of social functions. Autobiographical memories are shared for conversational purposes (to create or facilitate a discussion) but also for bonding (Harris et al., 2014). More adaptative social uses include increasing empathy for others (Bluck et al., 2013), fostering warmth in romantic relationships (Alea & Bluck, 2007), or making one's contribution to conversation more believable and persuasive (Pillemer, 1992).

Within family interactions, intergenerational transmission is a casual and common process that occurs in daily conversations (Fivush & Merrill, 2016). Discussing family history can also be ritualised, with privileged setups like dinnertime (Bohanek et al., 2009), and conversational roles for each member of the family (van der Haegen et al., 2022). Bohanek et al. (2009) recorded 37 American families during dinnertime and found that on average, one narrative of a past event comes out every five minutes. These narratives included reminiscing about the children's or the parent's day, parent–child interactions, family knowledge and stories, food, animals, injuries or illnesses, and vacations. The authors suggested that the more frequent the discussions, the more important these discussions were.

CONTACT David Baudet david.baudet@uliege.be GIGA Research, CRC Human Imaging, University of Liège, Allée du 6 Août, 8, 4000 Liège, Belgique
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For children, their parents – especially the mother – and their family are primary sources of information about the world. The stories they hear are used as guidelines for their understanding of the world making those discussions central to children's AM development (e.g., Farrant & Reese, 2009; Reese, 2002; Salmon & Reese, 2016). Fivush and colleagues argue that it is through this shared history that children construct their own identities (Fivush, 2008; Fivush & Merrill, 2016; Reese et al., 2019). In their model of family narratives, Fivush and Merrill (2016) propose three ecological systems in the middle of which the individual's AM is embedded. These three niches describe different types of family narratives: the micro-system defines the shared stories (events in which the family members engaged together), the exo-system consists of narratives that family members share about events that were not experienced by all of them, and the macro-system are narratives about extended family history or cultural narratives. Thus, different types of stories are shared across generations and differ on whether all family members were present or not. Some hold more personal importance, such as the personal stories of "grand-pa trying to impress grand-ma by singing under her window", while others can have a collective or historical significance, such as the story of "grand-ma fleeing her country because of the war". Traditionally, AM has been proposed to serve three main functions (Bluck et al., 2005; Bluck & Alea, 2002). AM helps create and maintain social bonds (social function), guides present and future behaviours (directive function), and creates a sense of identity and continuity (self function). Whereas AM and the self are interconnected (for a review see Conway, 2005), the construction of a coherent and reliable sense of self does not solely rely on the individual's memories of personal events. Pillemer et al. (2015) define vicarious memories as "recollections people have of salient life episodes that were told to them by another person, such as a friend or family member". These are memories told by relatives which can be incorporated into the life narrative if judged relevant. Moreover, studies on vicarious memories showed that both vicarious and personal memories share common characteristics, such as phenomenology functions, but at lower degrees (Pillemer et al., 2015; Pond & Peterson, 2020; Steiner, 2023).

Memories from others, and especially relatives, are also pieces of information to construct a sense of self and understand the world. Within families, adolescents and young adults use their parents' stories to form their identity, identify with their parents, learn values, and make intergenerational connections (Merrill et al., 2019). Identification and intergenerational connections are affected by gender, especially the gender of the parent (Fivush & Zaman, 2011). For instance, (Merrill et al., 2015) showed that during narrative conversations, mothers tend to talk more and in a more affiliative way than fathers. Previous works on gender differences demonstrated that women tend to be more detailed, more accurate, and globally more elaborative than men (for a review see Grysman & Hudson, 2013). More broadly, everyday communication-based memories, referred to as communicative memory, typically do not persist beyond three generations and tend to diminish with each successive generation (Assmann, 2011; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

Over the past decades, a growing number of studies have investigated how stories of important historical events are passed throughout generations, including memories from World War II (Cordonnier et al., 2021; Pohn-Lauggas, 2021; Stone et al., 2014), war in ex-Yugoslavia (Svob et al., 2016), the Holocaust (Auerhahn & Laub, 1998; Wiseman et al., 2006), Rwanda Diaspora (Féron, 2023), or the Vajont disaster in Northern Italy (Raccanello et al., 2022). Abel and Berntsen (2021) compared memories of public events with memories of personal events and showed differences in both phenomenological features and functions. Personal events serve more self and directive functions than public events. Public events also serve directive functions but to a lesser extent. Overall, public events seem to be relevant for their social functions, as these events were discussed with peers.

In addition, older generations also gain to share their experience with younger generations. Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity regulation theory (SST; Carstensen, 2006) postulates that when the subjective sense of future time is perceived as shorter, people tend to shift their priorities. Individuals who perceive their remaining time as shorter emphasise emotional fulfilment and psychological well-being optimisation by deepening existing relationships and developing expertise in areas of life that are already satisfying. In our context, this would lead to a natural tendency for older generations to share their life story with younger generations, to connect and deepen their relationships with close relatives.

If we know why people share, we know little about how often memory transmission occurs within families. Whereas some authors investigated the frequency of transmission in particular setups like dinnertime (Bohanek et al., 2009), and others examined conversations using audio samples recorded randomly during the day (Demiray et al., 2019), no previous study asked directly the participants to estimate how frequently transmission occurs in their daily lives. The goal of this paper is thus to measure the perceived frequency of intergenerational transmission of memory in the general population. Family is a broad term that people can interpret differently according to their experience, and every family has its dynamics regarding communication. In this study, our primary goal is to assess how frequently memory transmission occurs within the family. We then want to compare how the perspective (being the receiver or the transmitter) influences the perception of the transmission. A different perception of the transmission could mean that transmission serves different functions according to the perspective.

We also investigate the variables that could affect the perceived frequency of intergenerational transmission in the family. Specifically, we examine the frequency of contact, event type (personal vs. public event), the event timeframe (before and after the birth of the receiver, and recent events), and the generation gap (two or one generation). We chose the three levels of timeframe to bring a temporal perspective on transmission: we differentiate events that both family members lived recently, events that occurred after the receiver's birth, which could be related to micro or exo-systems of Fivush and Merrill's (2016) model, or events from before the receiver's birth, which would rely on the macro-level. Other measures include the importance of knowing family members' personal past and the feeling of interpersonal closeness. We test whether transmission of memory within the family is perceived as important and whether this correlates with the perceived frequency of transmission. We also measure participant's feeling of closeness with their family member, and with their family in general to assess whether those measures correlate with the perceived frequency of transmission.

Because of the competing results in the literature, and the topic being relatively new, we did not state specific hypotheses. However, while still being highly exploratory, we could expect that transmission of memory would be reported as more frequent when only a one-generation gap rather than a two-generation gap (Cordonnier et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2014), for personal events than for public events (Abel & Berntsen, 2021), and for recent events than for older events (Bohanek et al., 2009).

Method

Participants

A total of 619 participants were recorded. All participants were over 18 years old and spoke French. After removing incomplete questionnaires, participants who did not provide their age, and those who did not match our age criterion (described in Procedure), a final sample of 351 participants was examined. Among them, 129 were grandparents (G1), with an average age of 71 years old ($SD = 6$), and 71 were women (55%). There were also 153 parents (G2) with an average age of 56 years old ($SD = 10$), among whom 106 were women (69%) and two identified as non-binary. Other groups did not include non-binary participants. Finally, 69 participants were neither grandparents nor parents, so were placed in our last group (G3) with an average age of 24 years old (SD = 3), and 48 of them were women (70%). On average, participants from all three generations answered that they had completed 15 years of education. It is important to note that the design did not allow participants from the same families to be directly compared. Demographic information is reported in Table 1.

Participants were mainly French-speaking Belgians ($n = 333$), other participants were French ($n = 9$) or others French speakers ($n = 9$). They were solicited through the University of Liège's participants database, the Catholic University of Louvain's database, or personal channels (social media, emails, word of mouth). The link for the questionnaire was also published on the Belgian bi-monthly newspaper Ligueur's website (https://leligueur.be/).

The protocol was approved by the ethical committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Logopedics and Educational Sciences of the University of Liège (case number: 10433).

Procedure and materials

The questionnaire was generated using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2020) and was available to anybody who received the link. Participants were invited to answer a questionnaire about the intergenerational transmission of memory within families. After reading and signing a consent form, participants were instructed that given the heterogeneity behind the concept of "family", they would have to answer about the people they call family. For instance, when asked about transmission from "a parent", they could choose who was "a parent" to them.

Three branches formed the questionnaire (see Figure 1 for an overview). The first questions were created to orient the participant into the appropriate branch. First, subjects were asked if they had children older than 6. If they did not, they were classified as G3 and responded to corresponding questions. If they reported having at least one child older than 6, they were then asked if they had a grandchild older than 6. If they did not, they were classified as G2 and continued to G2 questions. Lastly, if participants answered having at least one grandchild older than 6, they were classified as G1. Incidentally, since the classification was based on parenthood and as a comparability concern, we added age criteria to reduce within-group variability. To focus on a younger generation, we excluded G3 who were over 30 years old. G1 is required to have at least one grandchild over 6 years old, ensuring that they had the opportunity to engage in verbal interactions with them. This group showed small variability ($M = 71.1$, $SD = 6.1$). We noticed that the two oldest participants (93 years old each) were in the G2 group, so we decided to exclude them to reduce the overlap with G1. G2 participants included a wider range of ages ($M = 56.4$, $SD = 10.8$), but was significatively younger than G1 participants ($t(280) = -14.97$, $p < .001$).

Questions were solely about the transmission of public and personal events from an older generation to a younger generation (from G1 to G2, G1 to G3, and G2 to G3) perceived either from the transmitter's or the receiver's perspective. We also restrained measures to transmission between living members. Keeping in mind that the transmission is always from an older generation, we referred to it as "top-down" when reported by the transmitter (e.g., G1 rating its transmission to G2), and "bottom-up" when reported by the receiver (e.g., G3 rating the transmission

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the participants.

Generation	Count	Age (*SD*)	Education (*SD*)	Number of women (%)	Parents alive	At least one grand-parent alive
G1	129	71.1 (6.1)	15.5 (3.1)	71 (55%)		
G2	153	56.4 (10.8)	15.9 (2.9)	106 (69%)	87 (56.9%)	
G3	69	23.9 (3.0)	15.8 (2.5)	48 (70%)		55 (79.7%)

Note: Education corresponds to the number of successful years achieved by the participant, six for primary education, six for secondary, and any completed year of higher education. The last two columns show how many G2 and G3 had at least one G1 alive, they did not have to answer perceived frequency if they had none.

from G2). Thus, whereas G1 were only transmitters (only top-down measures) and G3 only receivers (bottom-up measures), G2 had both bottom-up measures when rating transmission from G1, and top-down measures when rating their transmission to G3.

Regardless of their categorisation, the same general procedure was applied to all participants. Participants first indicated whether they had a preferred person for transmission, providing information on the age and gender of that person, and their frequency of interactions ("How frequently are you in contact with that person?"), before answering questions about the transmission itself. We framed the question about the frequency of interactions to encompass all forms of communication (virtual or in-person) as virtual communication is becoming increasingly common. If they did not report having a preferred person for transmission for that generation, they were forced to select one person and keep them in mind throughout the questionnaire.

Responses regarding perception of transmission frequencies were given using a slider on a visual analog scale (VAS) from 0 ("never") to 100 ("Very often"). Participants were not shown the number they chose on the scale. There were three questions for each event type, in this order: the transmission frequency of memories about events occurring before the birth of the youngest generation, after the birth of the youngest generation, and about recent events (less than a year prior). These questions were asked for both public events and personal events. Public events were described as "events that occurred during the lifetime, that are relevant for a community whether it be local, regional, national, or

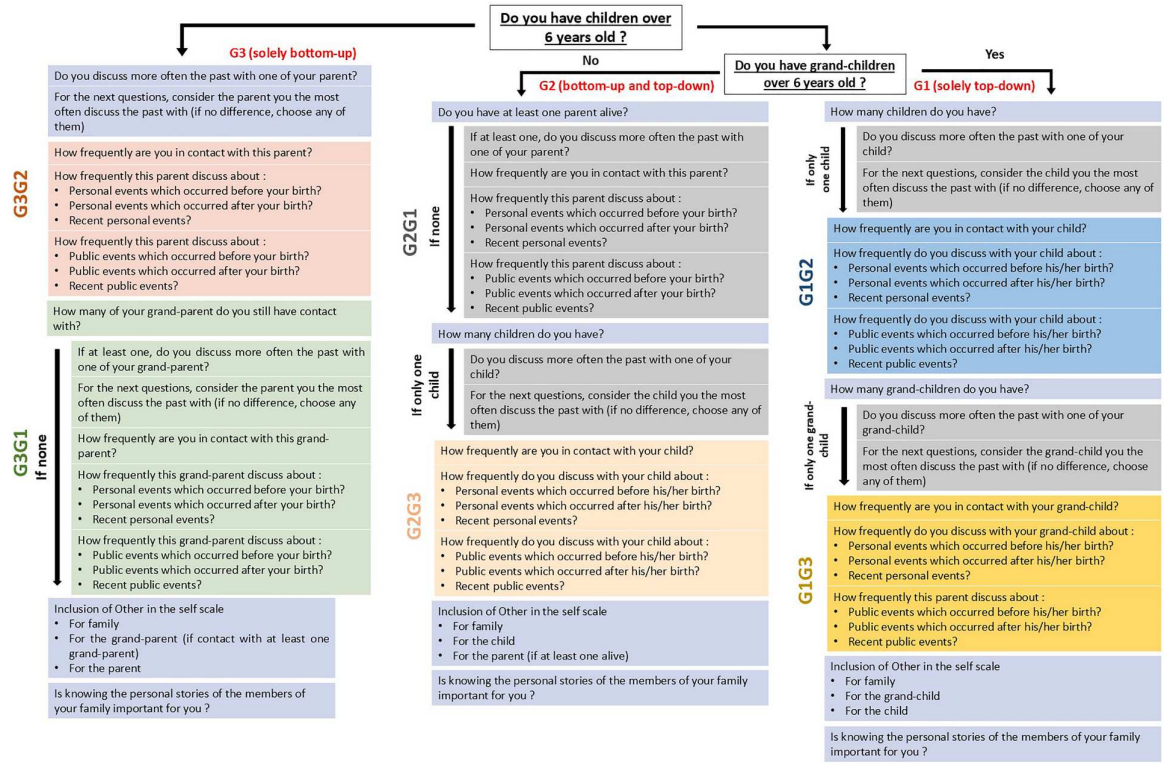


Figure 1. Overview of the survey.

Note: G1 participants first described the number of children they had, then if they had more than one, whether they felt there was a difference in the way they talked to each of them about the past. Then they had to answer the questions about age, gender, and frequency of contact with the selected children, even if they answered having no preference. Next followed the frequency of transmission of personal and public events that occurred before the birth of the selected children, after their birth, and recent events. Afterward, they answered similar questions about their transmission to their grandchildren. Finally, it ended with the IOS scales measuring feelings of closeness. Similar approaches were taken for G2 and G3 participants, with some specificities. For G2 participants, before asking them how frequently they felt that their "preferred parent" (G1) transmits memories, we first asked them if they had at least one parent alive. For G3s, they first answered if they still lived with their parents, before asking questions about preferences.

international (for instance, a local flood, a memorable sporting event, a pandemic)". An example of a top-down question would be: "How frequently do you talk to this child about personal events which occurred before their birth?", whereas a bottom-up question would be phrased: "How frequently does this parent talk to you about public events that occurred after your birth?".

Then, to capture the nature of the relationship between the individuals and their families, participants responded to an adapted version of the inclusion of other in the self (IOS) scale (Aron et al., 1992). Participants saw two circles they could bring closer and superpose (with 11 different degrees of superposition) to represent the relationship between themselves and another person. The more intertwined the diagrams were, the closer the respondent felt to the other person. We also adapted a version to measure the closeness between the respondent and their family in general.

The last question probed the importance of memory transmission within the family. It took the form of: "Is knowing the personal stories of the members of your family important for you?" and participants answered on a VAS from 0 to 100.

The questionnaire ended with demographic questions about age, gender, place of living, and the number of successful years of education. An exemplar of the questionnaire (French) is available on OSF.[1]

Analysis

Although reported in the Results section and given the highly exploratory character of the study and the multiplicity of analyses made, a cautious interpretation of *p*-values is recommended (e.g., Nosek & Lakens, 2014). Moreover, *p*-values are affected by sample size, the larger the sample size the more likely an effect will be detected, even a small one (e.g., Johansson, 2011; Lin et al., 2013). Therefore, given our large sample size ($N = 351$), results will be discussed regarding the effect sizes (Dunkler et al., 2020) and based on regression coefficients, which can be used as a non-standardized effect size (Baguley, 2009). It is noteworthy that our groups are not balanced (G1, $n = 129$; G2, $n = 153$; G3, $n = 69$) which can also affect the results of our analyses.

As participants rated the perceived frequency of transmissions on a 0 to 100 VAS, it was treated as a continuous variable. Hence, we mainly used linear mixed models (LMM) to investigate the effects of the different factors, as they are resistant to violation of normality or heteroscedasticity (Jacqmin-Gadda et al., 2007; Schielzeth et al., 2020). All LMM were fitted using the "lme4" (Bates et al., 2015) package in R (R Core Team, 2021). We used the t_to_epsilon2 function from the package "effectsize" (Ben-Shachar et al., 2020) to calculate partial epsilon-squared[2] (ε^2_p; which are equivalent to adjusted partial eta-squared; Iacobucci et al., 2023; Mordkoff, 2019). All codes are available on OSF.

Differences in reported transmission were examined according to the perspective (transmitter vs. receiver), and regarding the frequency of contacts. Then, we modelled the perceived transmission regarding the gap between generations (two vs. one), the event type (public vs. personal), the event timeframe (before the receiver's birth, after the receiver's birth, and recent events), and the gap between generations (two vs. one). Other analyses included gender, frequency of reported interaction, and feeling of closeness. Correlations between measures were also estimated and used in further analyses to examine their moderation effect.

To simplify our description, we have coded the type of transmission by including first who is evaluating the transmission and then with whom the transmission occurs. For instance, "G1G2" and "G2G1" are both transmissions between G1 and G2, but the former is evaluated by G1 (top-down), and the latter by G2 (bottom-up).

Results

As our data is composed of numerous variables, we report here only a curated part of potential analyses. More detailed information can be found in the Supplementary Material related to this study, including the complete descriptive table, post hoc analysis tables for the interaction effects between event type and event timeframe, the post hoc analysis table for the interactions between event type and generation gap, the interaction between event timeframe and generation gap, gender preferences, age-related analyses, and the correlation table.

We start here by providing an overview of the data with descriptive statistics of perceived memory transmission frequency followed by descriptive data for control variables. Second, we proceed to evaluate the impact of the perspective (transmitter vs. receiver) on perceived memory transmission, first by analyzing its main effect, and then by adding potential mediators to the model. Afterward, we explore the role of the generation gap and social cohorts on the perceived frequency. Finally, we run a complementary analysis focusing on two variables: event timeframe and event type.

Descriptive statistics of the perceived memory transmission frequency

Overall, and with relatively large interindividual differences, intergenerational transmission was reported as moderately frequent, whether perceived by the transmitter ($M_{top\text{-}down} = 52.3$, $SD_{top\text{-}down} = 29.9$) or by the receiver ($M_{bottom\text{-}up} = 48.8$, $SD_{bottom\text{-}up} = 30.9$).

Descriptive data regarding the perceived frequency of transmission are available in Table 2.

Descriptive statistics of control variables

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for variables including the perceived importance of knowing the personal history of family members, the overall family feeling of

Table 2. Perceived frequency of transmission for each combination.

	Public events			Personal events		
Combination	Before receiver's birth	After receiver's birth	Recent	Before receiver's birth	After receiver's birth	Recent
Topdown						
G1G2	31.37 (25.75)	46.58 (25.06)	67.64 (24.35)	48.59 (25.45)	59.60 (22.44)	68.15 (25.97)
G1G3	29.40 (27.60)	35.99 (28.71)	48.16 (30.94)	37.14 (29.13)	43.33 (28.04)	53.64 (29.67)
G2G3	30.66 (27.97)	32.43 (27.01)	55.91 (32.80)	44.40 (28.70)	48.60 (26.34)	60.78 (33.68)
Bottom-up						
G2G1	41.22 (27.65)	51.86 (27.89)	71.08 (26.05)	53.85 (26.33)	68.80 (20.19)	76.33 (25.92)
G3G1	37.02 (27.80)	26.60 (19.46)	52.89 (32.81)	55.36 (29.92)	40.58 (22.70)	59.76 (29.71)
G3G2	31.43 (25.63)	42.29 (28.84)	69.74 (27.36)	52.48 (25.53)	60.75 (21.60)	76.96 (28.54)

Note: Participants rated their perceived frequency of transmission from visual analogous scales ranging from 0 to 100. "Recent" refers to events that occurred less than a year prior. Standard deviations are given between parentheses.

closeness, personal feelings of closeness, and the frequency of interaction.

Importance of knowing the personal history of family members

We looked at the perceived importance of knowing the personal history of other family members. Overall, knowing family members' history seemed important for our respondents ($M = 80.41$, $SD = 20.71$). Interestingly, we found that it was less important for G1 than for the two other generations ($\beta_{G2} = 9.93$, 95% CI [5.16, 14.69], $t(348) = 4.09$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.09]; $\beta_{G3} = 6.73$, 95% CI [0.78, 12.68], $t(348) = 2.23$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .01$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.04]).

Family feeling of closeness

We found no differences between the answers of the different generations regarding the feeling of closeness with the family ($F(2, 348) = 0.73$, $p = .482$). The three generations answered feeling relatively close to their family ($M_{G1} = 6.96$, $SD_{G1} = 2.92$; $M_{G2} = 7.30$, $SD_{G2} = 2.49$; $M_{G3} = 6.99$, $SD_{G3} = 2.82$).

Personal feeling of closeness

Overall, participants felt close to their preferred person for memory transmission, with the lowest closeness ratings reported by grandchildren toward their grandparents (M = 5.6, SD = 3.27).

To investigate a potential difference in the way our duos perceived feeling close to the preferred person for transmission, we compared the feeling of closeness two by two for each combination (G1G2 vs. G2G1, G1G3 vs. G3G1, and G2G3 vs. G3G2). We found a significative difference between G1G2 and G2G1 ($\beta_{G2G1} = -1.38$, 95% CI [−1.90, −0.85], $t(391) = -5.14$, $p < .001$). This suggests that G1 participants felt a stronger sense of closeness to the child they identified as the primary recipient of their transmissions than G2 participants felt toward the parent they identified as their primary source of received transmissions. However, we found no differences between G1G3 and G3G1 ($\beta_{G3G1} = 0.45$, 95% CI [−0.21, −1.10], $t(377) = 1.35$, $p = .18$) or between G2G3 and G3G2 ($\beta_{G3G2} = -0.32$, 95% CI [−0.95, 0.30], $t(364) = -1.02$, $p = .31$).

Frequency of contact

Similar to the top-down vs. bottom-up comparisons of transmission frequencies, we compared the frequency of contact two by two for each transmission (G1G2 vs. G2G1, G1G3 vs. G3G1, and G2G3 vs. G3G2).

Perceived frequencies of contact were significantly different only between G1G2 and G2G1 ($\beta_{G2G1} = -8.70$, 95% CI [−15.17, −2.22], $t(214) = -2.65$, $p = .009$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .01$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.03]), no difference was found between G1 and G3 ($\beta_{G3G1} = 0.61$, 95% CI [−7.53, −8.74], $p = .883$), or G2 and G3 ($\beta_{G3G2} = -3.66$, 95% CI [−9.54, 2.21], $p = .22$). Our older generation (G1) felt that they were in contact more often with their children (G2) than their children felt being in contact with their parents. This could be due to a difference in social network size, or a difference of importance in this transmission. Other generations did not differ in the way they perceived being in contact with each other.

Effect of transmitter's vs. receiver's perspective on perceived transmission

We proceed in three steps. First, we evaluate the main effect of perspective on perceived transmission. Second, we explore correlational patterns between our dependent

Table 3. Descriptive data for control variables across combinations.

Combination	Feeling of closeness with other person	Frequency of interaction	Importance of transmission	Feeling of closeness with family
G1G2	7.16 (2.29)	72.80 (21.17)	74.76 (23.33)	74.76 (23.33)
G1G3	5.73 (2.84)	58.72 (26.65)		
G2G3	8.35 (2.03)	85.55 (19.63)	84.69 (17.90)	84.68 (17.90)
G2G1	5.94 (2.77)	64.10 (27.00)		
G3G1	5.57 (3.27)	59.33 (22.91)	81.49 (19.07)	81.49 (19.07)
G3G2	8.03 (2.32)	81.88 (22.44)		

Note: Standard deviations are given between parentheses. Feeling of closeness refers to the answers on the the *Inclusion of Other in the Self* scale (0–10) for both the preferred person for transmission, and family. "Recent" refers to events that occurred less than a year prior.

variable and control variables to identify potential mediators. Finally, we run our model again these identified mediators.

Main analysis

To compare the effect of the perspective (transmitter vs. receiver) on the perceived frequency of transmission, we ran LMM, using this formula: Transmission ~ Perspective + (1|Participant). We conducted three separate analyses. First, we analysed the reported frequency of transmission from G1 to G2 by comparing G1's perspective (G1G2) to G2's perspective (G2G1). Then, we analysed reported transmission from G1 to G3 by comparing G1's (G1G3) to G3's (G3G1) perspective, and finally, transmissions from G2 to G3 by comparing G2's (G2G3) to G3's (G3G2) perspectives (see Figure 2).

Results showed that G1 reported transmitting slightly more frequently to G2 ($M_{G1G2} = 53.66$, 95% CI [50.33, 56.99]) than G2 reported receiving from G1, $\beta_{G2G1} = -8.19$, 95% CI [−13.44, −2.95], $t(214) = -3.06$, $p = .002$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .04$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.10]. However, differences of reported frequency of transmission did not reach significance between G2 and G3 ($M_{G2G3} = 60.52$, 95% CI [57.52, 63.53], $\beta_{G3G2} = -4.91$, 95% CI [−10.30, 0.48], $p = .075$), and G1 and G3 ($M_{G1G3} = 41.28$ 95% CI [37.36, 45.19]; $\beta_{G3G1} = 4.09$, 95% CI [−3.07, 11.26], $p = .264$). Given the differences between the two perspectives on the frequency of transmission for at least one condition, we decided to split all further analyses according to the bottom-up and the top-down point of view.

Correlations with control variables

We ran correlation analyses between four variables: frequency of transmission, subjective importance of transmission, frequency of contact, and feeling of closeness. The rationale for these analyses was to investigate how those measures interacted together, if these interactions were different depending on the different combinations, and if a measure could mediate the previously described effects on transmission. Interpretation of the Pearson correlation (r) was based on Schober et al. (2018). All the results are reported in Table 4.

Globally, reported transmission and frequency of contact were positively moderately correlated for each combination ($0.42 < r < 0.55$), except for G2G3[3] ($r = 0.35$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.48]). Both G3G1 and G1G3 showed moderate positive correlations between reported transmission and feeling of closeness ($r = 0.56$, 95% CI [0.35, 0.72] and $r = 0.67$, 95% CI [0.56, 0.76], respectively). Finally, and not surprisingly, feeling of closeness and frequency of contact were moderate to strongly correlated ($0.52 < r < 0.72$) for each combination, except for G2G1 ($r = 0.33$) and G1G2 ($r = 0.44$).

Mediation effect of the frequency of contact

Given the strong correlation between transmission and the frequency of contact, we re-ran LMM analyses including the frequency of transmission as a predictor, to detect a possible mediation effect. First, we ran LMMs comparing bottom-up and top-down perspectives (G1G2 vs. G2G1; G2G3 vs. G3G2; G1G3 vs. G3G1), models' formula was: Transmission ~ Perspective * Frequency of contact + (1|ID). Once the frequency of contact was included in the models, there were no differences anymore between the receiver's and transmitter's perception of transmissions ($\beta_{G2G1} = -8.13$, 95% CI [−22.17, 5.90], $t(212) = -1.14$, $p = .257$; $\beta_{G3G2} = -11.58$, 95% CI [−31.45, 8.29], $t(218) = -1.14$, $p = .255$; $\beta_{G3G1} = 6.65$, 95% CI [−9.17, 22.4s8], $t(180) = 0.82$, $p = .411$). In summary, the oldest generation (G1) perceived that they transmitted more about their lives to their children than the middle generation (G2) perceived receiving from their parents. Additionally, the middle generation (G2) and the youngest generation (G3) reported engaging in memory transmission at comparable frequencies. Similarly, G1 reported transmitting to their grandchildren as frequently as G3 reported receiving from their grandparents. Furthermore, the findings revealed that greater perceived contact with another generation was associated with more frequent memory transmission between them. This relationship suggests that participants' judgments of transmission frequency may be supported by how often they perceive communicating with the other person (mediation effect).

Generation gap and social cohort

Main analysis for generation gap

Another important aim of our study is to compare the perceived transmission between parents and their children, and grandparents and their grandchildren. To achieve this, we conducted LMM comparing the effect of the generation gap on transmission, independently of the event type and the event timeframe. For the top-down perspective, we compared the transmission of a one-generation gap versus a two-generation gap (G1G2 and G2G3 versus G1G3). Results are shown in Figure 3 for the top-down perspective and Figure 4 for the bottom-up perspective.

Transmission was perceived as more frequent when there was a one-generation gap compared to a two-generation gap ($\beta_{1Gen\text{-}2Gen} = 15.81$, 95% CI [12.99, 18.64], $t(679) = 10.98$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .15$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.20]). Parents reported transmitting more frequently to their children than grandparents reported transmitting to their grandchildren.

On the other hand, from the bottom-up perspective, one-generation gap transmission frequency (G2G1 and G3G2) was barely greater than two-generation gap transmission (G3G1), $\beta_{1Gen\text{-}2Gen} = 4.34$, 95% CI [0.02, 8.66], $t(543) = 1.98$, $p = .049$, $\varepsilon^2_p < .01$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.02]. Children reported receiving slightly more from their parents than grandchildren reported receiving from their grandparents.

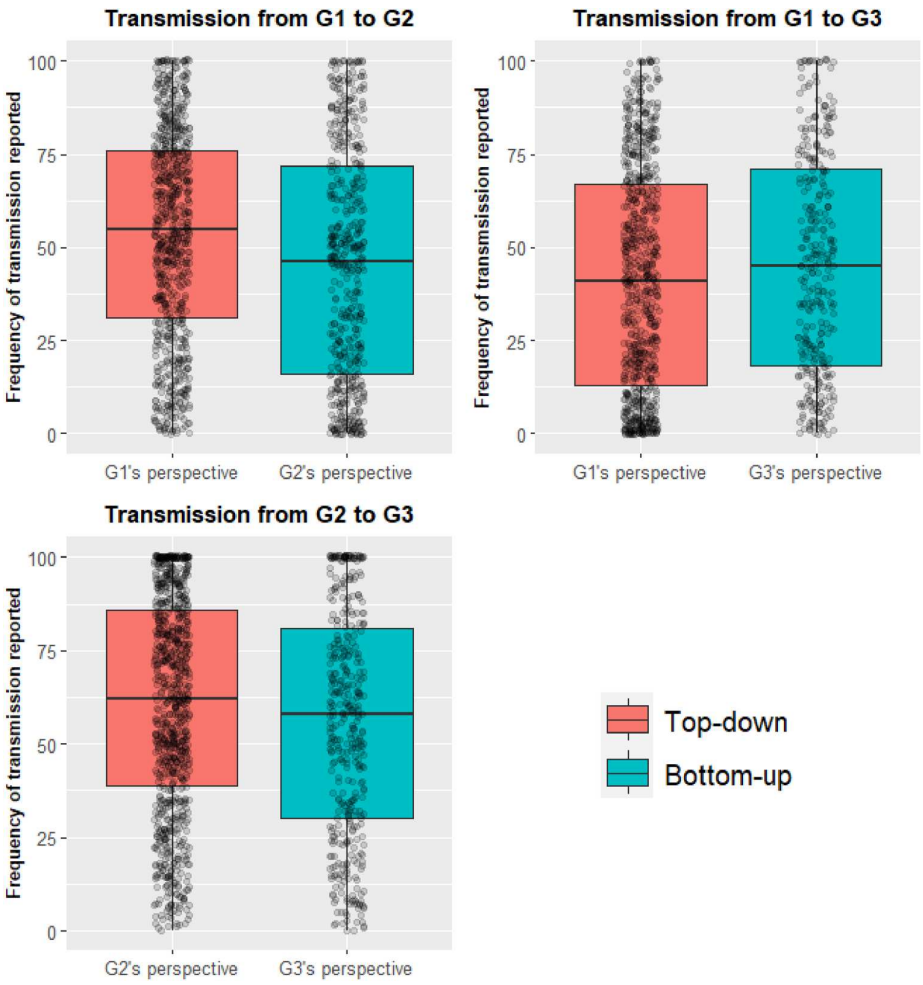


Figure 2. Perceived frequency of transmission according to the top-down perspective and the bottom-down perspective.

Table 4. Correlations between variables.

Variable 1	Variable 2		Correlation (Pearson)		Correlation (Pearson)
Feeling of closeness	Frequency de contact	**G2**G1	**0.33 [0.132, 0.508]**	**G1**G2	**0.44 [0.292, 0.572]**
Feeling of closeness	Importance of transmission		**0.29 [0.088, 0.474]**		**0.23 [0.056, 0.384]**
Importance of transmission	Frequency de contact		0.08 [−0.135, 0.284]		0.16 [−0.008, 0.328]
Frequency of transmission	Frequency de contact		**0.53 [0.364, 0.669]**		**0.42 [0.270, 0.556]**
Frequency of transmission	Importance of transmission		0.20 [−0.12, 0.393]		**0.23 [0.063, 0.390]**
Frequency of transmission	IOS		**0.27 [0.060, 0.452]**		**0.43 [0.273, 0.558]**
Feeling of closeness	Frequency de contact	**G3**G1	**0.72 [0.566, 0.829]**	**G1**G3	**0.63 [0.510, 0.722]**
Feeling of closeness	Importance of transmission		**0.36 [0.136, 0.550]**		0.17 [−0.001, 0.335]
Importance of transmission	Frequency de contact		**0.42 [0.170, 0.614]**		0.08 [−0.095, 0.248]
Frequency of transmission	Frequency de contact		**0.58 [0.372, 0.732]**		**0.58 [0.450, 0.683]**
Frequency of transmission	Importance of transmission		**0.27 [0.010, 0.503]**		**0.33 [0.166, 0.476]**
Frequency of transmission	IOS		**0.56 [0.348, 0.720]**		**0.67 [0.563, 0.756]**
Feeling of closeness	Frequency de contact	**G3**G2	**0.63 [0.463, 0.755]**	**G2**G3	**0.52 [0.392, 0.626]**
Feeling of closeness	Importance of transmission		**0.28 [0.050, 0.487]**		0.12 [−0.038, 0.275]
Importance of transmission	Frequency de contact		0.20 [−0.041, 0.415]		0.16 [−0.001, 0.308]
Frequency of transmission	Frequency de contact		**0.55 [0.360, 0.696]**		**0.35 [0.200, 0.480]**
Frequency of transmission	Importance of transmission		**0.26 [0.029, 0.471]**		**0.23 [0.077, 0.377]**
Frequency of transmission	IOS		**0.31 [0.081, 0.511]**		**0.33 [0.179, 0.463]**

Note: Pearson correlations between variables with 95% confidence intervals. Feeling of closeness refers to the score of the IOS scale with the other person of the duo. Correlations in bold are significant at $p < .05$.

Cohort effect

To detect a possible cohort effect (socially shared values from people of the same generation), we explored the transmission frequency between parents and children of different generations. For both perspectives, we compared the reported frequency of transmission from duos of a

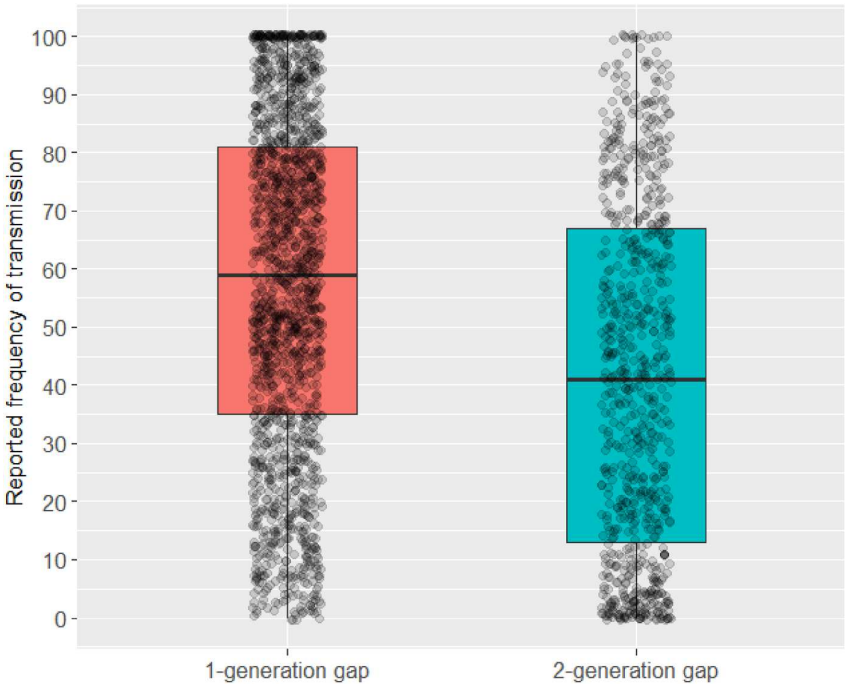


Figure 3. Top-down perception of transmission according to the generation gap: one-generation gap (G1G2&G2G3) vs. two-generation gap (G1G3).

one-generation gap: G1G2 vs. G2G3 for the top-down perspective (Figure 5), and G2G3 vs. G2G1 for the bottom-up perspective (Figure 6).

Although with a small effect size, outputs from the LMM revealed that G1 reported transmitting less to G2 than G2 reported transmitting to G3, $\beta_{G2G3\text{-}G1G2} = 6.87$, 95% CI [11.49, 2.24], $t(315) = 2.92$, $p = .004$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .02$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.07]. This means that within our sample, the older generation (G1) reported transmitting less to their children than the middle generation reported transmitting to theirs.

Similarly, in the bottom-up perspective, results showed that G2 reported receiving less frequently from G1 than G3 reported receiving from G2, $\beta_{G3G2\text{-}G2G1} = -10.15$, 95% CI [−16.31, −3.99], $t(175) = -3.25$, $p = .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .05$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.13]. This result might be indicative that the difference is potentially due to a cohort effect, where people who grew up earlier in the century transmit generally less to their children than people who grew up in the second half of the century.

Mediation effect of the frequency of contact

As for the perspective, similar mediation effects were observed regarding the generation gap. Looking at the bottom-up perspective (G2G1 vs. G3G2 and G3G1 vs. G2G3&G1G3), once the frequency of contact was introduced in the models, there was no difference in transmission anymore ($\beta_{G3G2\text{-}G2G1} = -2.91$, 95% CI [−8.54, 2.71], $t(207) = -1.02$ $p = .308$; $\beta_{1Gen\text{-}2Gen} = -1.57$, 95% CI [−6.04, 2.90], $t(596) = -0.69$, $p = .491$). Regarding the top-down perspective, the difference between G1G2 and G2G3 was not significant anymore ($\beta_{G2G3\text{-}G1G2} = -2.47$, 95% CI [−7.02, 2.07], $t(321) = -1.07$, $p = .285$). However, a very small difference persisted between G1G3 and G2G3&G1G2. Transmission was still perceived as significantly more frequent between parents and children (one-generation gap) than between grandparents and grandchildren ($\beta_{1Gen\text{-}2Gen} = 6.53$, 95% CI [3.49, 9.57], $t(815) = 4.22$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.04]).

To summarise, parents reported transmitting stories more frequently to their children than grandparents did to their grandchildren. Similarly, across generations, children reported hearing stories from their parents more often than grandchildren reported hearing stories from their grandparents. When comparing parent–child relationships across generations (G1G2 and G2G3), older parents (G1) perceived themselves as transmitting slightly less to their children than older parents (G2) reported transmitting to theirs. Conversely, younger children (G3) perceived receiving more stories from their parents than older children (G2) did from theirs.

Complementary analysis

Event timeframe and event type

We investigated the differences in reported transmission frequency according to the event type (public vs. personal), and the event timeframe (before the receiver's birth, after the receiver's birth, and recent events) for top-down (Figure 7) and bottom-up (Figure 8)

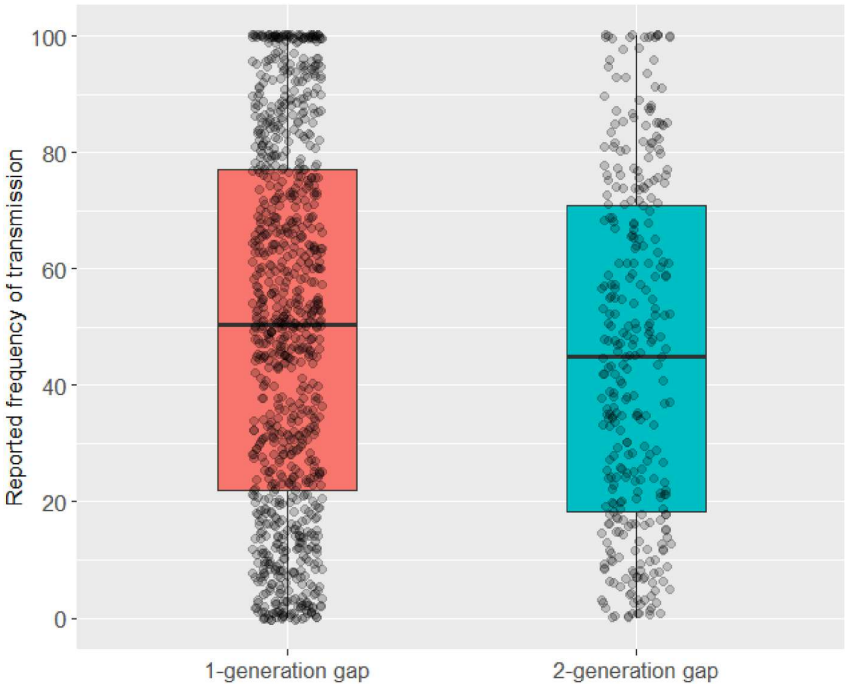


Figure 4. Bottom-up perception of transmission according to the generation gap: one-generation gap (G2G1&G3G2) vs. two-generation gap (G3G1).

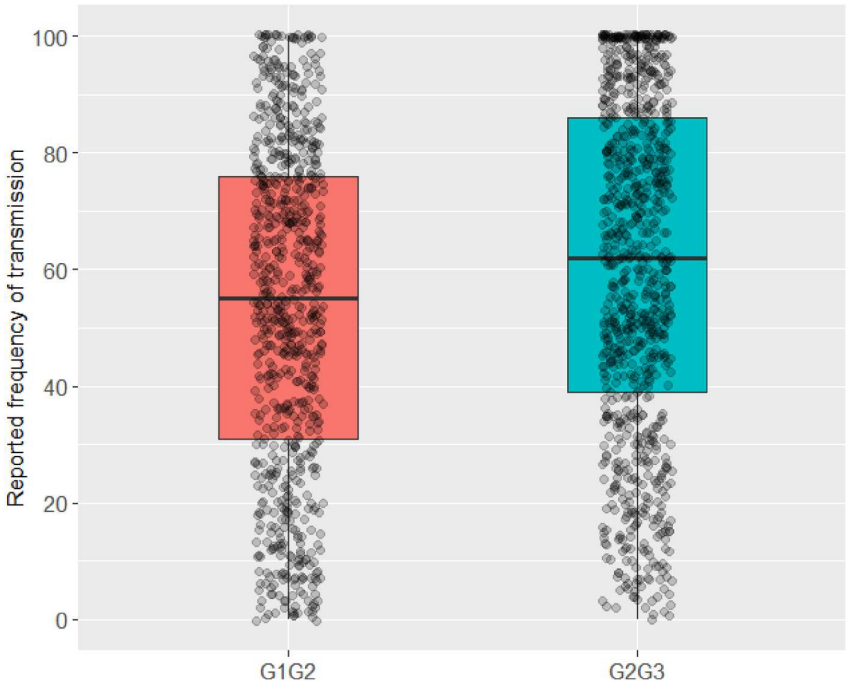


Figure 5. Top-down perception of transmission frequency with one generation gap.

perspectives separately. We first looked for overall effects and then analysed each combination. LMM's formulas were as follows: Transmission ~ Timeframe*Event type + (1|Participant). Further details can be found in the supplementary material.

For the top-down perspective, there was a small main effect of event type, with public events perceived as transmitted less frequently than personal events ($\beta_{public} = -12.54$, 95% CI [−15.34,−9.73], $t(2179.98) = -8.75$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .03$, 95% CI [0.02,0.05]); a large main effect of

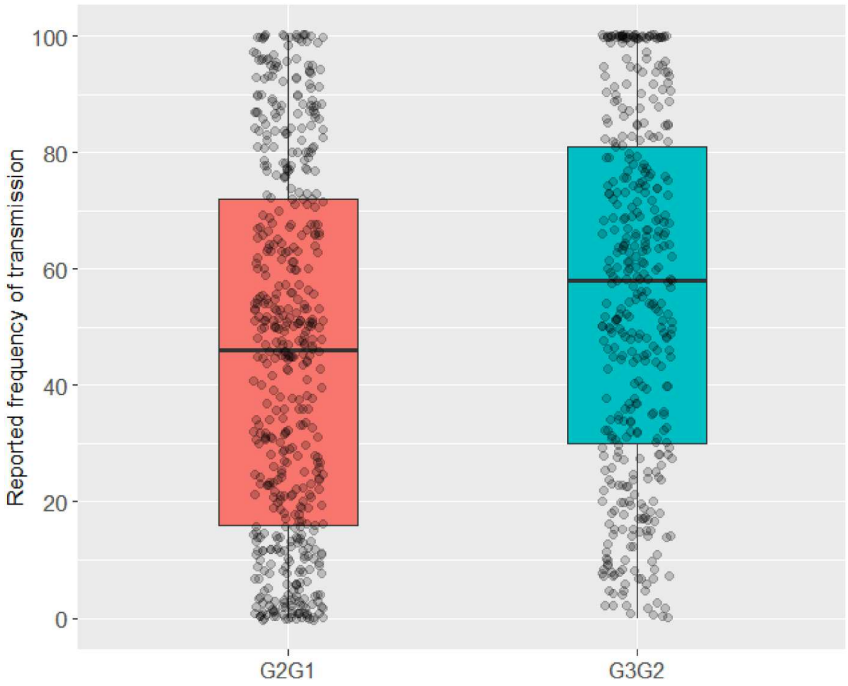


Figure 6. Bottom-up perception of transmission frequency with one generation gap.

event timeframe, with transmission frequency increasing for more recent events ($\beta_{time2-1} = 10.96$, 95% CI [8.16,13.77], $t(2179.98) = 7.65$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .03$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.04]; $\beta_{time3-1} = 19.68$, 95% CI [16.88, 22.49], $t(2179.98) = 13.74$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .08$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.10]); and a small interaction effect between the two ($p < .001$). Analyses of contrasts revealed that whereas nearly all simple effects were significant ($p < .0001$), most of the effects were relatively small.

With only minor differences, analyses revealed a similar pattern for the bottom-up perspective (Figure 8). The model showed that reported received transmission is higher for personal events than for public events ($\beta_{public} = -17.33$, 95% CI [−21.75, −12.92], $t(1101.19) = -7.70$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .05$, 95% CI [0.03,0.08]), that there is no difference in the transmission of events from before and after the receiver's birth ($\beta_{time2-1} = 0.58$, 95% CI [−3.83, 5.00]), and that transmission of events from before the receiver's birth is lower than transmission of recent events ($\beta_{time3-1} = 15.91$, 95% CI [11.49, 20.32], $t(1101.19) = 7.06$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .04$, 95% CI [0.02,0.07]). A closer look at the data (Figure 8) shows that frequency of transmission is perceived as higher for events occurring after compared to before the receiver's birth, but only when

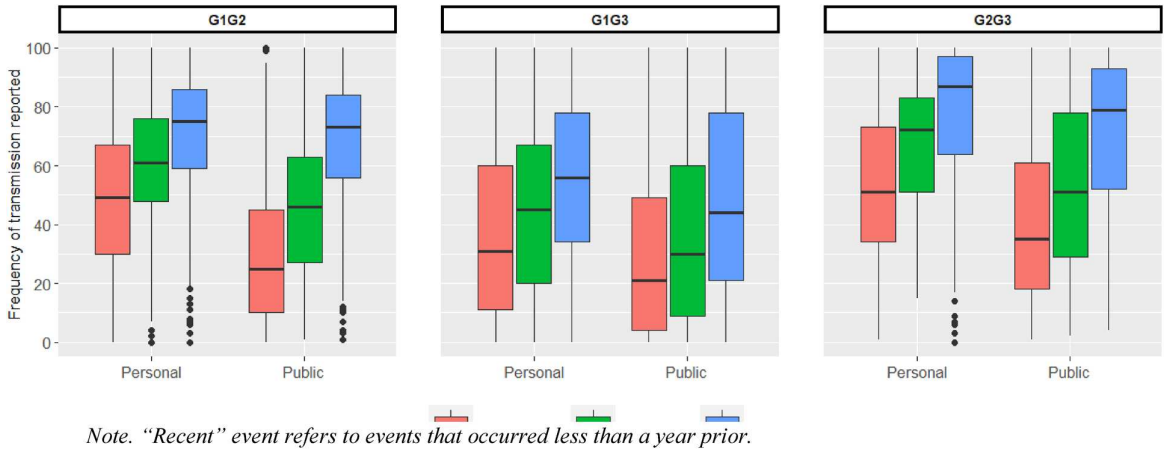
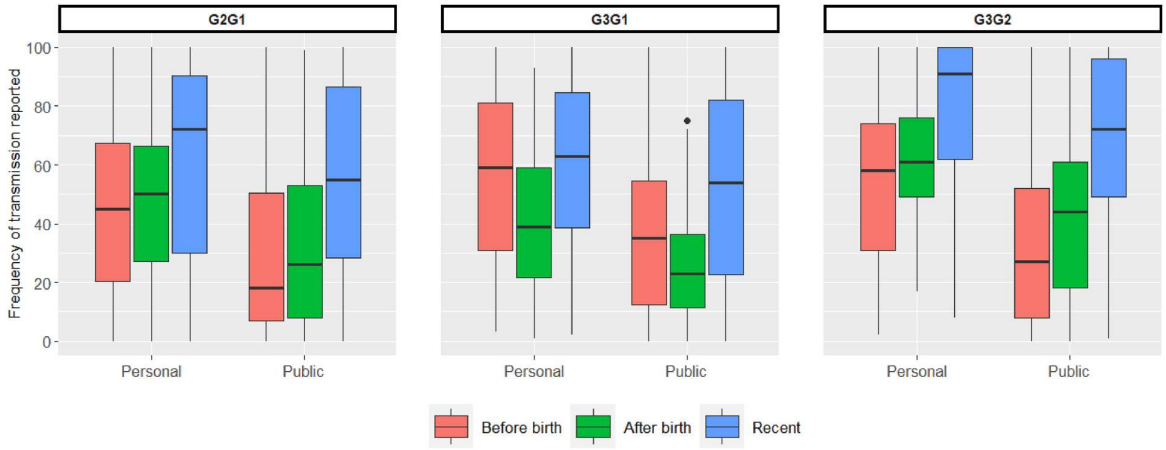


Figure 7. Top-down perception of frequency of transmission according to the event type and the event timeframe.
Note: "Recent" event refers to events that occurred less than a year prior.



Note. "Recent" event refers to events that occurred less than a year prior.

Figure 8. Bottom-up perception of frequency of transmission according to the event type and the event timeframe.
Note: "Recent" event refers to events that occurred less than a year prior.

described transmission from a parent (i.e., G2G1 and G3G2) but not when describing transmission from a grandparent (i.e., G3G1). This could explain the absence of significant differences when taking all three bottom-up combinations.

Finally, although significant, the interaction between event type and event timeframe was very small, $F(2, 1101.19) = 7.54$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2_p = .01$, 95% CI [000, 0.02 = 3]. We found that participants felt they were transmitting slightly more frequently personal than public memories, and this gap between public and personal events was larger for receivers. Personal memories were reported considerably more regularly than public events. However, the difference between public and personal recent events was very minor. Receivers reported hearing about recent public events almost as frequently as personal events.

Discussion

The objective of this survey was to investigate the perceived frequency of intergenerational transmission from an older to a younger generation of a family. Transmission of memory is a process that occurs spontaneously, and that is a part of forming the identity of the family (Fivush, 2019). However, we cannot access directly this frequency of transmission. Therefore, we asked participants to rate how frequently they perceived talking or hearing about these stories. We accounted for differences in the perceived frequency of transmission between the transmitters and the receivers of the memories to confront possible discrepancies between the perspective of the one who lived and told the story and the one apprehending the stories. From an exploratory perspective, we also investigated how the frequency of contact, the event type, the event timeframe, and the generation gap could influence the perception of frequency. Main outputs will be discussed here, and we want to remind readers that our results are exploratory and based on relatively small effect sizes.

First, results show that intergenerational transmission of memory is perceived as relatively frequent. In line with previous studies (e.g., Demiray et al., 2019), data showed great interindividual differences, but on average, it seems that people feel that they frequently transmit and hear stories about the past of their older family members. This supports previous findings about the spontaneous character of transmission (Bohanek et al., 2009; Fivush, 2009). This frequent occurrence hides many layers of complexity. From the point of view of the protagonist engaged in the transmission (the teller and the listener) to the type or the timeframe of the event, many factors seem to influence the way people perceive discussing the personal past of their family member.

Memory transmission requires at least two people: one person transmitting, and another listening and remembering what was transmitted. Our results showed that between most generations, there is a general agreement on how frequently older generations transmit to younger generations, but not in all cases. Participants who are now grandparents (G1) felt they were transmitting more to their children than what middle-aged participants (G2) perceived receiving from their parents. However, no differences in perspective were noted between grandparents (G1) and grandchildren (G3) or between parents (G2) and their children (G3). Based on Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006), this difference could arise from a shift in motivation. With age, as their perceived remaining time shrinks, individuals seem to reduce their social networks and prioritise their existing relationships. This reduction in social networks has been found repetitively in the literature (Bruine De Bruin et al., 2020; for a meta-analysis see Wrzus et al., 2013). While

grandparents' social networks become smaller, transmission to their children might appear more frequent and more important as they would probably prioritise relationships with their close relatives. This aligns with Wetzel and Hank (2020)'s study showing that during the transition to adulthood (16–30 years old) grandparent-grandchild frequency of contact decreases. These changes could be due to both the middle generation (here our G2) providing fewer opportunities for intergenerational contact between grandparents and grandchildren, and the latter's new roles and responsibilities when leaving the parental home. On the other hand, parents who were not grandparents (G2) are middle-aged adults with larger social networks and for whom remaining subjective time would be perceived as longer, transmission from their parents might be less accessible and carry fewer personal functions.

When looking at parent–child relationships in the youngest generations, younger parents (G2) and their children (G3) did not perceive differently their frequency of transmission. It is possible that middle-aged parents were not old enough for the subjective time to reduce sufficiently to observe an effect. Moreover, G2 and G3 reported a high frequency of transmission which could hide some smaller effects as well (ceiling effect). Differences between grandparents and grandchildren may also be hidden behind an overall lower reported frequency of transmission. Even if not found for each combination, this suggests different perceptions of the transmission for the teller and the listener. Another explanation could come from the grandparents' feeling of being more frequently in contact with their children. Grandparents reported being in contact with their children more frequently than the children reported being in contact with them. This difference in perception could be explained by the frequency of contact between them.

Not so surprisingly, we found an overall perception that memory was less often shared between grandparents and grandchildren than between parents and children. Previous works on communicative memory describes a loss of information throughout family generations (Cordonnier et al., 2021; Stone et al., 2014). As suggested by our mediation analyses, this difference might be partially explained by the frequency of contact, but not completely. In other words, more frequent contact with parents than grandparents does not fully explain why memory transmission is stronger from a parent than a grandparent.

The more you discuss with someone, the more you are likely to share about past events. Participants could also base their *judgments* of transmission frequency on the frequency of contact. The more you perceive being in contact with someone, the more you perceive transmitting/receiving with that person. However, the latter hypothesis does not seem likely when looking at the correlations between frequency of contact, transmission, and the feeling of closeness (IOS). For instance, correlations between frequency of transmission and frequency of contact are a bit lower for parent-to-child duos than for other pairs. This suggests that while parents report being in contact frequently with their children, it does not predict well the frequency of transmission. Moreover, in parent/child dyads, the closeness of their relationship only correlates weakly with how frequently they share their past, but when looking at grandparents/grandchildren relationships, their closeness correlates more strongly with transmission. It appears that memory transmission plays a different role between these two generations. These results support Wetzel and Hank's (2020) findings. While the frequency of contact between grandparent and grandchild decreases during the transition to adulthood, they observe no reduction in emotional closeness.

On the other hand, when looking at children and parents, we found that the frequency of transmission varies between different cohorts. We observed a lower reported frequency of transmission from older parents (G1) to their children (G2) than from younger parents (G2) to their children (G3). This difference could be attributed to differences in socially shared characteristics of people being born around the same time (social cohort effect), or an effect of age. Cultural norms evolve, and there may be shared cultural differences among individuals born in the same era. These differences could be observed at any age among these individuals. On the other hand, individuals of the same age (regardless of when they were born) may share common characteristics that influence their way of transmitting to younger generations. Our data do not allow us to differentiate between these two possibilities. Likewise from the bottom-up perspective, the youngest generation (G3) reported receiving more from their parents (G2) than their parents reported receiving from theirs (G1). However, once again, when introducing the frequency of contact in the models, the difference did not appear significant anymore.

We also identified additional variables with smaller effect sizes that may shed light on how individuals perceive memory transmission within their families. Although not the primary focus of this study, these variables provide a nuanced and more detailed perspective on the generational differences observed.

First, regarding the event timeframe, our participants tended to transmit and receive memories that occurred when both people were alive. This corresponds to the micro- and exo-systems from Fivush and Merrill's model (2016). Again, this also aligns with and extends the work of Bohanek et al. (2009). After recent daily events, the second most frequent theme they recorded was "parent–child social interaction". These are moments where at least one child and one parent were present. In our study, we expand these results to adults. Close family members discuss frequently recent events, both public and personal. This goes with the idea that family is a place to discuss and make sense of the world, for instance by discussing public events happening around family members. Family conversations include reviews of recent

private events as well. In line with Cordonnier et al. (2022), this can occur to make sense, reinterpret, validate, or challenge what one is leaving. It also carries social functions to bond and facilitate discussion. However, the youngest generation reported receiving from their grandparents more stories from before they were born than after they were born, which was not what the grandparents reported transmitting to them. Grandparents answered discussing mainly recent events, and events which occurred after the birth of their grandchild. This difference in perception could mean that while grandparents remember memories of events they lived with their grandchildren, grandchildren seem to remember more about older stories from their grandparents' lives. Grandparents seem to emphasise what they share with the younger generation, perhaps to deepen their bonds (social function), and the younger generation focuses more on stories making sense of their past (directive and self functions).

Globally, whereas transmission seems to be perceived by protagonists as frequent, most of the memories are from recent events. Similarly, Bohanek et al. (2009) found that, at dinnertime, conversations were most frequently dealing with children's or parents' activities of that day. As stressed by Fivush (Fivush et al., 2011), from a very young age, parents encourage children to discuss and tell stories about their experiences. Discussing daily life is one way for the family to validate each other's feelings and make sense of the world (Cordonnier et al., 2022; Fivush et al., 2011; Fivush & Merrill, 2016).

As previously established, family discussions concern family, personal, and public matters. Here, personal memories were reported to be transmitted more frequently than public events, replicating findings from Abel and Berntsen (2021). Memories about public events are shared but to a lesser extent than personal events. Furthermore, the authors noticed that participants struggled more to find and tell memories of public events. Family identity is built on shared memories (Cordonnier et al., 2022; Fivush & Merrill, 2016), so public events might not always be the most relevant to creating or maintaining bonds within the family.

Limits

A few methodological limits can be stated for this study. The goal of the survey was to get a first understanding of the variables that might influence the way people perceive how much they transmit or receive intergenerational transmission of memory within their family. Therefore, we created this exploratory survey and did not postulate clear hypotheses beforehand. The interpretation of our many analyses must be cautious, mainly about the *p*-values (Nosek & Lakens, 2014).

On a more theoretical basis, comparisons in the analyses included « duos » from different families. When we compared transmission from G1 to G2 from both perspectives, those G1 and G2 were not from the same families. We postulated that the respondents would be representative of the general population, but one cannot exclude individual variability. A more realistic assumption would be that respondents to our survey were people already interested in the topic, had time to answer, and had access to an online survey. Keeping in mind the goal of getting a better understanding of the intergenerational transmission of memory within the family in general, a future study could try to reach participants with lower education, and different social backgrounds.

Another limit that could be addressed is the age distribution of our "generations". We tried to account for this by analyzing the data regarding the age of the participants instead of their role within the family, but our groups suffer from a very wide range, which could hide some interesting specificities in the perception of transmission. The relationship between child and parent is likely different when the child is 18 and when the child is 30. Further studies could try to better look at age variabilities within generations.

Furthermore, we observed differences between the perception of the transmission between G1 to their child and G2 to their child, but with the presented data, we cannot state if this difference is due to an effect of the cohort (people being born at the same time sharing some features), or an effect of the age. Using a longitudinal paradigm, testing, and retesting the same people later in their lives would contribute to our understanding of these possible differences of transmission throughout lifetime.

This survey asked participants about their perception of the frequency of transmission of different types of memory. However, other than the frequency of contact, we do not have the "real" frequency of transmission of these events. The data does not allow us to determine if differences are due to differences in the frequency itself, differences in *perception* of those transmissions, or both. More qualitative studies examining more systematically how much has indeed been transmitted could bring another piece to the puzzle, yet they could never measure completely the amount of transmission. Instead, they can focus on aspects that have been passed down and some that have been forgotten.

Assessing the *perceived* frequency of memory transmission rather than the actual frequency introduces the potential influence of cognitive biases in estimating frequency, especially when considering that participants in the different groups of the main analysis (top-down versus bottom-up) had different ages. Few studies have investigated how different age groups estimate the frequency of reminiscence, and no differences have been observed (e.g., Merriam, 1994; Merriam & Cross, 1982; Webster, 1994). However, it is unclear which cognitive processes are involved in these estimations and how they relate to other estimations, such as time processing (Hinault et al., 2023).

Investigation of the content was out of the scope of this article but remains a critical aspect of intergenerational transmission of memory. Studies examining the stories that are transmitted are plentiful (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Merrill et al., 2019, 2017; Sahin-Acar et al., 2017) and bring central outputs for better understanding of memory in the family.

Finally, future research should compare perceptions of transmission within families of different cultures. Recent studies showed that transmission within families is widely different regarding the cultural backgrounds of the respondents (e.g., Bohn & Bundgaard-Nielsen, 2021; Chen et al., 2021; Reese et al., 2017). For instance, different cultural backgrounds in adolescents from New Zealand were linked to distinct ways of connecting their narratives to the ones of their past generations, with New Zealand Chinese and Maori adolescents drawing more connections than New Zealand European adolescents (Reese et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Intergenerational transmission of memories appears to be a frequent phenomenon within families. Knowing the personal history of family members is perceived as important across all generations. Of course, frequent interactions between family members lead to more transmission, especially when it comes to the memories coming from grandparents with which they feel close and vice versa. However, closeness with a parent did not specifically predict more transmission. Although part of our daily life, memory studies in psychology only recently showed interest in the social components of memory, especially within the family. While more and more authors start investigating these processes, the perception, functions, quality, and quantity components of the discussions shared by families still carry promises of many stimulating research questions.

Notes

1. https://osf.io/7uxjr/?view_only=400dc660a84c468d828d9ed16886ceb9.
2. Epsilon-squared showed to be a less biased effect size estimate compared to variance explained estimates (Carroll & Nordholm, 1975; Okada, 2013). Partial epsilon-squared are effect size estimates based on variance explained by each variable of the model and can add up to a value greater than 1 (e.g., Richardson, 2011). It is recommended to interpret these effects relative to each other, not based on a small, medium, or large arbitrary consensus (Iacobucci et al., 2023).
3. It is important to keep in mind than the sample size for G3 was smaller than in the other groups ($n = 69$, see Table 1).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings and the codes used for analysis are openly available in Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/7uxjr/?view_only=400dc660a84c468d828d9ed16886ceb9.

ORCID

David Baudet http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2272-7759
Aline Cordonnier http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4101-1948
Olivier Luminet http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1519-2178
Christine Bastin http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4556-9490

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Motives for transmitting and remembering: A functional analysis of intergenerational memory transmission in the family

David Baudet[1], Christine Bastin[1,2], Olivier Luminet[2,3], & Aline Cordonnier[3]

[1]GIGA Research, CRC Human Imaging, University of Liège
[2]Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS), Brussels, Belgium
[3]Research Institute for Psychological Science, University of Louvain

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David Baudet, Allée du 6 Août, 8, 4000 Liège, Belgique. Email: david.baudet@uliege.be

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Author Note

David Baudet https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2272-7759
Christine Bastin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4556-9490
Olivier Luminet https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1519-2178
Aline Cordonnier https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4101-1948

Abstract

Intergenerational memories help shape identity, transmit values, and sustain family relationships. Across two studies, we examined how parents, grandparents, and young adult children or grandchildren evaluate the functions of memories shared across generations. Older generations reported their reasons for transmitting important personal and public events, whereas young adults rated how they used vicarious memories received from parents or grandparents. Parents attributed greater functional relevance to the memories they shared than children did, particularly for teaching and problem-solving purposes. Grandparents and grandchildren showed fewer differences, though grandparents endorsed higher motives related to bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching than grandchildren reported using. Direct comparisons further revealed that vicarious memories from grandparents were perceived as more socially and identity relevant than those from parents. Across studies, personal events were consistently rated as more functional than public ones. Together, these findings highlight how family storytelling serves different functions across generations.

Keywords: *Autobiographical memory; family; transmission; functions.*

1 Introduction

" ... And this is how your uncle found himself being the Mikado world champion". From early childhood, individuals are often introduced to the past through stories shared by family members. Storytelling, particularly by primary caretakers, supports children's understanding and interpretation of the world around them. Narratives are omnipresent, appearing in various forms such as conversations, media, and literature, and they play a fundamental role in shaping how people perceive and make sense of their experiences (Fivush, 2019). This narrative tendency, especially in recounting past events, has garnered increasing attention within the field of psychology, particularly in discussions surrounding memory. However, little is known about the motivations behind intergenerational memory transmission.

In this paper, we investigate the functions attributed to intergenerational stories across three generations. Drawing on a series of studies involving parent–child and grandparent–grandchild adult dyads, we examine whether these narratives fulfill similar psychological functions for both transmitters and recipients, and how these functions may vary by generation and by the type of memory shared. In doing so, we aim to clarify the psychological significance of intergenerational storytelling for both transmitters and receivers.

1.1 Functions of autobiographical memory

Autobiographical memory (AM) involves more than the mere recollection of past events; it also encompasses the evaluation of these events, including their significance and personal relevance (Conway, 2005; Fivush, 2008; Fivush et al., 2011b; Habermas and Bluck,

2000). For a memory to be considered autobiographical (i.e., relevant to the self), it must undergo some form of reflective processing. Through this reflection, an event's importance, emotional resonance (e.g., happiness, sadness), or broader meaning may emerge. This meaning-making process can also occur through social interactions, such as discussions with family members and peers. In this sense, AM is often more closely aligned with the act of reminiscing than with straightforward recollection (Fivush, 2008).

Autobiographical memory (AM) and the self are deeply intertwined. Conway's self-memory system (SMS; Conway, 2005; Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000) describes how autobiographical knowledge serves as a database of what the self was, is, and can be in the future, while the self modulates the accessibility of autobiographical memories based on current goals. This dynamic process allows individuals to create a sense of continuity, foster self-development, and form a stable identity (Fivush et al., 2010a,1; Merrill et al., 2019). Maintaining a coherent sense of self is thus one of the key purposes of memory: the self function. The traditional tripartite model identifies two additional roles that memory serves: the social and directive functions.

It is important to clarify that, as emphasized by Bluck and Alea (2002, p. 5), the term function in psychology can refer to at least two meanings: (a) the *use* individuals make of a given cognitive process, and (b) its *adaptiveness* (i.e., whether it serves an adaptive or maladaptive purpose). In the present research, and consistent with the literature employing the traditional three-function framework (Bluck and Alea, 2002; Bluck et al., 2005; Sow et al., 2023), we adopt the first, more descriptive sense of the term, that is, "what do individuals use their memories of life for?" (Bluck and Alea, 2002). Thus, throughout this paper, "function" refers to the everyday uses or purposes of autobiographical remembering, not to its adaptive value.

The social function of AM refers to its role in creating and maintaining social bonds (Bluck and Alea, 2002; Bluck et al., 2005). Memories are often shared to spark discussions, teach lessons, or convey values, and this sharing process elicits empathy from listeners (Bluck et al., 2013). Meanwhile, memory also plays a critical role in directing present and future behavior. In this model, the directive function refers to the use of past experiences as knowledge to guide current thoughts and behaviors (Bluck and Alea, 2002; Pillemer, 2003). Over time, this function has expanded to include other elements such as emotional regulation and meaning making (Bluck et al., 2005).

The reminiscence literature has developed its own framework for understanding memory functions. Using the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS; Robitaille et al., 2010; Web-

ster, 1993,9), researchers have identified eight primary reasons why individuals reminisce about past events: boredom reduction, death preparation, identity, problem-solving, conversation, intimacy maintenance, bitterness revival, and teaching/informing. To explore commonalities across approaches, several studies have compared the RFS with the Thinking About Life Experiences (TALE) questionnaire (Bluck and Alea, 2011; Bluck et al., 2005), using factor analyses to explore potential overlaps and unify these frameworks (Bluck et al., 2005; Harris et al., 2014).

Building on these integrative efforts, Harris et al. (2014) proposed that the directive function could be seen as part of a broader "reflective function." This expanded view includes not only traditional directive roles but also self-oriented processes such as emotion regulation and the formation of attitudes and opinions, which contribute to shaping a coherent self. More recently, research has further differentiated between the directive and predictive functions of memory. Studies suggest that while memory is used to make projections about future behavior (the predictive function), the directive function is responsible for keeping those projections updated based on past experiences (Ay and Gülgöz, 2024). In this view, the directive function ensures that predictions remain grounded in real-world experience, supporting adaptive decision-making in the future.

1.2 Intergenerational transmission of memory

The intergenerational transmission of family memories has been widely studied by Robyn Fivush and her colleagues. Their research has shown that in family settings, memory transmission is a casual and common occurrence during daily conversations (Fivush and Merrill, 2016). For example, Bohanek et al. (2009) found that, during family dinnertime, narratives of past events surface approximately every five minutes. Through these exchanges, families co-construct their understanding of the world, validate each other's emotions, and foster a sense of belonging both as a group and as individuals (Fivush et al., 2010b). A recent study showed that three generations (i.e., grandparents, parents, grandchildren) perceived intergenerational transmission of memory as relatively frequent in the family (Baudet et al., 2025).

Beyond personal stories, families also engage in discussions about broader historical events, shaping how these events are remembered and understood across generations. Cordonnier et al. (2022) suggested that families serve as a bridge between individual and collective memory, functioning at the meso level where personal narratives intersect with

shared historical experiences. Families act as a filter between individual beliefs and collective memory, which is generally defined as commonly shared memories that sustain a group's collective identity (Assmann, 1995; Halbwachs, 1992; Hirst and Manier, 2008).

Several studies have examined how major historical events, such as World War II (Cordonnier et al., 2021; Pohn-Lauggas, 2021; Stone et al., 2014), the Holocaust (Auerhahn and Laub, 1998; Wiseman et al., 2006), or the wars in the former Yugoslavia (Svob et al., 2016), are transmitted across generations. This research suggests that while historical memories are actively passed down within families, they rarely persist beyond three generations. Grandparents serve as a living bridge to the more distant past, offering children access to firsthand accounts of experiences that might otherwise remain abstract historical facts (Reese and Fivush, 2008).

Furthermore, Gu et al. (2020) identified key factors influencing the intergenerational transmission of public events, highlighting that children are more likely to retain historical memories if their parents were personally affected by the event. This aligns with previous findings that children whose parents experienced war firsthand tend to recall more war-related events compared to those whose parents were less directly impacted (Svob and Brown, 2012; Svob et al., 2016). In terms of function, public memories are less frequently associated with self-reflection than personal memories, instead serving primarily as tools for social interaction and discussion (Demiray and Freund, 2015). Abel and Berntsen (2021) examined the functions of remembering public and personal events and showed that, compared to personal events, public events were especially associated with social functions. However, public events appear to be discussed less frequently in intergenerational contexts than personal ones (Baudet et al., 2025). While public memories are an important part of intergenerational storytelling, personal memories (especially those shared in early parent-child interactions) play a foundational role in the development of autobiographical memory and its functions.

The relationship between parents—especially mothers—and children has been extensively studied in the field of AM (see Fivush et al., 2006; Fivush and Salmon, 2023; Merrill and Fivush, 2016, for reviews). The literature is rich with studies examining the adaptive functions of early-life mother-child interactions. From early childhood, stories told by primary caregivers are thought to form the foundation of children's AM development (see Fivush and Salmon, 2023; Merrill and Fivush, 2016; Nelson and Fivush, 2004, for reviews). Research shows that children with more elaborative mothers tend to develop stronger autobiographical skills, demonstrating how discussions about past events scaffold important

abilities related to identity construction, and understanding the world and the self (Fivush et al., 2003,0; Salmon and Reese, 2016). A longitudinal study revealed that adolescents whose mothers received training in elaborative reminiscing later reported more coherent life narratives and fewer emotional problems (Mitchell and Reese, 2022). Moreover, higher-quality maternal reminiscing has been linked to better psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults, including improved self-esteem and emotional regulation (Chen et al., 2021; Duke et al., 2008; Fivush et al., 2011a,1; Merrill et al., 2017).

Despite this wealth of research, surprisingly few studies have investigated parents' subjective motivations for transmitting specific autobiographical memories to their children, nor have many studies compared the subjective uses of these stories from the children's side. On the one hand, mothers seem to share their stories primarily for conversational purposes, relationship maintenance, and teaching functions (Kulkofsky et al., 2009). On the other hand, Merrill et al. (2019) showed that adolescents recall their parents' stories as opportunities to learn more about them and because these stories often convey important life lessons. Other research indicates that younger generations use parents' stories for developmental and teaching purposes, emotional support, and to better understand family history (Bakir-Demir et al., 2020; Reese et al., 2017).

This idea that people use relatives' stories as important sources of knowledge for themselves relates to the concept of vicarious memory. Vicarious memory refers to the recollection of specific events and detailed stories recounted by others (Pillemer et al., 2015,2). These memories are adaptive in that they provide useful and insightful information without the need for firsthand experience. This function is particularly important in novel situations, such as those frequently encountered by children. Children often use their parents' stories to form preliminary understandings of new experiences and situations. Moreover, research on vicarious memories suggests that, while they share key characteristics with personal memories—such as phenomenology and functions—they score lower on measures of these characteristics (Pillemer et al., 2015; Pond and Peterson, 2020; Steiner, 2023).

Family vicarious memories are not limited to parent-child relationships; they also occur between grandchildren and grandparents. Across diverse countries and cultures (including European countries, the United States, South Africa, Israel, and Malaysia) grandparents are playing increasingly prominent roles in their grandchildren's lives, a trend facilitated by longer life expectancy and greater opportunities for intergenerational contact (see Buchanan and Rotkirch, 2018, for a review). For instance, Pratt et al. (2008) found that grandchildren frequently recalled meaningful, value-bearing vicarious stories from their

grandparents, with the values conveyed often differing from those passed down by parents. Recent research by Stephan (2024) identified three main functions served by vicarious memories from grandparents in young adults: strengthening the bond with grandparents and the family as a whole, learning about family history, and preserving the memory of the grandparents themselves. Narratives from grandparents seem to hold the functions of remembering the grandparents and their values, but also remembering the family lore by reconnecting with more distant roots. Barker (2007) found similar functions served by vicarious grandparents' stories among young adults: reinforcing identity, managing the emotional challenges of aging, fostering affective bonds, or conveying life lessons and values. Moreover, intergenerational communication between grandparents and grandchildren has positive effects on psychological well-being for both generations (see Swartz, 2009; Thomas et al., 2017, for reviews).

Beyond the personal benefits of storytelling, grandparents appear to be more emotionally invested in the grandparent–grandchild relationship than their grandchildren. The intergenerational stake hypothesis (Bengtson and Kuypers, 1971) suggests that older generations tend to perceive stronger emotional ties with younger family members than the younger generation perceives in return. This asymmetry has been observed specifically in grandparent–grandchild dyads, with grandparents often reporting greater closeness and engagement with their grandchildren than the grandchildren reported themselves (Harwood, 2001; Spalding and Carpenter, 2019). Due to this imbalance, grandparents may adopt distinct communicative strategies, including the use of autobiographical storytelling to revisit difficult past experiences (Barker, 2007; Fowler and Soliz, 2010).

Research on reminiscence has also documented meaningful age-related differences in its functions. For instance, Webster and McCall (1999) found that while the overall frequency of reminiscing remains relatively stable across the lifespan, the specific functions of reminiscence shift with age. Younger adults tend to report reminiscing more for boredom reduction, whereas this motivation decreases in later life. In contrast, the use of reminiscence for death preparation increases steadily with age. Consistent with earlier findings (Webster, 1995), identity and problem-solving functions are most prominent in young and middle adulthood, then decline in older age. No significant age differences were found for the social and intimacy maintenance functions, which appear stable across the lifespan. Bitterness revival, by contrast, shows a gradual decline with age, while teaching or informing others increases from adolescence to midlife and then stabilizes in later adulthood. Similarly, Cappeliez et al. (2001) found that young adults more frequently en-

dorsed the functions of boredom reduction, identity, and problem-solving, whereas older adults more characteristically used reminiscence for teaching or informing others. Moreover, longitudinal findings have shown that reminiscence functions are associated with later physical and mental health outcomes, particularly among older adults (King et al., 2019; O'Rourke et al., 2011).

A recent review of the functions of why people reminisce indicated a systematic trend: younger adults reminisce more for self-related functions (such as boredom reduction and identity/problem-solving), while older adults tend to focus on social functions (such as teaching/informing and death preparation) (Marques et al., 2023). Additionally, Graham et al. (2020) identified three distinct age-related profiles of reminiscers. First, the young-adult self-negative profile ($M_{age} = 20.14, SD = 1.79$) was characterized by high scores on bitterness revival and boredom reduction. In contrast, the middle-adult self-positive profile ($M_{age} = 36.82, SD = 18.49$) scored highly on identity, problem-solving, teaching/informing, and conversational factors. Lastly, the older-adult self-positive profile ($M_{age} = 47.42, SD = 7.94$) was marked by high scores on death preparation, identity, problem-solving, teaching/informing, and conversational functions. Additionally, younger adults tend to use memories more frequently for directive purposes, given their more limited life experience and the need to make more novel decisions. However, both younger and older adults seem to rely on memories equally for social and identity functions (Bluck and Alea, 2009; Vranić et al., 2018).

As stressed by Harris and Van Bergen (2024), motivations for telling a story are not always the same as the ones for remembering it. Interestingly, no study directly compared the motivations of parents and grandparents to transmit important personal and public memories to younger generations and the motivations of the younger generation to remember vicarious memories from the older generations.

1.3 The present studies

The present studies build on prior findings indicating that the perceived frequency of memory transmission within families varies by generation (Baudet et al., 2025). Specifically, Baudet et al. (2025) found that although partially mediated by the perceived frequency of contact, memory sharing was reported as less frequent between grandparents and grandchildren than between parents and children. Moreover, the relationship between perceived memory transmission and emotional closeness differed across dyads:

for grandparent-grandchild pairs, perceived closeness was more strongly associated with memory sharing than for parent-child pairs. These findings suggest that generational differences in memory transmission are not solely due to contact frequency, but may reflect differences in how family members use and engage with intergenerational memories. This motivated the current investigation into the functions that such memories serve across generations.

In this research, we focus on memory shared through everyday discussions, called communicative memory (Assmann, 1995). We aim to compare the functions evoked by transmitters and receivers across different generations of the same families. To achieve this, we asked parents or grandparents to recall memories they had transmitted to their children or grandchildren (all young adults) and measured their reasons for doing so. In turn, we asked the young adult children or young adult grandchildren to recall vicarious memories about their parent or grandparent and to rate their reasons for remembering them. The first study focused on parent-child dyads, the second one on grandparent-grandchild dyads, and we then analyzed the data from the first two studies, comparing the two types of generational dyads. Based on the literature (Demiray and Freund, 2015; Graham et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2014; Marques et al., 2023), we are testing the following hypotheses :

- *Study 1*

    1. Ratings of teaching/informing would be higher for parents' transmitted memories compared to children's vicarious memories.
    2. Children would report greater use of vicarious memories for identity and problem-solving than parents would report reasons for transmitting stories, reflecting developmental needs associated with identity exploration.
    3. Across transmitters and receivers, personal events would be rated as more functional than public events, given their greater emotional and relational relevance.

- *Study 2*

    1. Grandparents would report stronger reasons for transmitting memories related to bitterness revival, intimacy maintenance, teaching, and conversation than grandchildren would report uses of vicarious memories for these functions, reflecting older adults' tendency to frame narratives as emotionally meaningful and socially bonding.

2. Grandchildren would report greater use of vicarious memories for identity and problem-solving than grandparents would report reasons for transmitting such functions, consistent with younger adults' developmental focus.
3. As in Study 1, personal events would be rated as more functional than public events across generations.

- *Between-dyad comparison*

1. Parents would endorse stronger teaching reasons for transmitting memories than grandparents, consistent with their active role in daily education.
2. Grandparents would report stronger intimacy-maintenance and conversation reasons for transmitting memories than parents, reflecting generational differences in relational goals.
3. Young adults would attribute more social uses to vicarious memories originating from grandparents than from parents, given the storytelling role of grandparents.

Because older and younger members of each dyad evaluate different aspects of the same intergenerational narrative (older adults reporting their reasons for transmitting autobiographical memories and younger adults reporting their use of vicarious memories), our hypotheses examine how these two roles differ across memory functions and across personal versus public events. In all studies, the design consisted of a between-participants 2 (Generation: transmitter vs. receiver) × 2 (Event type: public vs. personal) × Function (within-participant) structure. Our hypotheses are organized according to these factors.

However, the existing literature has primarily examined the functions of individuals' own autobiographical memories, rather than transmitted or vicarious memories within intergenerational dyads. Moreover, it offers very few direct predictions about how parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads might differ. Our hypotheses therefore drew on established age-related trends in reminiscence functions, which provided a theoretical basis but could not yield precise, dyad-specific expectations. As such, although grounded in prior work, our hypotheses remain exploratory.

2 Study 1: Transmission between parents and children

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

Sixty-four parent-child adult dyads were recruited to participate in a study investigating memory transmission within families. The younger participants' ages ranged from 17 to 27 years (M = 20.5, SD = 2.5), with 55 (85.9%) identifying as women. The parents' ages ranged from 37 to 69 years (M = 50.9, SD = 6.0), with 51 (79.7%) identifying as women.

All participants were French-speaking Belgians. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, which included agreement to be audio-recorded during the experiment. Each participant either received 20 euros or class credits as compensation for their time. The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculté de Psychologie, Logopédie et Sciences de l'Éducation (FPLSE) at the University of Liège.

2.1.2 Procedure and materials

The experiment consisted of face-to-face interviews complemented by questionnaires administered using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2020). Material and discussions were solely in French. With assistance from the experimenter, participants completed the online questionnaire directly, using sliders ranging from 0 to 100, which were recoded depending on the specific question.

To capture the perspectives of both members of the dyads on important memories transmitted from the older generation to the younger one, each interview was divided into three phases: memory selection, memory narration, and general memory questionnaires. This study forms part of a larger project on intergenerational memory transmission within families; however, only data relevant to the present research questions will be discussed here. Participants were interviewed individually.

For participants' convenience, sessions were conducted either in person at the GIGA CRC Human Imaging Research Unit (of the University of Liège) or online using Microsoft Teams. Twenty-four parents preferred to participate in the study online (38%) against 20 for the children (31%).

Phase 1: Memory selection

Participants were first asked to list important stories they believed they had transmitted to their child (for the parent) or that they had heard directly from their parent (for the

child). The memories were required to be episodic, meaning they involved personal past events that occurred at a specific time and place. Additionally, the events had to have taken place before the parent's 30th birthday and must have been directly transmitted to the child. The age criterion ensured that the child did not experience the event firsthand or was too young to remember it directly. This also aligns with the reminiscence bump, a phenomenon in which people over the age of 30 recall more events from the ages of 10–30 (see Munawar et al., 2018), guaranteeing recollection of important memories. In dyads where the parent had the child before the age of 30, participants were asked to recall events that occurred before the child was 4 years old, as studies suggest that the earliest memories typically date from around 4 years of age due to childhood amnesia (see Jack and Hayne, 2007, for a review).

The experimenter asked participants to list both personal and public memories. Public memories were defined as events relevant to a group of people, whether locally, nationally, or internationally. Participants did not have to be directly involved in the event, it could also be how a public event had impacted them somehow.

After generating at least two public and two personal memories, participants completed an adapted version of the Centrality of Event Scale (CES; Berntsen and Rubin, 2006), which measures the importance of an event in one's personal or family life story. An example item from the CES is, "I think that this event permanently changed my life and/or the life of my family." The two public and two personal memories rated as most central were selected for the subsequent phases.

Phase 2: Memory narration

Next, participants were asked to narrate each selected memory in as much detail as possible while the experimenter recorded the narration. After each narration, participants answered questions about the memory, including questionnaires on the phenomenology of the memory (not discussed in the present study) and the reasons for remembering or transmitting the memory. The reasons for remembering were assessed using an adapted version of the RFS (Robitaille et al., 2010), with one item representing each of the eight dimensions (boredom reduction, death preparation, identity, problem-solving, conversation, intimacy maintenance, bitterness revival, and teaching/informing).

To ensure that the items were relevant to the participant's role, the wording was adapted for transmitters (parents or grandparents) and receivers (young adult children or grandchildren). See Table 1 for list of items for both transmitters and receivers.

Table 1: *Adapted items of the RFS for both transmitters and receivers.*

Functions	Transmitters	Receivers
	I told that story ...	*This story allows me ...*
Bitterness revival	So I don't forget old wounds	To not forget old wounds
Boredom reduction	To pass the time	To pass the time
Conversation	To create/facilitate discussion	To create/facilitate discussion
Death preparation	To help me cope with my mortality	To help me cope with my mortality
Identity	To know where I come from	To know where I come from
Intimacy maintenance	To remember someone who has passed away	To remember someone who has passed away
Problem solving	To remind me that I have the skills to cope with present problems	To remind me that I have the skills to cope with present problems
Teaching	In order to teach younger persons about values	Learn about values

Note. Items were adapted from the original RFS (Webster, 1997) to better fit French language.

Participants rated each RFS item on a continuous scale ranging from 0 (do not agree at all) to 100 (completely agree). The cursor was initially positioned on the left (0), and participants were instructed to move it toward the right to indicate the extent to which they agreed that a given memory served a particular function. Thus, higher scores reflect stronger endorsement of that function.

This process was repeated for each of the selected memories.

Phase 3: General memory questionnaire

Lastly, participants answered demographic and general questions about their memory. These data will not be discussed in this article.

2.1.3 Statistical analysis

Participants rated the functions of each anecdote on a scale from 0 (do not agree at all) to 100 (completely agree) using visual analog scales. Preliminary data inspection revealed that the ratings were not normally distributed. Model comparison confirmed that a gamma distribution provided the best fit[1]. Therefore, generalized linear mixed models (GLMM) were employed to account for the gamma distribution and the repeated-measures design.

[1]To address the Gamma distribution's requirement for strictly positive values, a small constant (0.0001) was added to the observations. This standard practice ensures compatibility with the distribution's assumptions and facilitates reliable model estimation.

Each participant rated four memories (two personal and two public), making GLMM well-suited for modeling within-subject variability. To control for within-item variability, a random variable was included, consistent with mixed-model guidelines (Brauer and Curtin, 2018). The GLMM was implemented in R (R Core Team, 2022) using the "glmmTMB" package (Brooks et al., 2017).

We specified five fixed effects to test our hypotheses:

- Main effects of generation (transmitter vs. receiver), event type (personal vs. public), and functions.
- Two interaction effects: generation * functions and event type * function category.

Following best practices (Brauer and Curtin, 2018), event type and generation were centered around zero to aid the interpretation of interaction effects.

The model included random intercepts for each participant and for function items, which were repeated four times per participant. Additionally, by-participant random slopes were incorporated to account for variation in responses to different function items and their interactions, capturing individual differences in within-subject effects. The initial model, which included covariances among random effects, did not converge. To resolve this, we removed the covariances. The final model specification was: *Function.score* $\sim$ *Function + Generation + Event.type + Function:Generation + Function:Event.type + (Function||ID)*[2] + (1|Function).

The model used a logarithmic link function. Parameters were estimated using maximum likelihood, and estimates were exponentiated to report odds ratios as effect sizes. Additional information on the model structure is provided in the supplementary material.

Because the sample was predominantly female, we tested whether gender influenced outcomes by including it as a covariate. A likelihood ratio test comparing models with and without gender indicated no significant improvement in fit ($\chi^2(1) = 1.72, p = 0.19$). The estimated effect of gender was non-significant ($\beta = 0.29, SE = 0.22, p = 0.19$), and including it did not alter the direction or significance of other predictors. Therefore, gender was not retained in the final model, though the sample imbalance is acknowledged as a limitation.

Participants could complete the study either in person or online. To examine potential effects of participation mode, testing modality was added as a predictor. This addition did

[2]The "||" notation is used to remove correlations among factors in afex package (Singmann et al., 2024).

not improve model fit ($p = 0.07$), and the estimated effect was small and non-significant. Accordingly, the final model did not include this variable.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Functions of transmission

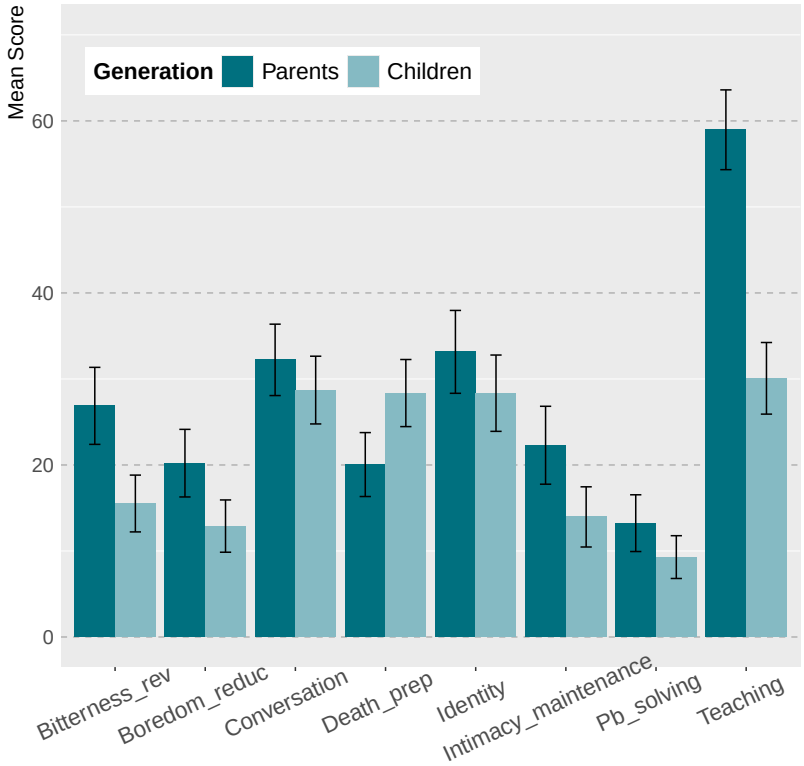
Detailed information can be found in the Supplementary Material related to this study, including the detailed post hoc analysis tables for the interaction effect. Descriptive data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: *Reported functions according to generation and type of event for the parent-child dyads.*

	Parents		**Children**	
	Personal	**Public**	**Personal**	**Public**
Centrality	61.4 (26.5)	39.5 (27.2)	39.6 (28.6)	20.5 (19.8)
Functions				
Bitterness revival	34.4 (39.8)	19.5 (31.2)	20.9 (29.3)	10.2 (23.1)
Boredom reduction	20.8 (33.5)	19.6 (30.5)	14.6 (26.0)	11.2 (23.3)
Conversation	33.9 (34.7)	30.6 (32.8)	29.6 (32.4)	27.8 (31.7)
Death preparation	20.1 (30.8)	20.0 (29.8)	29.0 (32.5)	27.7 (31.0)
Identity	44.6 (41.4)	21.9 (33.2)	44.0 (39.4)	12.7 (23.7)
Intimacy maintenance	23.5 (38.1)	21.1 (35.6)	12.6 (28.5)	15.3 (28.4)
Problem solving	12.1 (25.7)	14.3 (27.9)	6.5 (15.3)	12.1 (23.9)
Teaching	55.9 (38.4)	62.0 (36.8)	32.7 (35.7)	27.5 (31.8)

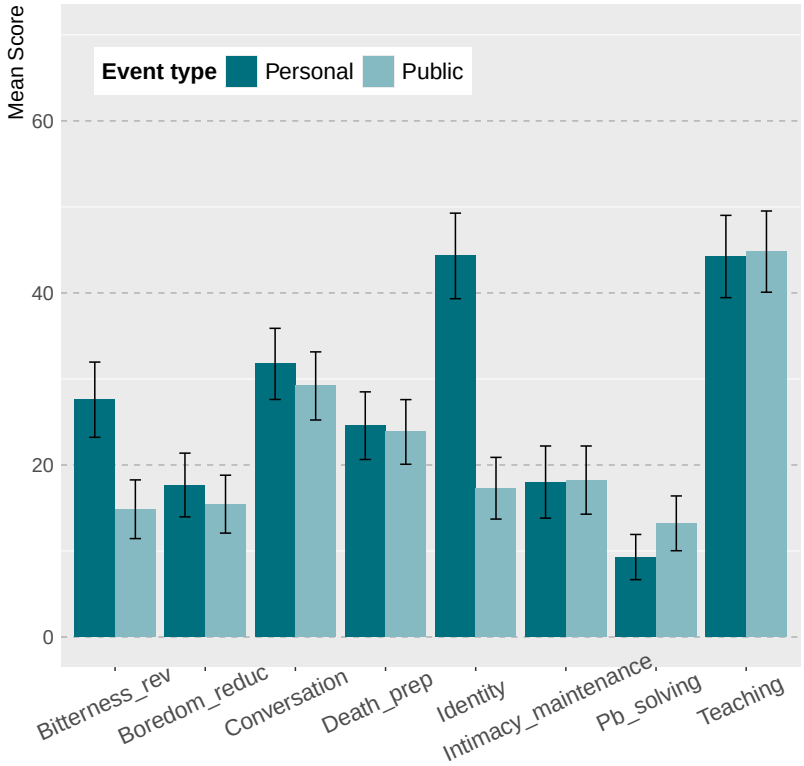
Note. Centrality refers to CES scores. All scores ranged from 0 to 100. Standard deviations are given between parentheses.

Figure 1: *Scores of reported function across type of event according to the generation for the parent-child dyads.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

Figure 2: *Scores of reported function across generation according to the type of event for the parent-child dyads.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

Overall, parents used higher function ratings than children ($\beta_{\text{Parents-Children}} = 0.47$, 95% CI $[0.14, 0.84]$, $z = 2.71$, $p = .0.007$, OR $= 1.63$, 95% CI $[1.14, 2.31]$). This shows that memories chosen by parents are 63% more likely to have higher ratings than those chosen by children.

Furthermore, results revealed that personal events had higher ratings on overall functions than public events ($\beta_{\text{Public-Personal}} = -0.32$, 95% CI $[-0.44, -0.20]$, $z = -5.10$, $p < .0001$, OR $= 0.73$, 95% CI $[0.64, 0.82]$). Across all function-related questions, participants were 27% less likely to rate public events as more functional than personal events.

Regarding generational differences, parents and children demonstrated distinct uses of functions (see Figure 1 and Table 3). Parents' ratings for bitterness revival ($\beta = 0.76$, 95% CI $[0.34, 1.17]$, $z = 3.57$, $p < .001$, OR $= 2.13$, 95% CI $[1.41, 3.22]$), boredom reduction ($\beta = 0.97$, 95% CI $[0.24, 1.71]$, $z = 2.61$, $p = .009$, OR $= 2.65$, 95% CI $[1.27, 5.51]$), intimacy maintenance ($\beta = 1.04$, 95% CI $[0.27, 1.81]$, $z = 2.64$, $p = .008$, OR $= 2.82$, 95% CI $[1.31, 6.09]$), and teaching ($\beta = 0.90$, 95% CI $[0.49, 1.31]$, $z = 4.27$, $p < .0001$, OR $= 2.45$,

95% CI $[1.62, 3.69]$) were significantly higher than children's ratings. No significant generational differences emerged for the other functions.

Taken together, these results indicate that parents and children differ in how they view the purposes of the memories that were transmitted. Parents reported stronger reasons for sharing memories that involved painful past experiences (bitterness revival), remembering significant others who had passed away (intimacy maintenance), passing the time (boredom reduction), and teaching values, compared to how children reported using these vicarious memories. In other words, parents tended to view intergenerational storytelling as an opportunity to teach, to transmit lessons grounded in difficult past experiences, and to keep important people alive, whereas children did not report using these memories to the same extent for those purposes.

Simple contrast analyses revealed significant differences in function ratings based on event type (Figure 2 and Table 3). Specifically, bitterness revival ($\beta = -0.97$, 95% CI $[-1.28, -0.66]$, $z = -6.08$, $p < .0001$, OR $= 0.38$, 95% CI $[0.28, 0.52]$) and identity ($\beta = -1.56$, 95% CI $[-1.94, -1.19]$, $z = -8.16$, $p < .0001$, OR $= 0.21$, 95% CI $[0.14, 0.31]$) were higher for personal memories than for public memories. However, public memories were associated with higher ratings of problem-solving functions ($\beta = 0.40$, 95% CI $[-1.28, -0.66]$, $z = 2.27$, $p = .023$, OR $= 1.49$, 95% CI $[1.06, 2.11]$). Personal memories were more strongly associated with bitterness revival and identity-related uses, suggesting that memories grounded in family or individual experience were perceived as more relevant for making sense of difficult past events and for constructing a sense of self. Conversely, public memories elicited higher problem-solving ratings, indicating that broader historical or societal events may be viewed as offering lessons or strategies applicable to current challenges.

Table 3: *Interaction effects between event type and generation.*

Interactions	Event Type		Generation	
	Public – Personal		Parent – Child	
	Estimate (β)	*Odds Ratio*	*Estimate (β)*	*Odds Ratio*
Bitterness revival	**-0.97 [-1.28, -0.66]**	**0.38 [0.29, 0.52]**	**0.76 [0.34, 1.17]**	**2.13 [1.41, 3.22]**
Boredom reduction	-0.24 [-0.61, 0.13]	0.79 [0.54, 1.14]	**0.97 [0.24, 1.71]**	**2.65 [1.27, 5.51]**
Conversation	-0.14 [-0.45, 0.18]	0.87 [0.64, 1.20]	0.36 [-0.29, 1.00]	1.43 [0.75, 2.74]
Death preparation	-0.02 [-0.35, 0.31]	0.98 [0.70, 1.36]	-0.73 [-1.53, 0.08]	0.48 [0.22, 1.08]
Identity	**1.56 [-1.94, -1.19]**	**0.21 [0.14, 0.31]**	0.14 [-0.39, 0.66]	1.15 [0.68, 1.94]
Intimacy maintenance	0.01 [-0.39, 0.41]	1.01 [0.68, 1.50]	**1.04 [0.27, 1.81]**	**2.82 [1.31, 6.09]**
Problem solving	**0.40 [0.05, 0.75]**	**1.49 [1.06, 2.11]**	0.46 [-0.47, 1.38]	1.58 [0.63, 3.98]
Teaching	-0.04 [-0.34, 0.26]	0.96 [0.71, 1.30]	**0.99 [0.48, 1.30]**	**2.45 [1.62, 3.69]**

Note. 95% CI are given between parentheses. *p*-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni method and were interpreted relative to $\alpha = 0.05$. Bold estimates are significant.

2.3 Discussion

In this study, we examined how parents and their adult children evaluate the functions of autobiographical memories transmitted across generations. Parents reported their reasons for transmitting specific personal and public memories, whereas children rated their use of vicarious memories shared by their parents. This complementary design allowed us to directly compare how intergenerational narratives are understood from the perspectives of both transmitters and receivers.

We hypothesized that parents would report stronger teaching/informing functions than children. Our findings supported this prediction: parents assigned significantly higher ratings to teaching, bitterness revival (i.e., discussing difficult or painful past events), boredom reduction, and intimacy maintenance. These results align with previous research showing an increased level of generativity in midlife (Harris et al., 2014; McAdams et al., 1993). Erikson (Erikson, 1963) famously described generativity as "the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation" (p. 240). Parenthood is one of the most direct and privileged avenues for expressing generativity, as highlighted by Merrill and Fivush (2016). Prior research using the RFS also shows that adults endorse teaching/informing more strongly than adolescents (Webster, 1995). In our study, the functions that parents endorsed most strongly often involved sharing painful experiences or commemorating

significant others who had passed away, narratives that offer rich opportunities to teach, warn, or guide. This pattern suggests that parents view intergenerational storytelling as a means of passing on lessons, revisiting emotionally charged experiences, maintaining emotional closeness, and keeping deceased or absent relatives alive in the family narrative.

We also expected children to use parents' vicarious memories more for identity-related and problem-solving functions. However, this prediction was not supported. Instead, parents and children reported similar levels for these functions. This suggests that intergenerational memories may hold comparable reflective value for both generations. Identity construction is a central goal of family storytelling, and both transmitters and receivers appear to recognize this. Similarly, no generational differences emerged for social functions (conversation and closeness). For both parents and children, intergenerational memories seem to support shared meaning-making and relational connection.

Finally, as expected, personal events received higher overall function ratings than public events. This was primarily driven by higher scores in bitterness revival and identity functions, both of which were more strongly associated with personal memories. These findings are consistent with the idea that personal narratives convey richer identity-relevant information and situate the individual within a familial context. In contrast, public events were less functionally rich overall but still served communicative purposes such as prompting conversations and transmitting general life lessons. Like previous work (Demiray and Freund, 2015), these results highlight that both personal and public memories contribute to intergenerational communication, though with different functional profiles.

3 Study 2: Transmission between grandparents and grandchildren

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Forty-nine grandparent-grandchild adult dyads participated in this study on memory transmission within families. The younger participants were between 16 and 29 years old (M = 20.1, SD = 2.5), with 37 (75.6%) identifying as women. The grandparents ranged in age from 60 to 94 years (M = 74.2, SD = 5.9), with 35 (74.5%) identifying as women.

Grandparents answered a French version of the MoCA (Montreal Cognitive Assess-

ment; Nasreddine and Patel, 2016) to detect a potential mild cognitive decline. To be included in the study, participants were required to reach a score of 23 or more (Carson et al., 2018).

As in Study 1, participants were French-speaking Belgians who consented to participate and be audio-recorded during the experiment. They either received 20 euros or class credits as compensation. The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculté de Psychologie, Logopédie et Sciences de l'Éducation (FPLSE) at the University of Liège.

The study was conducted both in person and online, with 9 grandparents (18%) and 7 grandchildren (14%) choosing the online format.

3.1.2 Procedure and materials

This study follows the same procedure as Study 1 but with dyads of grandparents and grandchildren.

3.1.3 Statistical analysis

For the analyses, data followed a gamma distribution so we used the same approach as in Study 1. We fitted a GLMM with fixed effects for event type, generation, and function category. We also tested interaction effects between event type and function category, as well as between generation and function category. The random effects structure included random intercepts for participants and for RFS items (i.e., function questions), along with random slopes for items nested within participants to account for within-subject variability.

The final model specification was: *Function.score* $\sim$ *Function.type* + *Generation* + *Event.type* + *Function:Generation* + *Function:Event.type* + *(Function||ID)* + (1|Function).

As in Study 1, the sample was predominantly composed of women. Adding gender to the model did not meaningfully improve model fit for functional ratings. The estimated main effect of gender was small and non-significant, and no significant interactions with other predictors (generation, memory type, or function) emerged. Therefore, gender was not retained in the final model.

Similarly, participants could complete the study either in person or online. To test whether the mode of participation affected results, we included testing modality (in-person vs. online) as an additional predictor. This factor did not improve model fit, and neither

its main effect nor any interactions were significant. Consequently, the final model was retained without the inclusion of testing modality.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Functions of transmission

Table 4: *Reported functions according to generation and type of event for the grandparent-grandchild dyads.*

	Grandparents		Grandchildren	
	Personal	**Public**	**Personal**	**Public**
Centrality	62.6 (27.9)	42.5 (26.2)	42.5 (24.5)	25.5 (20.0)
Functions				
Bitterness revival	34.5 (36.8)	20.9 (31.3)	19.9 (30.4)	9.6 (20.1)
Boredom reduction	23.8 (34.1)	15.3 (26.2)	13.8 (26.8)	10.5 (23.7)
Conversation	38.9 (34.3)	37.0 (34.0)	39.7 (33.9)	37.4 (28.6)
Death preparation	22.0 (31.1)	19.2 (30.0)	38.2 (33.2)	37.7 (31.0)
Identity	45.4 (41.2)	28.3 (36.9)	48.2 (37.5)	21.9 (30.6)
Intimacy maintenance	31.4 (40.8)	16.1 (30.3)	19.0 (33.5)	13.0 (29.2)
Problem solving	8.8 (23.2)	6.3 (17.7)	7.1 (20.4)	5.6 (16.3)
Teaching	57.1 (39.6)	54.8 (38.9)	46.3 (35.4)	34.4 (34.4)

Note. Centrality refers to CES scores. All scores ranged from 0 to 100. Standard deviations are given between parentheses.

Descriptive statistics can be found in Table 4.

Results revealed a significant difference of generation on function ratings ($\beta_{\text{Grandparent-Grandchild}} = 0.46$, 95% CI $[0.12, 0.80]$, $z = 2.66$, $p = .008$, OR = 1.59, 95% CI $[1.13, 2.23]$), indicating that grandparents reported higher uses of the autobiographical memories they transmitted than grandchildren reported for the vicarious memories they received.

There was also a significant difference according to the event type ($\beta_{\text{Public-Personal}} = -0.36$, 95% CI $[-0.48, -0.23]$, $z = -5.66$, $p < .0001$, OR = 0.70, 95% CI $[0.62, 0.79]$), with personal events rated higher in functionality than public ones.

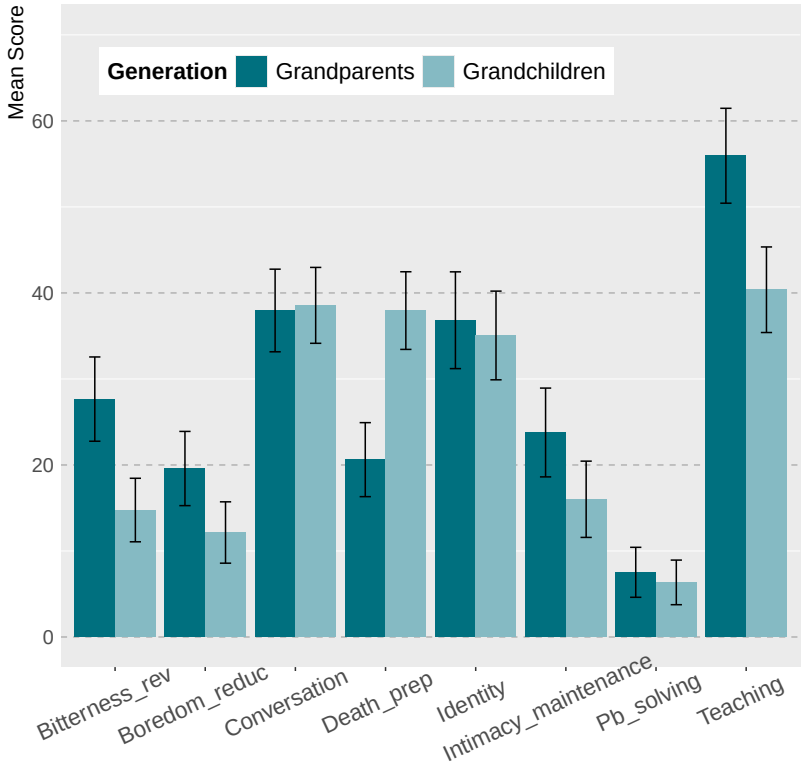
However, these effects must be interpreted in light of a significant interaction between generation and event type, indicating that the generational difference in how memories are used varies depending on whether the memory concerns a personal or a public event.

Simple-effects analyses showed that grandparents expressed stronger reasons for sharing memories than grandchildren reported uses of those same vicarious memories for several specific functions (see Figure 3 and Table 5). This was the case for bitterness revival ($\beta = 0.69$, 95% CI $[0.28, 1.09]$, $z = 3.34$, $p < .001$, OR = 1.99, 95% CI $[1.33, 2.97]$), boredom reduction ($\beta = 1.79$, 95% CI $[0.66, 2.91]$, $z = 3.11$, $p = .002$, OR = 5.96, 95% CI $[1.94, 18.34]$), intimacy maintenance ($\beta = 1.14$, 95% CI $[0.09, 2.19]$, $z = 2.14$, $p = .032$, OR = 3.11, 95% CI $[1.09, 8.90]$), and teaching ($\beta = 0.42$, 95% CI $[0.03, 0.82]$, $z = 2.10$, $p = .036$, OR = 1.52, 95% CI $[1.03, 2.26]$). However, grandparents reported significantly lower scores for death preparation ($\beta = -1.21$, 95% CI $[-1.80, -0.62]$, $z = -4.01$, $p = .0001$, OR = 0.30, 95% CI $[0.17, 0.54]$).

Concerning the event type (see Figure 4 and Table 5), personal events were associated with higher reported uses of vicarious memories for several functions. Specifically, personal memories were more strongly used for bitterness revival ($\beta = -0.84$, 95% CI $[-1.17, -0.51]$, $z = -4.99$, $p < .0001$, OR = 0.43, 95% CI $[0.31, 0.60]$), boredom reduction ($\beta = -0.43$, 95% CI $[-0.82, -0.05]$, $z = -2.22$, $p = .026$, OR = 0.65, 95% CI $[0.44, 0.95]$), identity ($\beta = -0.65$, 95% CI $[-0.97, -0.33]$, $z = -3.99$, $p < .001$, OR = 0.52, 95% CI $[0.38, 0.72]$), and intimacy maintenance ($\beta = -0.61$, 95% CI $[-1.00, -0.21]$, $z = -3.01$, $p = .003$, OR = 0.55, 95% CI $[0.37, 0.81]$). In other words, personal memories were used more than public memories for reflecting on negative experiences, remembering deceased relatives, supporting identity development, and passing the time.

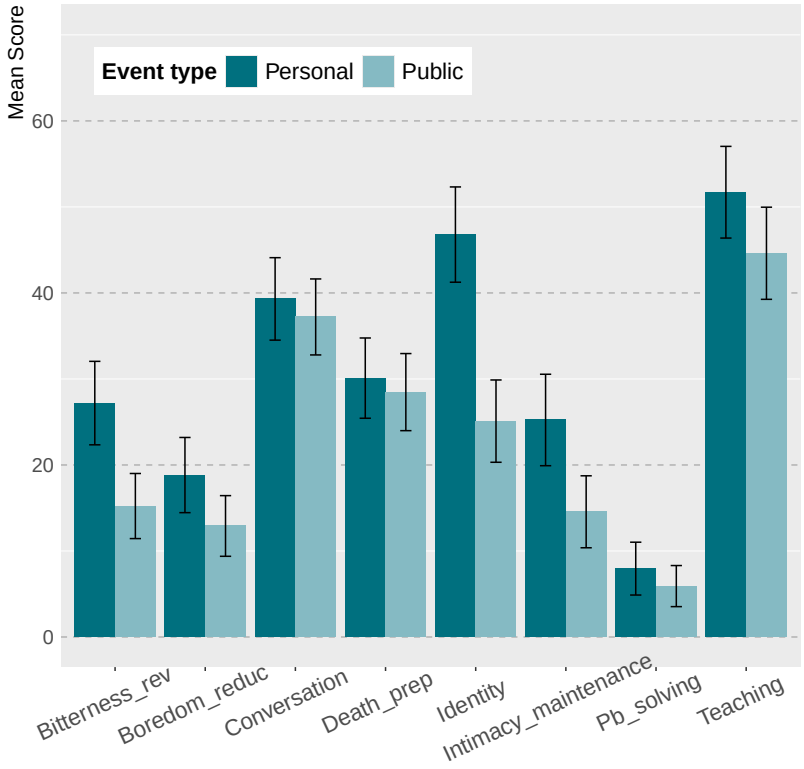
Taken together, these results indicate that grandparents see their stories as serving several relational and pedagogical purposes (such as passing on lessons, maintaining closeness, or sharing emotionally difficult past experiences) more strongly than grandchildren report actually using these vicarious memories for those same purposes. Surprisingly, grandchildren perceive vicarious stories from grandparents as helping them navigate themes of mortality, whereas grandparents do not primarily share these narratives for that reason.

Figure 3: *Scores of reported function across event type according to the generation for the grandparent-grandchild dyads.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

Figure 4: *Scores of reported function across generation according to the type of event for the grandparent-grandchild dyads.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

Table 5: *Interaction effects between event type and generation for the grandparent-grandchild dyads.*

Interactions	Event Type		Generation	
	Public – Personal		*Grandparents – Grandchildren*	
	Estimate (β)	*Odds Ratio*	*Estimate (β)*	*Odds Ratio*
Bitterness revival	**-0.84 [-1.17, -0.51]**	**0.43 [0.31, 0.60]**	**0.69 [0.28, 1.09]**	**1.99 [1.33, 2.97]**
Boredom reduction	**-0.43 [-0.82, -0.05]**	**0.65 [0.44, 0.95]**	**1.79 [0.66, 2.91]**	**5.96 [1.94, 18.34]**
Conversation	-0.05 [-0.36, 0.27]	0.96 [0.70, 1.31]	-0.08 [-0.48, 0.32]	0.93 [0.62, 1.38]
Death preparation	-0.09 [-0.43, 0.24]	0.91 [0.65, 1.27]	**-1.21 [-1.80, -0.62]**	**0.30 [0.17, 0.54]**
Identity	**-0.65 [-0.97, -0.33]**	**0.52 [0.38, 0.72]**	-0.12 [-0.52, 0.27]	0.88 [0.59, 1.31]
Intimacy maintenance	**-0.61 [-1.00, -0.21]**	**0.55 [0.37, 0.81]**	**1.14 [0.09, 2.19]**	**3.11 [1.09, 8.90]**
Problem solving	0.06 [-0.30, 0.42]	1.06 [0.74, 1.52]	1.07 [-0.02, 2.16]	2.92 [0.98, 8.69]
Teaching	-0.23 [-0.55, 0.09]	0.79 [0.58, 1.09]	**0.42 [0.03, 0.82]**	**1.52 [1.03, 2.26]**

Note. 95% CI are given between parentheses. *p*-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni method and were interpreted relative to $\alpha = 0.05$. Bold estimates are significant.

3.3 Discussion

In this study, we examined how grandparents and grandchildren evaluate the functions of autobiographical memories transmitted across generations. Grandparents reported on their reasons for transmitting specific personal and public memories, while grandchildren rated their use of the corresponding vicarious memories. This design allowed us to contrast how the same narratives are understood from the perspective of the transmitter and the recipient. We hypothesized generational differences across several functions, and expected personal events to elicit higher functional ratings than public ones.

Our findings provide partial support for these predictions. Overall, grandparents attributed higher functional relevance to their transmitted memories than grandchildren attributed to the vicarious stories they recalled. More specifically, grandparents expressed stronger reasons for sharing memories for bitterness revival (i.e., revisiting difficult or painful past experiences), boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching. These results suggest that grandparents view intergenerational storytelling as serving both emotional and relational purposes—such as working through past adversity, maintaining closeness, or conveying life lessons. This aligns with prior research showing that grandparents often draw on narratives involving hardship or adversity when interacting with grandchildren (Barker, 2007; Fowler and Soliz, 2010). Such memories may hold strong personal significance for grandparents, even if grandchildren do not report using them to the same extent.

Notably, grandchildren assigned higher scores than grandparents for death preparation, suggesting that younger generations may use grandparents' stories to help them make sense of aging, loss, or mortality—even though grandparents do not primarily share these stories for that purpose. Although previous work has shown that individuals reflect more on death preparation as they age (Webster, 1993), our findings indicate that vicarious memories from grandparents can also support younger generations in engaging with themes of mortality.

Conversation and identity functions did not differ by generation. Grandparents used their past experiences to impart values and maintain relational closeness, and grandchildren appeared to recognize and engage with these same functions. Both generations reported similar levels of identity-related and conversational use, indicating that intergenerational narratives remain meaningful for constructing family identity and sustaining communication across generations. This convergence echoes prior work emphasizing the role

of grandparental storytelling in fostering family continuity and belonging (Harwood et al., 2012; Soliz and Lin, 2014; Stephan, 2024). Grandchildren further reported that recalling these stories supported their sense of family origin, consistent with research showing that close grandparent–grandchild relationships facilitate identity development and belonging (Bernhold and Giles, 2017; Soliz and Lin, 2014).

Although nuanced by an interaction effect, as expected, personal events were rated as more functional than public ones. Across both generations, personal memories were more strongly associated with bitterness revival, identity, intimacy maintenance, and boredom reduction. These findings suggest that memories rooted in individual experience are particularly meaningful for making sense of difficult events, supporting identity development, maintaining emotional closeness, and facilitating conversation. While public memories also served communicative and educational purposes, they carried fewer personal or identity-relevant qualities.

4 Comparing transmission from parents and grandparents

While Studies 1 and 2 respectively examined parent–child and grandparent–grandchild pairs, this analysis brings these together to test whether the functions attributed to intergenerational memories differ depending on the generation of the transmitter (parents vs. grandparents) and the recipient (children vs. grandchildren).

4.1 Method and participants

Here, we combined data from the first two studies to compare the 64 parent-child dyads with the 49 grandparent-grandchild dyads. The different dyads were not from the same families, and whereas grandparents and parents differed in age, children and grandchildren were of similar ages ($t(111) = 1.02$, $p = .31$).

4.1.1 Analysis

For this analysis, we fitted two generalized linear mixed models (GLMMs). The first model compared function scores reported by parents and grandparents, while the second compared scores between children and grandchildren. In both models, function scores were predicted by event type (public vs. personal) and generation (parent vs. grandparent; child vs. grandchild, respectively). We tested for the main effects of function, generation, and event type, as well as the interactions between functions and generations.

This approach allowed us to test for the perceived functions of intergenerational memory transmission across two distinct generational dyads.

4.2 Results

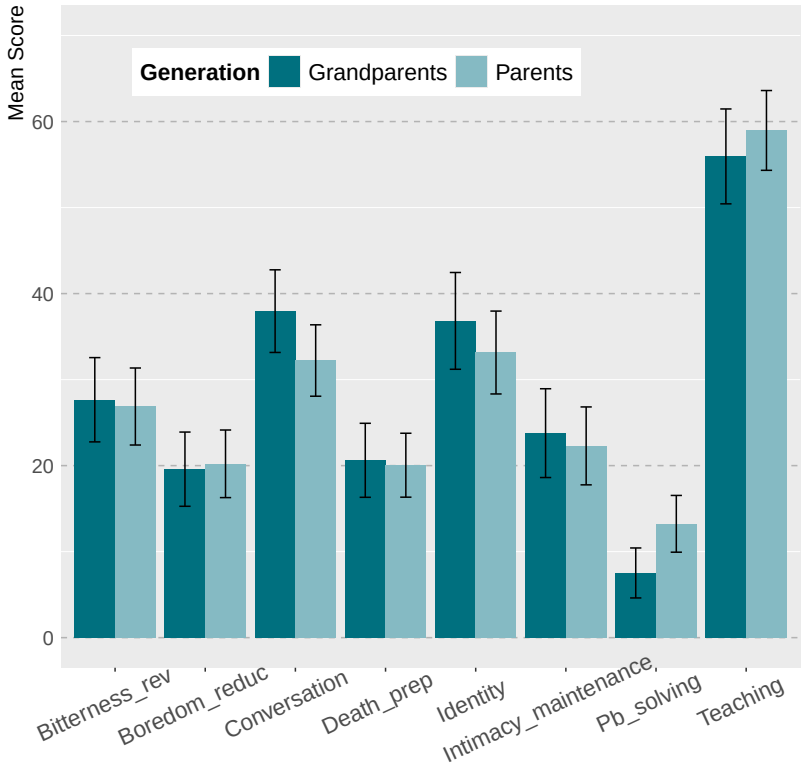
4.2.1 Parents vs. Grandparents

Results revealed no significant main effect of generation on function scores ($\beta_{\text{Grandparent-Parent}} = -0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.35, 0.30]$, $z = -0.15$, $p = .885$), indicating that grandparents and parents reported comparable reasons for transmitting autobiographical memories.

There was a main effect of event type, showing that personal events were rated as serving more functions than public events overall ($\beta_{\text{Personal}} = -0.30$, 95% CI $[-0.41, -0.18]$, $z = -5.07$, $p < .0001$, OR = 0.74, 95% CI $[0.66, 0.83]$).

Importantly, there were no significant differences in any of the reported functions between parents and grandparents (Figure 5), suggesting that across generations, older family members hold comparable reasons for sharing autobiographical memories with younger family members.

Figure 5: *Scores of reported function according to the generations.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

4.2.2 Vicarious memories from grandparents vs. Vicarious memories from parents

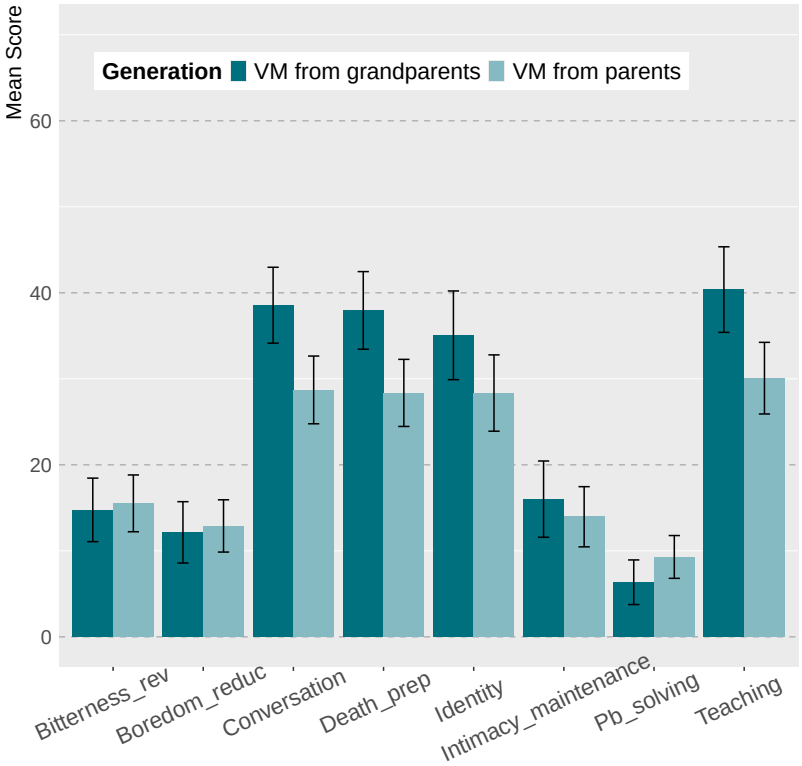
Model outputs revealed no main effect of generation, $\beta_{\text{Grandchild-Child}} = -0.11$, 95% CI $[-0.44, 0.22]$, $z = -0.65$, $p = .514$, indicating that, overall, young adults did not report using vicarious memories from grandparents as serving more functions than vicarious memories from parents.

There was a main effect of event type on the overall function scores ($\beta_{\text{Public-Personal}} = -0.34$, 95% CI $[-0.47, -0.21]$, $z = -5.21$, $p < .0001$, OR = 0.71, 95% CI $[0.62, 0.81]$): across both sources, personal stories were perceived as more functionally meaningful than public ones.

When examining the interaction (Figure 6), young adults reported greater use of vicarious memories from grandparents than parents for conversation ($\beta = 0.45$, 95% CI $[0.05, 0.85]$, $z = 2.20$, $p = .028$, OR = 1.57, 95% CI $[1.05, 2.35]$), and identity ($\beta = 0.46$, 95% CI $[0.06, 0.87]$, $z = 2.23$, $p = .026$, OR = 1.59, 95% CI $[1.06, 2.38]$). In other words, young adults more often drew on grandparents' stories to support conversations and to reflect on who they are.

By contrast, although overall scores were lower for problem-solving than for other functions, young adults reported greater problem-solving use for vicarious memories originating from parents than from grandparents ($\beta = -1.12$, 95% CI $[-2.18, -0.05]$, $z = -2.06$, $p = .040$, OR = 0.33, 95% CI $[0.11, 0.95]$), suggesting that parental stories were perceived as more practically applicable to everyday challenges.

Figure 6: *Scores of reported function according to the generations.*



Note. VM = Vicarious memories. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

4.3 Discussion

In this analysis, we examined the reasons that grandparents and parents attributed to the transmission of important autobiographical memories to younger family members. We also investigated how young adults (matched in age) rated the functions of vicarious stories they had received from either a parent or a grandparent.

Contrary to our hypotheses, parents and grandparents did not differ in the functions they reported for transmitting memories. No significant differences were found in any function between the generations, suggesting that both grandparents and parents share similar motivations for storytelling, including teaching, guiding, maintaining relationships, and supporting continuity. These results extend previous research emphasizing generativity in midlife (Harris and Van Bergen, 2024; McAdams et al., 1993), and align with findings that grandparents also actively transmit values and lessons through intergenerational storytelling (Pratt et al., 2008). The lack of differences highlights that older family members, regardless of generational position, perceive storytelling as a meaning-

ful vehicle for sharing knowledge and fostering family cohesion. Differences emerged in how young adults reported using vicarious memories from grandparents versus parents. Grandparents' stories were rated higher for conversation and identity, suggesting that young adults draw on these narratives to reflect on themselves and to engage in relational interactions. In contrast, parental stories were rated higher for problem-solving, indicating that young adults perceive their parents' memories as more directly applicable to practical challenges and everyday decision-making. The stronger perceived social and identity functions for grandparents' stories likely reflect their unique position within the family: grandparents can provide historical perspective, continuity across generations, and narratives not commonly encountered elsewhere, thereby strengthening emotional bonds and fostering a sense of family heritage (Dunifon, 2013; Pratt et al., 2010). This distinction is further supported by evidence that frequent memory transmission from grandparents is associated with closer grandparent–grandchild relationships—a pattern less pronounced between parents and children (Baudet et al., 2025).

Taken together, these findings suggest that while both parents and grandparents transmit meaningful memories, the content and perceived purpose of these stories differ, highlighting the complementary roles of older generations in supporting identity, relational connection, and practical learning within the family.

5 General discussion

Across two studies and one between-sample analysis, we investigated the functions of intergenerational memory transmission in parent–child and grandparent–grandchild relationships. In Study 1, parents reported why they transmitted important personal and public memories to their young adult children, while children rated the functions of vicarious memories they recalled from their parents or grandparents. Study 2 applied the same design to grandparent–grandchild dyads. The between-dyad analysis directly compared parents and grandparents as transmitters, and children and grandchildren as receivers, making it possible to examine how the functions of intergenerational stories vary across generations. By including both personal and public autobiographical memories, the present research provides a comprehensive picture of the roles intergenerational narratives play within families, both when they are transmitted by older generations and when they are used vicariously by younger ones.

As expected, and across both studies, personal memories were consistently rated as

more functional than public ones. These stories were more strongly associated with several RFS functions, including bitterness revival, identity, intimacy maintenance, and boredom reduction. This suggests that narratives grounded in personal experiences are particularly potent for reflecting on difficult events, supporting identity development, and maintaining emotional closeness. Public memories, though less strongly endorsed overall, nonetheless served meaningful functions as well: they supported teaching and conversation, echoing prior work showing how collective history can be used within families to foster shared understanding (Cordonnier et al., 2022). Thus, intergenerational transmission appears to draw on both personal and public narratives, but personal stories carry unique emotional and relational weight.

When comparing parents and children, we found that parents generally attributed higher functional relevance to the memories they transmitted than children did to the vicarious memories they recalled. This primarily reflected higher scores for bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching. These findings suggest that parents use storytelling not only to pass on lessons but also to process emotionally significant or difficult past experiences. Generativity (defined as the desire to guide and positively influence the next generation (Erikson, 1963)) has long been associated with parenthood (Merrill and Fivush, 2016; Newton and Baltys, 2014). Our results suggest that autobiographical memory transmission serves as one avenue through which parents express this generativity. By sharing personal memories such as stories of adverse events or stories of deceased relatives, parents aim to teach values and provide guidance to their children.

Children, by contrast, made more limited use of these stories for such purposes. This generational difference may partly reflect the distinction between personal and vicarious memories: as argued by Pillemer et al. (2015,2), vicarious memories typically serve similar functions as personal memories but with reduced intensity. Nevertheless, given the challenge of identity construction during early adulthood, we hypothesized that children would remember vicarious stories from their parents for identity and problem-solving reasons. However, children did not report higher (or lower) identity compared to parents. Similarly, conversational function was comparable between the two groups. Stories served as opportunities for conversation and relationship-building in both generations. This finding aligns with prior research showing that intergenerational storytelling plays a key role in shaping family identity and promoting a sense of belonging within the family unit (Fivush et al., 2010a; Fivush and Merrill, 2016; Jones and Ackerman, 2018; Merrill and

Fivush, 2016). Moreover, numerous past studies showed correlations between adolescents' knowledge about their parents' stories and their well-being (Chen et al., 2021; Fivush et al., 2011a,1; Fivush and Zaman, 2011; Merrill et al., 2017).

In this sense, parents' stories appear to satisfy different—but complementary—functions for each generation: they allow parents to transmit lessons and process past experiences, while offering children insight into their origins and family identity.

Despite the recognized importance of intergenerational narratives for youth development, relatively few studies have explored their psychological or emotional significance for parents themselves (Kulkofsky et al., 2009). Our results suggest that reflecting on life experiences—particularly adverse ones—and sharing them with the next generation might serve important psychological functions for parents, offering them a meaningful avenue for coping with past difficulties.

When comparing grandparents' reasons to transmit autobiographical memories to grandchildren's use of vicarious memory, we found that both grandparents and grandchildren reported similar levels of conversation and identity functions for these memories. Narratives were seen by both generations as important for maintaining closeness and sharing information about identity. Grandparents appeared motivated to share personal life experiences and to provide younger family members with a sense of where they come from, and grandchildren were also motivated to learn about these aspects of their family history.

Interestingly, grandparents reported transmitting for bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching reasons. This aligns with previous findings indicating that grandparents sometimes disclose painful or difficult life experiences to their grandchildren (Barker, 2007; Fowler and Soliz, 2010). These disclosures may carry emotional weight that younger receivers find challenging to engage with fully, potentially accounting for the observed difference. Surprisingly, although previous work has shown that individuals reflect more on death preparation as they age (Webster, 1993), our findings indicate that vicarious memories from grandparents can also support younger generations in engaging with themes of mortality. Grandchildren appear to use vicarious memories of their grandparents to help them deal with mortality. It is possible that younger adults do not know how to deal with these issues, and that grandparents are their only link to an older generation, which helps them draw on lessons that they may not obtain elsewhere (Pratt et al., 2010; Soliz and Lin, 2014; Stephan, 2024).

Between-transmitters comparison revealed that parents and grandparents did not differ in the functions they attributed to the memories they transmitted. Despite theoreti-

cal expectations based on generativity peaking in midlife (Harris and Van Bergen, 2024; McAdams et al., 1993), grandparents and parents expressed comparable motivations to teach, guide, connect, and reflect through storytelling. This aligns with work emphasizing grandparents' important role in value transmission within families (Pratt et al., 2008).

In contrast, young adults distinguished between vicarious memories received from parents and those received from grandparents. They rated grandparental memories as more functional for conversation and identity, indicating that grandparents' stories more strongly support relational engagement and self-reflection. Parental stories, however, were rated higher on problem-solving, likely reflecting their greater perceived relevance for everyday challenges and decision-making. Again, vicarious memories from grandparents may help them draw on lessons that they may not obtain elsewhere (Stephan, 2024).

These differences correspond with evidence that the perceived frequency of memory transmission is more strongly associated with feelings of closeness in the grandparent–grandchild dyad than in the parent–child dyad (Baudet et al., 2025). As young adults' contact with grandparents decreases (Wetzel and Hank, 2020), the stories that are shared may become more distinctive and symbolically meaningful. Grandparents offer a broader historical perspective and transmit values or experiences that may not arise in everyday interactions with parents (Dunifon, 2013; Pratt et al., 2010). This may explain why grandparental vicarious stories received higher ratings on identity function compared to parental ones: young adults appear to draw on these narratives to understand who they are and where they come from.

5.1 Limits and future directions

While the present studies provide novel insights into the functions of intergenerational memories, they did not examine the actual content of the narratives. A qualitative analysis of the transmitted and remembered stories would offer a more nuanced understanding of how specific themes and values relate to the functions they serve. For example, future research could explore whether the values that transmitters aim to convey align with those that the younger generation perceives in these memories. Pratt et al. (2008) found that young adults' recollections of value-laden stories from grandparents tended to be more specific to the child's life and involved the child less than similar stories from parents. Such content-level differences may shed light on why certain functions, like identity, are perceived differently depending on the generation.

Another limitation of our study concerns the selection of memories. Participants were asked to report the most important personal and public memories they had transmitted or remembered. By focusing only on the two most significant memories in each category, our data may not reflect the full range or frequency of intergenerational memory use in everyday family life. As such, caution is warranted when generalizing these findings to all intergenerational narratives shared within families.

Regarding the type of memory, many transmitted memories were more generic than strictly episodic. Indeed, our preliminary qualitative analyses (to be reported in future work) suggest that a substantial portion of participants' responses described broader, recurrent experiences rather than single, temporally specific events. Examining these more general forms of autobiographical memory will be essential for capturing intergenerational transmission in a more ecologically valid manner, and this constitutes an important direction for future research.

Additionally, prior research has documented gender differences in the structure and content of intergenerational narratives. For example, Bakir-Demir et al. (2023) found that women, particularly grandmothers, are more likely to emphasize social relationships and adopt the perspectives of others in their storytelling. Similarly, Fivush et al. (2009) showed that mothers tend to use a more elaborative and nuanced style when reminiscing with their children, which can vary by topic. These findings suggest that both the gender of the transmitter and the recipient may shape the functions of intergenerational memories. In the current studies, the sample was predominantly women, which limits our ability to examine potential gender differences. As a result, the findings may primarily reflect the motivations of women, and caution is warranted when generalizing to men. Future research with more balanced samples is needed to determine whether the patterns observed here extend to men participants.

An important direction for future research concerns the degree of alignment between transmitters' reasons for sharing memories and receivers' use of those same memories. In the present studies, transmitters and receivers did not report on identical memories, which prevented direct dyadic comparisons of use correspondence. However, the observed patterns suggest that such alignment may vary across family dyads. In particular, grandparents and grandchildren appeared more closely aligned in their evaluations of memory functions than parents and children, raising questions about when and why intergenerational communication succeeds or diverges.

Future work will directly examine this issue by collecting paired reports on the same

transmitted memories and assessing overlap between transmitters' motivations and receivers' interpretations. We are currently pursuing this approach by examining how memory characteristics (e.g., emotional intensity, centrality, phenomenology, and narrative content) predict similarity, elaboration, forgetting, and functional overlap between dyad members. Such designs will allow us to determine when storytelling intentions are effectively conveyed and when they are transformed or attenuated across generations.

5.2 Conclusion

Taken together, these three studies provide new insight into how autobiographical memories function within intergenerational relationships. Across parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads, transmitted memories served a wide range of functions related to interpersonal closeness, identity formation, and value transmission. Parents attributed more functional relevance to the stories they shared than their children recalled, whereas no such gap appeared between grandparents and grandchildren. Young adults also rated grandparental stories as particularly meaningful for identity and conversation compared to parental stories, highlighting the unique position of grandparents as transmitters of family history, moral lessons, and continuity across generations.

The present findings build on and extend Fivush's theoretical and empirical work on family storytelling by highlighting how intergenerational narratives function not only as shared knowledge structures, but as relational tools whose meanings may differ for tellers and listeners. By examining both reasons for transmitting memories and uses of vicarious memories across generations, this research underscores the dynamic, bidirectional nature of family narratives emphasized in Fivush's work. Across generations, family stories offer a powerful medium for making sense of the past, navigating adversity, and sustaining emotional connection. From an applied perspective, understanding how and why intergenerational stories are transmitted and remembered may inform efforts to support family communication, identity development, and intergenerational closeness in educational, clinical, and community contexts.

Data accessibility statement: The data supporting the findings of this study are available on the Open Science Framework.

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Lost in transmission? Comparing emotional content in transmitted vs. remembered family memories

David Baudet[1], Christine Bastin[1,2], Olivier Luminet[2,3], & Aline Cordonnier[3]

[1]GIGA Research, CRC Human Imaging, University of Liège
[2]Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS), Brussels, Belgium
[3]Research Institute for Psychological Science, University of Louvain

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David Baudet, Allée du 6 Août, 8, 4000 Liège, Belgique. Email: david.baudet@uliege.be

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Author Note

David Baudet https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2272-7759
Christine Bastin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4556-9490
Olivier Luminet https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1519-2178
Aline Cordonnier https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4101-1948

Abstract

This research investigated the emotions associated with intergenerational memories within families. Across two studies, we examined the perspectives of transmitters (parents and grandparents) and receivers (children and grandchildren) regarding important family memories. In Studies 1 and 2, transmitters selected memories they had previously shared with a specific family member, whereas receivers independently selected memories told by the same family member. We then combined these datasets to compare emotional patterns across generations. Across studies, transmitters reported higher emotional intensity than receivers, consistent with the idea that lived experiences evoke stronger emotions than vicarious memories. Differences in valence and discrete emotions emerged depending on generational roles: grandparents' stories were less negative than parents' stories, while grandchildren recalled grandparents' stories as eliciting greater admiration, happiness, pride, and respect than children recalled parents' stories. These findings highlight how the emotional characteristics of intergenerational memories reflect both the storyteller's experiences and the receiver's perspective, and they provide new insights into the socioemotional functions of family storytelling.

Keywords: *Autobiographical memory; vicarious memory, family; transmission; emotions.*

1 Introduction

Storytelling emerges early in familial interactions, shaping how the family comes to understand themselves and their social world. Human cognition is inherently narrative; individuals tend to interpret and organize their experiences through storied frameworks. Such narratives contribute to the development of personal identity and worldviews (McAdams & Manczak, 2015; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Pasupathi & Adler, 2021), facilitate the transmission of family knowledge (Bohanek, Marin, Fivush, & Duke, 2006; Fivush & Merrill, 2016), and support the emergence and consolidation of autobiographical memory (Farrant & Reese, 2009; Reese, Fivush, Merrill, Wang, & McAnally, 2017). Despite extensive research on these functions, comparatively little is known about the emotional content embedded in intergenerational narratives. It remains unclear whether older generations selectively transmit stories with particular emotional characteristics and whether these align with the emotional characteristics remembered by younger recipients.

1.1 Autobiographical memory and family

Research on intergenerational memory transmission within families has expanded significantly in recent decades. Numerous authors examine how memories from an older generation shape the development of autobiographical memory among children (e.g., Fivush, Bohanek, & Marin, 2010; Reese & Fivush, 2008). Autobiographical memory is a reflective form of memory that goes beyond the recall of experienced events, to include interpretation, evaluation, and integration of the events into a coherent life story (Conway, 2005;

Fivush, Bohanek, & Marin, 2010). It relies on meaning-making processes and reasoning. Previous studies showed that autobiographical reasoning (that is, the way one creates and reflects on its life story) is highly inherited from early reminiscence, especially from the mothers (Fivush & Merrill, 2016; Marshall & Reese, 2022; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). Children with more elaborative and encouraging mothers also seem to show more elaborative and coherent life stories (Marshall & Reese, 2022). Stories from older generations, and especially parents, help rooting one's own autobiographical memory and give more meaning-making tools to make sense of our own experiences.

Family memory exchanges are a natural and frequent part of everyday family interactions (Fivush & Merrill, 2016). In their study of family reminiscence, Bohanek et al. (2009) observed that families evoke past experiences (including stories about their day or older stories about the family) roughly every five minutes during routine family meals. These narratives allow families to co-construct meaning, validate emotions, and strengthen a sense of belonging both at the collective and individual levels (Fivush, Duke, Candler, & Bohanek, 2010). More recently, Baudet, Cordonnier, Luminet, and Bastin (2025) reported that members of three generations (grandparents, parents, and grandchildren) view intergenerational memory sharing as a relatively common feature of family life. By sparking conversations, imparting lessons, or communicating values, shared memories provide opportunities for listeners to engage empathetically with the storyteller (Bluck, Baron, Ainsworth, Gesselman, & Gold, 2013). However, more than benefiting the youngest generations, memory transmission also contributes to parents' and grandparents' well-being.

In middle adulthood, individuals often experience an emerging desire to contribute to the well-being of future generations. Erikson (Erikson, 1963) conceptualized this developmental concern as *generativity*, an interest in guiding and nurturing the next generation. Although there are multiple pathways to express generativity, parenting represents a particularly salient context for fulfilling this role. Engagement in generative behaviors has been consistently associated with enhanced psychological well-being among adults (An & Cooney, 2006; Grossbaum & Bates, 2002; Grossman & Gruenewald, 2017; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). Similar benefits have been observed in older adults, who report greater life satisfaction (Scott, Nadorff, Barnett, & Yancura, 2023), improved psychological health (Gruenewald, Liao, & Seeman, 2012), and reduced functional decline (Herrera, Galkuté, Fernández, & Elgueta, 2022). One meaningful expression of generativity is the intergenerational transmission of personal and family memories.

Intergenerational family stories are one type of story shared in the family, which refers

to the narrative of a memory lived by an older generation and told to a younger one (Fivush & Kellas, 2025). Past research highlights the unique role of grandparent narratives in this process. For instance, Pratt, Norris, Hebblethwaite, and Arnold (2008) found that grandchildren frequently recalled emotionally resonant and value-laden stories shared by grandparents, often carrying distinct themes from those transmitted by parents. More recently, Stephan (2024) identified three primary functions of grandparent storytelling for young adults: fostering emotional closeness between grandparents and grandchildren, conveying family history, and preserving the legacy of the grandparents themselves. These narratives serve not only to reinforce intergenerational bonds but also to transmit enduring family values and traditions, connecting younger generations to more distant familial roots. Importantly, intergenerational communication of this kind has been shown to promote psychological well-being in both grandparents and grandchildren (for reviews, see Swartz, 2009; Thomas, Liu, & Umberson, 2017).

1.2 The role of emotions in autobiographical memory

Emotions play a central role in the encoding, consolidation, and retrieval of autobiographical memories (see Luminet & Cordonnier, 2024a, for a review). One of the most robust findings in this domain is the emotion-enhanced memory effect (EEM), which demonstrates that emotionally charged events are more likely to be remembered than neutral ones (Cahill & McGaugh, 1998; Luminet & Cordonnier, 2024a; Steidl, Razik, & Anderson, 2011). Within the context of autobiographical memory, research has shown that different dimensions of emotionality (e.g., valence and intensity) influence memory processes in distinct ways.

On a methodological level, several authors have emphasized the importance of integrating emotional measures more thoroughly into memory research (Luminet, 2022). Emotions are typically assessed using either dimensional models—such as valence (pleasantness) and intensity (bodily activation) (e.g., Barrett et al., 2007)—or discrete emotion models, which classify emotions into basic categories such as happiness, sadness, or disgust (e.g., Izard, 2007). Although these frameworks originate from distinct theoretical traditions, there is growing consensus that combining both perspectives yields a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of emotional experience (Barrett, 1998; Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones, & Summerell, 2017). Traditional autobiographical memory studies often focus on valence and intensity, thereby overlooking the richness offered by discrete

or multidimensional evaluations of emotion (Luminet & Cordonnier, 2024a, 2024b). This methodological inclination could conceal important nuances in the findings. For instance, different discrete emotions may share similar valence levels, potentially obscuring distinct emotional and mnemonic processes. Therefore, we adopt a multi-dimensional approach and consider various dimensions of emotion in the context of intergenerational memory transmission.

First, regarding dimensional measures of emotions, both valence and intensity have been shown to contribute to the emotion-enhanced memory effect (EEM; see Luminet & Cordonnier, 2024a, for a review). Whereas these results were initially observed in studies using lists of words (Kang, Wang, Surina, & Lü, 2014; Kensinger & Corkin, 2003), EEM effects also extend to autobiographical memory research, where valence plays a central role. In particular, positive life events show a systematic advantage in recall: an effect known as the *positivity effect* (e.g., Levine & Bluck, 2004).

One possible explanation for this enhancement is the human tendency to maintain a coherent and favorable self-image, which makes positive events more easily integrated into one's life narrative (Matlin & Stang, 1978). This bias becomes more pronounced with age. Compared with younger adults, older adults' autobiographical memories tend to be predominantly positive in valence, a phenomenon known as the *positivity bias* (e.g., Charles, Mather, & Carstensen, 2003; Levine & Bluck, 2004). According to the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST; Carstensen, 2006), this bias reflects a shift in motivational goals with age: as individuals grow older, they increasingly prioritize emotion regulation and the pursuit of emotional well-being (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). Consequently, older adults may preferentially recall and share positive memories, especially in intergenerational contexts where narratives serve both emotional and identity-related functions.

Beyond differential recall for positive events, another phenomenon shaping emotional memory over time is the *fading-affect bias*, which refers to the tendency for negative memories to become less intense over time compared with positive memories (Walker & Skowronski, 2009). Similar to the positivity effect, the fading-affect bias contributes to a more positive self-perception.

However, the link between emotion and memory is not exclusively driven by positive valence. Under certain conditions, negative information exhibits its own memory advantages. For instance, the *negativity effect* has been observed when judging moral behavior (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987) and among individuals experiencing depression (Holland & Kensinger, 2010). Because depression is associated with a negatively biased self-view,

individuals with depression are more likely to recall negative experiences than positive ones (Holland & Kensinger, 2010). It has been proposed that a general attentional inclination toward negative stimuli may be adaptive, as ignoring potential threats could increase danger from an evolutionary perspective (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

While emotional valence yields mixed patterns depending on context, emotional intensity represents another key dimension influencing memory performance. Ack Baraly, Hot, Davidson, and Talmi (2016) reviewed strong evidence supporting an association between arousal and better performance in episodic memory, while also noting the mixed findings reported in autobiographical research. Talarico, LaBar, and Rubin (2004) demonstrated that when participants generated, recalled, and rated autobiographical memories differing in valence and intensity, intensity predicted memory properties to a greater extent than valence. Greater emotional intensity was linked to higher levels of vividness, narrative coherence, specificity, and rehearsal.

Taken together, these results indicate that both valence and intensity contribute to EEM, but at different levels. Bohanek, Fivush, and Walker (2005)'s findings support this idea. After asking women to narrate one intensely positive and one intensely negative memory (high-intensity conditions), as well as one moderately positive and one moderately negative autobiographical memory, the authors analyzed the content and structure of the recalled events. They found that high-intensity memories were longer than moderate-intensity ones, and negative memories were longer than positive ones. Negative narratives also contained more cognitively oriented language, particularly in the high-intensity condition, whereas positive narratives were structurally more complex. These results align with other findings showing that children aged 5 to 12 used more descriptive details about people and objects when narrating positive memories than negative ones, while negative events were recalled with more internal states and greater coherence (Fivush, Hazzard, McDermott Sales, Sarfati, & Brown, 2003). Beyond shaping the qualities of personal memories, emotional factors also influence how stories are remembered when they are transmitted by others.

Research on vicarious memory provides important insights into how emotional content is transmitted through narratives. Vicarious memories refer to recollections of events not experienced firsthand but conveyed by others, often through storytelling (Kirkegaard Thomsen et al., 2025; Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015; Pillemer, Thomsen, & Fivush, 2024). Although these memories lack direct experiential grounding, they can still

evoke phenomenological and emotional responses and serve similar psychological functions, although typically with less intensity than personally experienced events (Pillemer et al., 2015, 2024). Steiner (2023) found that vicarious memories do not show a positivity bias and that negative vicarious memories, much like negative personal memories, serve directive functions to a similar extent. Indeed, Pillemer et al. (2024) emphasizes the adaptive function of vicarious memory: by learning from others' experiences (particularly negative ones), individuals can acquire important life lessons without undergoing the adverse events themselves. This mechanism may be particularly relevant in intergenerational contexts, where stories are often shared with the intent of guiding or protecting younger family members.

Other work has explored how perceived meaning and emotional valence influence which memories are transmitted and retained within families. For example, Gu, Tse, and Brown (2020) found that when parents and children concurred on the personal significance of a parental life event, the corresponding memories were more likely to display a positive emotional valence. Moreover, such memories (particularly those diverging from culturally normative life scripts) were rated as more emotionally intense. Taken together, these findings underscore the pivotal role of emotional factors in the selection, transmission, and retention of family memories.

Despite these insights, surprisingly few studies have directly examined the emotional characteristics of intergenerational narratives through the lens of discrete emotions. Merrill, Srinivas, and Fivush (2017) compared pride and transgression memories shared by parents and recalled by college students, finding that pride narratives contained a higher proportion of emotional language and evaluative content than transgression narratives. These results suggest that emotional qualities may play a central role in determining which memories are remembered and transmitted across generations, a question that warrants further empirical investigation.

1.3 The present studies

The present research aims to examine the emotional characteristics of memories transmitted across generations within families. Specifically, we compare the emotional qualities of autobiographical memories recounted by older generations with those of the vicarious memories retained by younger family members. Despite the central role of emotion in memory transmission, no prior study, to our knowledge, has directly compared the emo-

tional content of significant family memories as recalled by different generations while simultaneously integrating both emotional valence and discrete emotion dimensions.

Across two studies and one between-sample analysis, we examined the emotions embedded in the memories that grandparents and parents chose to transmit and the emotions present in the vicarious memories that grandchildren and children retained from their grandparents or parents. *Study 1* focused on parent–child dyads, and *Study 2* applied a similar design to grandparent–grandchild dyads, in which grandchildren were also adults. The *Between-sample analysis* combined both datasets to investigate generational differences by comparing emotions in parents' versus grandparents' transmitted memories, and in children's versus grandchildren's vicarious memories. As an exploratory goal, we also examined whether the expression of specific discrete emotions is associated with the perceived functions of transmitted memories.

Because our paradigm compares the emotional characteristics of important memories transmitted by older generations with the emotional characteristics of vicarious memories recalled by younger generations, and because most existing research focuses on emotions in self-experienced autobiographical memories, our hypotheses were primarily exploratory:

- *Study 1: Parent–child comparison*
    1. Parents' autobiographical memories will be more positive in valence and more emotionally intense than the vicarious memories recalled by their children.
    2. Children's vicarious memories will be more negative and lower in emotional intensity than the autobiographical memories reported by their parents.
- *Study 2: Grandparent–grandchild comparison*
    1. Grandparents' autobiographical memories will be more positive than the vicarious memories recalled by their grandchildren.
    2. Grandchildren's vicarious memories will be more negative and less emotionally intense than the autobiographical memories reported by their grandparents.
- *Between-sample analysis: Intergenerational comparisons across dyads*
    1. Grandparents' autobiographical memories will be more positive than parents' autobiographical memories.

2. Among younger generations, vicarious memories of grandparents will be more positive than vicarious memories of parents.

Beyond these hypotheses, an additional goal was to provide an exploratory account of the discrete emotions embedded in transmitted and recalled memories across three generations. Finally, we examined whether the most prominent positive and negative discrete emotions were systematically related to the perceived functions of these memories.

2 Study 1: Transmission from parents to children

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

Fifty-seven parent-child dyads were recruited to participate in a study investigating intergenerational memory transmission in the family. The children's ages varied from 16 to 30 years (M = 22.6, SD = 3.0), with 39 (68.4%) identifying as women. The parents' ages ranged from 38 to 66 years (M = 53.1, SD = 5.3), with 42 (73.7%) identifying as women.

Participants were Belgian French-speakers who were recruited by word of mouth. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, which included agreement to be audio-recorded during the experiment. Each participant received 20 euros as compensation for their time. The study protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Faculté de Psychologie, Logopédie et Sciences de l'Éducation (FPLSE) at the University of Liège.

2.1.2 Procedure and materials

This study was part of a larger data collection effort conducted by the authors, aiming at investigating intergenerational memory. However, only data relevant to the current research questions are presented and discussed in the present article.

For participants' convenience, sessions were conducted either in person at the GIGA-CRC-Human Imaging Centre (University of Liège), at the participant's house, or online using Microsoft Teams. Twenty-seven parents (47%) chose the online option against 22 (39%) for the children.

Phase 1: Memory Selection

Participants were first invited to generate a list of important vicarious memories they transmitted (for the parents) or remembered (for the children). Parents had to list at least three autobiographical memories they transmitted to their child, and the children had to

list at least 3 vicarious memories they knew about their parent. For both generations, these memories had to meet specific criteria: to be episodic (i.e., referring to personally experienced events that occurred at a specific time and place), to have taken place before the parent's 30th birthday, and to have been directly transmitted from the parent to the child. The age criterion was used to ensure that the child had not experienced the event themselves or was too young to recall it firsthand. This constraint is also consistent with the phenomenon of the reminiscence bump, whereby adults tend to recall a disproportionate number of autobiographical memories from between the ages of 10 and 30 (see Munawar, Kuhn, & Haque, 2018). In cases where the parent had their child before the age of 30, participants were instructed to recall events that occurred before the child turned four, in line with findings that most individuals' earliest memories begin around age four, due to childhood amnesia (see Jack & Hayne, 2007, for a review). Importantly, parents and children selected memories on their own, so the recollections typically reflected distinct experiences rather than shared events.

Following the generation of the list of memories, participants rated each memory using an adapted version of the Centrality of Event Scale (CES; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006), which assesses how central a given event is to a person's self-concept or family narrative. An example item from the CES is: "I believe this event is central to my personal and/or family history." The three events rated as most central were selected for the following phase of the study.

Phase 2: Measures of Emotions and Functions

In the second phase, participants were asked to orally narrate each of their selected memories in as much detail as possible. These narrations were audio-recorded by the experimenter. Following each narration, participants responded to a series of questions assessing both the emotional and functional aspects associated with the memory.

The experimenter guided each participant through the questionnaire, which was administered via Qualtrics (Qualtrics, 2020). Participants were interviewed individually.

Emotional valence and intensity. Participants rated the emotional tone of each memory using items that assessed both valence and intensity. Valence was measured separately for positive (*"When I think about this event, I feel positive emotions."*) and negative (*"When I think about this event, I feel negative emotions."*) emotions. Emotional intensity was evaluated with the item: *"This event was intense for me"*. Participants responded using sliders ranging from 0 (do not agree at all) to 100 (completely agree).

Discrete emotions. To provide a more fine-grained view of the emotional landscape of

transmitted memories, participants rated the intensity of 16 discrete emotions. The set was chosen to cover both positive and negative emotions, as well as basic and moral/social emotions relevant to intergenerational memory transmission. Specifically, participants evaluated the extent to which they felt when thinking about the memory: (a) sadness, shame, anger, disgust, guilt, fear, contempt, and indignation, and (b) envy, indebtedness, happiness, pride, admiration, compassion, gratitude, and respect. Items reflecting positive and negative emotions were mixed rather than presented consecutively. Participants responded using sliders ranging from 0 (no emotion) to 100 (high intensity).

Functions of the memory. To measure why memories were transmitted or remembered, participants also completed an adapted version of the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS; Robitaille, Cappeliez, Coulombe, & Webster, 2010). It included one representative item for each of the eight dimensions: boredom reduction (*"To pass the time"*), death preparation (*"To help me cope with my mortality"*), identity (*"To know where I come from"*), problem-solving (*"To remind me that I have the skills to cope with my problems"*), conversation (*"To create/facilitate discussion"*), intimacy maintenance (*"To remember someone who has passed away"*), bitterness revival (*"Not to forget old hurts"*), and teaching/informing (*"To pass on values to younger generations"*). Although functions were not the central focus of the present study as they were analyzed in detail in another article (Baudet, Bastin, Luminet, & Cordonnier, n.d., *under review*), these measures were included to allow exploratory analyses of their potential associations with discrete emotions. Participants responded using sliders ranging from 0 (do not agree at all) to 100 (completely agree).

This procedure was repeated for each of the three selected memories.

2.1.3 Analysis

Participants rated the valence, intensity, and presence of discrete emotions on visual analog scales ranging from 0 ("completely disagree") to 100 ("completely agree"). The data were then considered as continuous.

Initial data inspection revealed that the ratings were not normally distributed. Given their robustness to non-normally distributed data (Jacqmin-Gadda, Sibillot, Proust, Molina, & Thiébaut, 2007; Li, Wong, Lamoureux, & Wong, 2012; Sainani, 2012), we used linear mixed models (LMMs) to account for both the non-normal distribution of the data and the repeated-measures structure of the design. As each participant rated three memories, LMMs were well-suited to capture within-subject variability. To account for variability

across participants and items, we included two random effects, consistent with current recommendations for mixed-effects modeling (Brauer & Curtin, 2018). We fitted two separate models: one for emotional intensity, negative valence and positive valence, and one for the discrete emotions.

The LMMs were implemented in R (R Core Team, 2021) using the `afex` package (Singmann, Bolker, Westfall, Aust, & Ben-Shachar, 2024).

As our main interest was the generational differences in emotional dimensions, the models tested the interaction between generation and emotion scores. The models also included random intercepts for each participant and for emotion items, which were repeated three times per participant. The final model specification was: *Emotion.score* $\sim$ *Emotion.type:Generation + (1|Participant.ID) + (1|Memory.ID)*.

Parameters were estimated using restricted maximum likelihood, and partial epsilon squared (ε^2) was used as the effect size, following current recommendations (Iacobucci, Popovich, Moon, & Román, 2023). However, while reported, effect sizes for fixed effects in linear mixed models should be interpreted with caution due to ongoing debates about their reliability and meaning (Iacobucci et al., 2023). The *p*-values were corrected using Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

Given the gender imbalance in our sample, we re-estimated both models (emotional intensity and valence, and discrete emotions) including gender as a covariate. Gender effects were non-significant ($p > 0.05$), and their inclusion did not change the direction or significance of any other predictors. Consequently, gender was not retained in the final models.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Emotional valence and intensity

Table 1: *Scores of emotional intensity and valences according to generation for the parent-child dyads.*

Emotion	Parents	Children	*p*	$\varepsilon^2_p[95\%CI]$
Intensity	60.6 (38.3)	21.3 (27.0)	<.0001	0.15 [0.10, 0.20]
Positive valence	59.3 (39.8)	46.7 (38.6)	0.0011	0.02 [0.00, 0.04]
Negative valence	31.7 (37.1)	22.4 (28.3)	0.0297	0.006 [0.00, 0.03]

Note. Scores were collected using 0 to 100 visual analog scales. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. *p*-values are corrected using the Bonferroni method.

Data are presented in Table 1.

Parents reported significantly higher emotional intensity than children ($\beta = 39.30$, 95% CI $[5.02, 20.10]$, $t(591.53) = 10.25$, $p < .0001$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.15$, 95% CI $[0.10, 0.20]$), indicating that the memories parents reported transmitting were experienced as more emotionally intense than the vicarious memories children recalled about them.

Regarding emotional valence, significant generational differences also emerged. Parents reported slightly higher levels of positive valence than children ($\beta = 12.55$, 95% CI $[4.83, 20.27]$, $t(591.53) = 3.27$, $p = .0011$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.04]$). A smaller but significant difference was also found for negative valence, with parents again reporting higher levels than children ($\beta = 8.36$, 95% CI $[0.83, 15.90]$, $t(591.53) = 2.18$, $p = .0297$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.03]$).

Taken together, these findings suggest that parents tended to report transmitting memories that were not only more emotionally intense but also slightly more positive and more negative than the memories children recalled from their parents.

2.2.2 Discrete emotions

Table 2: *Scores of discrete emotions according to generation for the parent-child dyads.*

	Emotion	Parents	Children	p	$\varepsilon_p^2[95\%CI]$
Positive	**Happiness**	**55.7 (41.6)**	**40.1 (37.8)**	**<.0001**	**0.02 [0.01, 0.04]**
	Pride	**38.9 (40.4)**	**26.5 (35.4)**	**0.0004**	**0.01 [0.01, 0.03]**
	Thankfulness	**34.5 (39.6)**	**18.6 (31.3)**	**<.0001**	**0.02 [0.01, 0.03]**
	Respect	33.4 (39.0)	31.5 (34.6)	0.5491	
	Admiration	26.3 (36.6)	31.3 (35.7)	0.1402	
	Envy	20.9 (34.2)	16.2 (29.1)	0.1501	
	Compassion	**16.5 (31.2)**	**28.1 (33.0)**	**0.0007**	**0.01 [0.00, 0.03]**
	Debt	4.1 (14.4)	3.3 (11.9)	0.7985	
Negative	Sadness	23.8 (35.0)	19.6 (28.3)	0.2337	
	Anger	13.6 (27.9)	11.2 (23.7)	0.4685	
	Fear	17.2 (30.4)	10.6 (21.5)	0.0542	
	Indignation	11.9 (26.3)	10.9 (24.3)	0.7310	
	Guilt	**11.6 (25.2)**	**3.5 (12.0)**	**0.0184**	**0.00 [0.00, 0.01]**
	Disgust	10.0 (24.7)	10.3 (23.3)	0.9430	
	Shame	8.9 (21.8)	5.5 (15.8)	0.3220	
	Contempt	5.3 (17.9)	6.8 (20.2)	0.6980	

Note. Scores were collected using 0 (no emotion) to 100 (high intensity) visual analog scales. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. Statistically significant differences between generations are indicated in bold, *p*-values are corrected using the Bonferroni method.

Out of the 16 discrete emotions assessed, parents' memories were primarily linked to positive emotions—most notably happiness, followed by pride, gratitude, and respect. Children's vicarious memories of their parents similarly centered on happiness, respect, and admiration. Negative emotions received lower ratings overall; when they appeared, sadness was the most frequently endorsed, followed by anger and fear.

Among these emotions, one negative and four positive reached significant generational differences (see Table 2). Compared to children, parents reported higher levels of guilt ($\beta = 8.11$, 95% CI $[1.38, 14.84]$, $t(1157) = 2.36$, $p = .0184$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.00$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.01]$), happiness ($\beta = 16.03$, 95% CI $[9.30, 22.76]$, $t(1157) = 4.67$, $p < .0001$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.04]$), pride ($\beta = 12.21$, 95% CI $[5.47, 18.94]$, $t(1157) = 3.55$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02]$), and thankfulness ($\beta = 15.49$, 95% CI $[8.75, 22.22]$, $t(1157) = 4.51$, $p < .0001$,

$\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.03]$).

In contrast, compassion was significantly higher among children than among parents ($\beta = -11.63$, 95% CI $[-18.37, -4.90]$, $t(1157) = -3.38$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02]$).

Taken together, these findings suggest that parents tended to use intergenerational memories to express self-evaluative, moral emotions (guilt, pride) as well as positive ones (e.g., happiness, thankfulness), whereas children's vicarious recollections were marked by more empathetic emotions such as compassion.

2.3 Discussion

In this study, we compared the emotional characteristics of intergenerational stories as reported by the transmitter (the parent) and the receiver (the child). Parents were asked to select and narrate important memories they believed they had transmitted to their child, while children selected and narrated important vicarious memories they remembered hearing from their parent. Both groups then rated the emotions associated with each memory. We examined differences in emotional intensity, positive and negative valence, and discrete emotions.

Consistent with our expectations, stories selected by the parents were rated as more emotionally intense than those selected by the children. This finding is in line with vicarious memory research, which shows that firsthand memories tend to be experienced with greater emotional and phenomenological intensity than memories learned indirectly (Pillemer et al., 2015, 2024).

Parents also reported more positive emotional content overall, both in terms of valence and discrete emotions. Specifically, their narratives contained higher positive valence and were more strongly associated with happiness, pride, and thankfulness than the stories recalled by the children. This pattern suggests that transmitters may intentionally select and pass on stories that present themselves in a positive light and highlight meaningful, formative experiences (Merrill et al., 2017). Such self-evaluative positive memories may serve not only to promote a positive image of themselves but also to provide key values and life lessons, as important memories often correspond to experiences that drive psychological change (Svob & Brown, 2012).

Interestingly, parents' stories also showed slightly higher negative valence and greater expressions of guilt than children's recollections, which runs counter to our predictions.

Based on Steiner (2023), who found that negative vicarious memories serve directive functions similar to personal memories, we expected young adults (motivated to learn from others) to recall more negative stories. Instead, parents transmitted more negative memories, possibly reflecting their role in teaching and warning about potential threats. Sharing negative guilt-laden experiences may thus fulfill social functions such as moral guidance or caution (Merrill et al., 2017). Nevertheless, effect sizes and overall levels of guilt expression were very small. Whereas parents' narratives occasionally emphasized self-evaluative emotions, children's recollections tended to convey more empathy.

Children selected stories that were associated with higher levels of compassion compared to parents. This finding supports prior research suggesting that vicarious memories (especially those transmitted within families) play a key role in helping children understand and empathize with their parents' experiences (Fivush, McAnally, & Reese, 2019; Merrill et al., 2017; Pillemer et al., 2024). The increased compassion in children's recollections may reflect their emotional perspective as recipients, emphasizing empathetic engagement with their parents' stories.

3 Study 2: Transmission from grandparents to grandchildren

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Fifty-four grandparent–grandchild dyads took part in this study on intergenerational memory transmission within families. The grandchildren were between 16 and 30 years old (M = 21.3, SD = 3.5), with 29 (53.7%) identifying as women. The grandparents ranged in age from 65 to 89 years (M = 77.0, SD = 5.12), with 35 (75.9%) identifying as women.

Recruitment was carried out by students collaborating on the project, who approached potential participants within their networks and communities.

Grandparents completed the French version of the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA; Nasreddine & Patel, 2016) to screen for potential mild cognitive impairment. A score of 23 or higher was required for inclusion, in line with established guidelines (Carson, Leach, & Murphy, 2018).

As in Study 1, all participants were French-speaking residents of the Liège region (Belgium). They provided informed consent and agreed to be audio-recorded during the session. Each participant received 20 euros as compensation. The research protocol was

approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, and Educational Sciences (FPLSE) at the University of Liège.

3.1.2 Procedure and materials

This study follows the same procedure as Study 1 but with dyads of grandparents and grandchildren.

As in Study 1, participants completed the study either online or in person. In this sample, 6 grandparents (11%) and 19 grandchildren (35%) chose the online option.

3.1.3 Analysis

Because the data followed the same distribution than data in Study 1, we applied the same modeling strategy. Specifically, we used a linear mixed-effects model (LMM) including fixed effects for the interaction between generation and emotion scores. The random structure comprised intercepts for participants and for memories (*Memory.ID*), allowing us to account for repeated measures within both individuals and items.

The resulting model was specified as: *Emotion.score* $\sim$ *Emotion.type* * *Generation* + *(1|Participant.ID)* + *(1|Memory.ID)*.

The *p*-values were corrected using Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons.

As in Study 1, we re-ran the models with gender included as a covariate. The gender effect was non-significant and did not change the model fit or the significance of the other predictors. Consequently, we retained the models without gender.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Emotional valence and intensity

Table 3: *Scores of emotional intensity and valences according to generation for the parent-child dyads.*

Emotion	Grandparents	Grandchildren	*p*	$\varepsilon_p^2[95\%CI]$
Intensity	57.5 (42.7)	25.1 (31.0)	<.0001	0.11 [0.06, 0.16]
Positive valence	63.8 (38.4)	58.2 (35.6)	0.2558	0.00 [0.00, 0.01]
Negative valence	22.1 (35.1)	17.2 (28.0)	0.2392	0.00 [0.00, 0.01]

Note. Scores were collected using 0 to 100 visual analog scales. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. *p*-values are corrected using the Bonferroni method.

Data are presented in Table 3.

Grandparents reported significantly higher emotional intensity than grandchildren ($\beta = 31.73$, 95% CI $[23.72, 39.8]$, $t(486) = 7.78$, $p < .0001$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.11$, 95% CI $[0.06, 0.16]$), indicating that the memories grandparents believed they had transmitted were experienced as more emotionally intense than the memories grandchildren recalled from their grandparents.

No significant generational differences emerged for positive valence ($\beta = 4.81$, 95% CI $[-3.21, 12.80]$, $t(486) = 1.18$, $p = .2392$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.00$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.01]$) or for negative valence ($\beta = 4.64$, 95% CI $[-3.38, 12.7]$, $t(486) = 1.14$, $p = .2558$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.00$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.01]$). This suggests that, although grandparents selected more emotionally intense stories, these stories were not perceived as more positively or negatively valenced than those selected by grandchildren.

3.2.2 Discrete emotions

Table 4: *Scores of discrete emotions according to generation for the grandparent-grandchild dyads.*

	Emotion	Grandparents	Grandchildren	p	$\varepsilon_p^2[95\%CI]$
Positive	**Happiness**	**61.7 (39.6)**	**49.4 (35.5)**	**0.0002**	**0.01 [0.00, 0.03]**
	Pride	**43.7 (42.0)**	**33.1 (38.3)**	**0.0026**	**0.01 [0.00, 0.02]**
	Respect	37.8 (41.5)	40.9 (38.3)	0.2921	
	Admiration	**31.2 (40.1)**	**39.5 (38.2)**	**0.0095**	**0.01 [0.00, 0.02]**
	Thankfulness	26.7 (37.8)	23.6 (33.8)	0.4110	
	Envy	**10.4 (26.7)**	**18.2 (30.7)**	**0.0146**	**0.00 [0.00, 0.02]**
	Compassion	**10.1 (24.7)**	**29.3 (33.1)**	**0.0007**	**0.01 [0.00, 0.03]**
	Debt	3.0 (13.6)	2.6 (10.0)	0.9042	
Negative	Sadness	15.8 (30.3)	15.4 (27.6)	0.9645	
	Fear	13.9 (29.5)	7.1 (18.5)	0.0781	
	Anger	8.6 (23.2)	7.5 (17.9)	0.8026	
	Indignation	5.7 (19.4)	7.8 (19.9)	0.5157	
	Guilt	5.2 (16.7)	3.9 (12.9)	0.7319	
	Shame	4.4 (16.0)	3.4 (12.4)	0.7797	
	Disgust	3.0 (12.8)	6.7 (18.8)	0.2410	
	Contempt	1.4 (8.6)	3.5 (13.4)	0.5301	

Note. Scores were collected using 0 (no emotion) to 100 (high intensity) visual analog scales. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. Statistically significant differences between generations are indicated in bold, *p*-values are corrected using the Bonferroni method.

For discrete emotions (see Table 4), both grandparents and grandchildren selected memories primarily associated with positive feelings. Grandparents most often described stories imbued with happiness, pride, and respect, while grandchildren's vicarious memories emphasized happiness, respect, and admiration. Negative emotions were rated much lower overall. Among them, grandparents most frequently reported sadness and fear, whereas grandchildren recalled stories marked mainly by sadness.

Regarding generational differences, grandparents reported significantly higher scores than grandchildren for happiness ($\beta = 12.32$, $SE = 3.33$, $t(1082) = 3.70$, $p = .0002$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.03]$) and pride ($\beta = 10.07$, $SE = 3.33$, $t(1082) = 3.02$, $p = .0026$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02]$). In contrast, grandchildren reported significantly higher levels of envy ($\beta = -8.15$, $SE = 3.33$, $t(1082) = -2.45$, $p = .0146$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.00$, 95% CI

$[0.00, 0.02)$, admiration ($\beta = -8.65$, $SE = 3.33$, $t(1082) = -2.60$, $p = .0095$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02)$, and compassion ($\beta = -19.65$, $SE = 3.33$, $t(1082) = -5.90$, $p < .0001$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.03$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.05)$ compared to grandparents.

No significant generational differences were observed for anger, contempt, debt, disgust, fear, guilt, indignation, respect, sadness, shame, or thankfulness (all $p > .05$).

Overall, grandparents tended to associate the stories they transmitted with more self-focused positive emotions (happiness, pride), while grandchildren more often linked the stories they received to other-oriented positive emotions (admiration, compassion) and, to a lesser extent, envy.

3.3 Discussion

In this study, we asked grandparents and grandchildren to recall memories that the grandparents had directly transmitted to the grandchildren. All stories were then rated for emotional valence (positive and negative), emotional intensity, and discrete emotions. We expected grandparents' stories to be more emotionally intense and positive, and grandchildren's stories to be more negative.

Results showed that grandparents' stories were indeed more emotionally intense than those recounted by grandchildren. This finding is unsurprising given that grandparents' memories were lived experiences, whereas grandchildren's accounts were vicarious. While vicarious memories can retain many of the qualities of personal memories, they are typically associated with lower emotional intensity (Pillemer et al., 2015, 2024).

Based on the positive bias in aging (Charles et al., 2003), we expected grandparents to select more positive stories. Indeed, transmitted memories were rated as mainly positive, but surprisingly, the positive valence of grandparents' stories did not differ from that of grandchildren's accounts. Previous research on grandparent–grandchild memory transmission suggests that grandchildren remember their grandparents' stories primarily because of the values they convey (Pratt et al., 2008; Stephan, 2024). Pratt (2008) emphasizes that these values often differ from those transmitted by parents. One such value is the reinforcement of intergenerational bonds and the connection of younger generations to more distant family roots, sometimes conveyed through positive or humorous narratives. This focus on transmitting values may help explain why grandparents' stories elicited more admiration, compassion, and envy from grandchildren, rather than simply stronger positive valence. Such emotions may be more reflective of the moral or relational significance of

the stories than of their positive valence. However, we did observe higher happiness and pride ratings in memories grandparents selected, consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006), which suggests that older adults prioritize sharing positively valenced stories that highlight meaningful and affirming aspects of their lives.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of assessing both emotional valence and discrete emotions. Relying solely on valence would have hidden more fine-grained intergenerational differences. Although overall positive and negative valence appeared comparable across generations, three positive emotions were more pronounced among grandchildren, whereas two were higher among grandparents.

Moreover, we did not observe the expected difference in negative valence. Because vicarious memories often contain important learning values and do not benefit from positivity bias (Steiner, 2023), we anticipated that grandchildren would recall more negative events compared to grandparents. However, this was not the case. Previous studies have shown that younger generations may feel uncomfortable when grandparents disclose painful experiences (Barker, 2007; Fowler & Soliz, 2010). Grandchildren may avoid remembering—or choose not to recount—such stories, thereby reducing the prevalence of negative memories in their narratives.

4 Comparing grandparents and parents transmission

4.1 Method and participants

For this analysis, we combined the participant pools from Studies 1 and 2, resulting in a comparison between 57 parent–child dyads and 54 grandparent–grandchild dyads. The two types of dyads came from different families. Although they differed significantly ($t(104.8) = -2.20, p = .030$), children and grandchildren were close in age ($M_{grandchildren} = 21.3$; $M_{children} = 22.6$).

4.1.1 Analysis

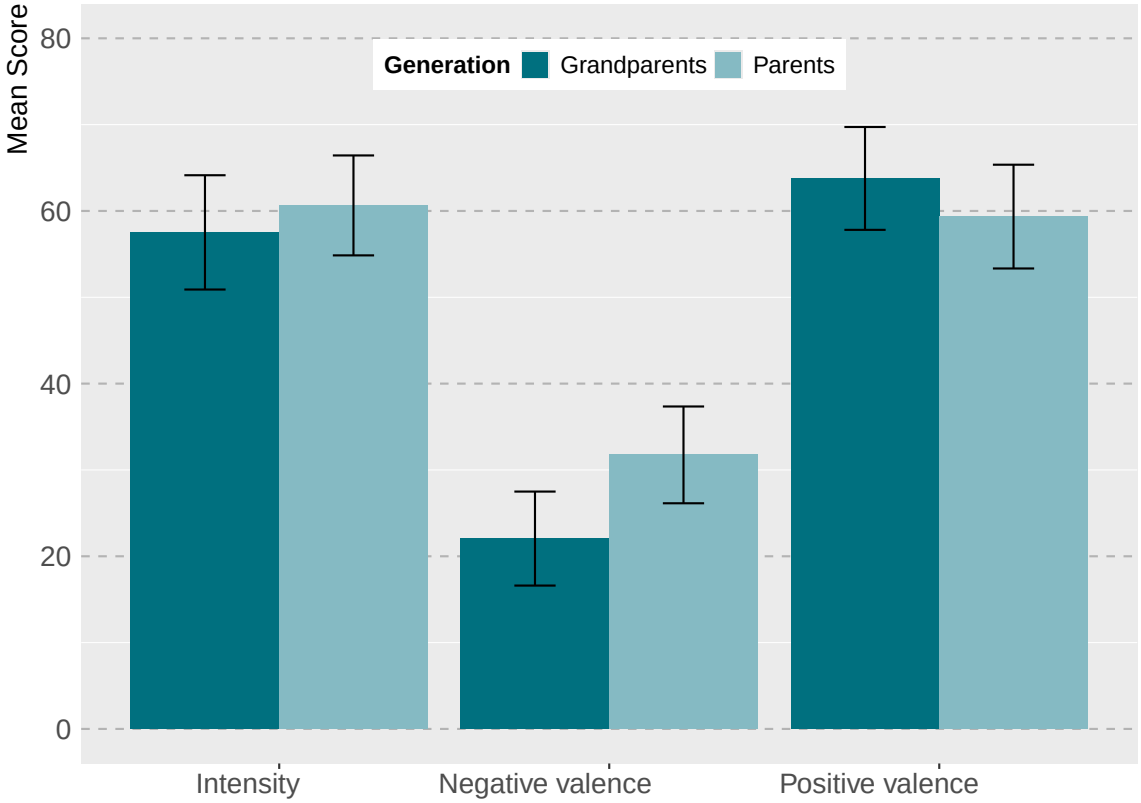
We ran four linear mixed models (LMMs) to compare emotional ratings across generations. Two models examined continuous measures (positive valence, negative valence, and emotional intensity) comparing parents with grandparents and children with grandchildren. The other two models focused on discrete emotions, using the same generational contrasts. In all cases, we included random intercepts for participants and for memories to

account for repeated measurements within both individuals and items.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Grandparents vs. parents

Figure 1: *Scores of emotional intensity and valences according to generation for grandparents and parents.*

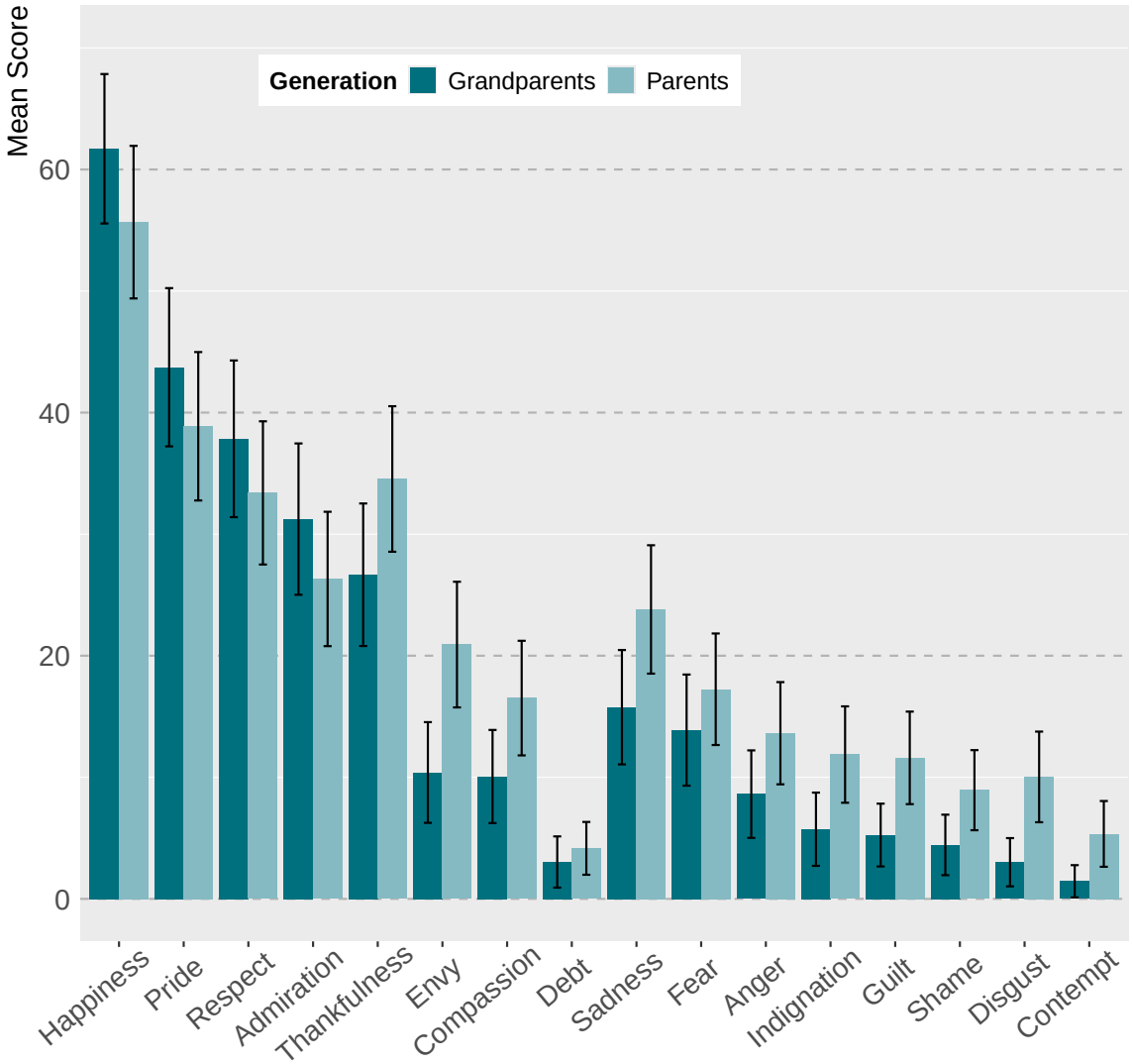


Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

For continuous emotion ratings (Figure 1), no significant generational difference emerged for emotional intensity ($\beta = -3.07$, $SE = 4.39$, $t(497) = -0.70$, $p = .4848$) or positive valence ($\beta = 4.49$, $SE = 4.40$, $t(498) = 1.02$, $p = .3077$). However, grandparents reported significantly lower scores of negative valence compared to parents ($\beta = -9.71$, $SE = 4.43$, $t(506) = -2.19$, $p = .0289$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.03]$).

In summary, emotional intensity and positivity were comparable across the two older generations; however, parents described the stories they transmitted as having more negative valence than the grandparents did.

Figure 2: *Scores of emotional intensity and valences according to generation for grandparents and parents.*



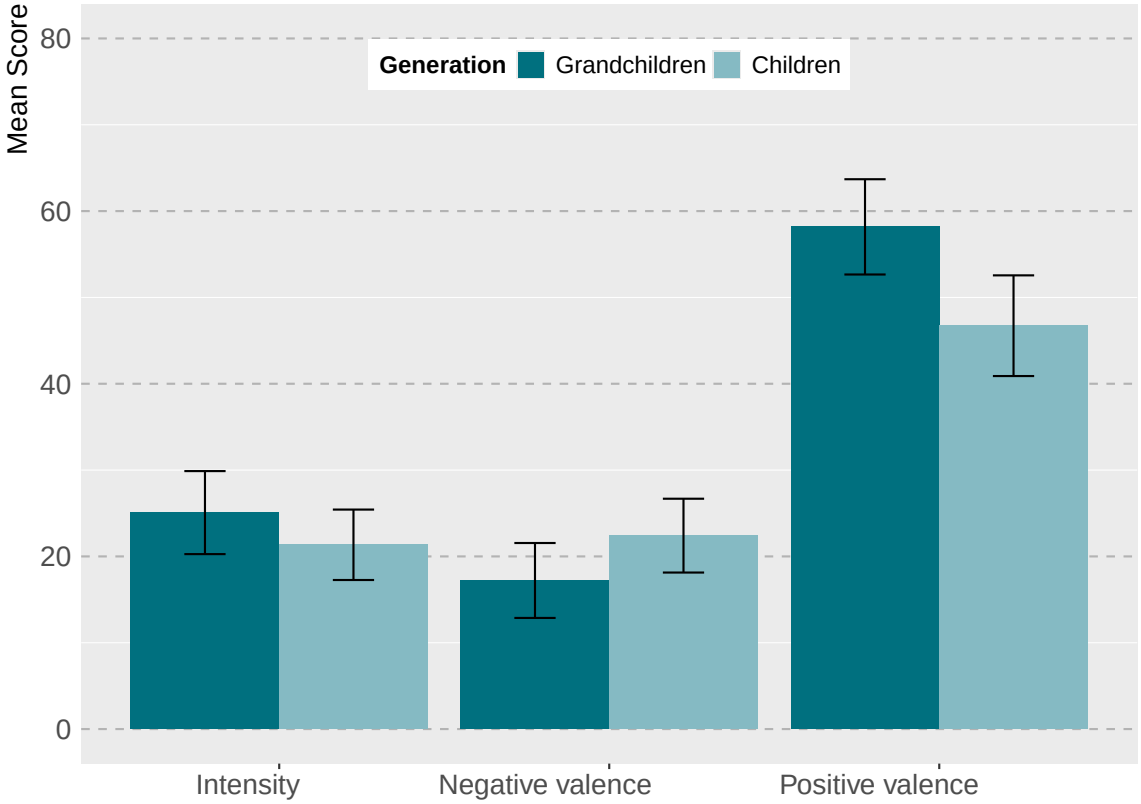
Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

For discrete emotions (Figure 2), parents reported significantly higher scores than grandparents for envy ($\beta = 10.21$, $SE = 3.60$, $z = 2.84$, $p = .0046$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.01$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02)$, sadness ($\beta = 7.91$, $SE = 3.61$, $z = 2.19$, $p = .0284$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.00$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.01)$, and thankfulness ($\beta = 7.92$, $SE = 3.60$, $z = 2.20$, $p = .0276$, $\varepsilon_p^2 = 0.00$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.01)$. No other differences reached significance after Bonferroni correction (all $p > .05$).

In short, while most discrete emotions were rated similarly across generations, the stories selected by parents were more strongly associated with envy, sadness, and thankfulness than those chosen by grandparents.

4.2.2 Grandchildren vs. Children

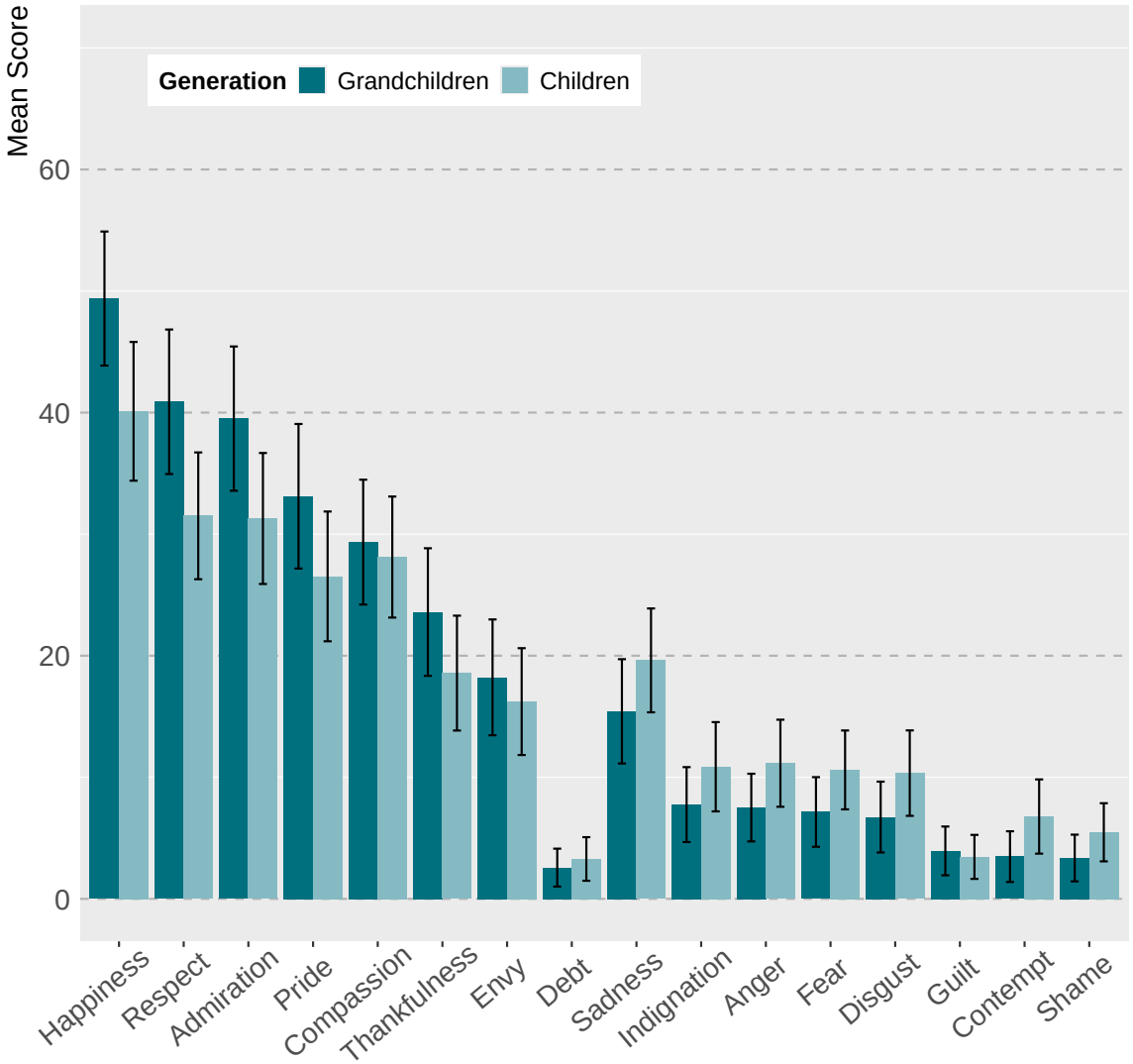
Figure 3: *Scores of emotional intensity and valences according to generation for grandchildren and children.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

For valence and intensity (Figure 3), young adults remembering memories from grandparents reported significantly higher positive emotional valence than young adults remembering parents' memories ($\beta = 11.45$, $SE = 3.53$, $t(553) = 3.25$, $p = .0012$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.02$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.04]$). No significant generational differences were observed for negative valence or emotional intensity (both $p > .05$).

Figure 4: *Scores of emotional intensity and valences according to generation for grandchildren and children.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Measures ranged from 0 to 100.

For discrete emotions (Figure 4), grandchildren selected memories associated with significantly higher levels of admiration ($\beta = 8.08$, $SE = 3.26$, $z = 2.48$, $p = .0135$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.006$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02]$), happiness ($\beta = 9.25$, $SE = 3.26$, $z = 2.84$, $p = .0047$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.008$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02]$), pride ($\beta = 6.55$, $SE = 3.26$, $z = 2.01$, $p = .0449$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.003$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.01]$), and respect ($\beta = 9.36$, $SE = 3.26$, $z = 2.87$, $p = .0043$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.008$, 95% CI $[0.00, 0.02]$) compared to children. No other differences reached significance.

In summary, young adults remembering stories from their grandparents tended to associate their chosen memories with more positive valence and with greater admiration, happiness, pride, and respect than young adults remembering their parents' stories.

4.2.3 Exploratory analysis: Correlation with functions

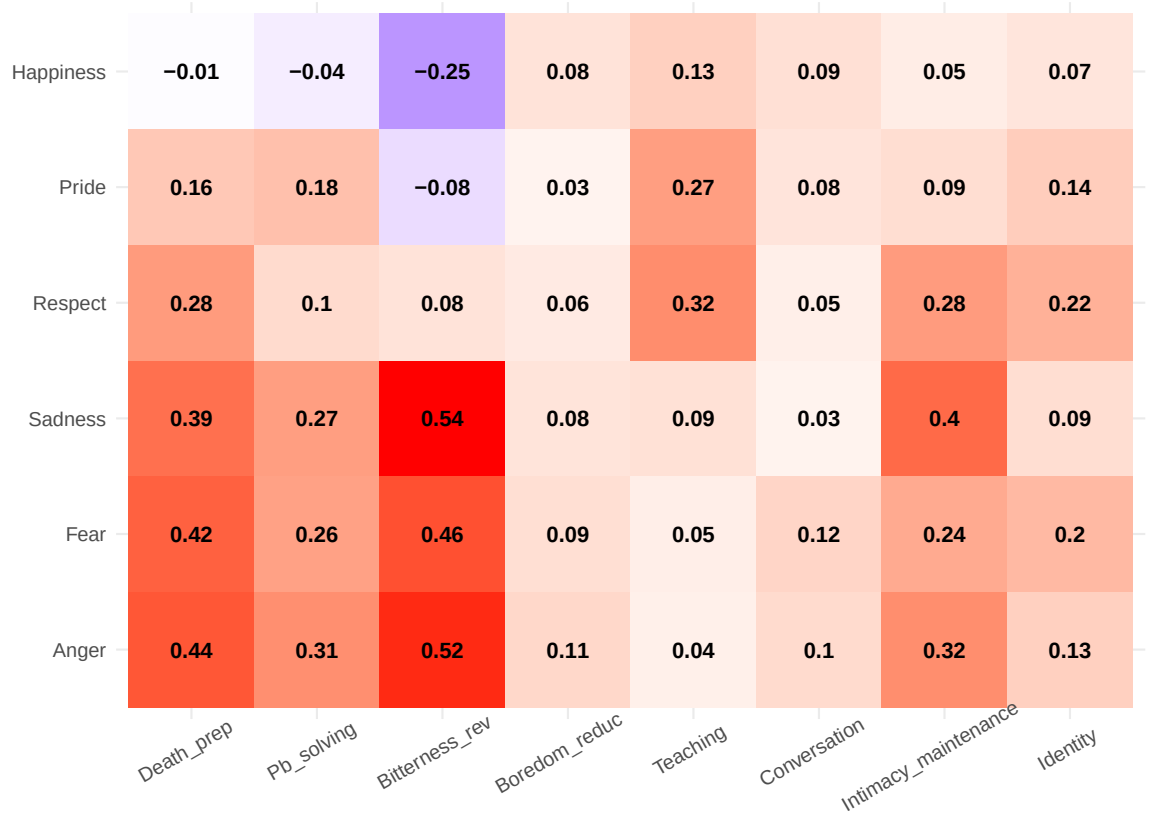
We examined whether some discrete emotions were correlated with the functions of intergenerational memories. To do so, we selected the three positive and three negative emotions with the highest mean ratings for both transmitters and receivers. We chose to analyze the three emotions with the highest scores to prevent a possible floor effect and because of the correspondence of emotions among transmitters and receivers. As a preliminary step, we verified that positive emotions correlated with positive valence and that negative emotions correlated with negative valence, which was indeed the case.

For the *transmitters*, the three positive emotions with the highest scores were happiness, pride, and respect, while the three negative emotions with the highest scores were sadness, fear, and anger. We then used Spearman correlations to investigate whether these six emotions were associated with the RFS functions. Correlations for transmitters are presented in Figure 5.

Among transmitters (grandparents and parents), negative emotions showed the strongest correlations with the functions of bitterness reduction, death preparation, and, to a lesser extent, intimacy maintenance and problem-solving. In contrast, respect and pride were primarily associated with teaching functions. Happiness showed generally weak associations, including a moderate negative correlation with the bitterness revival function.

Overall, these patterns suggest that negative emotions are more strongly linked to coping processes (e.g., problem-solving, preparing for death, and recalling painful events such as the loss of a relative), whereas memories associated with pride and respect are connected to teaching, intimacy maintenance, and, to a lesser extent, identity.

Figure 5: *Correlations between discrete emotions and functions among transmitters.*



Note. Data from parents and grandparents were combined. Red indicates positive correlations (darker shades reflect stronger correlations), whereas blue indicates negative correlations (darker shades reflect stronger correlations).

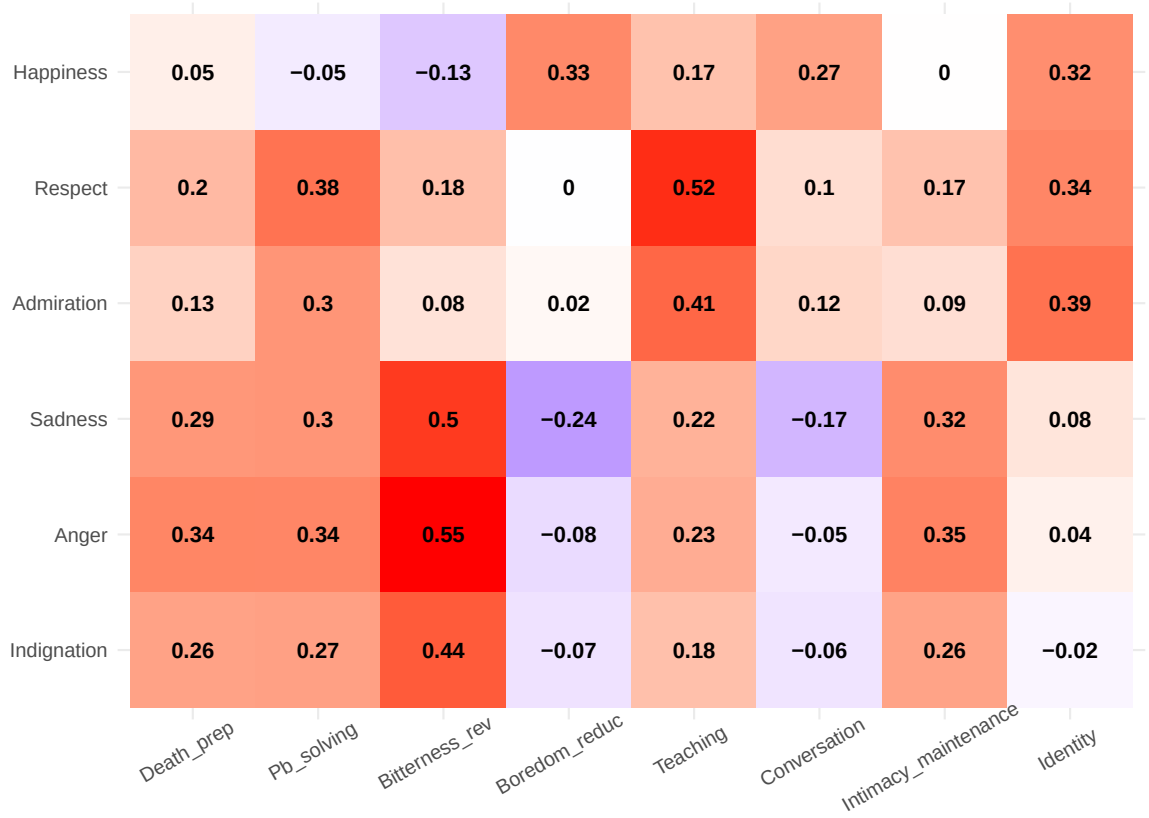
For the *receivers*, the three positive emotions with the highest scores were happiness, respect, and admiration, whereas the three negative emotions with the highest scores were sadness, anger, and indignation. Again, Spearman correlations were used to examine whether these six emotions were associated with the RFS functions. Results are presented in Figure 6.

Among receivers, negative emotions (indignation, anger, sadness) were positively associated with bitterness reduction, death preparation, and problem-solving, suggesting that children connect negative emotions with coping functions. However, respect and admiration showed strong links to teaching and identity functions, highlighting the role of positive, other-oriented emotions in learning family values.

Interestingly, happiness correlated positively with boredom reduction, conversation, and identity, pointing to its role in fostering everyday interactions and maintaining a

sense of belonging. These patterns suggest that, while negative emotions in receivers still serve coping purposes, positive emotions more strongly support functions related to family bonding, teaching, and identity transmission.

Figure 6: *Correlations between discrete emotions and functions among receivers.*



Note. Data from grandchildren and children were combined. Red indicates positive correlations (darker shades reflect stronger correlations), whereas blue indicates negative correlations (darker shades reflect stronger correlations).

4.3 Discussion

In this analysis, we combined the samples from Studies 1 and 2 to compare emotions in stories told by transmitters (parents and grandparents) and receivers (children and grandchildren). We hypothesized that grandparents would select more positive stories than parents, and that the younger generation would recall more positive memories about grandparents than about parents. We also investigated correlations between discrete emotions and the reported functions of the memories. It is worth noting that children and grandchildren were of similar age in this comparison.

Contrary to our expectations, grandparents did not choose more positive stories than parents. However, they selected less negative ones. This pattern may reflect the different functions of their storytelling: grandparents' narratives often focus less on educating about everyday challenges and more on transmitting family history (Stephan, 2024). As a result, they may avoid negative topics and favor stories that enhance positive self- and family-identity.

Some discrete emotion differences also emerged. Thankfulness was higher in parents' stories, likely because they often included child-related events such as meeting the other parent, marriage, or the birth of a child. Sadness was also more prominent in parents' stories, possibly because such narratives carry important life lessons. For young adult children, who are often navigating formative life challenges(Munawar et al., 2018), these cautionary tales may hold particular relevance.

The finding that grandchildren associated grandparents' stories with greater admiration, happiness, pride, and respect compared to children recalling parents' stories aligns with prior work on the unique socioemotional role of grandparents in family storytelling. Grandparents' narratives often serve not only to entertain but also to connect younger generations with distant family roots, reinforce intergenerational bonds, and transmit moral or identity-relevant values (Pratt et al., 2008; Stephan, 2024). Such functions may naturally elicit emotions like admiration and respect, which reflect acknowledgment of the narrator's life experiences and wisdom, as well as pride and happiness, which can emerge from hearing stories that affirm family achievements or cherished older traditions.

From a lifespan perspective, the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006) suggests that older adults are more likely to prioritize emotionally meaningful goals, often choosing to share positive, self-affirming experiences. These selective storytelling practices may explain why grandparents' memories (especially when remembered by grandchildren) are imbued with positive valence and esteem-related emotions rather than negative affect. In contrast, parents' stories, which may be more focused on guidance about immediate life challenges, might evoke a more mixed emotional profile.

Exploratory correlations further highlighted how emotions serve different storytelling functions. For transmitters, negative emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness were most strongly tied to coping-related functions (bitterness reduction, death preparation, problem-solving), whereas respect and pride were linked to teaching. For receivers, positive emotions (happiness, respect, admiration) were instead associated with identity- and teaching-related functions. These patterns suggest that while transmitters often draw on

negative emotions to convey lessons about challenges, receivers emphasize positive emotions when interpreting stories as sources of family identity and guidance. This aligns with Pillemer et al. (2024)'s suggestions, emphasizing the learning adaptive role of negative vicarious memories.

5 General discussion

In this research, we explored which emotions color the memories shared across generations within families. Across two studies, we compared the perspectives of transmitters (parents and grandparents) and receivers (children and grandchildren) regarding important memories. *Study 1* focused on parent–child dyads, and *Study 2* on grandparent–grandchild dyads, each comparing transmitters with their respective receivers. We then combined these datasets to examine differences within generations, comparing transmitters (parents vs. grandparents) and receivers (children vs. grandchildren) with one another *Between-sample analysis*. By analyzing the memories each generation chose to recount or recall, we captured the emotions that emerge in the important stories older generations decide to share, as well as the emotions found in the vicarious memories that younger generations remember.

Overall, transmitters' memories were consistently more emotionally intense than those of receivers, reflecting the firsthand nature of their experiences. Grandparents' stories were characterized by lower negative valence compared to parents' narratives, while parents' stories elicited slightly higher levels of discrete emotions such as sadness, thankfulness, and envy. Receivers' recollections varied by generation: young adults remembering grandparents' stories associated them with more positive emotions—including admiration, happiness, pride, and respect—than when recalling parents' stories. These findings highlight systematic differences in both the selection and the emotional characteristics of intergenerational memories, suggesting that the role of the storyteller and the generational distance shape how family narratives are emotionally experienced and remembered.

The present findings extend existing research on autobiographical and vicarious memories by showing that the emotional characteristics of family narratives are shaped not only by the teller's lived experience but also by their generational role. Consistent with prior work on vicarious memories (Pillemer et al., 2015, 2024), receivers' accounts were less intense than transmitters', supporting the idea that firsthand experience imbues events with greater emotional salience. At the same time, the observed generational patterns align

with the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006), which suggests that older adults prioritize emotionally meaningful and positive content in communication. Grandparents may selectively transmit stories that reinforce positive self-views, family cohesion, and shared pride, thereby explaining the lower negativity and the heightened admiration, respect, and pride reported by grandchildren. Parents' narratives, in contrast, may serve more directive or cautionary functions (Fivush, 2008), containing a greater mix of positive and negative emotions—such as thankfulness or sadness—that reflect lessons learned or challenges overcome. These patterns suggest that intergenerational storytelling is not only a vehicle for transmitting family history but also a means of shaping emotional and moral development in ways tailored to the teller's generational position.

For receivers, emotional appraisals varied systematically with the generational position of the transmitter. When recalling grandparents' stories, grandchildren reported higher levels of overall positive valence and of positive discrete emotions such as admiration, happiness, pride, and respect compared to when recalling parents' stories. Intergenerational memories play different roles for different dyads (Baudet et al., 2025). Grandchildren indicated that recalling these stories aided in understanding their familial origins, supporting prior findings that strong grandparent–grandchild relationships foster identity construction and a sense of belonging within the family (Bernhold & Giles, 2017; Soliz & Lin, 2014).

The exploratory analyses examining links between discrete emotions and reported functions revealed clear patterns. Among transmitters, negative emotions such as sadness, fear, and anger were predominantly associated with coping-related functions, including revisiting painful experiences, preparing for mortality, and problem-solving. Sadness and anger were also moderately related to memories of deceased relatives, highlighting their role in processing loss. Supporting children in navigating negative emotions is also a key aspect of parents' role (Fivush, Berlin, McDermott Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003).

Conversely, positive moral emotions appeared connected to more constructive functions. Respect and pride were strongly linked to teaching, and respect additionally showed associations with stories aimed at identity development and preserving the memory of deceased family members. Taken together, these findings extend previous research (Rasmussen & Berntsen, 2009), indicating that negative memories often serve directive or coping purposes, while positive memories contribute to personal well-being and the reinforcement of a positive self-concept. Our results suggest that these functional patterns might

apply to the intergenerational transmission of memory.

Among receivers, negative emotions—such as indignation, anger, and sadness—were again positively associated with coping functions. This aligns with Pillemer et al. (2024)'s suggestion that vicarious negative memories allow individuals to learn valuable lessons without directly experiencing adversity. These results also resonate with Merrill et al. (2017), who found that children recall both self-positive and self-negative stories, with the latter often fostering meaning-making. In contrast to transmitters, however, positive other-oriented emotions such as respect and admiration were strongly linked to teaching and identity functions, emphasizing their role in transmitting family values and supporting learning through observation.

These results also emphasize the distinct roles that different generations play in the intergenerational transmission of memory. Each generation appears to derive unique benefits from the process, underlining the constructed nature of autobiographical memory. Rather than simply reproducing past experiences, memories undergo a meaning-making process that unfolds in social contexts, particularly through conversations with family members and peers. In this sense, autobiographical memory may often be more closely aligned with the act of memory reconstruction than with straightforward recollection (Fivush, 2008).

5.1 Limits and future directions

While these studies provide novel insights into the emotional characteristics of intergenerational memories, several limitations should be noted. First, our analyses focused on emotional ratings and discrete emotions without examining narrative content. A qualitative analysis could reveal how specific themes and values shape emotional responses.

Second, our memory selection procedure, asking participants to report their most important memories, likely overrepresented highly emotional events and underrepresented more routine family stories. Thus, our findings may reflect peak emotional moments rather than the full range of intergenerational storytelling. It is interesting to note that, whereas it could have been the case, scores of negative valence were still low.

Third, individual factors such as gender, cultural background, and family roles may influence both the content and emotional characteristics of memories. For example, women, and especially grandmothers, often emphasize relational themes (Bakir-Demir, Reese, Sahin-Acar, & Taumoepeau, 2023), which may shape how younger generations respond. Uneven

gender representation in our sample limited the exploration of these effects and may constrain the generalizability of the findings. A more detailed assessment of family roles could also yield more nuanced interpretations. For instance, prior research indicates that grandparents' relationships with their grandchildren can differ substantially when they are directly involved in custodial care (see Thiele & Whelan, 2006, for a review).

Finally, longitudinal research could clarify how emotional responses to intergenerational memories evolve over time. It remains unknown whether the admiration, envy, or compassion observed in younger generations' recollections persist, fade, or transform with age, and how such changes influence identity and family bonds.

5.2 Conclusion

This work underscores that intergenerational storytelling is not merely a transmission of events but a socially constructed process that conveys values, fosters identity development, and strengthens family bonds. By examining emotional patterns across generations, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how family narratives shape both personal and collective memory, highlighting the dynamic interplay between experience, emotion, and generational role. Overall, this study demonstrates that intergenerational storytelling is a complex, emotionally rich process that plays a central role in both shaping individual development and sustaining intergenerational connections.

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From parent and grandparent to emerging adult: Predictors of elaboration and similarity in vicarious family memories

David Baudet[1]*, Aline Cordonnier[2]*, Olivier Luminet[2,3]**, & Christine Bastin[2,3]**

[1]GIGA Research, CRC Human Imaging, University of Liège
[2]Research Institute for Psychological Science, University of Louvain
[3]Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS), Brussels, Belgium
*These authors contributed equally
**These authors contributed equally

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David Baudet, Allée du 6 Août, 8, 4000 Liège, Belgique. Email: david.baudet@uliege.be

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Author Note

David Baudet https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2272-7759
Christine Bastin https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4556-9490
Olivier Luminet https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1519-2178
Aline Cordonnier https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4101-1948

Abstract

Intergenerational family stories shape identity and continuity, yet little is known about which features of these stories predict how they are retained and retold across generations. Across three studies, we examined parent–child (Study 1; 120 dyads) and grandparent–grandchild (Study 2; 98 dyads) dyads who each recounted intergenerational memories and rated their phenomenology, centrality, emotions, and functions. Narratives were coded for elaboration and dyadic similarity, and analyzed with cumulative link mixed models. In parent–child dyads, children's elaboration was predicted by their own centrality ratings, parents' elaboration, and child selection of the memory, but not by parents' subjective ratings; positive valence was linked to lower similarity. In grandparent–grandchild dyads, grandparents' phenomenology, negative valence, elaboration, and intimacy-maintenance functions predicted grandchildren's elaboration, whereas higher centrality in both generations predicted lower similarity. Study 3 showed comparable elaboration but higher similarity in parent–child than grandparent–grandchild dyads. Results are discussed in line with functional models of memory.

Keywords: *Autobiographical memory; vicarious memory; family; transmission.*

1 Introduction

Stories are pervasive in human life and play a fundamental role in cognitive and social development. From an early age, individuals are exposed to narratives originating from diverse sources, including books, films, peers, and, notably, family members. Within the family context, older generations often selectively share life experiences with younger relatives (Bohanek et al., 2009; Fivush & Merrill, 2016). Such intergenerational storytelling serves important functions at both the familial and individual levels. At the family level, these exchanges strengthen relational bonds and foster a sense of belonging (Fivush, Bohanek, & Marin, 2010). At the individual level, storytelling can benefit transmitters—such as parents (e.g., McAdams & Logan, 2004) and grandparents (Thomas, Liu, & Umberson, 2017)—as well as receivers by providing meaning, guidance, and identity-relevant knowledge (Fivush, Duke, Candler, & Bohanek, 2010; Fivush & Kellas, 2025; Marshall & Reese, 2022). Despite the relatively high frequency with which such narratives are reported to occur (Baudet, Cordonnier, Luminet, & Bastin, 2025), few studies have directly compared transmitters' and receivers' perspectives on salient intergenerational stories.

In the present study, we examine intergenerational narratives within two types of dyads: grandparent–grandchild and parent–child. First, we assessed how frequentlya transmitted memory is successfully remembered by the receiver, thus becoming a vicarious memory. Then, to apprehend part of the reasons underlying successful transmission, we focus on how multiple dimensions of intergenerational storytelling (assessed from both the transmitter's and the receiver's perspectives) such as centrality, phenomenology, functions, and emotional valence, interact to predict the level of memory elaboration of vicarious memories and the degree of narrative similarity between dyad members.

1.1 Intergenerational narratives

Intergenerational narratives are defined as stories recounted by an older family member to a younger relative who did not personally experience the event (Fivush & Kellas, 2025). Such narratives have been shown to provide several developmental benefits for receivers. Research indicates that adolescents and young adults particularly benefit from elaborated parental storytelling (Merrill, Srinivas, & Fivush, 2017), especially when adopting the parent's perspective in their narratives (Chen, Cullen, Fivush, Wang, & Reese, 2021; Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011). Documented benefits include higher self-esteem, fewer behavioral difficulties, a stronger sense of meaning in life, and greater social competence (for a review, see Fivush & Kellas, 2025).

By nature, autobiographical memory is narrative in form (Fivush, McAnally, & Reese, 2019; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Nelson, 2003). It encompasses self-relevant memories that may take episodic and/or semantic forms (Conway, 2005; Fivush, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011; Habermas & Bluck, 2000). The development of autobiographical memory relies on reinterpretative skills, meaning-making, and reflective processes that contribute to a coherent sense of self. This dynamic system begins in early childhood and is strongly shaped by parental reminiscing styles, particularly those of mothers (Fivush & Salmon, 2023; Merrill & Fivush, 2016; Reese & Fivush, 2008). The ways in which parents narrate their own past and encourage children to reflect on experiences provide crucial scaffolding for autobiographical skills. For example, children whose mothers were trained in an elaborative reminiscing style developed more coherent life narratives and reported higher levels of well-being (Marshall & Reese, 2022). Additional studies have consistently demonstrated links between elaborative parental narratives and adolescents' and young adults' stronger sense of self and narrative competence (Fivush, Berlin, McDermott Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Mitchell & Reese, 2022; Salmon & Reese, 2016).

Beyond parents, emerging evidence suggests that grandparents' narratives also play a distinctive role in intergenerational exchanges. For instance, Pratt, Norris, Hebblethwaite, and Arnold (2008) found that grandchildren often retained emotionally salient, value-oriented stories shared by grandparents, which differed in content and themes from those transmitted by parents. More recently, Stephan (2024) identified three core functions of grandparent storytelling for young adults: strengthening emotional closeness within the dyad, transmitting family history, and preserving the grandparents' legacy. These narratives not only reinforce intergenerational bonds but also serve to convey enduring values

and traditions, linking younger generations to more distant familial roots.

Importantly, transmitters themselves also benefit from intergenerational storytelling. For example, parents telling their stories to younger generations, have been closely linked to the construct of generativity (Merrill & Fivush, 2016), a concept originating in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963). Generativity refers to concern for leaving a positive legacy and guiding younger generations, a developmental task that typically peaks in middle adulthood (Harris, Rasmussen, & Berntsen, 2014; McAdams, De St Aubin, & Logan, 1993). Sharing intergenerational stories provides a salient expression of this motivation, allowing parents to connect with and guide their children (Merrill & Fivush, 2016). More broadly, engagement in generative activities has been associated with psychological benefits, including greater well-being (An & Cooney, 2006; Grossbaum & Bates, 2002; Grossman & Gruenewald, 2017; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008).

These benefits extend into later life. Grandparents, in particular, appear to gain psychological benefits from these exchanges. Intergenerational communication of this kind has been associated with enhanced well-being for both grandparents and grandchildren (for reviews, see Swartz, 2009; Thomas et al., 2017). Moreover, recent evidence suggests that the link between the perceived frequency of intergenerational narratives and feelings of closeness across generations is especially strong for grandparent–grandchild dyads (Baudet et al., 2025). When engaging in these exchanges, older adults report higher life satisfaction (Scott, Nadorff, Barnett, & Yancura, 2023), improved psychological health (Gruenewald, Liao, & Seeman, 2012), and reduced functional decline (Herrera, Galkuté, Fernández, & Elgueta, 2022). Thus, intergenerational narratives not only transmit values, life lessons, and a sense of continuity but also provide parents and grandparents with meaningful opportunities to fulfill their generative needs. Beyond its adaptive use, few studies have examined which factors determine whether intergenerational stories are actually remembered by younger family members.

1.2 Predictors of intergenerational narratives

The transmission of memories within families is a dynamic process. Motivations for engaging in intergenerational storytelling vary across generations, reflecting the unique roles family members occupy in family life. Webster and McCall (1999) found that older adults often reminisce with the goals of teaching life lessons and preparing for mortality, whereas younger adults are more likely to focus on identity exploration, problem solving,

boredom reduction, or the revival of unresolved bitterness. These age-related differences in motivation can be understood in light of Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 2006), which emphasizes that individuals' goals shift as their perceived remaining time in life becomes more limited. With age, people tend to prioritize emotion regulation and the pursuit of emotionally meaningful experiences (Mather & Carstensen, 2005). Consequently, older adults are more inclined to recall and share stories that can simultaneously foster emotional closeness and provide identity-relevant insights.

As previously mentioned, receivers' motivations to remember intergenerational stories are also shaped by the generation of the transmitter. Grandchildren tend to retain emotionally salient, value-laden, and historically oriented stories from grandparents, which not only strengthen emotional closeness and preserve legacy but also connect younger generations to more distant family roots (Pratt et al., 2008; Stephan, 2024). Lasota (2015) showed that parents primarily transmit specific skills, values, and moral norms to their children, whereas the exchange between grandparents and grandchildren places greater emphasis on historical knowledge alongside skills and values. In contrast, both semantic and pragmatic knowledge appear to be transmitted to a much lesser extent across generations.

Understanding how individuals remember stories they did not personally experience requires examining vicarious memories, that is, recollections of events conveyed by another person (Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015; Pillemer, Thomsen, & Fivush, 2024). Vicarious memories generally share phenomenological and functional qualities with personal memories but are typically experienced with lower intensity and are often described as more emotionally negative (Pillemer et al., 2015). Notably, whereas stories received from friends tend to be more negative than personal memories, those received from parents do not significantly differ in emotional valence from personal recollections (Pillemer et al., 2015). Furthermore, vicarious memories transmitted by parents are perceived as more likely to be integrated into the life story compared to those transmitted by friends. In line with this, Chen et al. (2021) found that when adolescents and young adults (12–21 years) were asked to recall their parents' childhood stories, they more often reported neutral or positive memories than negative ones. Given the central role of family in self-construction (for reviews, see Merrill, Booker, & Fivush, 2019; Merrill & Fivush, 2016), younger generations may thus be particularly motivated to retain self-informative and identity-relevant stories (Merrill et al., 2017).

Research has also begun to identify factors that influence which family stories are transmitted and remembered. For instance, Gu, Tse, and Brown (2020) found that when both

parents and children recalled the same memory, that memory tended to involve significant material and psychological changes and was perceived as more unique than memories recalled by only one generation. Related findings indicate that historical conflict knowledge is frequently passed down across generations and is understood as having personally meaningful, life-altering implications (Svob & Brown, 2012; Svob, Brown, Takšić, Katulić, & Žauhar, 2016). These findings suggest that intergenerational narratives are most likely to endure when they convey distinctive, impactful experiences that carry relevance for both the individual and the family.

Other studies have examined predictors of elaboration in autobiographical memory outside the family context. For instance, McCabe and Peterson (2012) investigated predictors of elaboration of early childhood and adolescent stories among young adults (18–29 years old). They found that positive memories were more likely to be retold, whereas negative memories were narrated in a more elaborated manner. They also examined attachment style and gender differences, showing that individuals with a more avoidant attachment style were less elaborative and that women produced more elaborated narratives than men. Using emotional musical excerpts to cue autobiographical memories, Sheldon, Williams, Harrington, and Otto (2020) likewise found that positive events were more easily accessed. However, to our knowledge, no study has explored predictors of successful transmission within families, especially while directly comparing multiple generations.

Despite these insights, research on the predictors of intergenerational storytelling remains fragmented. Prior work has highlighted differences across generations, the distinctive features of vicarious memories, and the types of family experiences most likely to be remembered. However, to date, no empirical investigation has directly compared parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads to examine how these predictors jointly shape the processes of transmission and recall.

1.3 The present studies

The present research aimed to identify factors that predict the characteristics of vicarious family narratives across different types of family dyads. Across three studies, we examined whether features such as centrality, emotions, phenomenology, and functions predicted narrative outcomes, including similarity, elaboration, and forgetting. We also sought to provide a descriptive account of the types of narratives that are naturally transmitted within families.

In Study 1, we focused on parent–child dyads, assessing whether features of parents' narratives predicted children's narrative outcomes about these events. In Study 2, we conducted a parallel analysis with grandparent–grandchild dyads. Finally, in Study 3, we combined both datasets to examine possible differences in elaboration and dyadic similarity according to the generation of the transmitter.

Given the limited body of research directly comparing parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads, this work adopted an exploratory approach. Rather than relying on strong directional hypotheses, our goal was to identify potential predictors of narrative transmission and recall, thereby laying the groundwork for future hypothesis-driven research.

2 Study 1: Transmission from parents to children

2.1 Method

Data for this study and Study 2 were collected using two similar but not identical data-collection procedures. Both followed the same general protocol for memory selection and narrative assessment, but differed slightly in the number of memories elicited (2 vs. 3) and auxiliary questionnaires (not analyzed here). See the Procedure section for details.

2.1.1 Participants

After excluding incomplete datasets[1], the final sample consisted of 120 parent–child dyads. Dyads were recruited for a study on intergenerational memory transmission within families. The only age-based inclusion criterion concerned the younger generation: children were required to be between 16 and 30 years old. This age range (while deliberately broad to facilitate recruitment) was selected to allow meaningful comparisons across participants.

Parents ranged in age from 37 to 69 years ($M = 51.8$, $SD = 5.8$), with 89 (74.1%) participants identifying as women. Children were between 16 and 30 years old ($M = 21.6$, $SD = 3.0$), and 96 (80.0%) identified as women.

All participants were French-speaking Belgians and were recruited through word of mouth. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, including consent for audio recording of the narrative tasks. Each participant received €20 or course credit

[1]Incomplete data included dyads that did not complete all three sessions, provided incomplete narratives, or had missing questionnaire data.

as compensation for their time. The protocols of both studies were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculté de Psychologie, Logopédie et Sciences de l'Éducation (FPLSE) at the University of Liège.

2.1.2 Procedure and material

Data included audio-recorded narratives and questionnaire ratings collected individually via a computer-based survey administered using the Qualtrics platform (Qualtrics, 2020). Responses were recorded on continuous sliders ranging from 0 to 100.

To maximize accessibility, participants could complete the session in person at the Research Centre of the Cyclotron (CRC, University of Liège), at their home, or remotely via Microsoft Teams.

Phase 1: Memory selection

Children first generated a list of significant stories they had learned from their parent. Children first generated a list of significant stories they had learned from their parent. They were instructed to focus on episodic memories (i.e., personally experienced events occurring at a specific time and place) that took place before the parent's 30th birthday and had been explicitly recounted by the parent. This age restriction ensured that the child had not personally experienced the event. If parents had children before age 30, participants recalled events from before the child's fourth birthday, consistent with research indicating that earliest autobiographical memories typically emerge around age four due to childhood amnesia (see Jack & Hayne, 2007, for a review). This criterion also aligns with the reminiscence bump, which shows that adults disproportionately recall events from ages 10–30 (see Munawar, Kuhn, & Haque, 2018).

Participants then rated each story using an adapted version of the Centrality of Event Scale (CES; Berntsen & Rubin, 2006), assessing how central an event is to one's identity or family's history. The adapted questionnaire included eight items; for example, *"I believe this event is central to my personal and/or family history."* The two or three memories with the highest centrality scores were retained for subsequent phases.

Phase 2: Memory measures

Participants were asked to orally recount each of the two or three selected memories in detail. Narratives were recorded and transcribed verbatim. After each narration, partici-

pants answered questions assessing phenomenology, emotions, and memory functions.

Each member of the dyad thus provided measures for three memories they had selected themselves and for three memories selected by the other dyad member.

Phenomenology. Phenomenological characteristics were measured with an adapted short form of the Memory Experience Questionnaire (MEQ; Luchetti & Sutin, 2016). Items assessed vividness (*"My representation of the event is very clear."*; *"My representation of the event includes many details."*), sensory detail (*"My representation of the event includes a lot of visual information."*; *"My representation of the event includes many sensory elements other than visual ones (touch, sounds, tastes, smells, etc.)."*), sharing and rehearsal (*"I often share this story with my friends or family."*; *"I have often thought about this event."*), coherence (*"The chronology of events is clear in my mind."*), and belief in accuracy (*"I believe this event unfolded exactly as I remember it."*). We then averaged all items to create a composite score representing phenomenological richness.

Emotional valence. Participants rated both valence and intensity of each memory. Positive (*"When I think about this event, I feel positive emotions."*) and negative (*"When I think about this event, I feel negative emotions."*) valence were assessed separately.

Functions of memory. Memory functions were assessed with a shortened version of the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS; Robitaille, Cappeliez, Coulombe, & Webster, 2010). One item represented each of the eight dimensions: boredom reduction (*"To pass the time"*), death preparation (*"To help me cope with my mortality"*), identity (*"To know where I come from"*), problem-solving (*"To remind me that I have the skills to cope with my problems"*), conversation (*"To create/facilitate discussion"*), intimacy maintenance (*"To remember someone who has passed away"*), bitterness revival (*"Not to forget old hurts"*), and teaching/informing (*"To pass on values to younger generations"*). Although not the primary focus, these items allowed exploratory analyses.

Frequency of sharing. For each memory, we asked the participant to rate how frequently they talked about the memory with the other member of the dyad ("*I often talk about this story with the other participant in this study*").

Each of the three central memories was assessed using this procedure.

Phase 3: Memories selected by the other dyad member

Participants were informed that the other dyad member had completed the same memory selection and narration process. They were then asked to recall the stories selected by the other member. For each memory, participants indicated if they knew it and, if they did,

they narrated the story and completed the same set of measures (centrality, phenomenology, emotions, and functions).

Coding of the narratives

For all three narrative coding schemes, the first and last authors initially selected a subset of narratives, coded them independently, and then compared their codes to resolve discrepancies. This procedure was repeated until satisfactory agreement was reached ($\kappa_{\text{weighted}} > 0.70$), after which the first author completed the coding of the remaining narratives.

Memory type. Narratives were coded for memory type on a 0–3 categorical scale: 0 for semantic only, 1 for episodic (single event), 2 for extended (spanning >1 day); 3 for repeated (recurring events).

Elaboration. Narratives were coded for elaboration using Zaman and Fivush (2011)'s scheme, on a scale from 0 (no narration) to 3 (high elaboration). See Table 1.

Similarity. Intergenerational similarity was scored from 0 (different content) to 4 (identical) by comparing the narratives regarding a given story recounted by the two members of the dyads. See Table 1 for a detailed description.

Table 1: *Similarity and elaboration coding schemes.*

Code	Score	Description
Similarity	0	Different; unrelated theme or no knowledge.
	1	Related; same general theme but with different focus.
	2	Divergent; same theme but contradictory elements altering meaning.
	3	Similar; same idea with minor variations.
	4	Identical; same theme and details.
Elaboration	0	There is no narrative present; there is only one event mentioned without details.
	1	Events are listed; there is very little detail and description of events.
	2	Events and actions are moderately expanded upon; there is some background information, quoted speech and information about characters' thoughts and feelings.
	3	There are multiple actions related to an event; events are linked by causal connections, expanded upon with adjectives and adverbs, and include background information, quoted speech, and information about characters' thoughts and feelings.

Note. Elaboration coding scheme and description from Zaman and Fivush (2011).

2.1.3 Statistical analyses

Elaboration (0–3 scale) and dyadic similarity (0–4 scale) were ordinal outcomes. We therefore used cumulative link mixed models (CLMMs; Ning et al., 2021), which are proportional odds models for ordinal dependent variables with non-independent observations (Christensen, 2018). Separate models predicted (a) children's elaboration of vicarious memories and (b) dyadic narrative similarity. Analyses were conducted in R (R Core Team, 2024) using the `ordinal` package (Christensen, 2023).

Continuous predictors (transmitters' ratings of negative valence, positive valence, centrality, phenomenology, and sharing frequency) were z-standardized across memories for comparability and convergence. *Perspective* was binary-coded: 0 for receiver-selected memory from transmitter's life, and 1 for transmitter-selected memory transmitted to receiver. Additional predictors included event type (episodic vs. extended; semantic/repeated cases excluded due to low prevalence, see Table 2) and receiver centrality ratings (tested as a potential mediator). The elaboration model also included the parents' ratings of elaboration to test potential mediation effect. Random intercepts accounted for dyad clustering

(Dyad ID).

Odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals are reported as effect sizes (Christensen, 2018). The proportional odds assumption was tested via likelihood ratio tests (`ordinal::nominal_test`).

We fitted maximal random structure models justified by convergence. For elaboration, sharing frequency violated the proportional odds assumption and caused rank deficiency, so it was excluded from the final model:

$$Elaboration_{Children} \sim Perspective + Negative\ Valence + Positive\ Valence + Centrality + Phenomenology + Event\ Type + Centrality_{Children} + Elaboration_{Parents} + (1|DyadID)$$

The final elaboration model satisfied the proportional odds assumption and scale assumptions (all $p > .16$).

For similarity, all predictors except children's centrality (which was thus removed) satisfied the proportional odds assumption (all $p > .16$), so the final model was:

$$Similarity_{Children} \sim Perspective + Negative\ Valence + Positive\ Valence + Centrality + Phenomenology + Sharing\ Frequency + Event\ Type + (1|DyadID)$$

2.2 Results

Table 2: *Types of memories for parent–child dyads.*

Generation	Total narratives	Semantic	Episodic	Extended	Repeated	Forgotten	Same
Parents	480	0	203	208	21	5	81
Children	480	1	206	163	14	46	81

Note. Forgotten corresponds to the number of memories selected by one member of the dyad that the other member could not recall. *Same* refers to the number of memories independently selected by both members of the dyad.

Table 3: *Descriptive statistics of memories for parent-child dyads.*

Perspective	Generation	Elaboration	Similarity	Centrality	Phenomenology	Positive valence	Negative valence
Bottom-up	Parents	2.5 (0.7)	2.7 (1.0)	26.1 (33.1)	67.4 (19.4)	57.7 (39.7)	32.6 (39.3)
Bottom-up	Children	2.3 (0.8)	2.7 (1.0)	37.9 (27.2)	36.7 (19.2)	48.5 (38.1)	23.2 (31.5)
Top-down	Parents	2.6 (0.6)	2.5 (1.1)	59.2 (27.6)	71.4 (17.9)	66.1 (37.3)	28.4 (36.0)
Top-down	Children	2.0 (0.8)	2.5 (1.1)	20.4 (29.6)	33.2 (20.7)	49.9 (38.9)	21.8 (32.6)

Note. Elaboration was scored on a scale ranging from 0 to 3, *similarity* on a scale from 0 to 4, and all other measures were assessed using 0–100 visual analog scales. *Perspective* refers to the member of the dyad who selected the memory (top-down for the parent, bottom-up for the child). Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

Results show that the younger generation remembered most parental stories. Only 9.6% of the 480 memories selected by parents were not recalled by their children, whereas 16.9% were independently selected by both members of the dyad. In terms of narrative type, parents produced both episodic and extended narratives in similar proportions (42.3% and 43.3%, respectively), with a smaller proportion of repeated events, and children showed a comparable pattern (42.9% episodic and 34.0% extended). This suggests that intergenerational storytelling in these dyads often involves both single-event and more extended episodes, and that the majority of stories parents report transmitting are indeed represented in children's vicarious memory, with a subset becoming jointly recognized as central by both generations.

2.2.1 Elaboration

Table 4: *Cumulative link model predicting child elaboration from parent memory characteristics.*

Predictor	β	OR 95% CI	*p*
Perspective	-0.95	0.39 [0.22, 0.69]	.001
$\text{Centrality}_{\text{Parent}}$	0.14	1.15 [0.83, 1.58]	.406
Phenomenology	0.02	1.02 [0.75, 1.40]	.879
Positive emotional valence	-0.07	0.94 [0.65, 1.35]	.726
Negative emotional valence	0.09	1.09 [0.76, 1.56]	.640
Event type	0.24	1.27 [0.78, 2.08]	.336
$\text{Centrality}_{\text{Child}}$	0.29	1.34 [1.00, 1.80]	.049
$\text{Elaboration}_{\text{Parent}}$	0.95	2.59 [1.69, 3.97]	$> .001$

Note. Perspective refers to the member of the dyad who selected the memory: bottom-up for children and top-down for parents. ORs from multilevel cumulative logit model with dyad random intercepts. Continuous predictors z-standardized.

Data are presented in Table 3 and outputs of the model in Table 4.

Not surprisingly, children produced less elaborated narratives for memories selected by parents (top-down perspective) compared to those they chose themselves (bottom-up perspective) ($OR = 0.39$, 95% CI [0.22, 0.69], $p = .001$). Children also produced more elaborated narratives for memories that their parents themselves narrated in a more elaborated way ($OR = 2.59$, 95% CI [1.69, 3.97], $p < .001$).

Beyond these effects, parents' memory characteristics did not significantly predict children's elaboration of those memories, but children's own centrality ratings did ($OR = 1.34$, 95% CI [1.00, 1.80], $p = .049$). Parent negative and positive emotional valence, centrality, phenomenology, and event type showed no significant associations with child elaboration (all $p > .336$).

In summary, while parents' elaboration and memory selection direction (child- vs. parent-initiated) strongly influenced children's elaboration, parents' subjective ratings showed no systematic associations beyond children's own centrality perceptions.

2.2.2 Similarity

Table 5: *Cumulative link model predicting parent-child narrative similarity from parent memory characteristics.*

Predictor	β	OR 95% CI	p
Perspective	-0.24	0.79 [0.48, 1.31]	.361
Centrality	0.05	1.05 [0.78, 1.42]	.739
Phenomenology	0.14	1.15 [0.84, 1.56]	.387
Positive emotional valence	-0.37	0.69 [0.49, 0.98]	.039
Negative emotional valence	-0.10	0.90 [0.64, 1.27]	.556
Sharing frequency	0.01	1.01 [1.00, 1.02]	.074
Event type	-0.30	0.74 [0.46, 1.20]	.220

Note. Perspective refers to the member of the dyad who selected the memory: bottom-up for children and top-down for parents. ORs from multilevel cumulative logit model with dyad random intercepts. Continuous predictors z-standardized.

Parents' memory characteristics showed limited prediction of parent-child narrative similarity. Only positive emotional valence was significantly associated with lower similarity ($OR = 0.69$, 95% CI [0.49, 0.98], $p = .039$), while perspective, centrality, phenomenology, negative valence, sharing frequency, and event type were nonsignificant (all $p > .074$).

In summary, parent-child narrative similarity showed minimal association with parents' memory characteristics, with only positive emotional content linked to reduced overlap.

2.2.3 Exploratory analysis

As an exploratory analysis, we also examined whether the functions served by the vicarious memories for the younger generation predicted elaboration and dyadic narrative similarity (function scores are displayed in Table 6). To this end, we fitted two CLMMs (one with elaboration, one with dyadic similarity) including the eight RFS items representing the functions of reminiscence (boredom reduction, death preparation, identity, problem-solving, conversation, intimacy maintenance, bitterness revival, and teaching/informing) as predictors. Function scores were z-standardized across memories to facilitate interpretation and model convergence.

Table 6: *Children's perspectives on the functions of memories transmitted by parents.*

Generation	Death preparation	Problem-solving	Bitterness revival	Boredom reduction	Teaching	Conversation	Intimacy maintenance	Identity
Parents	15.58 (27.54)	20.94 (31.17)	27.31 (35.46)	19.18 (30.20)	53.84 (37.53)	31.81 (34.27)	17.22 (33.6)1	46.13 (39.77)
Children	15.74 (26.73)	18.15 (27.81)	18.72 (28.34)	24.44 (30.60)	34.27 (35.59)	28.56 (31.66)	16.12 (32.54)	43.05 (38.50)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

In the elaboration model, the boredom reduction item violated the proportional odds assumption ($p = .029$), but the model nonetheless converged reliably, so the item was retained.

None of the reminiscence functions significantly predicted the level of narrative elaboration (all $p > .067$). In other words, the degree to which vicarious memories served different functions for children was not systematically associated with how elaborated their narratives were.

For dyadic similarity, only bitterness revival was significantly negatively associated with similarity between the two generations' narratives ($\beta = -0.30$, $OR = 0.74$, 95% CI [0.57, 0.96], $p = .025$). This indicates that the more a memory served to keep painful past experiences alive, the less similar parents' and children's narratives were.

2.3 Discussion

In this study, we examined whether characteristics of memories transmitted from parents to children (centrality, phenomenology, emotional valence, and event type) would predict the success of transmission. Specifically, we focused on the level of elaboration in children's narratives and on the degree of similarity with the parent's narrative for events from parents' lives before age 30, and tested whether parents' own ratings of these memories were associated with these outcomes in children's vicarious narratives. This study was primarily exploratory.

Beyond the main analyses, the data provides a descriptive picture of the types of memories that circulate within families. Both generations produced relatively high levels of elaboration (Table 3): parents and children were generally able to construct rich narratives

about events that occurred before the child's birth. However, this applied only to stories that children actually remembered. Of the 480 stories parents selected as important and reportedly transmitted, 46 (9.6%) were not recalled by the children, whereas 81 stories (16.9%) were independently selected by both generations. Although we asked for episodic memories (events lasting 24 hours or less), coding showed that extended memories were almost as frequent as strictly episodic ones (see Table 3). In addition, despite instructions to report important events, mean centrality ratings were relatively low, except for memories selected by parents, and centrality scores showed substantial inter-individual variability.

Taken together, these descriptive results suggest that intergenerational stories comprise not only highly central, life-defining events but also memories that may be less central to the parent's overall life story yet still perceived as meaningful for transmission. Such stories may be selected less because of their centrality in the parent's autobiography and more because they are seen as carrying lessons, values, or other communicative goals.

Turning to the predictors of elaboration, we found that parents' phenomenology, centrality, positive and negative valence, and event type did not predict how elaborated children's narratives would be. In other words, how parents subjectively remembered the stories they shared was not systematically associated with the level of detail or development in children's vicarious accounts.

Instead, two factors emerged as robust predictors of children's elaboration: parents' own elaboration and who selected the story. As expected, stories that children themselves selected as important intergenerational memories were recounted more elaborately than those selected only by parents. This suggests that children do assimilate and elaborate on vicarious memories, but those memories may differ from the memories parents view as central. In addition, children were more elaborative when parents' own narratives of these events were themselves highly elaborated, consistent with the idea that richer parental storytelling provides a scaffolding for children's reconstruction and retelling of vicarious memories.

For dyadic similarity, only parents' positive emotional valence was significantly associated with narrative similarity, but this association was negative. The more positively parents evaluated a memory, the less similar their narrative was to their child's version. This pattern suggests that positive events may be more prone to transformation across generations. Prior work has shown that people may draw more heavily on general knowledge to reconstruct positive than negative events (L. Levine & Bluck, 2004). More generally, positive emotions have also been linked to broader, more gist-like remembering,

whereas negative emotions tend to narrow attention and support more specific, detail-rich memories, which may further constrain how negative events are reconstructed over time (Kensinger, 2009; Monkman et al., 2025). Negative experiences often highlight problems to be resolved and may therefore constrain reconstruction more tightly, whereas positive, goal-consistent events afford greater flexibility for reinterpretation without implying threat or risk. Although these findings come from personal autobiographical memories, vicarious memories are by definition more reconstructive, which may further increase the drift of positive stories away from the original version.

Finally, we examined whether the functions served by vicarious memories for children would predict elaboration and similarity. None of the reminiscence functions significantly predicted the elaboration of children's narratives: children did not provide more detailed accounts as a function of how they reported using the vicarious memory. By contrast, bitterness revival was negatively related to parent–child narrative similarity. When a memory helped children to keep painful past experiences in mind, their narratives diverged more from their parents' versions. One possibility is that, as young adults, children may focus primarily on the directive aspects of such memories. Early adulthood is a period of intense identity exploration, during which stories about parents' past difficulties may be especially relevant for avoiding similar mistakes. Prior research indicates that parental memories serve not only to inform children about their parents' lives but also to provide material for reflecting on their own trajectories (Bakir-Demir, Reese, & Sahin-Acar, 2020; Reese, Fivush, Merrill, Wang, & McAnally, 2017). Children may therefore selectively attend to and elaborate on details that are most useful for guidance and warning, leading their narratives to depart more from their parents' original accounts.

3 Study 2: Transmission from grandparents to grandchildren

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Data for Study 2 came from the same two studies as those included in Study 1. After removing incomplete data, the final sample comprised 98 grandparent–grandchild dyads. As in Study 1, the only age-based inclusion criterion applied to the younger generation, with grandchildren required to be between 16 and 30 years old.

Grandparents ranged in age from 60 to 94 years (M = 75.5, SD = 5.7), with 73 partici-

pants identifying as women (74.5%). Grandchildren were between 16 and 30 years old (M = 20.5, SD = 2.9), and 62 identified as women (63.2%).

To screen for potential mild cognitive impairment, grandparents completed the French version of the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA; Nasreddine & Patel, 2016). Consistent with established guidelines, a cutoff score of 23 or higher was required for inclusion (Carson, Leach, & Murphy, 2018).

3.1.2 Procedure and materials

This study follows the same procedure as Study 1 but with dyads of grandparents and grandchildren.

3.1.3 Statistical analysis

As in Study 1, elaboration (0–3 scale) and dyadic similarity (0–4 scale) were analyzed using cumulative link mixed models (CLMMs; Ning et al., 2021) with proportional odds logit links (Christensen, 2018). Analyses were conducted in R (R Core Team, 2024) using the `ordinal` package (Christensen, 2023).

Similarly, continuous predictors (grandparents' ratings) were z-standardized across memories. *Perspective* was binary-coded: 0 for receiver-selected memory from transmitter's life, 1 for transmitter-selected memory transmitted to receiver. Event type contrasted episodic vs. extended memories (semantic/repeated cases excluded due to low prevalence; see Table 7). Receiver centrality ratings were tested as a potential mediator. For the elaboration model, grandparents' ratings of elaboration were also added for a potential mediation effect. Random intercepts accounted for dyad clustering.

Odds ratios (ORs) with 95% confidence intervals are reported as effect sizes (Christensen, 2018). The proportional odds assumption was tested via likelihood ratio tests (`ordinal::nominal_test`).

For elaboration, sharing frequency and both grandparents' and grandchildren's ratings of centrality violated proportional odds and were removed. Remaining predictors satisfied the assumption ($p > .12$):

$$Elaboration_{Grandchildren} \sim Perspective + Negative\ Valence + Positive\ Valence + Phenomenology + Event\ Type + Elaboration_{Grandparent} + (1|DyadID)$$

For similarity, no predictor violated the proportional odds assumption ($p > .15$), so all were retained:

$$Similarity_{Grandchildren} \sim Perspective + Negative\ Valence + Positive\ Valence +$$
$$Centrality_{Grandparents} + Centrality_{Grandchildren} + Phenomenology +$$
$$Sharing\ Frequency + Event\ Type + (1|DyadID)$$

3.2 Results

Table 7: *Types of memories for grandparent–grandchild dyads.*

Generation	Total narratives	Semantic	Episodic	Extended	Repeated	Forgotten	Same
Grandparents	392	0	147	152	22	4	101
Grandchildren	392	0	123	127	12	67	101

Note. Forgotten corresponds to the number of memories selected by one member of the dyad that the other member could not recall. *Same* refers to the number of memories independently selected by both members of the dyad.

Table 8: *Descriptive statistics of memories for grandparent–grandchild dyads.*

Perspective	Generation	Elaboration	Similarity	Centrality	Phenomenology	Positive valence	Negative valence
Bottom-up	Grandparents	2.2 (0.8)	2.3 (1.1)	39.3 (34.2)	69.9 (20.9)	64.8 (37.0)	23.5 (35.3)
Bottom-up	Grandchildren	2.2 (0.8)	2.3 (1.1)	38.2 (25.4)	38.3 (18.9)	60.3 (35.1)	15.7 (26.2)
Top-down	Grandparents	2.4 (0.8)	2.2 (1.3)	57.7 (28.6)	72.9 (18.8)	64.9 (37.9)	25.4 (37.5)
Top-down	Grandchildren	1.9 (0.8)	2.2 (1.3)	27.1 (26.9)	30.7 (21.2)	48.4 (36.2)	17.8 (29.3)

Note. Elaboration was scored on a scale ranging from 0 to 3, *similarity* on a scale from 0 to 4, and all other measures were assessed using 0–100 visual analog scales. *Forgotten* corresponds to the number of memories selected by one member of the dyad that the other member could not recall. *Perspective* refers to the member of the dyad who selected the memory (top-down for the parent, bottom-up for the child). Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

In the grandparent–grandchild dyads, a larger proportion of grandparental stories was forgotten, but most transmitted memories were still retained. Only 17.1% of the memories selected by grandparents were not recalled by grandchildren, whereas 25.8% were independently selected by both members of the dyad. As in Study 1, both episodic and extended narratives were frequent among grandparents (37.5% and 38.8%, respectively) and grandchildren (31.4% and 32.4%), with relatively few repeated-event narratives. These

descriptive patterns indicate that intergenerational narratives in this older dyad also encompass both single and extended episodes, and that a substantial subset of grandparental stories not only persists in grandchildren's vicarious memory but is also jointly treated as central.

3.2.1 Elaboration

Table 9: *Cumulative link model predicting grandchild elaboration from grandparent memory characteristics.*

Predictor	β	OR 95% CI	p
Perspective	-1.25	0.29 [0.16, 0.53]	$< .001$
Phenomenology	0.67	1.96 [1.34, 2.87]	$< .001$
Positive emotional valence	0.25	1.29 [0.87, 1.92]	.212
Negative emotional valence	0.47	1.61 [1.09, 2.37]	.017
Event type	-0.06	0.94 [0.53, 1.66]	.836
$\text{Elaboration}_{\text{Grandparent}}$	1.05	2.87 [1.78, 4.63]	$< .001$

Note. Perspective refers to the member of the dyad who selected the memory: bottom-up for grandchildren and top-down for grandparents. ORs from multilevel cumulative logit model with dyad random intercepts. Continuous predictors z-standardized.

Data are presented in Table 7 and in Table 8. Outputs of the model are in Table 9.

Grandparents' memory characteristics significantly predicted grandchildren's elaboration of those memories. Grandparent phenomenology ($OR = 1.96$, 95% CI [1.34, 2.87], $p < .001$) and negative emotional valence ($OR = 1.61$, 95% CI [1.09, 2.37], $p = .017$) showed significant positive associations, while positive valence and event type were nonsignificant ($p > .212$).

Grandchildren produced less elaborated narratives for memories selected by grandparents compared to those they chose themselves ($OR = 0.29$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.53], $p < .001$). In contrast, grandchildren's elaboration increased when grandparents' own narratives of these memories were more elaborated ($OR = 2.87$, 95% CI [1.78, 4.63], $p < .001$).

In summary, grandchildren's elaboration of vicarious memories from grandparents was related to both how these memories were experienced and how they were told by the older generation. Not surprisingly, grandchildren tended to say less about memories that were selected by grandparents rather than by themselves, but they elaborated more

when recounting memories that their grandparents had originally narrated in a highly elaborated way. Memories that grandparents described as more vivid and more negatively emotional were also retold by grandchildren in a more elaborated manner.

3.2.2 Similarity

Table 10: *Cumulative link model predicting grandparent-grandchild narrative similarity from grandparent memory characteristics.*

Predictor	β	OR 95% CI	*p*
Perspective	-0.20	0.82 [0.45, 1.52]	.531
$\text{Centrality}_{\text{Grandparent}}$	-0.64	0.53 [0.33, 0.83]	.006
Phenomenology	0.68	1.98 [1.24, 3.15]	.004
Positive emotional valence	-0.24	0.78 [0.50, 1.22]	.278
Negative emotional valence	0.61	1.84 [1.17, 2.89]	.008
Sharing frequency	0.01	1.01 [1.00, 1.02]	.097
Event type	-0.27	0.77 [0.40, 1.46]	.418
$\text{Centrality}_{\text{Grandchild}}$	-0.52	0.59 [0.39, 0.90]	.015

Note. Perspective refers to the member of the dyad who selected the memory: bottom-up for grandchildren and top-down for grandparents. ORs from multilevel cumulative logit model with dyad random intercepts. Continuous predictors z-standardized.

Grandparents' memory characteristics significantly predicted dyadic narrative similarity between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparent phenomenological vividness ($OR = 1.89$, 95% CI [1.19, 2.99], $p = .007$) and lower centrality ($OR = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.30, 0.73], $p < .001$) were associated with greater similarity in narrative between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandchildren's rating of centrality was also associated with lower similarity ($OR = 0.59$, 95% CI [0.39, 0.90], $p = .015$). Perspective, positive valence, negative emotional valence, and sharing frequency were nonsignificant (all $p > .084$).

These results suggest that memories rated higher in phenomenology and lower in centrality by grandparents predicted more similar narratives between grandparents and grandchildren.

3.2.3 Exploratory analysis

Similar to Study 1, we examined whether the functions served by the memories for the grandchildren predicted narrative elaboration and dyadic similarity. We again fitted two CLMMs, one for elaboration and one for dyadic similarity, including the eight reminiscence function items as z-standardized predictors.

Table 11: *Children's perspectives on the functions of memories transmitted by grandparents.*

Generation	Death preparation	Problem-solving	Bitterness revival	Boredom reduction	Teaching	Conversation	Intimacy maintenance	Identity
Parents	14.16 (27.57)	18.59 (32.23)	24.17 (34.52)	17.48 (28.46)	57.34 (38.49)	35.22 (34.37)	19.57 (35.06)	42.92 (40.67)
Children	18.60 (28.99)	17.93 (27.57)	15.63 (28.51)	26.62 (32.21)	41.84 (34.39)	37.23 (33.76)	18.27 (32.33)	44.33 (38.18)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

For elaboration, only intimacy maintenance significantly predicted grandchildren's narrative elaboration ($OR = 1.47$, 95% CI [1.05, 2.05], $p = .024$). Narratives were more elaborate when the memory served to maintain a bond with a deceased relative. No other function reached significance.

For dyadic similarity, only the identity function was significantly and negatively associated with similarity between grandparents' and grandchildren's narratives ($\beta = -0.47$, $OR = 0.63$, 95% CI [0.46, 0.86], $p = .004$). This suggests that memories serving stronger identity functions are associated with less overlap in how grandparents and grandchildren describe the same events.

3.3 Discussion

In this study, we examined whether characteristics of memories transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren predicted how successfully these stories were taken up by the younger generation. Using the same general paradigm as in Study 1, we focused on both grandchildren's elaboration of vicarious memories and the degree of similarity between grandchildren's narratives and their grandparents' original accounts of events. We tested whether grandparents' own ratings of these memories (centrality, phenomenology, emotional valence, event type) and their narrative elaboration were associated with these out-

comes. As in the parent–child sample, this investigation was largely exploratory, aiming to identify which properties of grandparents' memories are linked to more elaborated and more similar retellings by grandchildren.

Results show that, overall, both generations produced reasonably elaborated narratives. Grandparents and grandchildren were generally able to construct detailed accounts of events that took place before the grandparent turned 30 years old. As in Study 1, extended memories were common alongside strictly episodic ones (38.8% and 37.5%, respectively, for grandparents; 32.4% and 31.4% for grandchildren), suggesting that intergenerational storytelling often involves broader periods or recurring experiences rather than single, time-limited episodes only. A substantial number of memories selected by grandparents were forgotten or not known by the grandchildren (17.1%). Moreover, although we asked participants to report important events, average centrality ratings were not uniformly high, with considerable variability across individuals and perspectives. In particular, memories that grandparents themselves selected as important received especially high centrality ratings from them. This pattern implies that intergenerational narratives encompass not only highly central, life-defining episodes but also stories that may be less central in the grandparents' or grandchildren's overall life stories, yet still perceived as worth transmitting. This may be because they carry family history, values, lessons that grandparents wish to pass down, or amusing/unexpected elements

Looking at elaboration, we found that grandparents' ratings of phenomenology and negative emotional valence predicted grandchildren's elaboration. Grandparents' most vividly remembered and more negatively charged experiences seemed to provide especially fertile ground for grandchildren's narrative reconstruction. Given the generational gap, it may be particularly important for grandchildren to receive stories that offer rich sensory and contextual scaffolding, making it easier for them to imagine and re-tell events they never lived. Negative events may also be treated as cautionary or high-stakes stories that invite deeper reflection and meaning-making. Previous studies have shown that, compared to parents, grandparents tend to emphasize historical knowledge, moral lessons, and family values more than practical skills or everyday behavioral norms (Lasota, 2015). This may lead grandchildren to imagine their grandparents' lives as especially marked by adversity or challenge, and thus to elaborate more when narrating these negatively valenced vicarious memories.

Dyadic similarity was predicted by phenomenology, centrality for the grandparent, and grandchild centrality. More vivid memories were associated with greater similarity

between grandparents' and grandchildren's narratives. As with elaboration, this may reflect the idea that, because grandparents and grandchildren inhabit more distant sociocultural contexts, richer sensory and contextual detail from grandparents provides a stronger scaffold for grandchildren's reconstruction, making it easier for them to remain close to the original story.

In contrast, higher centrality ratings (reported by either generation) were linked to lower similarity, suggesting that memories perceived as highly central may be especially prone to generational reinterpretation. When an event is central to one's life story, it may be more likely to undergo ongoing interpretation and meaning-making. Grandparents and grandchildren occupy different developmental stages and may therefore have distinct life-related priorities (as proposed in socioemotional selectivity theory; Carstensen, 2006). Consequently, central memories may be reshaped to align with current goals and self-views, leading them to gradually diverge across generations rather than being repeated verbatim. In this sense, centrality may simultaneously increase the likelihood that a story is transmitted while also rendering its content more malleable and open to reinterpretation.

We then turned to exploratory analyses examining whether the functions served by vicarious memories were associated with elaboration and dyadic similarity. With respect to elaboration, only intimacy maintenance emerged as a significant predictor: memories that served to remember deceased relatives were recounted in greater detail. This pattern aligns with prior research suggesting that, for emerging adults, grandparents' narratives play a distinctive role in transmitting more distant family history and fostering a sense of connection to earlier generations (Lasota, 2015; Stephan, 2024; Taylor, Fisackerly, Mauren, & Taylor, 2013).

Regarding dyadic similarity, memories that served stronger identity functions were associated with lower similarity between grandparents' and grandchildren's narratives. This finding is consistent with the view that family stories are actively reconstructed to serve evolving self-goals. Accounts of the same event may therefore shift across generations to better fit how younger family members understand themselves. For example, Welzer (2005) described a process of *cumulative heroization*, whereby family narratives are progressively reshaped into more positive and self-enhancing versions over time.

Overall, these results highlight that vicarious memories are not simply transmitted but are actively shaped by their psychological functions, balancing continuity with reinterpretation across generations.

4 Study 3: Inter-dyad comparison

4.1 Method and participants

For this study, we combined the participant pools from Studies 1 and 2, resulting in a comparison between 120 parent–child dyads and 98 grandparent–grandchild dyads. The two types of dyads came from different families. While the parent and grandparent generations differed in age, the children and grandchildren were of comparable ages ($M_{grandchildren} = 20.5$; $M_{children} = 21.6$).

4.1.1 Analysis

In this Study, we compared the levels of elaboration and dyadic similarity in narratives from children and grandchildren from the two previous studies.

To do so, we used CLMM to examine dyadic differences in ratings of the youngest generation of each dyads. Random intercepts were added to account for multiple memories per participant. Elaboration was modeled as such:

$$Elaboration \sim Dyad + (1|ID)$$

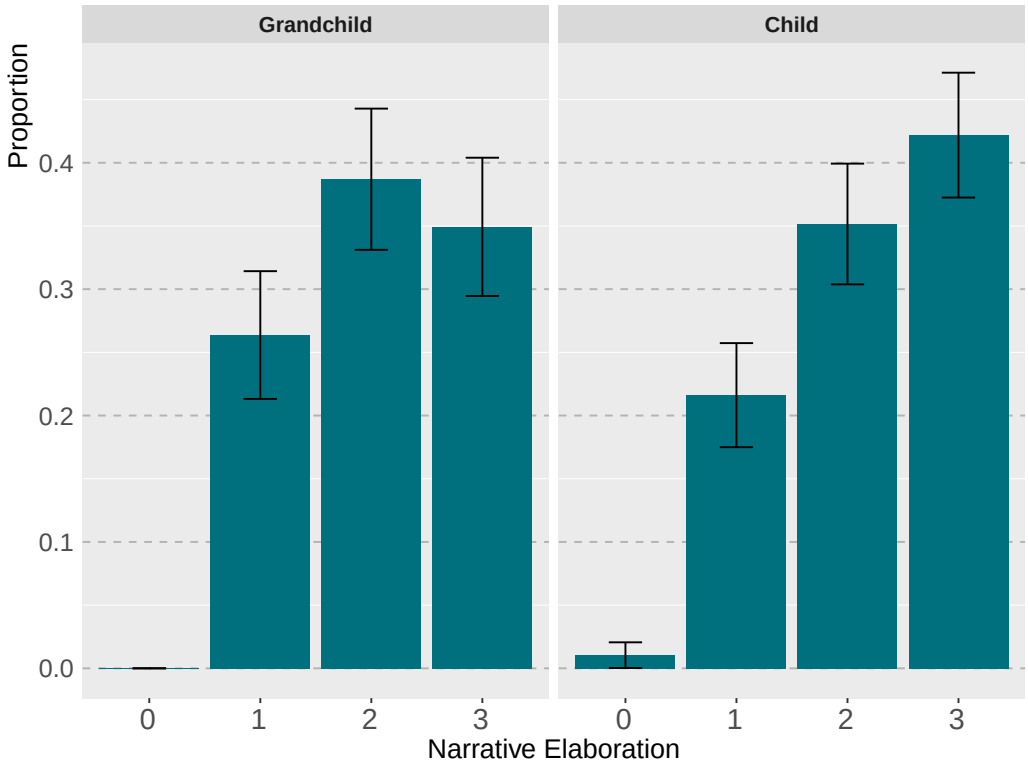
Regarding similarity, tests for the proportional odds assumption revealed that the differences between dyads violated the assumption. Therefore, we specified the nominal effect in the model, allowing the threshold parameters to vary on the predictor (Christensen, 2018). And similarity:

$$Similarity \sim Dyad, nominal =\sim Dyad + (1|ID)$$

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Elaboration

Figure 1: *Distribution of narrative elaboration ratings for the youngest generation across dyads*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

We observed no significant difference ($OR = 1.50$, 95% CI [0.86, 2.63], $p = .156$) in elaboration by the younger generation across dyad types. These results suggest that grandchildren elaborated grandparents' vicarious memories to a similar degree as children elaborated parents' memories.

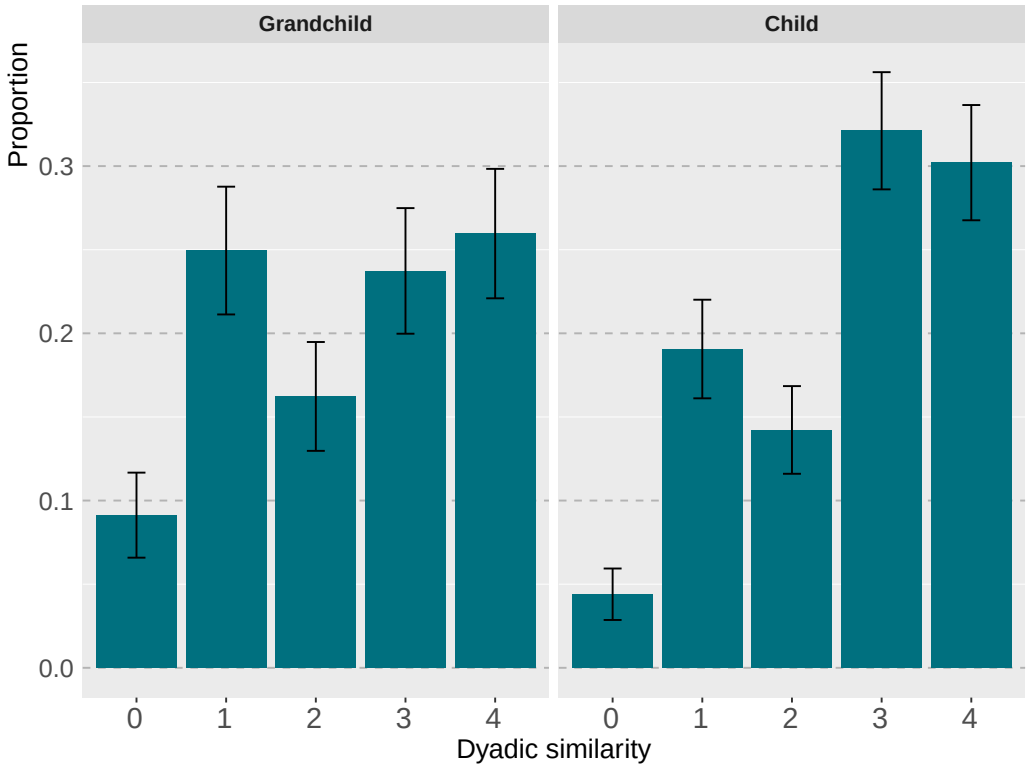
4.2.2 Similarity

Table 12: *Cumulative link model comparing narrative similarity across dyad types.*

Predictor	β	OR 95% CI (Wald)	p
Parent-child dyads	0.45	1.57 [1.29, 1.91]	$< 0.001^{***}$
Nominal effects (grandparent-grandchild vs. parent-child)			
0|1	-0.27	0.76 [0.53, 1.09]	0.15
1|2	-0.01	1.00 [0.86, 1.16]	0.88
2|3	-0.01	1.00 [0.86, 1.16]	0.95
3|4	0.30	1.35 [1.10, 1.66]	0.004^{**}

Note. ORs are cumulative odds ratios. Nominal effects are cutpoint-specific.

Figure 2: *Distribution of narrative elaboration ratings across dyads.*



Note. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Parent-child dyads showed substantially higher narrative similarity than grandparent-grandchild dyads (OR = 1.67, 95% CI [1.39, 2.00], $p < .001$). Cutpoint analysis confirmed that the difference was the strongest at maximum similarity (3 vs 4: OR = 1.35, $p = .004$), see Table 12.

4.3 Discussion

In this last study, we compared our two samples to detect possible differences in intergenerational transmission between grandparent–grandchild and parent–child dyads. More specifically, we contrasted the level of elaboration in young adults' vicarious memories originating from either a grandparent or a parent, and we examined whether dyadic narrative similarity was stronger in one type of dyad than in the other.

We did not observe any difference in elaboration between grandparental and parental vicarious memories. This suggests that young adults provide comparable levels of detail when recounting memories learned from parents and from grandparents. Previous studies have shown that younger adults are able to retell stories from both generations (e.g., Pratt et al., 2008; Stephan, 2024; Zaman & Fivush, 2013). Here, we directly compared the elaboration of such vicarious personal memories across dyads. Knowledge of both grandparents' and parents' narratives has been associated with more stable identity construction (Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011; Merrill et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2013), and our results indicate that emerging adults are able to construct richly detailed stories for both older generations.

By contrast, we found that parent–child dyads displayed higher narrative similarity than grandparent–grandchild dyads. Prior work has documented substantial loss of information across two generational gaps for historical events, particularly for personal details (Cordonnier, Bouchat, Hirst, & Luminet, 2021). Consistent with this, we observed lower similarity when narratives travel through the grandparent–grandchild link, likely reflecting greater appropriation and transformation of the story by the receiver. As reported in Study 2, the narrative as told by the transmitter appears to be reshaped in light of the receiver's idiosyncrasies and current goals. Importantly, the level of elaboration is not reduced for grandparents' narratives compared to parents', but the specific details and emphases seem to diverge more across the wider generational distance.

5 General discussion

Across three studies, we examined which characteristics of family stories predict how they are remembered and retold across generations. Focusing on vicarious memories transmitted within parent–child (Study 1) and grandparent–grandchild (Study 2) dyads, we investigated how features such as centrality, phenomenology, emotional valence, narrative elaboration, and perceived functions relate to two key outcomes in the younger gener-

ation: the level of elaboration and the degree of narrative similarity with the transmitter's account. In Study 3, we also compared intergenerational transmission across dyads to determine whether stories from parents and grandparents are received and reconstructed in similar ways.

First, these studies offer a descriptive overview of the characteristics of intergenerational narratives in our Belgian sample. Across two data collections, we gathered the central memories that parents and grandparents reported transmitting to their children or grandchildren, as well as the central memories that children and grandchildren reported remembering about their parents or grandparents. All generations were able to produce elaborated intergenerational narratives. Although participants were asked to report central events, we observed substantial inter-individual variability in centrality scores. The highest centrality ratings were consistently found for memories that transmitters (parents or grandparents) themselves selected to share. Prior work has shown that vicarious memories tend to resemble personal memories but with attenuated phenomenological and functional qualities (Pillemer et al., 2015, 2024). Here, we additionally observed that the gap in centrality between transmitters and receivers was smaller for memories selected by the receiver, suggesting that what is central for one generation is not necessarily central for another. These patterns underscore the value of studying both ends of the transmission to better understand how intergenerational memories are selected, retained, and told.

Our results also support the view that family vicarious memories are not passively copied but dynamically co-constructed, selectively retained, and integrated into receivers' developing life narratives (Fivush & Kellas, 2025; Merrill & Fivush, 2016). In the parent–child dyads, parents' ratings of their memories (centrality, phenomenology, emotional valence, event type) did not predict how elaborated children's vicarious narratives would be. This suggests that the "original" story, as subjectively experienced by the parent, is less critical than how children reconstruct the memory in light of their own current goals. However, parents' own narrative elaboration did predict children's elaboration, indicating that children require a certain level of detail on which to base their own retellings. Beyond parents' elaboration, only children's centrality ratings and whether they had selected the memory themselves predicted elaboration. This pattern highlights that both the accessibility of vicarious memories (selection) and the effort invested in elaboration depend on their perceived relevance for the self. However, our exploratory analysis of memory functions did not reveal any association between specific reported functions and the level of detail in children's narratives.

Analyses of parent–child dyadic similarity showed that only parents' positive emotional valence was significantly and negatively associated with similarity. One way to interpret this pattern is through the developmental needs of emerging adults. Prior studies indicate that young adults often reminisce for identity-related and problem-solving purposes (Cappeliez, Lavallee, & O'Rourke, 2001; Webster, 1995). Vicarious memories offer a means of learning from negative experiences without having to live them firsthand (Pillemer et al., 2024), which may encourage receivers to stay closer to the original event in those cases. By contrast, positive events may allow more flexibility in reconstruction, enabling receivers to reshape the story to better serve their own goals (L. Levine & Bluck, 2004). Since autobiographical memory is generally biased toward self-enhancing content (Keuler & Safer, 1998; Schacter, Greene, & Murphy, 2024), positive vicarious memories may be particularly prone to reinterpretation to maintain a positive self-image. Our analyses of functions and dyadic similarity are consistent with this interpretation: similarity decreased as vicarious memories served more bitterness revival functions for children. Although we do not know yet which specific details diverge, these findings suggest that when memories help keep painful past experiences in mind, children's narratives tend to depart more from those of their parents. It is plausible that young adults use parents' difficult experiences as warnings or lessons and selectively elaborate aspects most relevant to their own lives, thereby moving away from the structure and emphasis of the original story.

In the grandparent–grandchild dyads, a different pattern emerged. Here, grandparents' ratings of their memories did predict grandchildren's elaboration and dyadic similarity. Grandchildren's vicarious narratives were more elaborated when grandparents' memories were rated as more vivid (higher phenomenology), more elaborated, and more negatively valenced. This suggests that, given the larger generational gap and the rapidly changing sociocultural context, grandchildren may need richer narrative scaffolding (both in terms of sensory detail and narrative structure) to construct detailed vicarious memories. Negative valence also showed predictive value, indicating that grandchildren elaborated more on grandparents' memories that were experienced as more negative. Because older adults tend to both recall more positive events and focus on positive aspects within their memories (e.g., L. Levine & Bluck, 2004; Luminet & Cordonnier, 2024), negative events may stand out as particularly salient and functionally important for grandchildren. Consistent with this, our exploratory analyses showed higher elaboration for memories serving intimacy maintenance functions, that is, memories that help keep deceased relatives present in mind. These events may often be linked to loss or hardship and resonate

with grandparents' traditional role in transmitting family history, honoring ancestors, and fostering a sense of continuity across generations (Taylor et al., 2013).

Grandparent–grandchild narrative similarity was positively associated with phenomenological vividness and negatively associated with centrality for both generations. With aging, autobiographical memories tend to become more general and less detailed (B. Levine, Svoboda, Hay, Winocur, & Moscovitch, 2002; Piolino et al., 2010). When grandparents' memories are more vivid, they may be less generalized and thus easier for grandchildren to reconstruct in a similar way. In contrast, higher centrality for both grandparents and grandchildren was linked to greater divergence. According to Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (Carstensen, 2006), perceived time horizons shape motivational priorities, which may lead different generations to focus on distinct aspects of the same event. Our finding that dyadic similarity was reduced when vicarious memories served identity functions fits with this idea: as each generation uses central stories to support its own identity work, narratives may be selectively reshaped to align with current goals and self-views, thereby drifting apart across generations.

Finally, Study 3 showed that young adults produced comparable levels of elaboration for vicarious memories originating from parents and grandparents, indicating that emerging adults can construct detailed narratives about salient events from both older generations. However, parent–child dyads displayed higher similarity in their narratives than grandparent–grandchild dyads. Grandparental vicarious memories were as detailed as parental ones, but the specific details and emphases departed more from the transmitter's account. This pattern suggests that increasing generational distance does not necessarily reduce the richness of vicarious narratives, but it does increase the scope for appropriation and reinterpretation as stories are woven into the younger generation's own life narratives. Taken together, these findings reinforce the idea that intergenerational transmission is jointly shaped by generational position, developmental stage, and the identity-relevant uses that younger family members make of the stories they inherit.

Across studies, our findings converge on the idea that intergenerational memories are not simply preserved but actively reconstructed as they move across generations. The extent to which younger family members elaborate on and remain similar to transmitted stories depends not only on how richly those stories are told, but also on their perceived relevance for the self and the functions they serve. Narrative detail from transmitters provides an important scaffold, yet receivers selectively appropriate family stories in ways that reflect their developmental needs, identity concerns, and sociocultural context. Furthermore,

increasing generational distance appears to widen the space for reinterpretation without diminishing narrative richness. Together, these results highlight family storytelling as a dynamic process through which memories are both maintained and transformed, supporting continuity while allowing each generation to make inherited experiences its own.

5.1 Limits and future directions

These results should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the narrative coding could have benefited from additional judges and higher interrater agreement. Moreover, although our coding schemes have been widely used in prior work (e.g., Andrews, Zaman, Merrill, Duke, & Fivush, 2015; Fivush, Bohanek, Zaman, & Grapin, 2012), they remain relatively broad. Future studies could employ more fine-grained coding of narrative content (e.g., types of contextual, emotional, narrative coherence, or evaluative details, etc.) to better capture which specific aspects of stories diverge or converge across dyads.

A second limitation concerns the gender composition of the samples. Numerous studies have documented gender differences in autobiographical and family narrative practices (Fivush, 2009; Merrill, Gallo, & Fivush, 2015; Michałek-Kwiecień, 2020). Our samples were unbalanced with respect to gender and did not allow for systematic group comparisons. Future research with larger and more diverse samples, including crossed combinations of same-gender and different-gender dyads, could clarify how gender dynamics shape the transmission, elaboration, and transformation of vicarious memories.

A further limitation lies in the largely exploratory nature of our analyses. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the predictive value of transmitters' memory characteristics for receivers' elaboration of vicarious memories within the family context. Existing research has often focused on specific types of memories, such as historical or conflict-related events (e.g., Cordonnier et al., 2021; Svob & Brown, 2012), or has considered only one side of the interaction (either transmitters or receivers). Our findings therefore require replication in preregistered designs with clearly specified hypotheses and potentially complementary methodological approaches.

Nevertheless, we hope to have demonstrated that examining both sides of the transmission (how older family members remember and narrate their experiences, and how younger relatives reconstruct these stories) offers a fruitful framework for understanding intergenerational memory processes in families. Future work building on this dyadic per-

spective may further illuminate how family stories are selected, reshaped, and integrated into the life narratives of different generations.

5.2 Conclusion

These studies underscore that intergenerational transmission is not a passive copying process but a dynamic, co-constructed activity in which stories are selectively retained, reshaped, and integrated into the receivers' developing life narratives. Vivid, emotionally charged, and highly elaborated memories appear especially likely to be taken up and transformed by younger family members, sometimes at the cost of fidelity to the original account. By jointly considering the perspectives of transmitters and receivers across two generational links, this work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how family stories travel through time and how they participate in the construction of identity and continuity across generations.

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Chapter 4

General discussion

This thesis aimed to examine both sides of intergenerational memory transmission within families: how and why parents and grandparents choose to share important autobiographical events with younger family members, how emerging adults remember and use these vicarious narratives, and how parental and grandparental stories differ in their characteristics and functions. By directly comparing transmitters' and receivers' perspectives within parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads, it addressed key literature gaps to reveal generation-specific adaptive functions, deepen understanding of family transmission processes, and advance the functional conception of vicarious memories.

In this chapter, I first review the main results from the four empirical studies that comprise this thesis. Once these results are summarised, I interpret them within a broader common framework, structured as two main sections: *Parent-child memory transmission* and *Grandparent-grandchild transmission*. I then offer a general conclusion that summarizes the contributions of this thesis to understanding intergenerational memory transmission within families. Finally, I conclude with directions for future research to deepen this understanding.

4.1 Summary of the empirical work

Schematic representations of the main outputs are shown in Figure 4.1.

Study 1 used an online questionnaire to investigate the perceived frequency of intergenerational memory transmission within families. Participants were grouped by generational status: grandparents (G1, those with grandchildren), parents (G2, those with children but no grandchildren), and young adults without children (G3, under 30 years

old). G1 and G2 reported how frequently they transmitted personal and public memories from their lives to younger generations, whereas G2 and G3 reported how frequently they received such memories from older generations.

Results revealed that intergenerational transmission is perceived as relatively frequent overall, albeit with substantial inter-individual variability. Different generations reported distinct transmission and reception frequencies: grandparents (G1) reported transmitting more often to their children than those (G2) reported receiving, grandparents and grandchildren (G3) perceived comparable transmission levels, and parents (G2) and their children (G3) aligned closely in their reports. Grandparent–grandchild dyads showed moderate positive correlations between perceived transmission and feelings of closeness, whereas parent–child dyads exhibited higher overall transmission frequency than grandparent–grandchild dyads. This difference was mediated by contact frequency for receivers but not transmitters. Notably, grandparents reported greater closeness to their children than reciprocated. Personal memories were transmitted and received more frequently than public ones across generations, and older memories were generally perceived as being transmitted less frequently, except by grandchildren. They reported receiving memories from before their birth more often than post-birth ones.

Study 2 examined the functions served by transmitted autobiographical memories, either related to personal or public events, using adapted items from the Reminiscence Functions Scale in parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads. Overall, across the two types of dyads, both transmitters and receivers associated intergenerational narratives with teaching, identity, and conversation functions.

In parent–child dyads, parents attributed higher functions overall to the memories they transmitted than children did to the vicarious stories they recalled, particularly for bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching. Compared to public memories, personal memories elicited higher bitterness revival and identity functions. Conversely, public memories were more strongly associated with problem-solving.

In grandparent–grandchild dyads, grandparents attributed stronger overall levels of functions (main effect) to the memories they transmitted than grandchildren did to their recall of these vicarious memories. Particularly, grandparents reported higher scores for bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching functions. Grandchildren, however, attributed greater death preparation functions to these vicarious memories than grandparents did to their transmission. Compared to public memories, personal memories were more strongly associated with higher bitterness revival, boredom reduc-

tion, identity, and intimacy maintenance functions.

Direct comparisons across dyads revealed no overall differences (main effects) in functions reported by transmitters (parents vs. grandparents) or receivers (children vs. grandchildren). Among receivers, however, vicarious memories from grandparents supported more conversation and identity functions than those from parents, whereas parental memories were more tied to problem-solving.

Study 3 investigated the emotional dimensions of transmitted autobiographical memories (including overall intensity, positive and negative valences, and discrete emotions) in parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads.

In parent–child dyads, parents' transmitted memories were associated with higher emotional intensity, positive valence, and negative valence than children's vicarious recollections. Parents also reported higher levels of guilt, happiness, pride, and thankfulness (positive emotions overall, except guilt).

In grandparent–grandchild dyads, grandparents' transmitted memories were more emotionally intense than grandchildren's vicarious ones, with no differences in valences. Grandparents further associated their memories with greater happiness and pride (positive discrete emotions) than their grandchildren.

Cross-dyad comparisons among transmitters revealed that parents' memories were more negatively valenced than grandparents', and more tied to envy, sadness, and thankfulness. Among receivers, grandparental vicarious memories were more positively valenced than parental ones, and linked to stronger admiration, happiness, pride, and respect.

Finally, correlations between emotions and memory functions highlighted distinct patterns. For transmitters, negative emotions were linked to bitterness revival, death preparation, intimacy maintenance, and (weakly) problem-solving. On the other hand, respect and pride were linked to teaching, and happiness showed weak ties overall, including a moderate negative link to bitterness revival. For receivers, negative emotions (indignation, anger, sadness) correlated with bitterness revival, death preparation, and problem-solving, and respect and admiration were strongly associated with teaching and identity. Finally, happiness was positively correlated with boredom reduction, conversation, and identity.

Study 4 integrated data from Studies 2 and 3 to identify predictors of successful intergenerational transmission, operationalized as receivers' narrative elaboration of vicarious memories and dyadic narrative similarity (transmitter vs. receiver versions). Descriptively, most transmitted memories persisted in receivers' vicarious recall: in parent–child

dyads, only 9.6% of parents' selected memories were unknown by children, while 16.9% were jointly selected by both members of the dyads. Both generations also produced comparable proportions of episodic (42.3–42.9%) and extended narratives (43.3–34.0%). In grandparent–grandchild dyads, 17.1% of grandparents' memories were unknown by grandchildren, while 25.8% were jointly selected. Once more, both generations produced episodic (37.5–31.4%) and extended (38.8–32.4%) narratives.

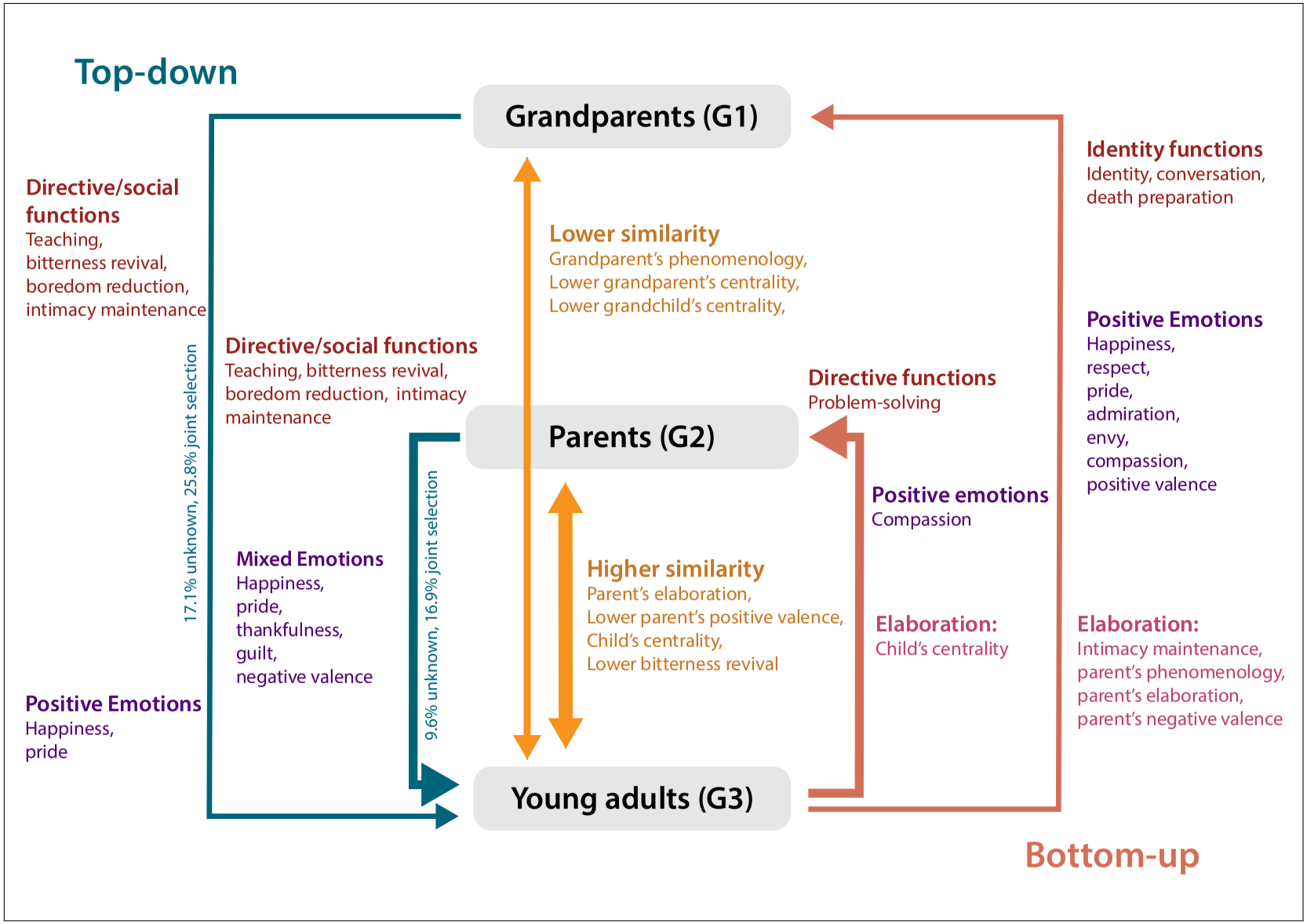
In parent–child dyads, parents' ratings of centrality, phenomenology, emotional valence, and event type did *not* predict significantly children's elaboration. Instead, children's elaboration increased when parents' own narratives were more elaborated, children rated the memory as more self-central, or the child (vs. only the parent) had selected it. Dyadic similarity decreased with parents' higher positive valence ratings; other parent-rated features were nonsignificant. Exploratively, functions did not predict elaboration, but children's stronger bitterness revival linked to lower similarity.

In grandparent–grandchild dyads, grandchildren's elaboration rose with grandparents' higher phenomenological vividness, more elaborated narratives, and greater negative valence. Memory selection by the grandchild (vs. only the grandparent) also boosted elaboration. Dyadic similarity was positively associated with vividness but negatively with centrality ratings from both generations. Exploratively, intimacy maintenance (e.g., remembering deceased relatives) predicted higher elaboration, whereas stronger identity functions were linked to lower similarity.

Cross-dyad comparisons showed that young adults' elaboration was comparable whether their vicarious memories came from parents or grandparents. However, parent–child dyads exhibited higher narrative similarity than grandparent–grandchild dyads, indicating that generational distance preserved narrative richness but increased divergence from the original.

Now that I have summarized the main results, I bring them together within a broader framework. The next sections combines these findings and extend their interpretation. To better emphasize the different roles that intergenerational narratives play for each protagonist, generational differences, and the overall place of these stories in family life, the discussion is structured as follows: the first section focuses on parent–child dyads, considering both sides of transmission and integrating empirical findings, and concludes with a theoretical reflection on the construction and role of vicarious memories in middle adulthood. The subsequent section adopts a similar approach for grandparent–grandchild dyads. Finally, I offer a more general conclusion that ties these outputs into a coherent framework.

Figure 4.1: Overview of the main outputs of the four studies.



Note. Schematic overview of the main empirical findings from Studies 1–4, summarising the characteristics of the AM grandparents and parents transmitted to their adult children and grandchildren, and the characteristics of the vicarious memories the young adults remembered about their grandparents and parents.

4.2 Parent-child memory transmission

4.2.1 Parents' memories

Parent–child transmission is the most common kind of intergenerational storytelling in families, which is not surprising given parents' custodial roles. This custodial position appears to structure many of their exchanges with children: parents use stories about their past to guide, warn, and prepare the younger generation. Across studies, a consistent picture emerges of parents as everyday transmitters, drawing on their life experiences to scaffold their children's understanding of both family and wider life challenges.

Overall, most parental stories were represented in children's vicarious memories. Only 9.6% of the memories selected by parents were not recalled by their children (either because they were forgotten by the children or never transmitted in the first place), whereas 16.9% were independently selected by both members of the dyad (Study 4). Parents and children both produced high proportions of episodic and extended narratives, with fewer repeated-event stories, suggesting that intergenerational storytelling often revolves around single impactful episodes and broader life periods rather than routine events. Taken together, these patterns indicate that the majority of stories parents report transmitting are indeed preserved in children's vicarious memory, and that a notable subset becomes jointly recognized as central by both generations.

Parents most strongly attributed teaching, identity, and discussion functions to the autobiographical memories they chose to transmit to their children (Study 2). These priorities align with midlife generative concerns, where sharing personal experiences serves to instruct, explain their family origins, and sustain conversational bonds. Compared to their children's reasons for remembering parents' stories, parents reported stronger motives for transmitting memories linked to bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching functions (Study 2). Bitterness revival reflects the sharing of adverse or difficult past events. Through such stories, parents keep negative experiences accessible and narratively available, likely as cautionary tales. This links with teaching: one central parental role is to convey lessons about potential adversities and life challenges, using their own past as a source of guidance and warning for their children.

These functional differences align with the emotional profile of parental memories. Although parents' stories were not more or less positive or intense than grandparents' stories, they were more negatively valenced overall (Study 3). Negative autobiographical memories often serve directive functions for both tellers and listeners (Pillemer et al., 2024;

Rasmussen & Berntsen, 2009; Steiner, 2023), especially when the parents (who have an important custodial role) use them to warn about potential dangers. In our samples, parents frequently selected memories from their own youth or early adulthood, often at ages similar to those of their children (e.g., student years). By narrating their past mistakes, difficulties, or turning points during comparable life stages, parents effectively use their autobiographical memories as a template to inform their children's decisions.

Beyond their guiding role, negative and mixed-valence memories also appear central within the family narrative. Intimacy maintenance, for example, involves remembering deceased relatives. Parents may recount stories about their own parents or grandparents to their children, thereby preserving family legacy and offering children a sense of where they come from. In this view, parents do not solely transmit directive warnings but also share memories that anchor children within a broader intergenerational lineage.

Public memories, though discussed less frequently than personal ones (Study 1), also played conversational roles. They received relatively high teaching and conversation ratings, often comparable to personal memories (Study 2). This suggests that, despite being overall less functionally rich, public events are used as material for discussion and as entry points into broader topics. In line with boredom reduction functions, parents may mobilize both personal and public stories to spark conversation, fill everyday interactional space, and engage children around current or historical events, especially given their high frequency of contact with children (Study 1).

On the emotional side, parents' transmitted memories were more strongly associated with guilt than children's vicarious recollections of those stories (Study 3). This may reflect parents' self-reflection on earlier life choices, including regrets or perceived shortcomings, which they now share as lessons. At the same time, parents also linked their memories to happiness, pride, and thankfulness. Many of the important memories transmitted before age 30 concerned origins of the child's own story (e.g., meeting the other parent, weddings, childbirth). Such narratives interweave directive and affiliative components: they both convey values and decisions and mark the child's place within the family's trajectory.

Taken together, parents' stories appear strongly directive in nature—characterized by elevated teaching and bitterness revival functions, more negative valence, and frequent focus on recent family history or the child's origins. These stories carry important meaning for parents, who intentionally engage in these exchanges to guide, warn, and situate their children within a shared family past.

4.2.2 Children's vicarious memories

Young adults remember most stories shared by their parents and report knowing more about their parents' past than their grandparents'. However, the qualities, functions, and construction of these vicarious memories differ systematically between sources. Rather than serving primarily as identity-building blocks, parental vicarious memories emerge as pragmatic directive tools embedded in everyday interactions and oriented toward practical guidance for emerging adulthood.

As previously noted, parent–child dyads reported the highest perceived transmission frequency across studies (Study 1). Unlike grandparents, however, children's perceptions of this frequency were fully mediated by contact frequency, suggesting that young adults may base their estimates of intergenerational storytelling on overall conversational volume with parents. This embedding in everyday discussions could render parental stories less salient as distinct narratives, compared to scarcer, more salient grandparental ones. The result is a larger repertoire of remembered stories from parents (lower forgetting rates, Study 4), but potentially diluted in everyday exchanges.

These vicarious memories from parents were associated with similar overall functional levels as grandparental ones, but showed a distinct profile (Study 2). Notably, they were more strongly tied to problem-solving functions and less to identity or conversation. Children also reported higher compassion ratings for their vicarious memories of parents compared to parents' own ratings of transmitted stories, suggesting these narratives foster emotional understanding alongside practical guidance. For young adults, parental stories thus serve directive purposes: guiding behavior and decision-making in concrete ways, akin to cautionary tales or practical exemplars. This aligns with Lasota (2015)'s findings: while grandparents emphasize historical knowledge and values, parents transmit pragmatic skills, norms, and procedural guidance. Identity functions remained present but secondary, particularly relevant for our sample of emerging adults navigating independence while still relying heavily on parental support (Fingerman, Cheng, Tighe, Birditt, & Zarit, 2012).

Children demonstrated high preservation of the important stories their parents selected, and they reported remembering these parental stories primarily for teaching, conversation, and identity functions (much like the parents themselves). However, it was children's own priorities (centrality, selection), rather than parents' original characteristics (centrality, phenomenology, valence, event type), that shaped how richly these memories

were reconstructed. This suggests that whereas both generations reported similar main functions, these functions served different individual-oriented needs.

Dyadic narrative similarity further illuminated this reconstruction process. Similarity decreased when parents rated memories as more positively valenced (Study 4), leaving more room for children to reshape them freely, perhaps because upbeat stories offer fewer directive constraints (Monkman et al., 2025). Conversely, children's stronger bitterness revival was also linked to lower similarity: when vicarious memories highly served as "bad examples" or cautionary lessons for the children, reconstructions departed further from the parental original. This pattern may reflect young adults' emphasis on the negative aspects to maximize learning, integrate personal reflections, and gain deeper understanding of their parent (higher compassion ratings for children's vicarious memories), whereas parents' versions emphasize thankfulness, pride, and happiness, focusing on positive resolutions.

Emotional patterns reinforced this directive role. Negative emotions (indignation, anger, sadness) correlated with bitterness revival, death preparation, and problem-solving for receivers (Study 3), suggesting parental stories help young adults process and cope with challenges. Overall similarity between transmitters and receivers remained moderate, reflecting functional and emotional divergences: parents emphasize teaching/intimacy from their perspective, while children extract pragmatic guidance. Nonetheless, the source shapes vicarious memory qualities. Parental stories foster coping and decision-making, distinct from grandparental identity work (see section *Grandchildren's vicarious memories*).

Elaboration levels were comparable for parental and grandparental vicarious memories, confirming young adults' capacity to reconstruct detailed narratives from both sources. In parent–child dyads, however, similarity was higher overall than in grandparent–grandchild dyads. With abundant stories serving less identity-focused functions, children reconstruct parental vicarious memories with fidelity to the original when directive needs demand it, but with room for personalization when positivity rises.

Parental vicarious memories thus stand out as frequent, pragmatically oriented resources in emerging adulthood. Embedded in abundant contact and serving directive functions like problem-solving and cautionary guidance, they are well-preserved yet reconstructed according to children's immediate self-needs, with diminished similarity when children perceived the memory as a "bad example" lessons (bitterness revival) and when the parent rated the memory as positively valenced. This pattern reflects a custodial legacy from parents, equipping young adults with behavioral templates while highlight-

ing source-specific influences on vicarious memory construction.

4.2.3 Middle adulthood transmission

The findings from parent-child dyads depict intergenerational memory transmission as a frequent and robust process in middle adulthood, where parents actively share stories from their own pasts to guide their emerging adult children. For them, these memories served pronounced directive and social functions, with elevated ratings for bitterness revival, teaching/informing, conversation, and intimacy maintenance, often tied to generative concerns peaking in this life stage (Erikson, 1963; Graham et al., 2020). Emotionally, they featured guilt alongside happiness, pride, and thankfulness, underscoring the search for emotional processing and relational stability.

Children's vicarious memories retained elaboration levels comparable to parental recollections and with relative stability (similarity). Children emphasized identity and conversation functions, with problem-solving more prominent than in grandparent contexts, aligning with early adulthood's exploratory needs where parental stories offer pragmatic lessons without lived cost (Pillemer et al., 2024). Emotional profiles featured a focus on compassion, with negative emotions correlating with bitterness revival and problem-solving uses. These patterns underscore how children repurpose transmissions for self-regulation and better relationships with parents.

Considering both perspectives reveals shared purposes but generational differences in how transmitted memories are used. Parents and children alike reported teaching, identity, and relational functions, yet these manifested differently depending on the narrator. Analyses of elaboration and dyadic similarity showed that children's elaboration reflected their own priorities: similarity decreased with positive emotional valence, suggesting that children adapt positive stories to better fit their developmental goals. A similar pattern emerged when memories served bitterness revival functions for children, likely reflecting a focus on extracting lessons from the narrative. Thus, intergenerational memories support the transmission of practical lessons, family identity, and relational bonds, while their interpretation varies across generations.

Overall, transmission in middle adulthood appears as a generative opportunity to share directive life stories. Frequent contact between parents and children may support relatively high fidelity in cautionary narratives while allowing reinterpretation of affirming ones. These findings highlight complementary processes: parents emphasize practical

and familial teaching, whereas children draw on these narratives for self-exploration and behavioral guidance.

4.3 Grandparent-grandchild transmission

4.3.1 Grandparents' memories

Grandparents' transmission of autobiographical memories differs in nature from that of parents. Although less frequent, it carries distinct meanings and functions for both grandparents and their grandchildren (see *Grandchildren's vicarious memories* next). Grandparents occupy a unique role in the family: they transmit family stories and bridge connections to the more distant past. At the same time, intergenerational narratives serve particular purposes for grandparents, enabling them to express generativity and maintain bonds with the younger generation.

Our findings support and extend prior research showing that older adults actively transmit memories within the family (Bernal & De la Fuente Anuncibay, 2007; Thiele & Whelan, 2006). Although less frequent than in parent–child dyads, Study 1 revealed that grandparents perceive transmission to their grandchildren as relatively common, with moderate frequencies and substantial inter-individual variability. Study 1 also showed that grandparents reported greater closeness to their grandchildren than reciprocated, replicating the intergenerational stake hypothesis, whereby older generations feel more emotionally invested in younger relatives (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Harwood, 2001; Spalding & Carpenter, 2019). This asymmetry underscores how transmission may reinforce grandparents' relational priorities in later life. Although less frequent than parents' transmission, grandparents' transmission plays an important role for grandparents themselves and serves a different purpose than parental transmission.

As seen in Studies 1 and 2, grandparents primarily discussed personal memories, which were perceived as more frequent and functionally richer than public ones. Recent public and personal events were transmitted at nearly equal frequencies (perhaps reflecting shared contemporary relevance) but personal events dominated overall, emphasizing grandparents' focus on intimate family history.

For grandparents, intergenerational transmission is not trivial or merely a pastime; it is a motivated activity tied to relational goals. The correlation between perceived transmission frequency and closeness in Study 1 supports this, linking transmission directly to

intergenerational bonds. Focusing on narratives from before the receiver's birth (true intergenerational stories; Fivush & Kellas, 2025), grandparents reported comparable overall levels of function to parents.

Grandparents transmitted memories with centrality levels similar to parents, but in smaller quantities: lower self-reported frequencies than parents, alongside higher forgetting (17.1%) and joint selection rates (25.8%; Study 4). These patterns indicate selective transmission, that is, fewer but distinctive memories that persist despite generational distance, comparably functional (e.g., high teaching/intimacy) to parental ones.

One difference lies in associated emotions. Relative to parents, grandparents transmitted memories of similar intensity but lower negative valence (Study 3), favoring more positive content. Although content analysis could clarify valence drivers, this selectivity aligns with grandparents avoiding cautionary tales (unlike parents) and prioritizing connective, origin-focused stories, potentially easing integration into grandchildren's narratives.

Moreover, grandparents' memories exceeded grandchildren's vicarious recollections in intensity and associations with happiness and pride (Study 3)—positive discrete emotions. Joyous, self-affirming memories serve as ideal vehicles for bonding and conveying positive family history, with grandparents rating them higher (e.g., higher pride/happiness ratings). This fulfills generativity by preserving legacy while strengthening ties, consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006; Mather & Carstensen, 2005). Pride and happiness were also correlated with teaching functions, further supporting that these memories aimed to teach grandchildren about values and how to live a joyful life.

Reported functions further align with these roles. Grandparents reported stronger bitterness revival, boredom reduction, intimacy maintenance, and teaching than grandchildren (Study 2). Although bitterness revival often involves negatives, it may encompass family hardships requiring deeper narrative analysis. Boredom reduction and teaching reflect social motives (sharing origins to enrich exchanges) while intimacy maintenance (keeping deceased relatives alive) highlights grandparents' role for irreplaceable history (e.g., their own parents/grandparents), differentiating from parental transmission.

In sum, intergenerational transmission forms an active part of grandparents' role. They carry familial memories, connect younger generations to distant roots, and use these discussions to maintain bonds. Unlike parents' educational focus, grandparents transmit central positive memories tied to family identity, alongside fun stories strengthening relationships. This fulfills generativity needs and leaves a notable trace in grandchildren, as explored next.

4.3.2 Grandchildren's vicarious memories

Grandchildren remember a great deal from the stories of their elders. Across our studies, they recalled numerous stories about their grandparents, and these vicarious memories both differed from parental stories and diverged in systematic ways from the memories grandparents reported transmitting. Taken together, the results portray grandchildren not as passive recipients of grandparental narratives, but as active constructors of vicarious memories that serve their own identity and relational needs.

Descriptively, a substantial portion of grandparental stories persisted in grandchildren's vicarious memory. In the grandparent–grandchild dyads, only 17.1% of the memories selected by grandparents were not recalled by grandchildren, whereas 25.8% were independently selected by both members of the dyad (Study 4). As in parent–child dyads, both generations produced many episodic and extended narratives, with relatively few repeated-event stories, indicating that intergenerational storytelling in these older dyads also centers on single impactful episodes and broader life periods. However, grandparents and grandchildren showed a higher proportion of jointly selected memories than parents and children, suggesting that a smaller set of stories becomes particularly central to their relationship. Study 1 further showed that perceived transmission frequency and feelings of closeness were more strongly correlated in grandparent–grandchild pairs than in parent–child dyads, for both grandparents and grandchildren. This pattern supports the idea that these shared stories are tightly linked to emotional closeness and that grandchildren may selectively retain what is most meaningful to them.

Study 4 also indicated that a larger proportion of grandparents' stories were not recalled by grandchildren than parents' stories by children. This discrepancy could reflect either grandparents' inaccuracy in judging which stories they transmitted or greater filtering by grandchildren. The latter interpretation, rather than signaling substantial information loss, suggests grandchildren selectively retain narratives resonating with their self-concerns, discarding less personally relevant episodes. One noteworthy function associated with these vicarious memories is death preparation. Compared to grandparents' own reasons for transmitting, grandchildren reported using grandparental stories more to reflect on mortality and aging (Study 2), underscoring grandparents' position as a salient link to an older generation and to a life stage that young adults encounter relatively rarely in their everyday social networks.

What grandchildren seem to preserve, above all, are stories that inform their iden-

tity. Grandparental vicarious memories were rated at similar overall functional levels as parental ones, but were more strongly associated with both identity and conversation functions (Study 2). Young adults reported drawing more heavily on selected grandparental stories than parental ones not only when constructing their sense of who they are, but also when using them as material for discussions, highlighting these narratives' dual role as identity anchors and conversational resources in this dyad. Learning about their grandparents appears to provide a broader perspective and helps situate the self within a more extended family and historical context. Consistently, grandchildren rated vicarious memories from grandparents higher in pride, admiration, respect, and happiness than those from parents (Study 3). This emotional profile fits prior work suggesting that grandparents play a distinctive role for adolescents and emerging adults: Lasota (2015), for instance, showed that while parents primarily transmit specific skills, values, and pragmatic knowledge, grandparents more often transmit historical knowledge, traditions, and culture.

Across our studies, we did not find evidence that grandparents transmit public or historical events more frequently, or that such vicarious public memories are functionally richer than those from parents (Study 1 and Study 2 showed similar levels for public events from both sources). Instead, the distinctiveness of grandparental vicarious memories appears to lie in their identity and value content. It is plausible that grandparents' stories provide a form of family historical knowledge, connecting grandchildren to aspects of the family's past that would otherwise escape parental narratives. This interpretation is consistent with our finding that grandchildren reported receiving more stories from before their own birth than after their birth (Study 1), suggesting that such pre-birth narratives are particularly salient for the younger generation.

Other studies have highlighted these identity-related functions of grandparental stories. Taylor et al. (2013) showed that grandchildren draw on grandparents' stories to honor ancestors, acknowledge shared values or traits, and extend family legacies. Our findings align with and extend this picture: the vicarious memories that young adults retain from grandparents not only tell them where they come from but are also linked to pride, respect, admiration, and happiness. Indeed, grandchildren rated grandparental vicarious memories as more positively valenced than parental ones (Study 3). This may reflect either a transmission of the positivity bias observed in older adults or a selective remembering process in which identity-relevant positive memories are more available and perhaps reconstructed in a more positive light (Levine & Bluck, 2004). Although parents and grandparents reported comparable positive valence for the memories they believed they

transmitted, grandchildren's preferential retention of more positive grandparental stories suggests active filtering at the receiver level.

Study 4 further nuanced this picture by examining predictors of elaboration and similarity for grandparental vicarious memories. Overall, young adults' elaboration of memories from grandparents was comparable in richness to their elaboration of parental memories, indicating that generational distance does not reduce narrative detail. However, grandparental vicarious elaboration was driven by different predictors. Grandchildren produced more elaborated narratives when grandparents rated their memories as more phenomenologically vivid, more elaborated, and more negatively valenced. These findings suggest that vivid, detailed grandparental narratives provide a strong scaffold for reconstructing rich vicarious memories, and that negatively valenced events may invite more specific, detail-oriented recall—consistent with evidence that unpleasant events tend to be remembered in more specific and richly contextualized ways (Monkman et al., 2025). The intimacy maintenance function also predicted higher elaboration: when stories aimed to keep the memory of a deceased relative alive, grandchildren produced particularly detailed accounts.

Despite this high elaboration, grandparental vicarious memories showed lower narrative similarity to the original stories than did parental vicarious memories (Study 4). When reconstructing stories from grandparents, grandchildren appear to prioritize self-coherence over faithful reproduction, perhaps also because the original events are more distant in time and removed from their own lives. Supporting this interpretation, greater centrality (whether rated by grandparents or grandchildren) was associated with lower narrative similarity. In other words, the more central a memory becomes for either partner, the more it is reshaped to serve individual goals. Grandparental vicarious memories seem to be built on a relatively strong informational base (vivid, elaborated, often emotionally intense stories) but flexibly reconstructed by grandchildren to meet identity and relational needs.

Grandparental vicarious memories thus appear as a distinct layer of the autobiographical landscape in emerging adulthood. They are selectively retained, emotionally positive, and strongly identity-oriented, rooted in vivid and often elaborated grandparental narratives yet flexibly reshaped to support grandchildren's own sense of self and familial belonging.

4.3.3 Later-life transmission

The findings from grandparent–grandchild dyads depict intergenerational memory transmission as a selective yet generative process in later life, where grandparents share formative stories despite greater generational distance. For both generations, these memories served pronounced teaching, conversational, and identity functions. Despite lower transmission frequency compared to parent–child dyads and a higher proportion of unrecalled stories, substantial joint selection (25.8%) suggests these memories function as shared "family myths" maintained through common significance rather than verbatim detail.

From the grandparents' perspective, transmission reflects a generative effort to bridge generational gaps through the selective sharing of formative, value-laden life stories. Their emphasis on teaching, conversational, and identity functions aligns with the socioemotional selectivity theory, which predicts an increased focus on emotionally meaningful goals and relationships in later life (Carstensen, 2006). The frequent narration of proud and happy experiences further highlights a motivation to transmit legacy moments and affirm generativity in older adulthood (Graham et al., 2020).

Grandchildren, by contrast, actively appropriate these narratives to meet their developmental needs, emphasizing identity functions while selecting memories evoking pride, admiration, and respect. This focus underscores the stories' role in shaping their value systems and identity work. Lower narrative similarity was associated with higher centrality, suggesting that developmental distance fosters interpretive flexibility. Phenomenological vividness provides reconstructive scaffolding, while centrality enables personalization, transforming grandparental legacies into resources for emerging adult identity development.

Taken together, these patterns position grandparent–grandchild transmission as an understudied yet unique conduit for family storytelling. Selective sharing generates mutual benefits despite relational asymmetries: grandparents fulfill generative concerns (Erikson, 1950; Graham et al., 2020), while grandchildren integrate these narratives into their developing sense of self. In contrast to the more frequent and pragmatically oriented exchanges observed in parent–child dyads, the relative scarcity of contact in grandparent–grandchild relationships may expand the space for interpretive reconstruction, thereby amplifying the transformative potential of transmitted memories.

4.4 Intergenerational narratives in autobiographical memory

Now, I am going to integrate these results into the theoretical framework presented in the second chapter (*Chapter 2: Theoretical introduction*), and extend the current models for intergenerational narratives and vicarious memories. This thesis aimed to examine what role intergenerational narratives play in the family, for both the transmitters and the receivers. By directly comparing two types of generational dyads (parent–child and grandparent–grandchild), the studies investigated how storytelling responds to different developmental needs and relational goals across the lifespan. In the theoretical introduction, I argued that vicarious memories can be considered part of autobiographical memory. I will now review arguments for and against this view.

4.4.1 Vicarious memories as autobiographical memory

Based on the Self-Memory System (SMS) model (Conway, 2005; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000) and the Sociocultural Developmental Theory (Nelson & Fivush, 2004), I have argued throughout this thesis that autobiographical memory (AM) is more than the recollection of a past event. Instead, it is a motivated, functional, identity-oriented, and interpretative process that reconstructs and reinterprets experiences in order to weave them into a coherent, goal-oriented life narrative. In this view, the balance described by Conway, Singer, and Tagini (2004) between *self-coherence* (stable self-perception) and *adaptive correspondence* (fidelity with lived experience) tends to swing toward self-coherence, especially once we consider vicarious memories as potential autobiographical memories (Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Pillemer et al., 2024). The vicarious memories presented here are particularly well suited to illustrate this point, because participants were asked to reminisce about important memories from a parent's or grandparent's reminiscence bump (high identity-relevance). This makes them a particularly good case for integration in AM because they can serve identity functions without having to satisfy the same constraints of direct lived experience.

Since vicarious memories are, by definition, not lived firsthand, adaptive correspondence does not seem to be an essential criterion for their autobiographical status. Across our studies, the formation and reconstruction of vicarious memories appeared to depend more on receivers' characteristics than on transmitters' subjective experience. For example, in parent–child dyads, children's elaboration of vicarious memories was predicted by whether they had selected the memory themselves and by how central they judged it to be,

whereas parents' centrality, phenomenology, or emotional valence did not predict elaboration (see Study 4, Table 4). When children perceived a transmitted event as more central—both more accessible and more important for their life story—they produced more elaborated narratives. At the same time, parents' own elaboration remained a strong predictor of children's elaboration, suggesting that rich parental narration provides the minimum scaffolding on which self-coherent reconstruction can build.

For more distant transmitters like grandparents, this scaffolding extends further: their elaboration, phenomenology, and negative valence robustly predicted grandchildren's elaboration, likely serving as a proxy for adaptive correspondence. Here, rather than fidelity to one's own lived experience, receivers rely on a mix of reality monitoring (judging the story's plausibility in real life) and what I would call "vicarious mnemicity" (judging whether it is an actual memory or mere imagination; adapted from Mahr et al. (2023)'s mnemicity), grounded in trust and relational closeness. Recent work supports this view: when raters encounter richly detailed narratives with perceptual and contextual details, they perceive those accounts as more truthful and faithful than sparse ones (Bastin & Geurten, 2026). Thus, transmitters' elaboration and phenomenological vividness become the perceptual "proof" that allows vicarious memories to function autobiographically.

Similar patterns emerged when comparing elaboration across generations. In Study 4, parents' and grandparents' elaboration was only slightly higher than children's and grandchildren's, especially for memories selected by the younger generations. When transmitters selected the memory, receivers' elaboration was somewhat lower. Taken together, these results indicate that when a story is perceived as relevant, young adults can reconstruct narratives about non-lived events in nearly as much detail as the original teller. Vicarious memories are therefore not necessarily impoverished in narrative form: their elaboration depends on their fit with current self-goals rather than on being directly experienced.

Centrality findings further support a functional, self-relevance-based view. In Study 4, vicarious memories received relatively high centrality ratings from children and grandchildren for bottom-up stories. Although these values remain lower than transmitters' centrality for their own selected memories, they show that many vicarious memories are appropriated and integrated as meaningful elements of the receivers' life stories. Receiver centrality also emerged as a stable predictor of reconstruction: children's centrality predicted their own elaboration over and above parents' ratings, and both grandparents' and grandchildren's centrality were negatively associated with dyadic narrative similarity. In

the grandparent–grandchild dyads, memories with higher centrality scores were the ones that diverged most from the original account, as higher centrality in either generation predicted lower similarity. These patterns suggest that when a vicarious memory becomes identity-relevant, reconstruction is guided primarily by self-goals and appropriation, even if this leads to greater distance from the transmitter's version.

The types of memories we collected also support a functional definition of AM. We asked participants to report central episodic memories, yet after coding, both transmitters (for their personal memories) and receivers (for their vicarious memories) most often produced episodic and extended narratives, with repeated-event memories being much less frequent (Study 4). As Conway (2005) describes, AM draws on a hierarchically organized knowledge base, from general life story and lifetime periods to general events and specific episodes. At the same time, Nelson (2003) emphasizes that AM is deeply dependent (perhaps inseparable) from its narrative form. In our data, what people chose to transmit and what receivers remembered rarely took the form of strictly bounded, time-limited episodes, even though we explicitly requested episodic memories. This is particularly striking given that we asked about events from before age 30 for transmitters, which are likely to be old and repeatedly reinterpreted. Transmitters and receivers nonetheless constructed narratives with phenomenological richness and emotional tone, and were able to supply "episodic" details, suggesting that autonoetic-like experiences (Tulving, 2002) are possible even for extended or vicarious accounts. However, the fine-grained distinctions in temporal specificity that matter for episodic memory seem less central for AM, which instead privileges narrative organization and interpretative meaning.

From this perspective, I contend that vicarious memories are governed by similar self-enhancing and self-serving functions as autobiographical memories and follow parallel patterns of storage and reconstruction. The distinction between episodic memory and autobiographical memory developed in *Chapter 1: Autobiographical memory* can be extended to vicarious content as well: not all vicarious memories become autobiographical. Some will be retained primarily for other purposes (e.g., trivia, entertainment) and may gradually be forgotten or semanticized over time, unless they acquire self-relevance, such as learning from someone else's painful experience that "getting kicked by a Muay Thai fighter is something to avoid." In that sense, vicarious memories cross the threshold into AM when they become useful for making sense of the self and guiding future behavior.

Overall, these results support a definition of AM that is highly interpretative and self-oriented. Within this framework, I argue for including vicarious memories within AM

when they reach sufficient self-relevance, in the same way that only some episodic memories become autobiographical when they are integrated into the life story. Our findings show that vicarious memories are strongly driven by self-coherence while still relying, especially for more distant generations like grandparents, on the transmitter's elaboration and phenomenology to meet a basic "reality check"—likely grounded in trust and relationship quality.

Such judgments of trustworthiness draw on multiple cues, including the memory's richness and type of details (e.g., Bastin & Geurten, 2026; Nadel & Simon, 2024; Sporer & Sharman, 2006), the receiver's intrinsic characteristics such as personality traits (Freitag & Bauer, 2016), and the quality of the relationship with the transmitter (Freitag & Traunmüller, 2009). Beyond these reality monitoring processes, I propose "vicarious mnemicity" (extending Mahr et al. (2023)'s concept of mnemicity) as a distinct mechanism: whereas reality monitoring assesses whether a story could plausibly occur in real life, vicarious mnemicity evaluates whether a transmitted story qualifies as an "actual memory" from another's past rather than mere imagination, with trust as its core anchor.

In sum, vicarious memories appear to rely on the same reconstructive processes as personal AM, with selectivity based on identity relevance and current goals. To achieve such relevance, the transmitter must themselves be identity-relevant (typically a family member) and the nature of the relationship should matter. As shown by the differences between parental and grandparental vicarious memories, the role each transmitter plays for the receiver shapes both remembrance and forgetting, as well as the way narratives are reconstructed. From this standpoint, vicarious memories are best understood not as marginal add-ons to AM but as fully embedded components of the autobiographical system whenever they contribute to coherence, guidance, and a sense of belonging.

4.4.2 An integrative model of family transmission

The preceding sections examined parent–child and grandparent–grandchild transmission separately, tracing how each dyadic configuration serves distinct relational and developmental functions. Having established these dyad-specific patterns, I now synthesize these findings into an integrated functional model that positions intergenerational memory transmission as a bidirectional, adaptive system operating across the lifespan. This model builds on the Self-Memory System's framework (Conway, 2005), which emphasizes the tension between adaptive correspondence and self-coherence, but extends it to

account for the unique dynamics that emerge when memories travel across generational boundaries within families. Rather than treating transmission as a simple transfer of information, the model conceptualizes it as a process in which transmitters and receivers engage in parallel but asymmetric acts of autobiographical reconstruction, each shaped by their own developmental needs and relational positions.

I specifically focused on intergenerational narratives (stories of an older generation's past told to a younger generation, Fivush & Kellas, 2025) and, as detailed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3, adopted a functional perspective to compare how different generations benefit from engaging in this particular form of memory sharing.

At its core, the model rests on a fundamental asymmetry: transmitters select from their own autobiographical knowledge base (filtering personal memories through current generative goals, emotional regulation needs, and relational intentions) while receivers encounter these narratives as externally sourced material that must be evaluated, interpreted, and selectively integrated into their own emerging life stories. This asymmetry produces systematically different patterns of elaboration, emotional experience, and functional ratings across generations, as documented throughout Studies 2, 3, and 4. The model therefore distinguishes between two overlapping but non-identical processes: *"generative transmission"*, in which older adults curate their pasts to fulfill teaching, legacy, and connection motives, and *"appropriative reception"*, in which younger adults reconstruct inherited narratives to support identity formation, practical guidance, and coherence with their own self-concepts. Both processes are autobiographical (both involve constructive remembering in service of self-oriented goals) but they operate under different constraints and serve different adaptive functions.

4.4.2.1 Transmitters: Generativity and narrative selection

Across both parent–child and grandparent–grandchild dyads, transmitters consistently reported higher functional ratings than receivers, particularly for teaching and identity functions (Study 2). Building on the detailed patterns described in *section 4.2 Parent-child memory transmission* and *section 4.3 Grandparent-grandchild transmission*, these elevated ratings can be interpreted through theoretical accounts of generativity (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, De St Aubin, & Logan, 1993) and the socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 2006). For middle-aged parents, storytelling represents a central generative act: an opportunity to guide emerging adults through the uncertainties of young adulthood by sharing caution-

ary tales, moral lessons, and examples of resilience drawn from their own youths. In this sense, parents often mobilize adverse or ambivalent memories as teaching tools, whereas grandparents more often rely on positively toned, pride- and happiness-related episodes to sustain a sense of legacy and connection (Studies 2 and 3).

Grandparents' reduced custodial responsibilities, relative to parents, afford them greater narrative flexibility. They can emphasize humor, nostalgia, and family pride without bearing primary responsibility for directive guidance. At the same time, grandparents occupy a unique position as keepers of family history, bridging generational time and linking grandchildren to ancestors, eras, and events that would otherwise remain inaccessible. The memories they transmit thus serve not only personal generative goals but also collective functions, situating the family within broader historical and cultural contexts.

Importantly, both generations of transmitters engaged in a selective process in which not all autobiographical memories are deemed suitable for transmission. This curation is evident in the types of memories selected (Study 4): transmitters overwhelmingly chose episodic and extended narratives over repeated-event memories, suggesting a preference for stories that carry interpretive weight and narrative closure. It is also visible in the emotional and phenomenological profiles of transmitted memories. Although transmitters reported vivid, phenomenologically rich recollections (Study 4), their selections were filtered through current relational goals. Memories that could serve teaching functions, reinforce family identity, or maintain intimacy were prioritized, while those lacking clear functional relevance (even if possibly personally significant) were less likely to be shared. This filtering process aligns with the working self's role in the SMS (Conway, 2005): the working self organizes retrieval around current goals, and in the context of family storytelling, those goals are inherently social and relational.

4.4.2.2 Receivers: Appropriation and reconstruction

Receivers, by contrast, do not select which stories they hear, but they do select which stories they remember and how they remember them. Across both dyadic configurations, receivers' vicarious memories were characterized by moderate-to-high elaboration (Study 4), often approaching transmitters' own narrative detail when the story was perceived as personally relevant. Elaboration depended primarily on receivers' own centrality ratings: when children or grandchildren judged a transmitted story as central to their life narrative (both highly accessible and identity-relevant) they produced richly detailed, coherent

accounts (Study 4). In parent–child dyads, children's centrality predicted their own elaboration over and above any features of the parents' original account, including the parents' centrality, phenomenology, or emotional valence. This pattern suggests that appropriation (the process by which a vicarious memory becomes autobiographical) is driven foremost by self-coherence demands rather than by fidelity to the transmitter's experience.

For more distant transmitters like grandparents, receivers' elaboration also depended on features of the original narrative (especially its phenomenological vividness and elaboration) highlighting that transmitter-side richness supports the construction of vicarious memories (Study 4). These transmitter features likely function as proxies for adaptive coherence. Since the receiver does not access the original event, they rely on such narrative characteristics as cues to scaffold their mental representation. This could be helped by what I termed *vicarious mnemicity*: a reality-monitoring process through which receivers evaluate whether a transmitted narrative qualifies as an actual memory from another's past, rather than imagination, exaggeration, or folklore. Building on Mahr et al. (2023)'s concept of mnemicity (the subjective sense that a mental representation refers to a genuinely experienced event), vicarious mnemicity extends this judgment to others' narratives. When grandparents narrate stories with high phenomenological detail (vividness, sensory details, temporal coherence, beliefs in accuracy) it eases the reconstruction processes for the receivers. Recent evidence supports this interpretation: raters judge phenomenologically rich narratives as more truthful and faithful than sparse ones (Bastin & Geurten, 2026). Thus, transmitters' elaboration and vividness serve as perceptual cues that allow vicarious memories to function autobiographically, providing the correspondence anchor that justifies their integration into receivers' life stories.

This reliance on transmitter cues was asymmetric across dyadic types. In parent–child dyads, parents' elaboration predicted children's elaboration, but parents' centrality and phenomenology did not (Study 4). Children appeared to trust their parents' accounts with minimal reality monitoring, perhaps because frequent contact and shared life contexts render parental stories inherently plausible. For grandparents, however, whose stories often reference distant historical periods and unfamiliar life circumstances, receivers required stronger phenomenological scaffolding. Grandparents' vividness and elaboration thus become the bridge between correspondence and coherence, enabling grandchildren to incorporate stories from eras they never witnessed into their own identity work.

Once appropriated, vicarious memories undergo similar reconstructive processes to those that govern personal autobiographical memory. Receivers reshape inherited nar-

ratives to align with current self-views, moral frameworks, and emotional needs. The emotion–function correlations (Study 3) are consistent with this view: transmitters' negative emotions (sadness, fear, anger) predominantly support coping, closure, and legacy motives (bitterness revival, death preparation, intimacy maintenance), whereas receivers' negative emotions (indignation, anger, sadness) are more tightly tied to problem-solving, teaching, and identity work. Similarly, receivers' positive emotions (respect, admiration, happiness) strongly predicted identity and teaching functions, underscoring the role of vicarious pride and family admiration in sustaining intergenerational bonds and transmitting values, while transmitters' positive emotions (happiness, pride, respect) were particularly linked to teaching.

4.4.2.3 The correspondence–coherence balance across generations

Our findings can be interpreted through the lens of the differential balance between adaptive correspondence and self-coherence (Conway, 2005; Conway et al., 2004) across dyadic types. As shown in Study 4 (and previously discussed), narrative similarity was relatively high in parent–child dyads, suggesting that children's vicarious memories lean toward correspondence (staying close to parents' original accounts). Parents' positive valence, however, negatively predicted similarity, indicating that when parents narrated positive stories, children were more likely to diverge. This may reflect children's tendency to appropriate positive parental experiences as aspirational templates, reshaping them to fit their own emerging goals.

In grandparent–grandchild dyads, similarity was significantly lower overall (Study 4), and centrality ratings from both generations negatively predicted similarity. When either grandparents or grandchildren judged a memory as highly central, divergence increased. This pattern suggests that identity-relevant vicarious memories prioritize self-coherence over correspondence: grandchildren reconstruct stories to serve their own narrative needs, even when this produces substantial deviation from grandparents' versions. The lower similarity in grandparent–grandchild dyads thus reflects not transmission failure but successful identity work: grandchildren transform inherited narratives into personally meaningful components of their own life stories.

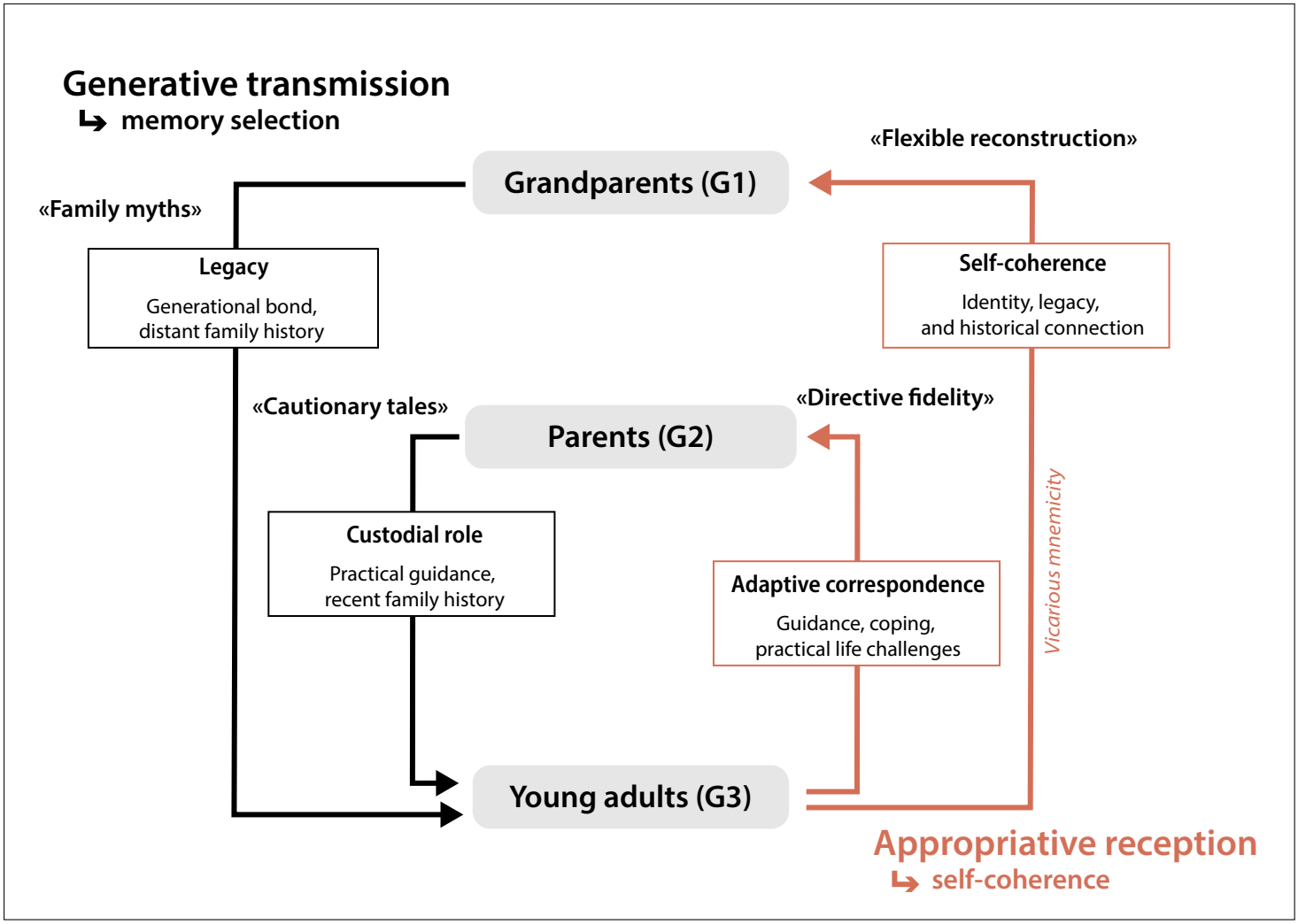
The divergent similarity patterns across dyads align with the functional differentiation described in earlier sections. Parental transmission, embedded in everyday custodial interactions, serves primarily directive functions—offering guidance, warnings, and models

for navigating proximal life challenges. For these functions to succeed, receivers must retain enough correspondence to extract applicable lessons; substantial distortion would undermine the story's pragmatic utility. Grandparental transmission, by contrast, serves identity, legacy, and historical connection functions. These narratives link receivers to family myths, cultural heritage, and moral exemplars from the past. Such stories are not meant to be replicated in detail but rather to be appropriated and woven into the receivers' evolving sense of who they are and where they come from.

4.4.2.4 Toward an integrated model

Integrating these patterns, the functional model proposes that intergenerational memory transmission operates as a dynamic, lifespan-embedded system in which each generation's participation is shaped by their developmental position and relational investment. Middle-aged parents transmit memories that balance teaching with emotional authenticity, drawing on their own youths to provide directive scaffolding for emerging adults. Their storytelling is frequent, pragmatic, and emotionally mixed, reflecting both their custodial responsibilities and their ongoing identity work as parents. Older grandparents, guided by socioemotional selectivity and legacy motives, transmit stories that emphasize positive family identity, historical continuity, and intergenerational connection. Their narratives are less frequent but more emotionally positive and historically distant, serving to anchor the family's collective story across multiple generations. This model is represented in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Integrative model of intergenerational family narratives transmission.



Note. Integrative model of central intergenerational memory transmission within families, illustrating how parents and grandparents select, shape, and share autobiographical memories, and how young adults appropriate these stories as vicarious memories.

For receivers, developmental stages shape appropriation priorities. Emerging adults, navigating identity formation and autonomy development (Arnett, 2000), approach vicarious memories as resources for self-construction. They selectively remember and reconstruct stories that resonate with current identity concerns, relational needs, and practical challenges. The asymmetry in centrality ratings across dyad members (Study 4) underscores this selectivity: both transmitters and receivers reported higher centrality scores for the memories they had selected. Each generation privileged memories that served their own self-oriented goals: transmitters selecting stories that fulfilled generative and legacy motives, receivers selecting stories that supported identity exploration and coping.

This selectivity extends to unknown memories. Although most transmitted memories

persisted in receivers' vicarious recall (Study 4), a subset (particularly those selected solely by transmitters) was forgotten (or the transmitter misremembered transmitting the story). Forgetting rates were higher in grandparent–grandchild dyads than in parent–child dyads, consistent with the inference that more distant generational relationships and less frequent contact reduce narrative consolidation. Yet, even when remembered, vicarious memories exhibited substantial reconstructive flexibility. The negative association between centrality and similarity in grandparent–grandchild dyads (Study 4) suggests that the most identity-relevant vicarious memories are also the most heavily reconstructed, transformed through repeated retrieval and reinterpretation to align with evolving self-narratives.

Finally, the model situates intergenerational transmission within broader sociocultural contexts. The Sociocultural Developmental Theory (Nelson & Fivush, 2004) emphasizes that autobiographical memory develops through social interaction and cultural scaffolding. In individualist cultural contexts, where personal identity and self-development are prioritized, younger generations are encouraged (implicitly and explicitly) to appropriate family narratives in service of their own self-construction. This cultural framing legitimizes the reconstructive flexibility observed in our data: divergence from transmitters' accounts is not deviation but developmental work. Transmitters, too, operate within these cultural expectations. By narrating their pasts to younger generations, they fulfill culturally scripted generative roles, reinforcing family continuity while simultaneously granting receivers permission to interpret and transform those stories as they construct their own autobiographies.

In sum, the functional model of family memory transmission conceptualizes intergenerational storytelling as a bidirectional, developmentally embedded process in which both transmitters and receivers engage in autobiographically motivated reconstruction. Transmitters curate their pasts through generative and socioemotional lenses, selecting narratives that fulfill teaching, legacy, and relational connection goals. Receivers evaluate, appropriate, and reconstruct these narratives, guided by identity needs, pragmatic concerns, and vicarious mnemicity judgments. The balance between correspondence and coherence shifts across dyadic types and relational contexts, with parental transmission favoring directive fidelity and grandparental transmission enabling identity-oriented transformation. Together, these processes sustain family narratives across generations while allowing each generation to construct coherent, goal-directed life stories that integrate both lived and inherited pasts.

4.5 Limits

This work is not without caveats, which constrain the scope of our theoretical propositions. In this section, I present three main limitations: memory selection, memory content, and sampled population.

First, as already mentioned, our empirical work focuses on a particular subset of vicarious memories. The familial context of the studies and the explicit reference to "intergenerational transmission of memory in the family" in the recruitment materials may have primed participants' family identity, leading to an overestimation of the importance of these intergenerational memories for identity compared to other contexts. In this already identity-primed setting, participants were further asked to focus on the most central memories (for themselves and/or their family). My theoretical propositions therefore concern self-relevant vicarious memories, which are plausible candidates for inclusion within autobiographical memory. However, not *all* vicarious memories reach this level of centrality; one might argue that only a relatively small subset is truly identity-defining, whereas other, less self-relevant vicarious memories may be forgotten or semanticized, much like non-central episodic personal memories.

Beyond selection, our work did not delve deeply into the content of these memories. The general measures used here could not capture more fine-grained qualitative differences. For instance, although parents and grandparents both reported high levels of value transmission, we do not know which specific values were involved, nor whether parents and grandparents emphasized similar or distinct sets of values. More globally, a systematic content analysis of the stories would substantially enrich our findings. A closer examination of the themes of the narratives, and of how specific topics map onto particular functions, would allow for a more precise and differentiated model of intergenerational memory transmission.

Similarly, the narration itself remains an underexplored dimension. Prior work on narrative coherence has shown that the way personal memories are told is tightly linked to developmental and adjustment outcomes (e.g., Reese et al., 2011). Future research could therefore fruitfully examine additional narrative variables (e.g., coherence, emotional language, cognitive terms) and their relations to successful transmission, operationalized as elaboration and dyadic similarity, as well as to the functions and uses of vicarious memories. Such analyses would increase the sensitivity of the model to how form and content shape intergenerational remembering.

Finally, our sampling strategy and population characteristics limit the generalizability of the present findings. Participants were primarily recruited from "traditional" family structures (heterosexual nuclear and blended families), and dyads who volunteered for the studies typically reported good relationships, which is not necessarily representative of the general population. As a result, the present conclusions apply mainly to families that are functioning relatively well from a relational perspective. Additionally, our analyses did not examine gender differences, despite prior work on elaborative reminiscing which underscored important gender dynamics (Bakir-Demir et al., 2020; Fivush & Zaman, 2013; Merrill, Gallo, & Fivush, 2015). Our samples lacked balance for crossed analyses (e.g., mother–daughter vs. father–son dyads) and did not allow for gender comparisons. Future research should explore whether same-gender pairs exhibit higher similarity or elaboration, potentially via gendered transmission of emotional content or relational stakes.

It would also be important to investigate other family forms and more marginalized groups. For instance, previous work has highlighted how cultural norms and minority stress shape memory transmission among queer communities (e.g., Assmann, 2025). Our focus on French-speaking Belgians further excludes families with other cultural, linguistic, and migratory backgrounds, including those in which generations do not share the same culture or language. Extending this work to more diverse family constellations and cultural settings is thus essential for testing the robustness and boundary conditions of the proposed model.

4.6 Conclusion and future directions

This thesis has traced a pathway through which autobiographical memories become intergenerational narratives. Stories selected by older generations and appropriated by younger ones to construct coherent, goal-directed life stories. By examining both transmitters (parents and grandparents) and receivers (children and grandchildren) within dyadic configurations, we revealed how family storytelling operates as a bidirectional, lifespan-embedded system. Transmitters engage in generative storytelling, filtering their autobiographical stories base through teaching, legacy, and relational motives shaped by generativity (Erikson, 1963; McAdams et al., 1993) and socioemotional selectivity (Carstensen, 2006). Receivers, in turn, appropriate these narratives via reconstruction processes guided by self-coherence demands (Conway, 2005), centrality judgments, and practical learning.

Several contributions emerge from this systemic perspective. First, our intra- and inter-

dyadic comparisons highlight complementary narrative roles across generations. Middle-aged parents prioritize directive and social functions, transmitting pragmatically mixed memories to scaffold emerging adults' decision-making, while later-life grandparents emphasize identity and historical continuity through positively toned family myths, affording greater reconstructive flexibility for grandchildren. Second, by documenting predictors of elaboration and similarity, we demonstrate that vicarious memories are not secondary or impoverished but actively elaborated when self-relevant. The asymmetry in similarity patterns underscores that transmission success lies not in verbatim replication but in enabling identity work: younger generations retain fidelity for pragmatic guidance but prioritize coherence for legacy narratives.

These findings extend the Self-Memory System (Conway, 2005) by showing how the correspondence–coherence balance shifts across relational contexts while reinforcing a functional view of autobiographical memory. Following other researchers' perspective (Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Pillemer et al., 2024) I argued for vicarious narratives to cross into AM when serving self-oriented goals. Critically, examining both sides of the dyad reveals that centrality asymmetries reflect parallel autobiographical processes: each generation privileges memories aligned with its working self.

In this light, intergenerational transmission is no mere relay of facts but a generative dialogue: one that sustains family bonds, transmits values, and equips each generation to navigate its unique developmental horizon. By bridging empirical patterns with theoretical frameworks, this work illuminates how the past shapes the present, not through passive inheritance, but through active, self-serving reconstruction.

4.6.0.1 Future directions

While this thesis provides a foundational model, it also opens many research directions for future exploration. Building on the limitations outlined above, I propose several possible clues for future directions.

First, systematic content analysis of narratives could reveal thematic patterns distinguishing parental versus grandparental stories, clarifying how content mediates functional differences. For instance, parental teaching may emphasize pragmatic lessons, whereas grandparental teaching focuses more on cultural or moral values. Similar distinctions might emerge for receivers' vicarious memories.

Second, longitudinal designs could track how vicarious memories evolve over time.

Do centrally rated grandparental stories gain or lose elaboration as grandchildren transition into parenthood? How do memory functions shift (e.g., from problem-solving in emerging adulthood to social functions in midlife)? Such studies would test the model's dynamic predictions—examining whether reconstructed narratives stabilize or diverge further, and whether they integrate into full life stories (Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011; Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011). Given the self-orientation of memory in our model, vicarious memories should follow developmental memory stages. For instance, a vicarious memory originally remembered for teaching/identity reasons in emerging adulthood would shift toward more social functions (empathy, bond maintenance) later in life, when identity construction becomes less salient.

Third, broader associations merit investigation: how are centrally elaborated vicarious memories linked to well-being outcomes (e.g., identity achievement, reduced anxiety)? One promising avenue connects intergenerational transmission to future thinking, where constructivist theorists link past reconstruction to prospective simulations (e.g., D'Argembeau, 2020). Transmitted family narratives may thus enhance prospection coherence or family continuity motives, potentially extending prior links between intergenerational connections (perspective-taking) and stable identity (Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011). A stronger link to the past (by way of more vicarious memories from grandparents or parents) could facilitate future projection when these memories support healthy identity construction.

Do vicarious memories appear in life-story interviews as turning points? Future studies could ask participants to write important past events that led to who they are today, examining whether they naturally include vicarious memories and how. I would argue that, due to Western cultural socialization, people are not accustomed to positioning vicarious memories as central (Nelson, 2003), though this may differ in other cultures or when family contexts are primed. Comparing well-being and identity construction between those who include vicarious memories and those who do not would further illuminate their adaptive role.

These directions would extend the functional model, illuminating how family narratives (as living bridges between past and future) adapt to diverse lives while preserving their core adaptive power.

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