

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

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Abstract

Intergenerational memories help shape identity, transmit values, and sustain family relationships. Across three 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, Habermas, Waters, & Zaman, 2011;

Habermas & 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 & 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, Bohanek, & Marin, 2010; Fivush, Habermas, et al., 2011; Merrill, Booker, & Fivush, 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 & Alea, 2002; Bluck, Alea, Habermas, & Rubin, 2005; Sow, Dijkstra, & Janssen, 2023), we adopt the first, more descriptive sense of the term, that is, "what do individuals use their memories of life for?" (Bluck & 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 & 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, Baron, Ainsworth, Gesselman, & Gold, 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 & Alea, 2002; D. 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 mem-

ory functions. Using the Reminiscence Functions Scale (RFS; Robitaille, Cappeliez, Coulombe, & Webster, 2010; Webster, 1993, 1997), 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 & Alea, 2011; Bluck et al., 2005), using factor analyses to explore potential overlaps and unify these frameworks (Bluck et al., 2005; Harris, Rasmussen, & Berntsen, 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 & 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 common and spontaneous part of everyday conversations (Fivush & Merrill, 2016). For example, Bohanek et al. (2009) found that narratives about past events arise approximately every five minutes during family dinners. Through these exchanges, families co-construct their understanding of the world, validate one another’s emotions, and foster a sense of belonging both as a family and as individuals (Fivush, Duke, Candler, & Bohanek, 2010). Extending this work, recent research has shown that family storytelling also supports children’s identity development and learning by embedding domains such as science and nature within caregivers’ personal narratives (Bühler-Wassman et al., in press). Consistent with the central role of storytelling in family life, a recent study found that grandparents, parents, and grandchildren all perceived intergenerational memory transmission as a relatively frequent occurrence within their families (Baudet, Cordonnier,

Luminet, & Bastin, 2025).

Beyond personal stories, families also engage in discussions about broader historical events, shaping how these events are remembered and understood across generations. Cordonnier, Rosoux, Gijssels, and Luminet (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 & Manier, 2008). Research on intergenerational sharing of trauma highlights that sharing difficult collective experiences can foster mutual understanding, resilience, and connection when narratives are transmitted within supportive relationships (McLean & Weststrate, in press).

Several studies have examined how major historical events, such as World War II (Cordonnier, Bouchat, Hirst, & Luminet, 2021; Pohn-Lauggas, 2021; Stone, van der Haegen, Luminet, & Hirst, 2014), the Holocaust (Auerhahn & Laub, 1998; Wiseman, Metzl, & Barber, 2006), or the wars in the former Yugoslavia (Svob, Brown, Takšić, Katulić, & Žauhar, 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 & Fivush, 2008). Family historical memories can serve both personal and collective functions, particularly for identity, social connection, and behavioural guidance, with these functions varying according to the content of the narratives (Cordonnier & Luminet, in press).

Furthermore, Gu, Tse, and Brown (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 & 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 & 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, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Fivush & Salmon, 2023; Merrill & 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 & Salmon, 2023; Merrill & Fivush, 2016; Nelson & 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, Berlin, McDermott Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003; Fivush et al., 2006; Salmon & 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 & 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, Cullen, Fivush, Wang, & Reese, 2021; Duke, Lazarus, & Fivush, 2008; Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011; Fivush, Duke, et al., 2010; Merrill, Srinivas, & Fivush, 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, Wang, & Koh, 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, Reese, & Sahin-Acar, 2020; Reese, Fivush, Merrill, Wang, & McAnally, 2017).

This idea that people use relatives' stories as important sources of knowledge for them-

selves relates to the concept of vicarious memory. Vicarious memory refers to the recollection of specific events and detailed stories recounted by others (D. B. Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015; D. B. Pillemer, Thomsen, & Fivush, 2024). 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 (D. B. Pillemer et al., 2015; Pond & 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 & Rotkirch, 2018, for a review). For instance, Pratt, Norris, Hebblethwaite, and Arnold (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, Liu, & Umberson, 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 & 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 & 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 & 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, Lavalley, and O'Rourke (2001) found that young adults more frequently endorsed 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, Cappeliez, Canham, & O'Rourke, 2019; O'Rourke, Cappeliez, & Claxton, 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, Dias, & Sousa, 2023). Additionally, Graham, Rahm-Knigge, and Conner (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 & Alea, 2009; Vranić, Jelić, & Tonković, 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 the third analyzed the data from the first two studies, comparing the two types of generational dyads. Based on the literature (Demiray & 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.

- *Study 3*

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) $\times$ 2 (Event type: public vs. personal) $\times$ 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 ques-

tionnaire 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, Kuhn, & Haque, 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 & 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 & 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>I told that story ...</i>	<i>This story allows me ...</i>
<i>Bitterness revival</i>	So I don’t forget old wounds	To not forget old wounds
<i>Boredom reduction</i>	To pass the time	To pass the time
<i>Conversation</i>	To create/facilitate discussion	To create/facilitate discussion
<i>Death preparation</i>	To help me cope with my mortality	To help me cope with my mortality
<i>Identity</i>	To know where I come from	To know where I come from
<i>Intimacy maintenance</i>	To remember someone who has passed away	To remember someone who has passed away
<i>Problem solving</i>	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
<i>Teaching</i>	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 fit¹. Therefore, generalized linear mixed models (GLMM) were employed to account for the gamma distribution and the repeated-measures design. 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 & 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 & 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* ~ *Func-*

¹To 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.

tion + 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 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.

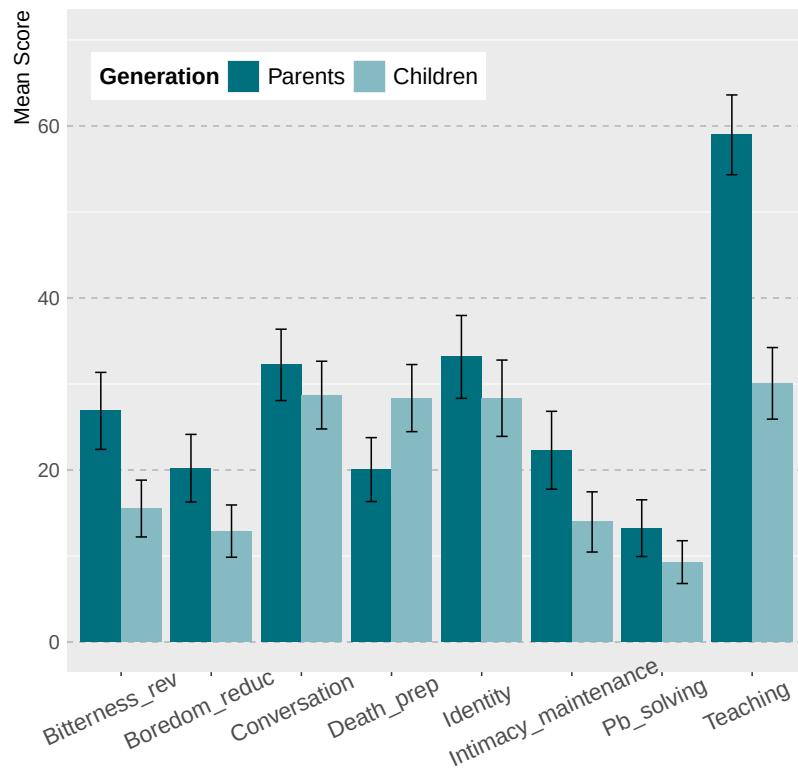
²The “||” notation is used to remove correlations among factors in afex package (Singmann, Bolker, Westfall, Aust, & Ben-Shachar, 2024).

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

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

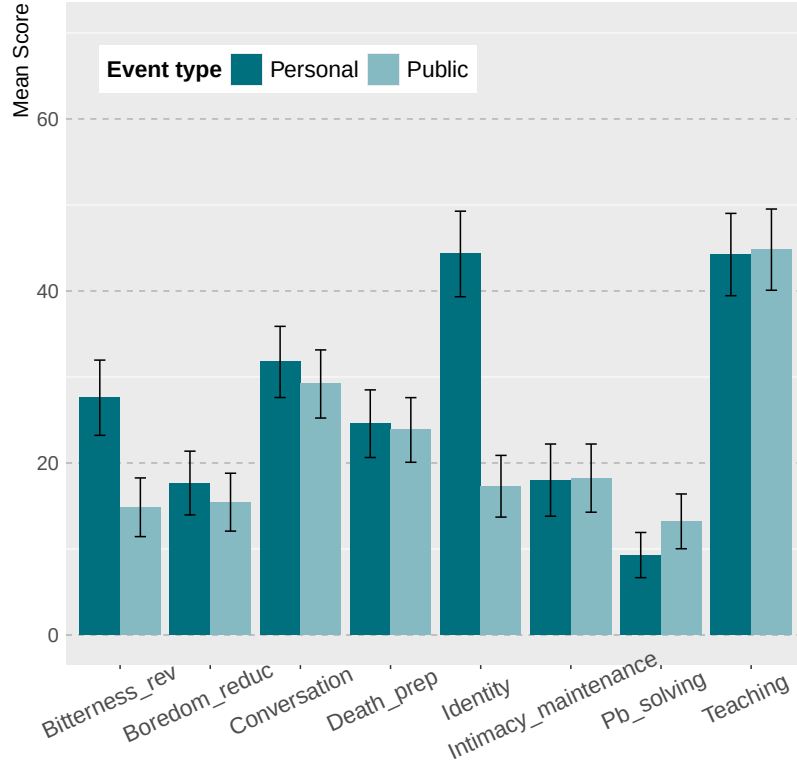
Note. Centrality refers to CES scores. All scores ranged from 0 to 100. Standard deviations are given between parentheses.

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], $z = 2.71$, $p = .0007$, 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	
	<u>Public – Personal</u>		<u>Parent – Child</u>	
	Estimate (β)	Odds Ratio	Estimate (β)	Odds Ratio
<i>Bitterness revival</i>	-0.97 [-1.28, -0.66]	0.38 [0.29, 0.52]	0.76 [0.34, 1.17]	2.13 [1.41, 3.22]
<i>Boredom reduction</i>	-0.24 [-0.61, 0.13]	0.79 [0.54, 1.14]	0.97 [0.24, 1.71]	2.65 [1.27, 5.51]
<i>Conversation</i>	-0.14 [-0.45, 0.18]	0.87 [0.64, 1.20]	0.36 [-0.29, 1.00]	1.43 [0.75, 2.74]
<i>Death preparation</i>	-0.02 [-0.35, 0.31]	0.98 [0.70, 1.36]	-0.73 [-1.53, 0.08]	0.48 [0.22, 1.08]
<i>Identity</i>	1.56 [-1.94, -1.19]	0.21 [0.14, 0.31]	0.14 [-0.39, 0.66]	1.15 [0.68, 1.94]
<i>Intimacy maintenance</i>	0.01 [-0.39, 0.41]	1.01 [0.68, 1.50]	1.04 [0.27, 1.81]	2.82 [1.31, 6.09]
<i>Problem solving</i>	0.40 [0.05, 0.75]	1.49 [1.06, 2.11]	0.46 [-0.47, 1.38]	1.58 [0.63, 3.98]
<i>Teaching</i>	-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, De St Aubin, & Logan, 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 expe-

periences 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 & 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 & 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, Leach, & Murphy, 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
<i>Centrality</i>	62.6 (27.9)	42.5 (26.2)	42.5 (24.5)	25.5 (20.0)
Functions				
<i>Bitterness revival</i>	34.5 (36.8)	20.9 (31.3)	19.9 (30.4)	9.6 (20.1)
<i>Boredom reduction</i>	23.8 (34.1)	15.3 (26.2)	13.8 (26.8)	10.5 (23.7)
<i>Conversation</i>	38.9 (34.3)	37.0 (34.0)	39.7 (33.9)	37.4 (28.6)
<i>Death preparation</i>	22.0 (31.1)	19.2 (30.0)	38.2 (33.2)	37.7 (31.0)
<i>Identity</i>	45.4 (41.2)	28.3 (36.9)	48.2 (37.5)	21.9 (30.6)
<i>Intimacy maintenance</i>	31.4 (40.8)	16.1 (30.3)	19.0 (33.5)	13.0 (29.2)
<i>Problem solving</i>	8.8 (23.2)	6.3 (17.7)	7.1 (20.4)	5.6 (16.3)
<i>Teaching</i>	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.

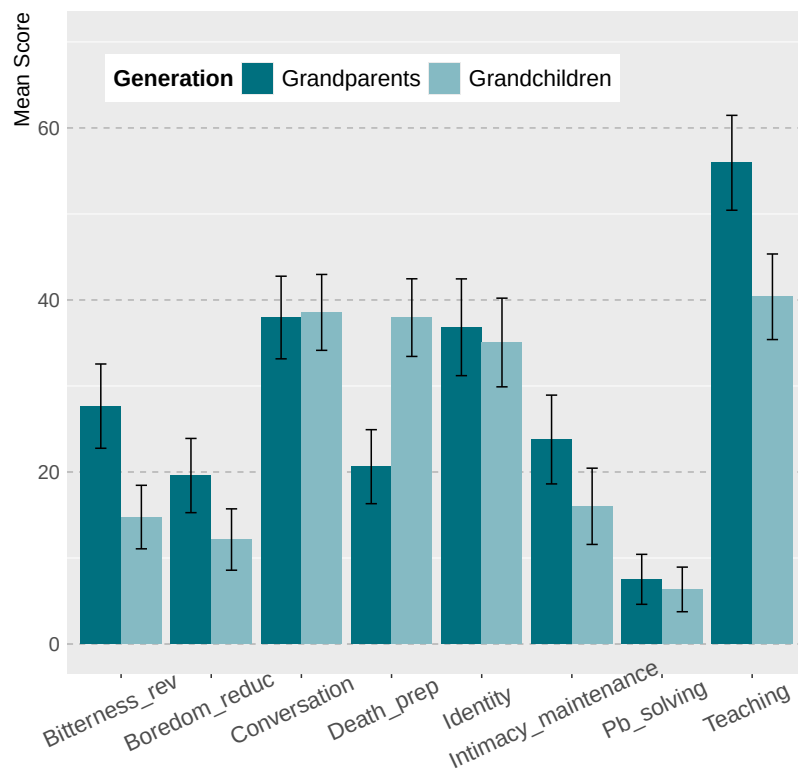
However, these effects must be interpreted in light of a significant interaction between generation and event type, indicating that the generational difference in how memories are used varies depending on whether the memory concerns a personal or a public event.

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.

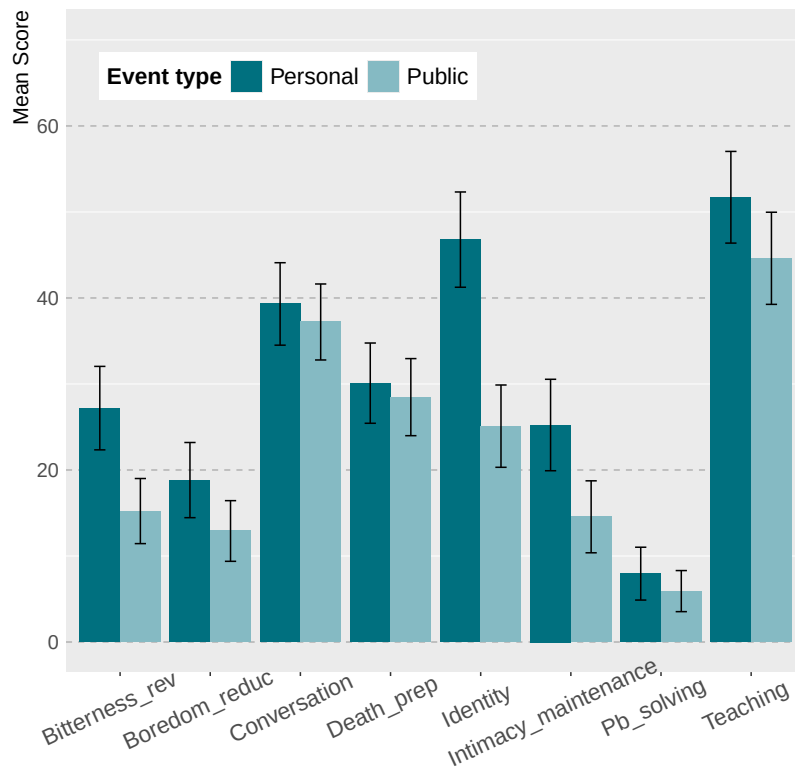
Taken together, these results indicate that grandparents see their stories as serving several relational and pedagogical purposes (such as passing on lessons, maintaining closeness, or sharing emotionally difficult past experiences) more strongly than grandchildren report actually using these vicarious 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	
	<i>Public – Personal</i>		<i>Grandparents – Grandchildren</i>	
	<i>Estimate (β)</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>	<i>Estimate (β)</i>	<i>Odds Ratio</i>
<i>Bitterness revival</i>	-0.84 [-1.17, -0.51]	0.43 [0.31, 0.60]	0.69 [0.28, 1.09]	1.99 [1.33, 2.97]
<i>Boredom reduction</i>	-0.43 [-0.82, -0.05]	0.65 [0.44, 0.95]	1.79 [0.66, 2.91]	5.96 [1.94, 18.34]
<i>Conversation</i>	-0.05 [-0.36, 0.27]	0.96 [0.70, 1.31]	-0.08 [-0.48, 0.32]	0.93 [0.62, 1.38]
<i>Death preparation</i>	-0.09 [-0.43, 0.24]	0.91 [0.65, 1.27]	-1.21 [-1.80, -0.62]	0.30 [0.17, 0.54]
<i>Identity</i>	-0.65 [-0.97, -0.33]	0.52 [0.38, 0.72]	-0.12 [-0.52, 0.27]	0.88 [0.59, 1.31]
<i>Intimacy maintenance</i>	-0.61 [-1.00, -0.21]	0.55 [0.37, 0.81]	1.14 [0.09, 2.19]	3.11 [1.09, 8.90]
<i>Problem solving</i>	0.06 [-0.30, 0.42]	1.06 [0.74, 1.52]	1.07 [-0.02, 2.16]	2.92 [0.98, 8.69]
<i>Teaching</i>	-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 & 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, Rit-tenour, & Lin, 2012; Soliz & 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 & Giles, 2017; Soliz & 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 Study 3: Comparing transmission from parents and grandparents

While Studies 1 and 2 respectively examined parent–child and grandparent–grandchild pairs, Study 3 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

In this study, 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. grand-

parent; 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

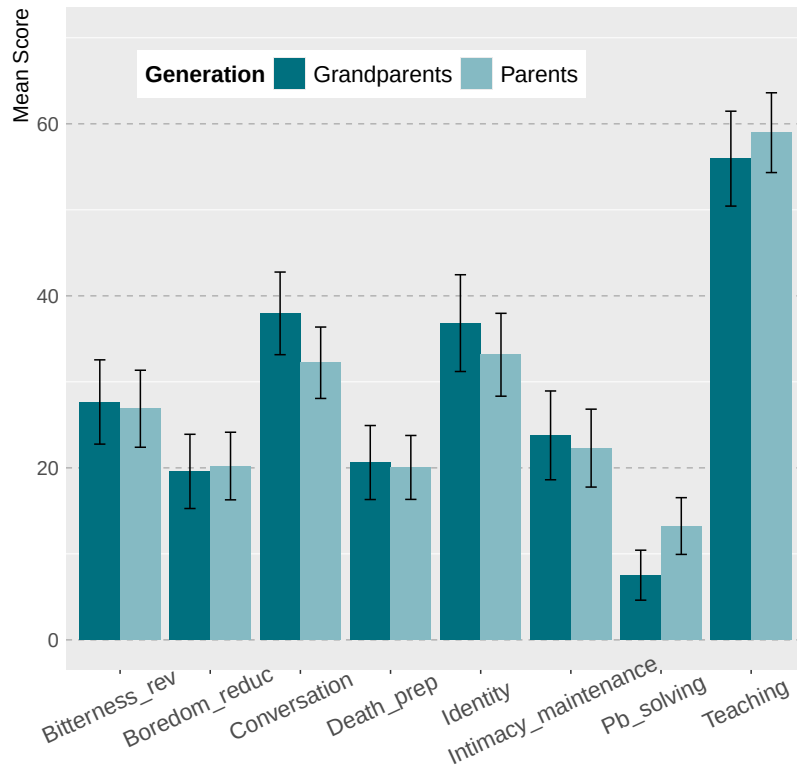
4.2.1 Parents vs. Grandparents

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.

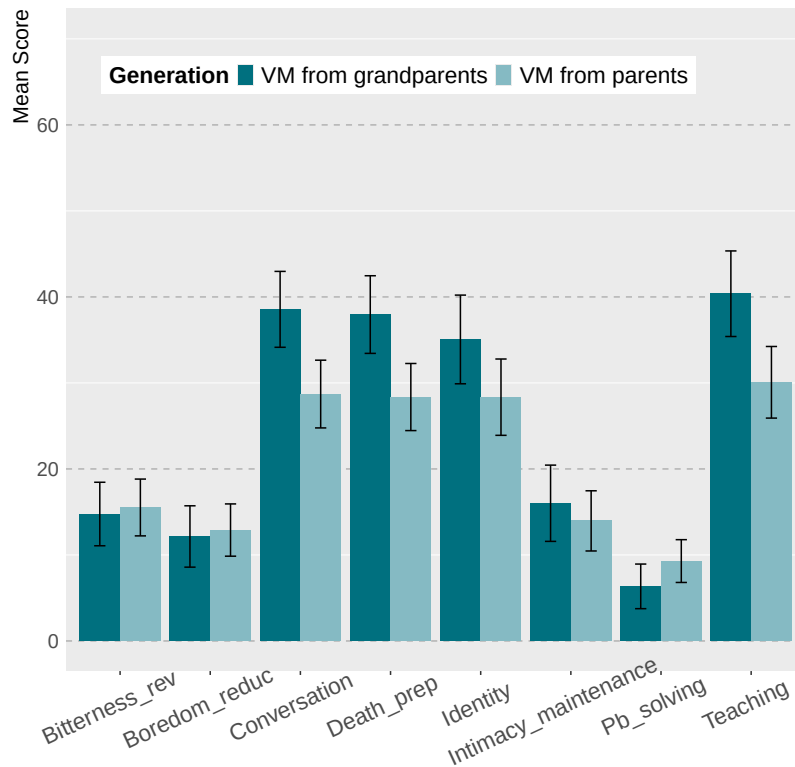
There was a main effect of event type on the overall function scores ($\beta_{\text{Public-Personal}} = -0.34$, 95% CI $[-0.47, -0.21]$, $z = -5.21$, $p < .0001$, OR = 0.71, 95% CI $[0.62, 0.81]$): across both sources, personal stories were perceived as more functionally meaningful than public ones.

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 study, 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 & 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 meaningful 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, Norris, Lawford, & Arnold, 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 three studies, 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. Study 3 directly compared parents and grandparents as transmitters, and children and grandchildren as receivers, making it possible to examine how the functions of in-

tergenerational 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, particularly for teaching and conversation. This finding converges with recent work showing that family historical memories support both personal and collective functions, helping families construct shared identities while transmitting lessons drawn from collective history (Cordonnier & Luminet, in press; 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 & Fivush, 2016; Newton & 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 D. B. Pillemer et al. (2015, 2024), 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, Bohanek, & Marin, 2010; Fivush & Merrill, 2016; Jones & Ackerman, 2018; Merrill & Fivush, 2016). Moreover, numerous past studies showed correlations between adolescents' knowledge about their parents' stories and their well-being (Chen et al., 2021; Fivush, Bohanek, & Zaman, 2011; Fivush, Duke, et al., 2010; Fivush & 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. This interpretation is consistent with recent work showing that autobiographical meaning making is enhanced through the social disclosure of memories and supportive interpersonal interactions (Camia, in press).

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 & 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 & Lin, 2014; Stephan, 2024).

Between-transmitters (Study 3) comparison revealed that parents and grandparents did not differ in the functions they attributed to the memories they transmitted. Despite theoretical expectations based on generativity peaking in midlife (Harris & 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) and with recent work showing that in later life, autobiographical storytelling provides an opportunity to shape a meaningful legacy for one's family by communicating values and life lessons through personal narratives (Cogdill-Richardson, Whiacre, & Bluck, in press).

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 & 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, Reese, Sahin-Acar, and Taumoepeau (2023) found that women, particularly grandmothers, are more likely to emphasize social relationships and adopt the perspectives of others in their storytelling. Similarly, Fivush, Marin, McWilliams, and Bohanek (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 differ-

ences. 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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