

Self-Defining Memories and Future Self-Continuity: A Qualitative Study in Emerging Adulthood

Paulo. Castro-Medina^{1*}, Juan Pablo. Saravia²

¹ Senior Researcher, Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Cuernavaca, Mexico

² Department of Psychology, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, Lima, Peru

* Corresponding author email address: Paulocastro@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore how emerging adults in Mexico narrate self-defining memories and how these narratives shape their sense of continuity with their envisioned future selves.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the narrative and temporal processes that support future self-continuity. Twenty emerging adults (12 women and 8 men) aged 18–29 years from various regions of Mexico were recruited through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews focused on personally significant life events, emotional interpretations, and future identity projections. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, and NVivo 14 software was used to support systematic coding and organization of emerging categories.

Findings: Analysis revealed three main thematic domains: (1) narrative foundations of identity, including formative turning points, emotional markers of the past, and value anchors; (2) bridging present and future selves, encompassing vision of future identity, continuity across time, and agency over life direction; and (3) social and cultural context shaping self, involving family influence, cultural belonging, and negotiation of societal expectations. Participants demonstrated an active process of meaning-making, reframing adverse experiences into resilience-building narratives and integrating cultural heritage with personal aspirations. Rich, detailed self-defining memories supported optimism and future planning, while vague or fragmented narratives were linked to uncertainty and anxiety about adulthood.

Conclusion: Emerging adults' self-defining memories serve as psychological resources that maintain identity coherence and promote future self-continuity. Culturally embedded narrative reflection may strengthen resilience, self-agency, and adaptive life planning during the transition to adulthood.

Keywords: Autobiographical memory; self-defining memories; future self-continuity; emerging adulthood; narrative identity; cultural psychology

1. Introduction

The transition into emerging adulthood, typically between late adolescence and the late twenties, is marked by intense self-exploration and the consolidation of personal identity. During this life stage, individuals increasingly work to integrate their past, present, and envisioned future selves into a coherent life narrative. Central to this process are self-defining memories—autobiographical episodes imbued with personal meaning, emotional significance, and enduring life themes. These memories act as narrative anchors, helping people situate who they have been with who they hope to become (Fivush & Waters, 2019; Singer, 2022). They serve as psychological resources that reinforce a stable sense of self across time (Roß et al., 2019; Rubin, 2019), a process especially crucial when facing the uncertainties and decisions that define emerging adulthood (Prescott & Dominey, 2024; Wang, 2025).

Autobiographical memory is central to constructing and maintaining identity because it transforms lived experience into a meaningful story about the self (Grilli & Ryan, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2020). Self-defining memories are not static records of past events but dynamic, meaning-laden constructions that weave together emotion, identity concerns, and long-term goals (Cantó-Milà et al., 2024; Zifla et al., 2025). These memories often form around key life turning points such as educational breakthroughs, family transitions, or culturally significant rites of passage (Bauer et al., 2019; Freyermuth, 2025). They give emerging adults a sense of narrative backbone to adapt to changing roles and responsibilities (Hetherington & Atherton, 2023; Roß et al., 2024). Yet, despite their significance, the specific ways these narrative anchors function in early adulthood remain underexplored, particularly in non-Western cultural contexts where collective identity and familial ties may shape memory construction (Litwin et al., 2024; Nieto et al., 2019).

Memory construction is inherently reconstructive and shaped by current self-views and future aspirations (Markowitsch & Staniloiu, 2022; Singer, 2022). This plasticity allows individuals to reinterpret past adversity, transforming it into a resource for resilience and growth (Allé et al., 2024; Audrain et al., 2022). For instance, recalling mastery experiences during social identity threat can reaffirm competence and self-worth (Tavitian et al., 2019). Such narrative reframing may be vital in emerging adulthood, when career decisions, relational commitments, and personal values are in flux (Arbeláez et al., 2020; Keeler

et al., 2022). At the same time, difficulties retrieving detailed autobiographical memories can weaken the ability to project coherent future selves, diminishing optimism and direction (Audrain et al., 2022; Keeler et al., 2022).

Future self-continuity—the subjective sense that one’s future self is meaningfully connected to the present—is a core developmental achievement in this stage (Matsumoto, 2025; Prescott & Dominey, 2024). Rich and specific autobiographical recall supports future simulation and planning (Audrain et al., 2022; Grilli & Ryan, 2020), while gaps or inconsistencies in memory may compromise goal-setting and identity coherence. The act of extending one’s life story forward, imagining a stable yet evolving self, enables emerging adults to navigate uncertainty with hope and agency (Hetherington & Atherton, 2023; Matsumoto, 2025). However, this capacity is shaped by the cultural and social environment in which the self develops.

Culture significantly influences what is remembered, how memories are told, and the meanings they hold (Wang, 2021; Hupkova, 2022). In collectivistic frameworks, memories often emphasize relationships and communal belonging, whereas individualistic contexts privilege personal achievement and independence (Fivush & Waters, 2019; Mandal, 2020). Mexico, with its strong familial bonds and evolving modern identity, provides a unique context to study how cultural scripts are woven into self-defining narratives (Cantó-Milà et al., 2024; Zifla et al., 2025). Cultural expectations and intergenerational stories may support identity stability but also create tension when young adults negotiate between tradition and autonomy (Spreckelsen et al., 2021; Tivyaeva, 2022).

Emotional tone is another key dimension of self-defining memory. Positive and mastery-related memories often strengthen self-efficacy and hope (Hetherington & Atherton, 2023; Tavitian et al., 2019), while unresolved or negatively charged events can fragment self-narratives and weaken future orientation (Markowitsch & Staniloiu, 2022; Roß et al., 2019). However, even difficult experiences can become adaptive resources when reframed with meaning and growth (Allé et al., 2024; Freyermuth, 2025). This suggests that the critical factor is not the valence of the event but the interpretative process through which it is integrated into the life story (Audrain et al., 2022; Grilli & Ryan, 2020).

Neuroscientific and cognitive findings shed further light on these mechanisms. The anterior hippocampus and related cortical systems support the construction of richly detailed autobiographical memories and facilitate mental time travel to the future (Audrain et al., 2022; Gurguryan et al., 2024).

These neural processes underpin the simulation of possible selves and long-term planning (Litwin et al., 2024; Singer, 2022). Narrative identity theory posits that this neurocognitive capacity allows humans to craft a “storied self,” integrating disparate life events into a coherent temporal framework (Grilli & Ryan, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2020).

At the same time, technological shifts have introduced new external memory systems that shape how young adults build identity. Social media platforms and digital archives extend autobiographical memory beyond the individual, preserving past experiences in accessible, curated forms (Tivyaeva, 2022; Wang, 2025). While such resources can reinforce self-continuity, they may also complicate authenticity and coherence if online representations diverge from lived identity (Sutton & Render, 2021; Zifla et al., 2025). These dynamics are especially relevant for emerging adults negotiating multiple cultural and social identities both offline and online (Fekete, 2019; Hetherington & Atherton, 2023).

Despite theoretical advances, empirical research exploring how emerging adults actively mobilize self-defining memories to maintain a coherent sense of self and imagine future identities is still limited. Much existing work has focused on childhood and adolescence (Litwin et al., 2024; Roß et al., 2024) or on clinical and aging populations where memory impairments are central (Allé et al., 2024; Stramba-Badiale et al., 2025). There is a need for qualitative inquiry that gives voice to young adults themselves, particularly in diverse sociocultural contexts where narrative identity development may follow distinct pathways (Freymuth, 2025; Hetherington & Atherton, 2023).

The objective of this study is to explore how emerging adults in Mexico narrate self-defining memories and how these narratives shape their sense of continuity with their envisioned future selves.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how self-defining memories contribute to the sense of future self-continuity among emerging adults. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of subjective experiences and meaning-making processes, particularly suitable for examining identity development and temporal self-perception. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling to

ensure that those selected could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon under study. The inclusion criteria required individuals to be between 18 and 29 years old, identify as being in the stage of emerging adulthood, and have the ability to articulate personal life narratives. Exclusion criteria included any self-reported severe mental health conditions that could impair reflective narrative sharing. A total of 20 participants (12 females and 8 males) from various regions of Mexico were included. Recruitment occurred through university networks, community groups, and social media announcements. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.

2.2. Measures

Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, as this method facilitates exploration of participants’ personal experiences while allowing flexibility to probe deeper into emerging topics. An interview guide was developed based on the study’s aims and existing literature on self-defining memories and future self-continuity. Core questions invited participants to describe personal memories that they perceived as central to their identity, discuss the emotions and meanings attached to these memories, and reflect on how these experiences shaped their sense of who they might become in the future. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were conducted in Spanish, the participants’ native language, to ensure nuanced expression. With participants’ consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned, and any potentially identifying information was removed.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by an interpretive approach to identify recurring patterns and deeper meanings within participants’ narratives. Analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generation of initial codes capturing meaningful text segments, (3) searching for potential themes by clustering codes, (4) reviewing and refining themes for internal coherence and distinction, (5) defining and naming themes to reflect their essence, and (6) producing the final report with illustrative participant quotes. NVivo 14

qualitative analysis software was used to support data management, coding, and organization of emerging categories. The researchers maintained reflexive journals to account for personal biases and enhance analytic rigor. Peer debriefing sessions among the research team were held to ensure interpretative validity and consistency.

3. Findings and Results

The study involved 20 emerging adults from various regions of Mexico, including 12 women (60%) and 8 men (40%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 29 years, with the largest group between 23 and 26 years old ($n = 9$; 45%), followed by those aged 27–29 years ($n = 6$; 30%), and a

smaller number aged 18–22 years ($n = 5$; 25%). Regarding educational status, most were undergraduate students ($n = 11$; 55%), while others were recent graduates or employed professionals ($n = 6$; 30%), and a few were postgraduate students ($n = 3$; 15%). In terms of occupational status, 10 participants (50%) were studying full-time, 6 (30%) were employed, and 4 (20%) combined study and part-time work. Most participants were single ($n = 14$; 70%), with the remainder in committed relationships ($n = 6$; 30%). This diversity in age, educational background, and relationship status provided a wide range of personal narratives and future self-conceptions essential for exploring self-defining memories and future self-continuity.

Table 1

Main Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Derived From the Interviews

Main Themes (Categories)	Subthemes (Subcategories)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Narrative Foundations of Identity	Formative Turning Points	Childhood adversity; Academic breakthroughs; Family migration; Critical friendships; Cultural milestones
	Emotional Markers of the Past	Nostalgia; Regret; Pride; Gratitude; Fear; Relief
	Values and Belief Anchors	Moral lessons learned; Cultural traditions; Religious or spiritual insights; Role models' influence; Personal resilience
	Self-Reflection and Meaning-Making	Reinterpreting painful events; Forgiving oneself or others; Constructing coherent life stories; Integration of multiple roles
	Autonomy and Independence	First employment experiences; Moving away from family; Financial self-reliance; Personal decision-making
2. Bridging Present and Future Selves	Vision of Future Identity	Career aspirations; Educational goals; Family and relationship plans; Desired personality growth; Lifestyle ambitions
	Continuity Across Time	Feeling of "same me" over time; Linking childhood dreams to adult roles; Ongoing personal values; Emotional stability
	Agency and Control Over Future	Planning capacity; Proactive decision-making; Coping strategies; Overcoming uncertainty
	Hope and Optimism	Positive expectations; Confidence in life trajectory; Imagined thriving future; Self-belief
	Possible Selves and Fears	Avoidance of negative futures; Fear of stagnation; Anxiety about failure; Concern for losing authenticity
3. Social and Cultural Context Shaping Self	Family Influence	Parental expectations; Intergenerational narratives; Emotional support; Migration stories
	Peer and Romantic Relationships	Validation by friends; Romantic commitments; Social comparison; Shared future planning
	Cultural Identity and Belonging	Pride in Mexican heritage; Collective struggles; Bicultural tensions; Celebrating traditions
	Societal Pressures and Norms	Gender roles; Career success expectations; Pressure to marry; Academic excellence demands
	Community and Social Contribution	Desire to "give back"; Role in community progress; Volunteering experiences; Leadership aspirations

Narrative Foundations of Identity

Formative Turning Points. Participants consistently described specific pivotal experiences that shaped their sense of who they are today. These turning points included childhood adversity, academic breakthroughs, and significant life transitions such as family migration. For instance, one participant shared, "*When my father lost his*

job and we had to move to another city, it forced me to adapt and be stronger; that moment changed how I see myself." Others emphasized cultural milestones and critical friendships that gave them a sense of direction and belonging.

Emotional Markers of the Past. The emotional charge of self-defining memories was central in identity

construction. Feelings of nostalgia, regret, pride, gratitude, fear, and relief emerged repeatedly. A participant explained, *"Every time I think of that summer with my grandmother, I feel warmth and safety, and it reminds me where I come from."* Another reflected on regret: *"I wish I had spoken up during high school when I was bullied; that silence still shapes my confidence."* These emotions helped participants assign meaning to the past and integrate it into their self-concept.

Values and Belief Anchors. Personal values and belief systems acted as stable reference points across time. Participants mentioned moral lessons from family, cultural traditions, religious or spiritual insights, and resilience learned through hardship. *"My parents always told me honesty is non-negotiable; that's something I carry with me, no matter what career I choose,"* said one interviewee. Others spoke about how Mexican traditions, such as Día de Muertos, gave them a sense of rootedness and continuity.

Self-Reflection and Meaning-Making. Emerging adults actively engaged in reinterpreting and integrating past experiences. This process included forgiving themselves or others, constructing coherent life stories, and reconciling multiple social roles. A participant noted, *"I used to see my parents' divorce as only pain, but now I think it made me independent and empathetic."* These reflective processes appeared to strengthen identity coherence and prepare participants for their envisioned futures.

Autonomy and Independence. Moments of achieving autonomy, such as first employment and financial self-reliance, were strongly linked to identity growth. *"When I paid my own rent for the first time, I felt like an adult; it was proof I can survive on my own,"* said one participant. Moving away from family or making independent life choices also symbolized the transition from dependence to emerging adulthood.

Bridging Present and Future Selves

Vision of Future Identity. Participants frequently described imagined future selves anchored in career, education, relationships, and personal development. *"I picture myself as a psychologist helping young people like me,"* one respondent stated. Others envisioned thriving families, meaningful work, and a balanced life aligned with their current values.

Continuity Across Time. A sense of personal sameness was important for psychological stability. Participants traced a clear line between past aspirations and their present identity. *"Even as a kid, I loved drawing; now I'm studying design. It feels like I'm fulfilling what my younger self*

wanted," shared one participant. The connection between enduring personal values and current goals fostered a continuous life narrative.

Agency and Control Over Future. The ability to plan and cope with uncertainty emerged as vital for sustaining future self-continuity. Interviewees described proactive decision-making and strategies to overcome unpredictability. *"I'm scared about the job market, but I know if I keep networking and improving my skills, I can shape my own path,"* one participant explained.

Hope and Optimism. Hopeful expectations about the future were intertwined with self-defining narratives. Confidence and self-belief were particularly strong when participants overcame adversity. *"I went through so many struggles to study medicine; if I did that, I can do anything next,"* said one. Optimism seemed to buffer fears about adulthood and motivate goal pursuit.

Possible Selves and Fears. Alongside hope, there was also anxiety about possible negative futures, including failure, stagnation, and losing authenticity. *"Sometimes I fear becoming someone who just works for money and forgets who I am,"* one participant admitted. These fears motivated some to clarify their values and set protective strategies against undesired outcomes.

Social and Cultural Context Shaping Self

Family Influence. Family remained a powerful narrative anchor. Participants emphasized parental expectations, emotional support, and intergenerational stories. *"My parents always tell how they came from poverty to build our house; it pushes me to honor their sacrifice,"* shared one respondent. Migration stories and family struggles were often integrated into personal identity and future plans.

Peer and Romantic Relationships. Friends and romantic partners acted as mirrors and motivators. Validation from peers helped shape self-worth, while romantic commitments influenced future orientation. *"My partner believes in me even when I doubt myself; that keeps me going,"* one participant explained. Shared planning for the future with significant others reinforced continuity.

Cultural Identity and Belonging. Participants described pride in their Mexican heritage, while some also experienced bicultural tensions. *"I feel deeply Mexican, but studying abroad made me question parts of my identity and then embrace them even more,"* one shared. Traditions and collective struggles provided a sense of belonging and narrative depth.

Societal Pressures and Norms. The influence of social expectations—such as gender roles, marriage, and career

success—was evident. While some felt empowered by these norms, others expressed conflict. *“Society expects me to be married by now, but I’m focusing on my career; sometimes I feel guilty,”* one participant admitted.

Community and Social Contribution. A strong desire to give back to society and improve the community surfaced as part of future self-continuity. *“I want to use my engineering skills to help rural areas get clean water; it’s my way of giving back,”* said an interviewee. Volunteering and leadership aspirations were seen as ways to honor personal and cultural identity.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that emerging adults in Mexico construct self-defining memories as narrative anchors that sustain a coherent identity and foster a sense of connection with their future selves. Three broad thematic domains emerged: the narrative foundations of identity, the bridging of present and future selves, and the role of social and cultural contexts in shaping memory construction. These domains highlight that self-defining memories are not static archives of the past but dynamic, meaning-rich structures that support psychological continuity and agency in the transition to adulthood (Fivush & Waters, 2019; Singer, 2022). Participants described life-turning points, such as migration, educational milestones, and personal challenges, which became critical narrative building blocks. This aligns with the proposition that autobiographical memory is integral to organizing identity across time (Grilli & Ryan, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2020), and that salient memories anchor the self by encapsulating personal values and long-term concerns (Cantó-Milà et al., 2024; Zifla et al., 2025).

One of the most striking findings was how participants reinterpreted adverse experiences to cultivate resilience and future orientation. Rather than simply recounting hardship, they engaged in active meaning-making, transforming potentially fragmenting memories into narratives of strength and self-growth. This is consistent with research suggesting that autobiographical recall can be reconstructive and adaptive, serving present identity needs (Markowitsch & Staniloiu, 2022; Singer, 2022). Prior work demonstrates that mastery-related recollections under social threat bolster self-worth and efficacy (Tavitian et al., 2019), and our participants echoed this by reframing adversity, such as family instability or early career struggles, as evidence of inner competence and autonomy. This pattern underscores the transformative potential of narrative reflection during

emerging adulthood, a developmental window where constructing a coherent life story is central (Freyermuth, 2025; Hetherington & Atherton, 2023).

Another important dimension of our findings concerns the temporal extension of self through autobiographical memory. Participants consistently linked their remembered selves with envisioned future identities, demonstrating a sense of narrative continuity. They often integrated early aspirations and core personal values into forward-looking life stories, supporting the idea that future self-continuity depends on the ability to mentally “time travel” and connect past identity threads to future goals (Matsumoto, 2025; Prescott & Dominey, 2024). Prior studies show that the specificity and richness of autobiographical recall predict optimism and future planning (Audrain et al., 2022; Grilli & Ryan, 2020). Our participants frequently articulated detailed future scenarios built upon vividly recalled life moments, such as academic breakthroughs or family sacrifices. Conversely, when memories were vague or fragmented, participants expressed uncertainty and anxiety about their future selves, echoing evidence that impoverished memory detail undermines future-oriented thinking (Keeler et al., 2022; Nieto et al., 2019).

Cultural identity emerged as a powerful thread running through participants’ self-defining narratives. Memories tied to family heritage, intergenerational migration, and cultural rituals such as Día de Muertos anchored a sense of belonging and temporal stability. This finding reinforces the notion that autobiographical memory is culturally constructed (Wang, 2021; Нуркова, 2022). While some participants expressed tension between traditional familial expectations and personal autonomy, most were able to weave cultural scripts into their self-story in a way that supported continuity rather than fragmentation. This resonates with research highlighting how cultural frameworks provide narrative templates that guide memory encoding and meaning (Fivush & Waters, 2019; Mandal, 2020). At the same time, the interplay of tradition and independence reflects Mexico’s evolving cultural landscape, where collectivist values coexist with emerging individualistic aspirations (Cantó-Milà et al., 2024; Zifla et al., 2025).

The findings also illuminate the emotional architecture of self-defining memories. Participants described emotionally vivid episodes that carried enduring affective tones—sometimes positive, sometimes initially painful but later reframed as growth opportunities. Prior research shows that positive and mastery-laden memories bolster hope and self-efficacy (Hetherington & Atherton, 2023; Tavitian et al.,

2019), while unresolved negative memories risk fragmenting the self (Markowitsch & Staniloiu, 2022; Roß et al., 2019). Our participants' narratives reflected a dynamic process of emotional integration: rather than suppressing negative experiences, many reframed them as life lessons, supporting the view that meaning-making, not mere valence, determines adaptive outcomes (Allé et al., 2024; Audrain et al., 2022; Grilli & Ryan, 2020). This integrative work may be particularly crucial in transitional cultural settings where young adults balance family expectations with personal aspirations.

Additionally, the role of technology and digital memory traces appeared implicitly in participants' stories. While not all explicitly discussed social media, some noted how online archives such as photos or past posts triggered self-reflection and helped consolidate personal timelines. This supports the argument that digital environments have become external memory systems extending autobiographical continuity (Tivyaeva, 2022; Wang, 2025). Yet, as prior work warns, discrepancies between online and lived identity could complicate coherence (Sutton & Render, 2021; Zifla et al., 2025). Our participants seemed aware of this risk, emphasizing authenticity in what they choose to preserve or share. This self-curation may be a strategy to protect a coherent sense of self across digital and offline contexts, a phenomenon warranting deeper study.

From a cognitive perspective, the narratives observed here are consistent with findings on the neural basis of autobiographical recall and future simulation. Participants' rich, sensory-laden descriptions align with evidence that the anterior hippocampus supports detailed memory construction and projection into the future (Audrain et al., 2022; Gurguryan et al., 2024). The fluid integration of emotion and narrative we observed also resonates with narrative identity models that describe the "storied self" as a neurocognitive system organizing memory and imagination across time (Grilli & Ryan, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2020).

Together, these findings extend previous research by illuminating how emerging adults actively work with their memories to create temporal coherence in a culturally embedded context. Much of the existing work has focused on either younger populations (Litwin et al., 2024; Roß et al., 2024) or memory dysfunction in older or clinical groups (Allé et al., 2024; Stramba-Badiale et al., 2025). By focusing on healthy young adults navigating transition and cultural hybridity, this study adds a nuanced understanding of narrative identity formation. It also underscores the importance of a qualitative lens that captures the subjective

meaning-making process beyond what quantitative self-continuity scales can detect (Freyermuth, 2025; Hetherington & Atherton, 2023).

5. Limitations & Suggestions

While this study offers valuable insight into the mechanisms by which emerging adults use self-defining memories to sustain future self-continuity, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was modest ($n = 20$) and drawn exclusively from Mexican participants, which may limit generalizability to other cultural groups. Cultural frameworks strongly shape autobiographical narrative style and meaning-making, so the patterns found here may differ in more individualistic or culturally heterogeneous contexts. Second, as with all retrospective self-report research, the data rely on participants' current interpretations of their memories, which may be subject to reconstruction biases and emotional reappraisal. Third, although theoretical saturation was reached, the diversity of participants in terms of socioeconomic background and life experience could have been greater, potentially enriching the thematic landscape. Finally, the qualitative design does not permit causal inference about the directionality between memory coherence and future self-continuity.

Future research could build on these findings by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across cultural contexts to test the universality and cultural specificity of the themes identified here. Comparative studies could illuminate how collective versus individualistic cultural values shape the content and function of self-defining memories. Longitudinal designs would allow tracking of how narrative coherence and future self-continuity evolve over time, particularly across major adult transitions such as career entry, marriage, or parenthood. Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, such as integrating narrative interviews with neural or behavioral measures of autobiographical memory specificity, could deepen understanding of cognitive and emotional mechanisms. In addition, exploring the digital dimension of autobiographical memory—including how social media archives are curated and integrated into identity—represents an important and underexamined direction.

These findings suggest practical strategies for supporting identity development and psychological well-being in emerging adults. Clinicians and counselors could incorporate narrative-based interventions, encouraging

young adults to explore and reinterpret self-defining memories, especially those involving adversity, to strengthen resilience and future orientation. Educators and mentors might promote reflective practices—such as guided journaling or storytelling exercises—that help students link past achievements and struggles to future aspirations. Culturally sensitive approaches are essential; interventions should validate the dual pull of tradition and autonomy that many young adults experience. Finally, digital literacy programs could help individuals curate online memories intentionally to support a coherent sense of self across time and context.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed in this article.

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