**Somali Migration to the U.S.:
Understanding Adaptation through Digital Stories**

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Abstract

Objectives: The purpose of this study was to further understand the psychological process of migration through an interdisciplinary (psychology, history, and digital humanities) collaboration that examines the experiences of Somali refugees in the U.S. **Method:** The sample consisted of 26 Somali-American emerging adult and older adult refugees who created digital stories as part of the *Immigrant Stories Project* (<https://immigrantstories.umn.edu/>). Stories were analyzed through an examination of narrative structure and content. **Results:** The structure of the authors' stories was primarily progressive or stable, with very few regressive stories. Although the distribution of these story structures did not differ for emerging adults and older adults, there were important variations in content. Emerging adults' stories reflected a struggle to find self-continuity across time and place, whereas older adults' stories indicated attempts to find meaning and optimally adapt to their current situations. Moreover, none of the stories took on a redemptive structure, a type of story that has been identified as culturally prevalent in U.S. culture but seldom examined across diverse populations. **Conclusions:** The findings highlight the varieties of paths toward successful immigration and the importance of taking a collaborative, participatory approach to understanding migration experiences.

Keywords: immigration, refugee, Somalia, redemption, adjustment, digital stories

Public Significance Statement: The present study adds to the growing literature on migration pathways by examining digital stories created by Somali-Americans, a population that is seldom represented in the research literature. The study also demonstrates the utility of digital storytelling as a collaborative method for psychological research.

The current politics surrounding increased movements and integration of people from the Middle East and Africa into Europe are raising important political, humanitarian, and social issues in need of further exploration. In the U.S., the debate over immigration has reached new levels of divisiveness. Within this context, there is an urgent need to understand the diversity of immigration experiences at the interface of self and society. The psychological research on immigrants' adaptation has mostly relied on quantitative models, examining how immigrants identify with the values, beliefs, and behaviors of both their host culture and their culture(s) of origin (e.g., Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Lui & Zamboanga, 2018a). Most of this research has been "top-down," employing Berry's (1980) acculturation strategies model (see Berry (2017) for a review). Further limiting this body of research is the lack of interdisciplinary perspectives on immigration—a phenomenon that is political, historical, and geographical just as much as psychological.

The purpose of the present study is to further understand the process of migration through an interdisciplinary (psychology, history, and digital humanities) collaboration that examines the experiences of Somali refugees in the U.S. We analyze refugee-created digital stories from the Immigrant Stories Project (<https://immigrantstories.umn.edu/>), an open-access digital humanities project that involves participants writing and recording digital stories (audio, pictures, video, text) of their migration experiences and lives in the U.S. Two major goals of the study were to provide descriptive insights into the details of immigrant pathways and to highlight digital storytelling as a promising collaborative research tool for working with under-represented populations.

Digital Stories as a Tool for Psychological Analysis

The rise of technology and digital media has ushered in an era of novel research methodologies for examining psychological and cultural phenomena, introducing innovative ways to both *access* (e.g., "big data" on social media) and *collect* (e.g., photovoice) data (Roberts, Snee, Hine, Morey, & Watson, 2016). One digital methodology that holds much promise for cultural psychology, in particular, is digital storytelling—a participant-created, story-based data gathering strategy (Sarica & Usluel, 2016). Through the process of authoring and recording a voiceover narrative, combining it with pictures, videos, music, and text, individuals produce their own 3- to 5-minute digital stories (de Jager, Fogarty, Tewson, Lenette, & Boydell, 2017). In the general psychological literature, findings have suggested digital storytelling has the potential to improve visual memory and writing skills (Sarica & Usluel, 2016), build relationships (Pera & Viglia, 2016), and increase students' science learning motivation, among other learning-related variables (Hung, Hwang, & Huang, 2012).

In addition to the previous areas of research, digital storytelling has demonstrated great potential for cultural psychology research, especially for examining identity development in context among marginalized communities (de Jager et al., 2017). Indeed, digital storytelling is a powerful research method for providing rich, culturally relevant, first-person narrated accounts of people's lives, and it has been used extensively in narrative identity research with Indigenous peoples (Cunsolo Willox, Harper, Edge, 'My Word': Storytelling and Digital Media Lab, & Rigolet

Inuit Community Government, 2013), refugees (Lenette, 2017), immigrants (Ranieri & Bruni, 2013) and other disempowered populations (Martin, McLean, Brooks, & Wood, 2019). As a methodology, digital storytelling is unique, as it places the power of constructing a life story in the hands of participants who have experienced historical and contemporary oppression, while simultaneously providing psychologists with culturally and contextually rich data (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). Thus, digital storytelling allows researchers to further understand the development occurring at the intersection of individuals and their environment.

Despite the promise of digital storytelling, digital research methodologies are seldom considered a legitimate or mainstream approach to research (Roberts et al., 2016). Digital storytelling, specifically, is less commonly used in psychological research and the social sciences in general, and more often seen in the humanities (Gladstone & Stasiulis, 2017) and with interdisciplinary teams of researchers (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). To bridge this gap in the literature, we use digital storytelling as a research methodology to understand the migration experiences and adaptation of Somali immigrants and refugees in the U.S. Our inquiry, which occurs at the intersection of psychology, history, and the digital humanities, introduces both alternative methodologies and innovative perspectives for studying migration and narratives outside of mainstream cultural contexts.

Story Structures: Master Narratives, Redemption, and Migration

The current study is situated within the master narrative model (McLean & Syed, 2015), a framework developed to understand how psychological processes interrelate with cultural and structural conditions. Master narratives are culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors (see also Hammack, 2008). They represent the broader societal norms and expectations for what is good, what is moral, and how to live a proper life (Syed, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2020). A master narrative perspective draws attention to *how* stories of migration are told and *what* the stories are about, thereby providing strong descriptive material about migration pathways that tends to be lacking in the dominant quantitative models.

The *how* of stories is known as their *structure*, which is the underlying construction of how stories are arranged and told (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Hammack, 2006). Gergen and Gergen (1988) outlined three general structures with respect to affective and experiential change through the stories: *progressive* stories that mark ascent, growth, and development from the beginning to the end; *regressive* stories that represent a negative turn, where the tellers indicate they are worse off at the end of the story compared with the beginning; and *stable* stories, which may fluctuate a bit between positive and negative but nevertheless do not indicate much change from beginning to end. Benish-Weisman (2009) extended these structures to the immigration context, examining how immigrants to Israel from the former Soviet Union narrated their migration experience. She found that differences in the form of immigration stories tracked with how successful they personally felt their immigrant experience to be.

In the U.S. there is a strong cultural preference for a type of progressive story structure called *redemptive stories* (McAdams, 2013). Redemptive stories correspond to how individuals reconstruct and think about past negative events. Specifically, redemptive stories are ones in which negative experiences have ultimately come to be a positive force in the teller's life. Not only do redemptive stories communicate growth in response to a challenge, but the teller is doing better now than they were at the beginning of the story. Individuals telling redemptive stories are stronger than they were *because* of the experience.

The redemption narrative is conceptualized as a *structural* master narrative in the U.S., meaning that it serves as a story form template that a majority of individuals use to structure stories about their personal experiences. The prevalence of this story structure, however, appears to be cultural. Indeed, Hammack (2006) found that whereas Israeli youth told redemptive stories that mapped on to their broader cultural experiences of thriving despite substantial barriers, Palestinian youth told stories of *contamination*, a form of regressive stories where a good life subsequently turns sour, which maps on to their broader cultural experience of losing their land, autonomy, and state. Thus, there is great value in understanding the master narratives underlying the experiences of diverse populations. To begin to understand this process, we must first examine the stories told by diverse communities to get a sense for the structure and content of their storytelling.

Somali Refugees in the U.S.

The present study focuses on the stories of Somali refugees to the U.S., who comprise a unique and important population for several reasons. First, the psychological research on migration and adjustment to the U.S. has overwhelmingly focused on migrants from Asia and Latin America (Lui & Zamboanga, 2018a; Lui & Zamboanga, 2018b), with relatively little focus on migrants from Africa in general or Somalia in particular (but see Catalano, Fox, & Vandeyar (2016) for immigration and adaptation in South Africa).

The global diaspora of Somalis was triggered by the Somali Civil War, which began in the late 1980s and resulted in an overthrow of the government in 1991 (Kusow, 1994). Though fighting, factions, and governments have ebbed and flowed, there has been ongoing conflict ever since, displacing Somali people across the globe. There are an estimated 2 million Somali refugees worldwide, many of whom are still in refugee camps in Kenya and Ethiopia (Connor & Krogstad, 2016). The U.S. population of Somali Americans is around 150,000, with between 40,000-80,000 living in Minnesota—the location of many of the participants in our study. A section of Minneapolis near the University, Cedar-Riverside, is known colloquially as Little Somalia or Little Mogadishu, named after Somalia's capital. Somalis have established themselves as part of the Twin Cities community and have increasingly participated in governance, with Abdi Warsame being elected to city council (Williams, 2013) and Ilhan Omar elected first to the Minnesota State House (Minneapolis Public Radio & Xaykaothao, 2016) and subsequently to the U.S. House of Representatives (Witt, 2018).

Despite establishing positive communities within the U.S., Somali Americans have been the focus of intensive expressions of Islamophobia and racism, interpersonally and within a broader global context of Islamophobia. Somali Americans are stereotypically believed to be culturally inferior, a threat, and completely different from non-Muslims (Bergen, Hoffman, Tiedemann, 2011; Garner & Selod, 2015; Islam, 2018). These beliefs only increased after an FBI investigation found terrorist organizations recruiting young Somali males to fight abroad (National Public Radio, 2009) and, more recently, an attack in a mall in St. Cloud, Minnesota (Smith, 2016). These events have perpetuated discrimination toward Somali Americans, including state-sponsored campaigns targeting Somalis in Minnesota (Warsame, 2017) and Minnesota being labeled by conservative media and the Trump campaign as the "terrorist recruitment capital" of the U.S. (McKay, 2018). Thus, even though the Somali American community is well-established in Minnesota, they are often looked at as un-American and not having American values (Saghay-Biria, 2012; Ahmed, 2019).

With respect to potential immigration stories, there is a clear shared negative experience among Somalis: the Civil War. This is somewhat unique in that the scale and influence of the war is massive, paired with the fact that it is an ongoing, unresolved conflict. It is quite possible that this shared experience would be narrated in progressive, if not redemptive terms. However, attention to age, development, and cohort suggests a more complicated situation. Contemporary emerging adults were born in the midst of the civil war; many spent their early years in refugee camps prior to coming to the U.S. and thus have no personal memories of Somalia prior to the conflict. In contrast, older adults have memories of life in Somalia prior to the unrest precipitating the civil war. Thus, Somali American adults are more strongly positioned to tell redemptive stories, so long as that story structure resonates with them culturally: they have positive memories of Somali prior to the current conflict, and they successfully escaped the conflict and resettled in the U.S.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to further understand the psychological process of migration by examining the experiences of Somali immigrants and refugees in the U.S. shared via digital stories. We adopt an interdisciplinary strengths-based approach, seeking to understand Somali-American experiences and adjustment from their own perspectives. Moreover, the use of participant-generated digital stories exemplifies collaborative and participatory research that can both engage and empower immigrant and refugee populations. The study was largely exploratory, guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the structure of Somali Americans' stories of their migration experiences? We examined the relative frequencies of stable, progressive, and regressive narratives, and we assessed the presence of redemptive stories within progressive narratives and contamination stories within regressive narratives.
2. Do the identified structures vary for emerging adults vs. older adults?

Method

Data Source

The data in this study are drawn from the public archive of the *Immigrant Stories* project (<https://immigrantstories.umn.edu/>). Because all of the data are publicly available, the study was deemed to be exempt from IRB review and approval by the University of Minnesota. Starting in 2013, the Immigrant History Research Center (IHRC) initiated *Immigrant Stories* as a means of collecting contemporary migration stories through digital storytelling methodologies that could be preserved and accessed via digital archives. *Immigrant Stories* workshops teach people about the digital storytelling process, empowering participants to create a digital story about a migration experience by writing their own story, recording a voiceover narrative, and choosing accompanying images, documents, and music to create a 3- to 5-minute video. The power of participants to choose and tell their own stories was deliberately made an essential part of the design of *Immigrant Stories*. The hope was that this approach would facilitate a more "neutral" methodology that allowed participants to share a wide variety of stories, not just the progressive ones that are the most common in immigration-related oral history projects. To date, the *Immigrant Stories* collection includes 306 digital stories of migration accessible to the public, representing over 50 international communities. Detailed information about the project and how the stories were collected are available on the project home page, <https://immigrantstories.umn.edu/>.

The analytic sample consists of the 26 participants in the archive who migrated from Somalia to the U.S., 13 of which were emerging adults (18-25) and 13 older adults (26+) at the time they created their digital stories. The current study is a secondary data analysis of this archive. That is, these stories were not collected specifically to address the current research questions. Rather, we identified the archive as an interesting opportunity to explore psychological questions that are underrepresented in the literature. The subset of data used in the present analysis is available at <https://osf.io/vfm8u/>.

Because this is a secondary data analysis and the stories were not collected with psychological research in mind, we have relatively little information about the participants apart from what they shared in their stories. Meta-data include who created the story (i.e., the author), the date it was created, a brief description of the story, who the author partnered with to create their story (i.e., IHRC), duration of the story, as well as the ethnicity, world region, and language of the author. We used the age and country of origin data to select the sample, but otherwise we relied only on the content of the stories for our analysis.

Analysis Plan

The analysis team consisted of the first three authors of this article, a mixed-ethnic male psychology professor from an immigrant family, a female Skarú:rę' counseling psychology doctoral student, and a White female post-baccalaureate student with an English B.A and Education B.S. Although none of the analysts were Somali, they collectively had diverse personal and educational experiences pertaining to immigration, indigeneity, diverse life

pathways, and storying process. We analyzed the stories using a narrative analytic method that focused on structure and content. Rather than using a purely deductive approach, wherein we would apply existing coding systems to the current data, the first three authors spent several months closely reading and discussing the narratives to become familiar with the data (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). This collaborative process exposed our individual biases, preferences, and ideas about what constitute positive and negative stories. Over the months of multiple readings and discussions, we arrived at a place of being as open as possible to what the participants were seeking to share through their stories. These discussions relied heavily on the construction of life diagrams (Söderström, 2019), which are visual representations of the story structure. We used these life diagrams to better understand the underlying story structure and content. Through this discussion it became apparent that the standard coding system for general story structure would indeed suit the data.

We coded for whether the stories took a progressive, regressive, or stable structure (see <https://osf.io/vfm8u/> for full coding manual). Progressive stories were further evaluated for whether they were redemptive, and regressive stories were further evaluated for whether they were contaminated. Following recommendations to establish reliability with percent agreement when coding qualitative data, the first and second author coded all of the stories, resulting in an acceptable level of reliability ($P_A = .77$, 20/26 agreement; Syed & Nelson, 2015). The fourth author's codes were used to resolve disagreements for the six stories the previous two raters did not agree on.

Progressive stories. A progressive narrative is when the story moves forward. The individual evaluates the self as moving incrementally (upward) over time as experiences are accumulated.

Regressive stories. A regressive narrative is when the story is characterized by decline or deterioration. The individual evaluates the self as moving decrementally (downward) over time as experiences are accumulated.

Stable stories. A stable narrative is when the plot is steady, changes only a little, and/or the individual characterizes the self as basically unchanging over time and experience from beginning to end, although there may be positive and negative changes along the way.

Redemption. Redemption is present when bad or unhappy circumstances are transformed into good outcomes, either within or outside of the self. There should be a clear connection between the negative experience and connection to positive outcome. The situation itself does not need to be fully resolved for redemption to be present. If the general "goodness" and "badness" (or neutral aspects) of narratives do not change very much, then redemption is not present. Additionally, redemption can only be present if there is a period of positivity that precedes the bad or unhappy circumstances.

Contamination. Contamination is present when good circumstances or self-conceptions are paired with negative outcomes. There should be a clear sequence of positive experiences

subsequently leading to negative ones. If the general “goodness” and “badness” (or neutral aspects) of narratives do not change very much, then contamination is not present.

Although the primary focus of the analysis was on story structure, when reporting on the structure below, we also highlight interesting and important aspects of the *content* of the stories: the actual details discussed, not just how they were told.

Results and Discussion

The overall distribution of stories was 12 progressive, 10 stable, and 4 regressive. The distribution was nearly identical across the emerging adult and older adult samples: 6 progressive, 6 stable, and 1 regressive for emerging adults, and 6 progressive, 5 stable, and 2 regressive for older adults. Despite this similarity in distribution, and as described in subsequent detail, the content within these structures varied between the two groups in important ways. We first discuss the findings for the emerging adult sample, followed by the older adult sample.

Emerging Adult Sample

The overarching characterization of the emerging adults’ stories is that they represented a *struggle for continuity*. That is, the story structure was largely defined with respect to their current feelings of continuity in their lives. All 13 authors referenced the Somali Civil War, and 11 of those grounded their story in it, referencing the conflict at the beginning of their story as a backdrop to the remainder of their story. The progressive stories tended to communicate ways in which the authors were able to foster and improve continuity, the stable stories communicated the maintenance of continuity, and the regressive stories consisted of unfruitful struggles for continuity. We describe each in turn.

Progressive stories. These stories consisted of authors with explicit discussion of self-continuity and whose views on their lives have improved in some way over time. All of these stories were anchored with the Civil War; that is, they reference the Civil War at the very beginning of the story (or nearly so). There were two evident routes to enhanced continuity, and thus, progressive narratives. First was a return visit to Somalia. Indeed, all three of the authors who reported returning to Somalia also created progressive stories. The visit provided them with what they considered to be crucial missing information about their heritage, as articulated by Saida:

This was the first time I had been back to Somalia since I was three years old. I didn’t know a lot about Somalia. It was a lot of cultural shock. I wanted to see the working life of Somalia....they gave me a sense of understanding of who I am and where I am going. It gave me memories and gave me a sense of belonging.
(<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/603>)

It should be noted that visiting Somalia is no easy feat, given time, cost, safety, and both bureaucratic and political restrictions. Thus, a return trip is not a simple or accessible route to

continuity for most people. Despite this, authors who were able to visit Somalia seemed to be provided with a broader context for self-understanding, context previously unavailable due to often-abrupt departures from Somalia at early ages.

The second route to enhanced continuity was an important place or object that grounded the authors, providing context and support for identity development. For example, Ayan talks about the importance of her mother's grocery store in Mogadishu:

When I was nine years old, I had the responsibility to open the grocery store early in the morning....If it wasn't for my mom's store, I wouldn't know how to work with different people. Now I like helping others....My mom's grocery store helping me [be] responsible at such a young age. I had to open a store and go to my Islamic school at the same time. Even today, this is important to me because it has taught me a valuable lesson in life: when I go to a store and see young people helping older [people], I remember the old times. (<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/627>)

Importantly, none of the stories classified as progressive met the criteria for redemptive stories. Even though all of the stories refer to many negative experiences, and all indicate some degree of growth and development, none indicate a specific causal connection between the negative experiences and their current situation; they do not indicate being "better off" because of their past negative and traumatic experiences.

Stable stories. Although called "stable" stories, nearly all in this group consisted of a series of ups and downs. Benish-Weisman (2009) classified this type of story as a "romance" genre within a redemptive narrative sequence because it corresponded with a sense of improvement through past experiences. In contrast to romantic redemption, we observed a kind of romantic stability; the ups and downs were not a route to improvement but rather a fact of the life lived. The only two emerging adult stories (of all 13) that were not anchored by the Civil War were of this type. Many of these stability stories provided factual, descriptive information about the authors' lives, often to communicate to others what their lives, and the lives of those in similar circumstances, are like. For example, in the following story, Mohamed describes a piece of clothing that may be unfamiliar to many Americans, and how it affects his ability to establish the type of continuity he desires:

Even though Somalia had many ups and downs, it has a unique culture....Ma'awes is a strong garment worn around the waist by most Somali men....My father who passed away in 1990 bought my first ma'awes. When I see ma'awes, I remember when my father and I worked together. ...Unfortunately, ma'awes is only found in some parts of the world, and America is not one of them. I came here knowing that I would not be able to wear my ma'awes in public....I will keep my ma'awes. It is something that will be a part of my life. And I want to start a clothing line for ma'awes so that people can buy it when they see it in the stores. (<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/594>)

Although he is clear that not wearing ma'awes poses a challenge for him, the narrative mixes positive and negative emotions and is largely factual in nature. Despite the stable nature of the story, it nonetheless emphasizes a disruption to feelings of continuity that is perhaps impacted by the change in context (i.e., wearing ma'awes to not wearing ma'awes) he experiences. If we conceptualize the ma'awes as a grounding object for the author, fluctuations in his story can be thought of in terms of changes to the ma'awes as Mohamed's cultural anchor. This was true for other stable-structure stories as well, which described objects (xeedho, subeeyad, clothing, a photo) that activate memories allowing for the maintenance of continuity.

Regressive stories. Only one emerging adult's story was classified as regressive, so we are quite limited in possible insights. Nevertheless, Mustafa's story clearly communicates an unmet need for belonging in the U.S., which is a barrier to continuity and integration of his Somali and American identities:

Life was good, but for me it was not home. Perhaps it is the discrimination I experienced in the United States. Perhaps it is the fact that my family struggled financially as new immigrants. Maybe just simply it was the fact that I am Somali and in the United States that keeps me from calling myself an American....I am on a quest to find out these answers and to study the memories of other Somalis. So as I still search for these answers, I call myself Somali. Maybe one day I may add American to the end of that.
(<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/501>)

This unmet need for belonging stands in contrast to the progressive stories, in which the need was met, and the stable stories, in which no such need was communicated. Additionally, this story illustrates a departure from routes to continuity seen in the other emerging adults' stories, as this author does not describe a return visit to Somalia or a place or object that provides context for identity. Without continuity, threats to identity (i.e., discrimination) and identity processes (i.e., adaptation) may be particularly difficult to handle.

Older Adult Sample

In comparison to the emerging adults' stories representing a struggle for continuity, the older adults' stories most often involved a *struggle for meaning*. The stories were less focused on facilitators and challenges to personal continuity and more about how they found, or are searching for, a meaningful and productive life given their current circumstances. This is not to say that continuity was not an issue at all—it was—just that it was not the primary emphasis as it was in the emerging adults' stories.

Like the emerging adults, all of the older adult authors explicitly referenced the Civil War. Unlike with the emerging adults, the Civil War did not always anchor the stories. Rather, the older adults described their pre-war and post-war selves, with the war as a disrupting event in between. This is not surprising, as they possess substantial memories prior to the conflict. Thus, the older adults' stories are set within a broader fractured context, and so the question they are faced with is how to best manage this fracture.

The struggle for meaning occurred within the context of adaptation, finding ways to improve or make the most of their situations. Unlike the emerging adults' stories, which were focused more on personal development, nearly all of the older adult stories—regardless of story structure—detail a series of changes in their work and living arrangements, involving the balance of agency to ensure a good life within a context of deep connection to family (children, parents, siblings, friends). Nevertheless, there were some important variations across the structures.

Progressive stories. The progressive stories tended to describe the authors' paths to their current situations, which they viewed as generally positive. They were engaged in some work or activity that provided them with meaning in their life and hope for the future, such as in Nur's story:

I worked in assembly as a computer scanner in Minnesota. I liked the work, but it was a temporary job. After that, I became a PCA, which is a personal care assistant....After a careful consideration, I decided to pursue education. I came to Hubbs Center and started in low-level classes. That made me understand the importance of education, work hard, and climb up the ladder. I know that I have to study hard so I can be where I want to be....Going back to school was the best decision that I ever made in my life for myself and my family. I hope someday I will go to college and fulfill my future goals.
(<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/615>)

Three of the progressive stories invoke the “American Dream” master narrative to some extent, describing the U.S. as the land of opportunity and that success can come through hard work and determination, exemplified in Abdi's story:

I am happy in the U.S. I say thank you for the United States people, United States government. And I like because they give me safe place, they give me everything when I come here, they said, “Welcome to United States.”...I want to work. I want to cover myself and pay my family. Now working, I'm happy [in] United States. Someday I will open a business shop. You're not working [for] another someone. You work for your own self. You open for your shop any time you want. Any time you want, you close your shop. Plus you have freedom of business. Freedom of business.
(<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/467>)

This invocation of the American Dream was not evident in the emerging adults' stories. Moreover, although all of the stories describe negative experiences in the past in contrast to a more positive present and anticipated future, none of the stories are redemptive. There is no causal link between the negative past and the positive present; they do not articulate being better off now because of their past trauma. Rather, they have constructed a positive situation after what they have had to endure.

Stable stories. Like the emerging adults' stability stories, the older adults' stability stories were characterized by factual, descriptive accounts of their lives and/or ups and downs leading them to a current situation which is largely unresolved. Maryama's story, for example:

...my son and I had to get away in order to save our life in 2002. We went to Cairo, Egypt because we had one friend that I know back in my country. We started our life there and lived peacefully. But a lot of things were missing: food, clothes, and education. I struggled a lot because I frustrated. I wasn't have any money to support my son....I started looking for a job, but unfortunately there wasn't job for immigrants. After a couple of months, I contacted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.... They accepted me as a refugee, finally. They told me that we were going to the United States. I was excited because I thought my life changed right away. But it wasn't true. (<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/546>)

Whereas the authors of the progressive stories seemed to have found some meaning and expressed hope for the future, authors of the stable stories continue to search, ending in a place of ambiguity and lacking clear resolution.

Regressive stories. The two regressive stories are what Benish-Weisman (2009) labeled *victimization* narratives, wherein bad experiences beget more bad experiences, with no apparent route to making a more positive life. Fadumo's story exemplifies this:

In the year 2009, a financial crisis occurred in the U.A.E. After that my husband was laid off from his job. So we had to leave the country. We moved to New Delhi, India with our eight children. My children and I qualified for student visas, but my husband didn't. So, he went back to Somalia. My children and I stayed in India for five years. Life was so hard. Since we could only live in India for five years, we moved to the U.S. in July 2013. That is the reason why we are here today. (<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/items/show/545>)

Moreover, one of the two regressive stories was a *contamination* story, in which an initially positive and hopeful life took a turn for the worse—specifically detailing the ways in which language barriers can interfere with everyday functions and lead to heightened distress. However, as with the emerging adult sample, the limited representation of regressive narratives precludes possible inference at this time.

General Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to further understand the psychological process of migration by examining the experiences of Somali refugees in the U.S. shared via digital stories. We did so through a comparative analysis of the structure and content of the stories, examining the relative occurrence of progressive, stable, and regressive story structures for emerging adults and older adults in the sample. The participatory, collaborative approach framing our research methodologies (i.e., digital storytelling) is a major strength of the study. Digital storytelling provides us, as researchers, with rich narrative data that allows us to gain

insight into psychological constructs seldom studied from a bottom-up perspective, while simultaneously inviting participants to be a part of a process. An additional strength of the present study was our sample, which consisted exclusively of Somali immigrants and refugees to the U.S., a population presently understudied and underrepresented in the psychological literature. Both of these strengths allow us to expand upon the literature in meaningful ways. First, taking a qualitative approach to studying migration is a notable departure from common quantitative methods for examining immigrant and refugee adaptation (Berry, 1997; Berry et al., 2006). Second, our sample population is one of the few to include immigrants from Africa, and more specifically, Somalia, enabling us to explore the veracity of common storytelling structures in a different culture.

The difference between emerging adults' stories, reflecting a struggle to find self-continuity across time and place, and the older adults' stories, indicating attempts to find meaning and optimally adapt to each of their current situations, is consistent with past developmental and contextual work (McAdams et al., 2006; Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Thus, this particular pattern of findings does not reveal anything new, per se, but illustrates how these developmental phenomena look within a group that has scantily been represented in the psychological literature. It was notable, however, that despite the fact that all participants describe themselves as better off now than when in Somalia, their stories were not structured as redemptive narratives (i.e., strength and positivity gained through suffering). Although the story prompts were not designed to elicit redemption, the lack of evidence of redemption in this sample—where the situation is *seemingly* ripe for it—raises further questions about the universality of redemption as a structure used to make positive meaning out of negative experiences (c.f., Hammack, 2006; McAdams, 2013).

Despite its several strengths, there are of course several limitations, most notably the small sample size ($n = 26$) and reliance on the digital stories already collected as part of the larger *Immigrant Stories* project. Moreover, there may have been some selection bias in terms of who chose to create and share a digital story and those who did not, such as access to opportunity, willingness to share, and digital literacy, although staff affiliated with IHRC were present on some occasions to help with the latter. Given the nature of the study design, we only had access to a single story and had no opportunity to follow up with participants for additional information, limiting our study to cross-sectional analyses and curtailing our ability to determine how participants adapt over time. Finally, the bulk of the Somali stories were collected prior to 2016, after which anti-Muslim rhetoric increased in association with the Trump campaign both nationally and locally. It is possible that if new stories were collected today, we would see a greater frequency of regressive stories.

Implications for Participatory Approaches with Immigrants and Refugees

Although the focus of the present study was not on research methodologies per se, we have gained several insights through our participatory, collaborative approach using digital storytelling with a population that has largely been neglected in psychological research. Much like other research using digital storytelling methodologies with refugees (Lenette, 2017) and

immigrant populations (Ranieri & Bruni, 2013), we found the use of digital methods to give freedom to voices and stories that have been long oppressed, marginalized, and erased from contemporary U.S. society. In a time in history where chanting “Send her back!” serves as the cultural backdrop for master narratives *about* Somali migrants in the U.S. (Rosenwald & Wootson, 2019), our digital storytelling methodology was able to accomplish several goals situated in empowerment. First, our participatory approach effectively brought stories of family, cultural objects, customs and traditions to life through narrative, images, videos, and music. Second, through these same methods, participants shared their first-person, lived experiences of migration and adaptation brought about by a large and ongoing historical event: the Somali Civil War. Not only does the *Immigrant Stories* project empower Somali migrants to be the authors of their own stories instead of the subjects, it also offers the listener an opportunity to hear about the ways in which the self is shaped by the culture and history of a given society.

In a parallel process in cultural psychology, we as researchers can continue to study marginalized and disempowered communities as the subject of our research, or we can invite them to be a part of the research process as active participants (Lenette, 2017). Consequently, we can give communities the power to shape what we know of them. As is the case in the present study, digital stories created by Somali immigrants and refugees are actual points of data that will come to be part of the narrative on Somali migration experiences in psychology and the broader society. Thus, the 26 Somali immigrants and refugees in our study are not solely participants but also producers of new psychological knowledge (Lenette, Brough, Schweitzer, Correa-Velez, Murray, & Vromans, 2019). While the emphasis of the *Immigrant Stories* project is first and foremost on creating digital stories, this has in no way limited our inquiry, as a major focus of participatory research is valuing and honoring the lived experiences of communities of people, as well as empowering them with the tools to influence knowledge creation. Indeed, digital storytelling is a legitimate research methodology providing psychologists with rich, descriptive narratives that speak to the cultural and historical context underlying migration experiences, while at the same time creating “a seat at the research table” for immigrant and refugee populations.

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