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## The associations between national identity and adjustment: What can we learn from autobiographical narratives?☆

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the interplay between national identity, autobiographical narratives on national identity and the adjustment of immigrant and majority groups in Israel. Participants were 193 Jewish Israelis (63.68% female; mean age 29.54 years); 51.29% immigrated from the Former Soviet Union and 48.71% were from native-born families. Participants reported the centrality of and private regard for national identity and provided autobiographical narratives on peak and nadir experiences of national identity. Narratives' topics and themes of agency and communion were coded. Participants also reported positive adjustment (self-esteem, life satisfaction); negative adjustment (depression, anxiety symptoms); and civic engagement (voting, consumption of news about Israel). The immigrant group showed lower centrality of national identity, less positive adjustment, and lower civic engagement than the majority group. The groups significantly varied in narrative topics. Private regard for national identity was associated with better adjustment of both groups. Agency in peak narratives was associated with higher civic engagement of immigrants. Agency in nadir narratives was associated with more positive adjustment and less negative adjustment of immigrants and with higher civic engagement of both groups. The findings indicate that national identity is important in the adjustment of both immigrant and majority groups. It extends prior research by documenting the unique role of autobiographical experiences of national identity in adjustment.

## Introduction

The study described here addressed two gaps in the research on national identity. First, it examined the role of national identity in the adjustment of majority group members; such studies are both rare and inconsistent. Second, identity theory suggests that autobiographical narratives are the building blocks of identity (Singer, 2004) and, thus, may shed light on the subjective content of national identity. Yet little is known about autobiographical narratives on national identity and their associations with adjustment (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010). The study began to fill both gaps by examining the interplay between national identity, autobiographical narratives on national identity, and the adjustment of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and majority group members in Israel.

☆ The article is based in part on master's thesis by Lior Gal. Part of this work was presented in July 2016 at the Cultural Diversity, Migration, and Education Conference, Potsdam, Germany.

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### *National identity and adjustment*

With increased global migration, the adjustment of migrants is becoming a concern of both policy makers and researchers. Acculturation theories suggest that immigrants' adjustment is shaped by their identification with their ethnic minority group and the majority group (Berry, 1980). Group affiliation provides a sense of belonging and is conceptualized as a psychological resource contributing to wellbeing and adjustment (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This sense of belonging, or social identification, contributes to adjustment by providing meaning in life (Kiang & Fuligni, 2017) and promoting feelings of social support (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Numerous studies document links between ethnic identity and ethnic minorities' adjustment (see Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Studies also suggest that having a sense of national identity is related to ethnic minorities' adjustment. For example, adopting an American identity was found to be related to less alienation and distress and more satisfaction in life among FSU immigrants in the USA (Persky & Birman, 2005). Other studies show that in assimilative environments, adopting a national identity is especially important for immigrants even if they risk relinquishing ethnic identity (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001; Shalom & Horenczyk, 2004).

Although research has mostly focused on immigrant and minority groups, there is growing interest in the relations between national identity and the adjustment of majority groups. Relatively few studies have examined this issue, and results are inconsistent. Some find no significant associations between the national identity, self-esteem and depressive symptomatology of European-Americans (Phinney, 1992; Walker, Wingate, Obasi, & Joiner Jr, 2008; Xu, Farver, & Pauker, 2015). Others report associations between national identity and higher self-esteem among European-Americans (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), majority Dutch (2009, Verkuyten, 1995) and majority Israeli and German adolescents (Benish-Weisman, Daniel, Schiefer, Möllering, & Knafo-Noam, 2015), as well as higher civic engagement (Anglin, Johnson-Pynn, & Johnson, 2012) and more positive academic attitudes among European-American adolescents (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005). The first goal of this research, therefore, was to study the associations between national identity and the adjustment of members of both immigrant minority and host-country majority groups.

### *Autobiographical narratives on national identity and adjustment*

The study of ethnic and national identities uses close-ended scales (e.g., Birman & Trickett, 2001; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). This type of measurement reveals little about the subjective meaning individuals attribute to group identity (McLean, Syed, Yoder, & Greenhoot, 2014) and whether this subjective meaning is related to adjustment. Autobiographical narratives are conceptualized as a window to the way individuals perceive and construct reality to create a sense of coherence and purpose in their lives (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Thus, our second goal was to explore the meaning of national identity for immigrant and majority groups as it is revealed in autobiographical narratives.

Narrative research in this context is rare. Syed and Azmitia (2008, 2010) asked participants from ethnic minority and majority groups to recall and narrate times they became particularly aware of their ethnicity when in the company of a close friend. They documented associations between narrative content and ethnic identity status (Syed & Azmitia, 2008, 2010). We used a different approach and asked participants to narrate peak (positive) and nadir (negative) experiences associated with membership in the national group to enable them to freely choose events that were salient to them (see McAdams, 2006).

An autobiographical narrative reflects an event and the narrator's subjective meaning-making of it. Different events may be more frequent or more important in the daily life of immigrant minority and host-country majority groups and thus appear more frequently in their narratives. For example, immigrants may experience discrimination more often and emphasize it in their narratives. Furthermore, each group may have a different cultural background, values, norms, and history and experience nationality differently. For example, one group (immigrant or majority) that values family ties may tend to narrate family gatherings on national holidays more than the other. Hence, the second goal of this study was to compare the topics of the narratives of the two groups to see if each expressed a unique national identity content.

Narrative researchers emphasize that the subjective meaning-making of an autobiographical event may be more closely linked to adjustment than the event itself (Blagov & Singer, 2004). According to this view, the narrative is not an objective reflection of events but an interpretation of what happened. When narrating an autobiographical event, the narrator attributes subjective affective meaning, highlights certain aspects over others, and chooses how to present the self (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Arguably, these subjective interpretations correlate with adjustment. For example, how people construct their narratives tells us more about their coping abilities than the specific event they choose to narrate (Benish-Weisman, 2009). Assessing the subjective meaning-making of events related to national identity may contribute to our understanding of how and why national identity relates to adjustment (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016).

In this study we focused on two subjective meaning-making themes, agency and communion. These themes reflect two basic modalities of human existence and have been studied extensively in relation to adjustment (Bakan, 1966; McAdams et al., 2006). Agency refers to expressions of autonomy, achievement, and competence. Agency during positive or negative autobiographical events associated with majority group membership may suggest the individual resolved the event and reconstructed her/his memory while emphasizing her/his personal strengths. Feeling able and active may lead to better coping, relating, in turn, to higher self-esteem, more satisfaction with life, and lower psychological distress. A subjective sense of agency may also be reflected in increased involvement in society, expressed, for example, in higher civic engagement.

Communion reflects the experience of a caring, supportive social environment, of belongingness and solidarity. Communion in the context of negative autobiographical events could be expressed in memories of receiving support or comfort from family, friends, or the larger community. Reconstruction of memories emphasizing being loved, appreciated, and supported may be associated with

higher self-esteem, lower psychological distress, and greater motivation to reciprocate the caring and solidarity by being involved in society, as in higher civic engagement.

Studies suggest themes of agency and communion in autobiographical narratives regarding other life experiences are robustly associated with adjustment, above and beyond other personal variables, such as demographics or traits (Adler et al., 2016; Bauer & McAdams, 2010). For example, increased agency in narratives about therapeutic processes is related to better mental health during psychotherapy (Adler, 2012) and communion growth goals in narratives on life goals, such as desiring deeper experiences with others, predicts increased adjustment (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). Accordingly, our third goal was to examine the relations between agency and communion themes in autobiographical narratives about national identity and adjustment. We expected both themes would relate positively to the adjustment of immigrant and majority group members.

#### *Study context: immigrants from FSU and the Israeli majority*

The associations of national identity with adjustment may vary across cultural contexts (Meeus, 2017; Phinney et al., 2001), depending on the features of an immigrant's culture (e.g., perceived compatibility of the immigrant and hosting cultures) and the attitudes of the hosting society towards immigrants (e.g., the extent to which it accepts immigrants or pressures for assimilation; Phinney et al., 2001). This research was conducted in Israel and focused on immigrants from FSU and native-born Jews.

About a million Jews immigrated to Israel from FSU between 1989 and 2000, with the majority arriving 1989–1992, following the collapse of the Soviet regime. This was the largest wave of immigration to Israel since its establishment, increasing the Jewish Israeli population by 15% (Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009). Israel has a strong national ethos of encouraging Jews to immigrate. They are not considered immigrants but “home-comers”, and once arrived, they are automatically entitled to Israeli citizenship. They receive benefits to facilitate adjustment, including financial support during the first years of residence, Hebrew language classes, occupational courses, and scholarships for the higher education system (Ministry of Aliyah & Immigration Absorption, 2016). The Israeli public policy and society at large, however, tend to encourage assimilation (Phinney et al., 2001). This unique combination of unconditional acceptance and pressure for assimilation may lead to positive associations between national identity and adjustment (Phinney et al., 2001).

Two previous studies documented the relationship between commitment to national (Israeli) identity and higher life satisfaction and self-esteem among FSU immigrant adolescents (Phinney et al., 2001; Shalom & Horenczyk, 2004). Another study found that a higher sense of belonging to Israel was associated with higher life satisfaction among adults who immigrated to Israel from FSU or France (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). Yet Kurman and colleagues' study of FSU immigrant adults (Kurman, Eshel, & Zehavi, 2005) found no significant links between Israeli identity and self-esteem. As findings are inconsistent and focus on a limited set of outcomes (i.e., self-esteem and life satisfaction), and since to the best of our knowledge, only one study has examined national identity among majority group adolescents in Israel (Benish-Weisman et al., 2015), further research is needed.

#### *The current study*

This study examined whether and how national identity and agency and communion themes in autobiographical narratives on national identity relate to the adjustment of immigrant adults from FSU and from native-born adults in Israel. It also explored group differences in narratives' topics. National identity was evaluated in terms of centrality, i.e., the significance the individual attached to this group, and private regard, i.e., feeling positively about the national group (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). Adjustment was defined in terms of self-esteem, satisfaction in life, depression and anxiety symptoms, and civic engagement (i.e., the extent to which participants voted in local and national elections and followed news related to Israel; Spiezio, Baker, & Boland, 2005). These are central indicators of adults' wellbeing and competence (Erikson, 1968; Obradović & Masten, 2007) and have been examined in previous research on national identity (e.g., Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Anglin et al., 2012; Kurman et al., 2005).

We hypothesized the following:

- (1) Following research on immigrants from FSU in Israel (e.g., Phinney et al., 2001) and studies of majority groups in the US and Europe (e.g., Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), we expected that the centrality of and private regard for national identity would be positively associated with the adjustment of both immigrant and majority groups.
- (2) As this was the first study, to the best of our knowledge, to examine peak and nadir experiences of national identity, we explored the topics of participants' narratives and examined differences between immigrant and majority groups with no a-priori hypothesis.
- (3) Following previous narrative research (Adler et al., 2016), we expected that agency and communion in peak and nadir autobiographical narratives of national identity would be associated positively with the adjustment of both immigrant and majority groups, after controlling for the associations of centrality and private regard with adjustment. We ended the analyses with a qualitative elucidation of agency and communion themes and their relations with adjustment. The goals of this analysis were to enrich the quantitative findings and to tap into how participants constructed their national identity to feel good about themselves and be involved in their social environment.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables by Country of Origin.

	Majority group (n = 91-95) M (SD) / n (%) <sup>a</sup>	Immigrant group (n = 84-99) M (SD) /n (%) <sup>a</sup>	t-test / Lambda	Cohen's d/ phi
Centrality of national identity	5.02 (.91)	4.44 (1.31)	3.60***	.51
Private regard for national identity	4.67 (1.26)	4.73 (1.25)	-.35	.05
Agency in national identity peak narratives			.06	.11
No	32 (35.16)	23 (25.00)		
Yes	59 (64.84)	69 (75.00)		
Agency in national identity nadir narratives			.000	.08
No	66 (71.74)	66 (78.57)		
Yes	26 (28.26)	18 (21.43)		
Communion in national identity peak narratives			.41***	.41
No	27 (29.67)	65 (70.65)		
Yes	64 (70.33)	27 (29.35)		
Positive wellbeing	3.60 (0.55)	3.24 (1.10)	2.86**	.41
Negative wellbeing	1.37 (0.40)	1.48 (0.59)	-1.49	.23
Civic engagement (z-score)	.31 (0.51)	-.28 (1.08)	4.78***	.70
Age	30.29 (5.57)	28.80 (3.16)	2.25*	.33
Gender			.03	.08
Female	66 (70.21)	62 (62.63)		
Male	28 (29.79)	37 (37.37)		
Level of education <sup>b</sup>	2.43 (.85)	2.87 (.44)	-4.46***	.65

Note.

<sup>a</sup> Percentage within country of origin.

<sup>b</sup> Level of education was coded as: 1 = only high school education, 2 = post high school professional training, 3 = academic education.

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## Method

### Participants

Adults were approached through university courses and social media and invited to participate in a study of affiliation with cultural groups in Israel. One hundred and ninety-four Jewish adults (63.68% female) participated; ninety-nine were immigrants from FSU, namely were born in FSU or were children of immigrants from FSU ( $n = 96$  and  $n = 3$  respectively), and ninety-five were native-born Israelis whose parents were also born in Israel. Participants' average age was 29.54 ( $SD = 4.57$ ); 79.26% had an academic education, 6.91% had post high school professional training, and 13.83% had only high school education. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics by country of origin. Immigrants moved to Israel, on average, 23 years earlier ( $SD = 2.50$ ). In this respect, the subsample was representative of the population of FSU immigrants in Israel (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Average age at immigration was 5.81 years ( $SD = 3.19$ ).

### Procedure

An online survey was uploaded to the university's online platform. Participants were asked to write autobiographical narratives about peak and nadir experiences related to being Israeli. They were then asked to complete close-ended questionnaires on national identity, adjustment, and demographics. All participants completed the narrative task and only then were shown the questionnaires to make sure their narratives were not colored by the questionnaires' items. Informed consent was obtained in writing. Participants had a chance to win a prize (\$50 in gift cards). The study's procedure and measures were approved by the university's Human Research Review Board (#331/13).

### Measures

#### Centrality of and private regard for national identity

Participants completed the centrality and private regard subscales (eight and six items respectively) of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers et al., 1997), adapted to Israeli identity (e.g., centrality: "Being an Israeli is an important reflection of who I am"; private regard: "I am happy that I am Israeli"). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The MIBI was developed to assess the racial identity of African-Americans but has been validated among other ethnic groups (e.g., Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006), including FSU immigrants in Israel (Benish-Weisman, 2016). To calculate measurement invariance, we conducted multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the

**Table 2**  
Frequency of Topics of Peak and Nadir Narratives by Immigrant and Majority Groups.

	Peak point		Nadir point	
	Majority group (n = 89)	Immigrant group (n = 95)	Majority group (n = 92)	Immigrant group (n = 87)
Does not have any event to narrative about, because does not feel Israeli	1 (4.8, -2.5*)	9 (5.2, 2.5*)	1 (3.1, 1.7†)	5 (2.9, -1.7†)
Army service	10 (19.3, -3.3*)	30 (20.7, 3.3*)	7 (4.6, 1.6)	2 (4.4, -1.6)
Encounter with non-Israelis	16 (11.1, 2.2*)	7 (11.9, -2.28*)	10 (9.3, .4)	8 (8.7, -.4)
Achievements of Israelis	49 (41.1, 2.3*)	36 (43.9, -2.3*)	—	—
National rituals	13 (12.6, .2)	13 (13.4, -.2)	—	—
Discrimination against FSU immigrants	—	—	0 (9.8, -4.7*)	19 (9.2, -4.7*)
Negative characteristics of Israelis	—	—	55 (49.3, 1.7†)	41 (46.7, -1.7†)
War / terror attacks	—	—	5 (5.7, -.4)	6 (5.3, .4)
Distrust in the Israeli government	—	—	14 (10.3, 1.8†)	6 (9.7, -1.8†)

Note.

Within parentheses, the first number (in italics) is the expected value, and the second is the adjusted standardized residual. Adjusted standardized residuals are Z scores; they are statistically significant at the 0.05 level when greater than 1.96 or smaller than -1.96 (marked with asterisks) and marginally significant at the level of 0.09 when greater than 1.65 or smaller than -1.65 (marked with obelisk). Cells marked with asterisks make significant contributions to the overall associations.

AMOS23 program. This analysis indicated an adequate fit of the two subscales across immigrant and majority groups, CMIN/DF = 2.09,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = 0.075; CFI = .902. In addition, the MIBI demonstrated good internal reliability,  $\alpha$  centrality immigrant group = .88;  $\alpha$  centrality majority group = .76;  $\alpha$  private regard immigrant group = .87;  $\alpha$  private regard majority group = .86.

#### Autobiographical narratives

Participants were asked to write autobiographical narratives on peak (very positive) and nadir (very negative) experiences related to their national identity (see Appendix A). The use of peak and nadir points is suggested by McAdams (1985) in his Life Story Interview guidebook. Narratives' topics (see Table 2) were coded following Syed and Nelson (2015) by the first and second authors. Inter-rater reliability based on 20% of the narratives was good ( $\text{Kappa}_{\text{peak point narratives of majority group}} = .82$ ;  $\text{Kappa}_{\text{peak point narratives of immigrant group}} = .79$ ;  $\text{Kappa}_{\text{nadir narratives of majority group}} = .79$ ; and  $\text{Kappa}_{\text{nadir narratives of immigrant group}} = .88$ ).

Coding criteria for agency and communion themes were based on McAdams (2001). Agency refers to expressions of autonomy, achievement, and competence. Communion reflects themes of caring for or receiving support from the close or distant social environment, as well as belonging and solidarity. Ten narratives were coded by all four authors for criteria consolidation and training. The third and fourth authors coded all narratives and rated whether they included an agency and/or communion theme. Kappa scores, calculated separately for agency and communion themes in peak and nadir stories, were excellent, ranging from 0.90 to 1.00 ( $M = .96$ ;  $SD = .04$ ). Disagreements were discussed until consensus was reached.

#### Adjustment

**Positive adjustment.** Positive adjustment consisted of two indicators. First, global self-esteem was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This 10-item scale includes five positive (e.g., "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself") and five negative feelings about the self (e.g., "At times I think I am no good at all"). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The measure is widely used, including in studies of FSU immigrants in Israel (e.g., Oznobishin & Kurman, 2009). It demonstrated good internal reliability ( $\alpha_{\text{immigrant group}} = .88$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{majority group}} = .73$ ). Second, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), a short 5-item self-report, measures global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with life (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life"). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measure is widely used in research in Israel, including among FSU immigrants (e.g., Hadjar et al., 2012) and demonstrated excellent internal reliability in the present study ( $\alpha_{\text{immigrant group}} = .97$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{majority group}} = .80$ ). As self-esteem and satisfaction with life were strongly correlated ( $r = 0.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ), self-esteem scores were converted to a 5-point scale, and self-esteem and satisfaction with life scores were aggregated based on their mean score.

**Negative adjustment.** Participants completed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale 21 (DASS 21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). Two 7-item scales were used to examine symptoms of depression (e.g., "I felt down-hearted and blue") and anxiety (e.g., "I felt scared without any good reason") experienced by the participants over the past week. Participants rated the extent to which they experienced each symptom on a 4-point Likert scale from 0 (does not apply) to 3 (applies very much). The Hebrew version of the DASS has been used in several studies in Israel (e.g., Yaari et al., 2015), including in a sample of FSU immigrants (Dickstein et al., 2012). Both scales demonstrated good internal reliability ( $\alpha_{\text{depression immigrant group}} = .95$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{depression majority group}} = .82$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{anxiety immigrant group}} = .88$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{anxiety majority group}} = .84$ ). Since depression and anxiety symptoms were moderately correlated ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), they were aggregated based on their mean.

**Civic engagement.** Participants were asked if they tended or did not tend to vote in local and national elections. Their reports were

rated on a 3-point scale: 1 (not voting in local and national elections); 2 (voting in local or national elections); 3 (voting in local and national elections). Participants also reported the extent they consumed news about Israel on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 (not at all); 2 (once in several weeks); 3 (once every several days); 4 (at least once a day). As we did not have specific hypotheses on voting and news consumption, scores were standardized and aggregated for further analyses. It should be noted that the association between voting and news consumption was significant among immigrants ( $r_{one-tailed} = 0.73, p < .001$ ) but insignificant among majority group participants ( $r_{one-tailed} = 0.17, p = .055$ ). The latter weaker association may reflect a ceiling effect, namely the tendency of most of the majority group participants to vote and consume news on a daily basis, as reflected in their average scores on these variables which were close to the maximal values and the low variability of the scores ( $M_{voting} = 2.70; SD = 0.46; M_{news\ consumption} = 3.69, SD = 0.59$ ). Notably, however, results were similar when analyses were run separately for voting and news consumptions.

*Planned analyses*

We performed *t*-tests, Lambda and Carmer’s V tests to examine differences in background and study variables (including narratives’ topics; hypothesis 2) by country of origin. We used correlation analyses to examine the associations between background and study variables; the results informed the selection of covariates for primary analyses. To examine the associations of centrality, private regard, agency themes and communion themes with adjustment indices (hypotheses 1 and 3), we tested for bivariate correlations and preformed regression analyses.

**Results**

*Preliminary analyses*

The distribution of all continuous variables was sufficiently normal to render parametric statistics valid (i.e., skewness < 2, kurtosis < 2; Garson, 2012). Descriptives of study variables by country of origin appear in Table 1.

Only four participants expressed communion in their nadir narratives, so this variable was not included in further analyses and is not presented in Table 1. As shown the table, compared with the majority group, the immigrant group reported lower centrality of Israeli identity, tended less to articulate communion in peak narratives and reported lower positive adjustment and lower civic engagement. There were no group differences in private regard for Israeli identity, agency themes in peak and nadir narratives or negative adjustment. Older age was associated with higher civic engagement. Higher level of education was associated with lower private regard and themes of communion in peak narratives (see Table 3). Thus, age and level of education were included in subsequent analyses.

*Group differences in topics of narratives on national identity*

Table 2 presents narrative topics. We found a significant group difference in the topics of peak narratives (Carmer’s V = 0.34,

**Table 3**  
Bivariate Correlations among Study Variables (N<sup>a</sup> = 75–194).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1. Centrality of national identity	–	.64***	.17*	.05	.11	.21*	–.12†	.22**	–.10	.09	–.12	.002	
2. Private regard for national identity		–	.17*	–.18*	.02	.23**	–.22**	.26***	–.08	–.14†	–.22**	.02	
3. Agency in national identity peak narratives <sup>b</sup>			–	–.05	.03	.09	–.13†	.09	–.10	–.04	–.04	–.11	
4. Agency in national identity nadir narratives <sup>b</sup>				–	.03	.05	–.03	.13†	.12	.06	.08	–.19	
5. Communion in national identity peak narratives <sup>c</sup>					–	.08	–.07	.07	–.14†	–.07	–.18*	–.05	
6. Positive wellbeing						–	–.70***	.60***	–.07	.06	–.08	–.22*	
7. Negative wellbeing							–	–.59***	.001	–.11	.03	.14	
8. Civic engagement								–	.14	.15*	–.12	–.07	
9. Gender <sup>d</sup>									–	.05	.08	.05	
10. Age										–	.46***	.18†	
11. Level of education <sup>e</sup>												.11	
12. Years since immigration													–

Note.

<sup>a</sup> N ranged between 163–194 except for correlations involving the variable of years since the immigration, which was collected only for the immigrant group. Thus, the latter correlations were based on n ranging between 75–88.

<sup>b</sup> Agency is coded as: 0 = no agency theme in the narrative, 1 = there is an agency theme in the narrative.

<sup>c</sup> Communion is coded as: 0 = no communion theme in the narrative, 1 = there is a communion theme in the narrative.

<sup>d</sup> Gender was coded as: 1 = female 2 = male.

<sup>e</sup> Level of education is coded as: 1 = only high school education, 2 = post high school professional training, 3 = academic education.

†  $p < .10$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .



$p < .001$ ). In particular, the immigrant group tended more than the majority group to report that they could not narrate on national identity because they did not feel Israeli and to narrate more about their military service. In contrast, the majority group tended to narrate the achievements of Israelis and encounters with non-Israelis. There was also a significant group difference in the topics of nadir narratives (*Cramer's V* = .41,  $p < .001$ ). In particular, immigrants had a greater tendency to narrate stories of discrimination.

#### *Relations between national identity, agency and communion themes and adjustment*

##### *Bivariate relations*

As shown in Table 3, and supporting hypothesis 1, higher centrality of national identity was significantly correlated with more positive adjustment and higher civic engagement. Yet centrality was not significantly associated with negative adjustment. Also as expected, higher private regard for national identity was significantly associated with more positive adjustment, less negative adjustment and higher civic engagement. Contrary to hypothesis 3, agency in peak and nadir narratives and communion in peak narratives were not associated with adjustment.

##### *Regression analyses*

We conducted three hierarchical linear regression analyses for each adjustment outcome (i.e., positive adjustment, negative adjustment and civic engagement). The goal was two-fold: first, to evaluate the distinct effects of the centrality of and private regard for national identity (hypothesis 1) and agency themes in peak and nadir narratives and communion themes in peak narrative (hypothesis 3) on adjustment; second, to examine the consistency of these effects across groups, using interaction terms between each predictor and country of origin.

Participants' education level, which as noted earlier, was associated with private regard and communion in peak narratives, and country of origin were entered in the first block of all regression analyses. As described above, age was significantly associated with civic engagement but not with any other dependent or independent variables in the regression analyses. Thus, age was included in the first block of the regression analysis for civic engagement only. Centrality of and private regard for national identity were entered in the second block, followed by interaction terms between centrality of national identity and country of origin and between private regard for national identity and country of origin in the third block. The next block included agency in peak and nadir narratives to examine their association with adjustment, after controlling for the associations of the private regard for and centrality of national identity with adjustment. The fifth block included interaction terms between agency in peak narratives and country of origin and between agency in nadir narratives and country of origin. Finally, communion in peak narratives and the interaction between communion in peak narratives and country of origin were entered in the six and the seventh blocks respectively. Continuous predictors were centered to minimize collinearity (Kraemer & Blasey, 2004). We used Hayes' (2013) PROCESS routine to probe the simple slopes of significant interaction effects.

As shown in Table 4, and supporting hypothesis 1, private regard for national identity was associated with higher positive adjustment, lower negative adjustment and higher civic engagement. The interaction effects between private regard for national identity and country of origin were not significant, suggesting the association between private regard and adjustment was consistent across groups. Unexpectedly, centrality of national identity was not related to adjustment in either group.

Agency in peak narratives was not associated with the adjustment indices. Yet the interaction between agency in peak narratives and country of origin had a significant effect on civic engagement. Simple slope analyses revealed a significant association between agency in peak narratives and higher civic engagement only among immigrants but not among majority group. Agency in nadir narratives was associated with higher civic engagement of both immigrant and majority groups. Furthermore, the interaction between agency in nadir narratives and country of origin had significant effects on positive adjustment and negative adjustment. Simple slope analyses revealed that for immigrants but not the majority group, agency in nadir narratives was associated with more positive adjustment and less negative adjustment (see Table 4). Finally, unexpectedly, communion in peak narratives and the interaction between communion in peak narratives and country of origin had no significant effects on any adjustment indices (all  $p$ 's > .220, not shown in Table 4).

#### *Qualitative elucidation of agency and communion themes and associations with adjustment*

Here we tap into the meaning of agency and communion themes and examine how these subjective constructs related to adjustment. As the above analyses show, agency plays an important role in adjustment, particularly among immigrants. Igor, a 31 old male immigrant, narrates the following agentic peak event:

A peak moment related to being Israeli was when I was elected to be the head of the students' council in grade 11. I remember this as a very happy moment. I immigrated to Israel at a young age, my Hebrew was not great, and therefore I experienced many episodes of humiliation. However, I had grown up and overcame, and when I was elected to be the council head, it was a peak point for me.

Igor constructs his narration in terms of personal achievement and social recognition. Being on students' council is voluntary and reflects activism and is likely to be associated with ongoing involvement in society as an adult. In addition, being elected head in high school (where most students belong to the majority group) is an impressive accomplishment and likely to be associated with higher self-esteem and life satisfaction. Finally, Igor's narrative suggests his agency goes beyond helping him cope with the hardships of immigration by contributing to his sense of belonging to the larger society.

**Table 4**

Regressions of Participants' Adjustment on National Identity, Agency and Communion in Narratives on National Identity, and their Interactions with Country of Origin (N = 160).

Variables	Positive wellbeing			Negative wellbeing			Civic engagement		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\Delta R^2$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\Delta R^2$	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\Delta R^2$
Block 1			.05*			.01			.13***
Country of origin <sup>a</sup>	-.35 <sup>†</sup>	.15		.02	.06		-.48**	.15	
Level of education	-.07	.11		.11	.09		-.16	.12	
Age	–	–		–	–		.04 <sup>†</sup>	.02	
Block 2			.06**			.05**			.07**
Centrality of national identity	.01	.08		.02	.05		-.09	.08	
Private regard for national identity	.18 <sup>†</sup>	.08		-.11*	.05		.26**	.08	
Block 3			.01			.01			.02 <sup>†</sup>
Centrality of national identity X country of origin <sup>a</sup>	-.18	.17		.11	.10		-.02	.17	
Private regard for national identity X country of origin <sup>a</sup>	.25	.17		-.12	.10		.27 <sup>†</sup>	.16	
Block 4			.01			.01			.05 <sup>†</sup>
Agency in national identity peak narratives <sup>b</sup>	.13	.16		-.11	.10		.25 <sup>†</sup>	.15	
Agency in national identity nadir narratives <sup>b</sup>	.20	.16		-.10	.10		.39 <sup>†</sup>	.15	
Block 5			.03 <sup>†</sup>			.04 <sup>†</sup>			.05**
Agency in national identity peak narratives X country of origin <sup>ab</sup>	.31	.31		-.15	.19		.90**	.29	
Israel	–	–		–	–		-.14	.19	
FSU	–	–		–	–		.76***	.22	
Agency in national identity nadir narratives X country of origin <sup>ab</sup>	.67 <sup>†</sup>	.32		-.51*	.19		.47	.30	
Israel	-.10	.22		.13	.13		–	–	
FSU	.57 <sup>†</sup>	.24		-.37*	.14		–	–	
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.16			.13			.34		
Final model	F (12, 147) = 2.39**			F (12, 147) = 1.86*			F (13, 146) = 5.70***		

Note.

*b* and *SE* values are from variables' first entry into model. Blocks 6 and 7 that included communion themes in peak narratives and their interactions with country of origin were not significant and are not shown.

<sup>a</sup> Country of origin is coded as: 0 = Israel, 1 = FSU.

<sup>b</sup> Agency is coded as: 0 = no agency theme in the narrative, 1 = there is an agency theme in the narrative.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Igor indirectly describes a process of becoming Israeli by being accepted as a leader by the majority group. For Julia, a 27-year-old female immigrant, being Israeli is taken for granted. In her nadir narrative she sees herself as Israeli and describes her activism as an effort to improve Israeli society. Her agency is manifested in the decision to increase her civic engagement, and this helps her overcome negative adjustment:

The last national election was a low point. It was a disappointment, a feeling of a dead-end, that the Israeli people cannot create a change. In the beginning I felt helpless but afterward, this disappointing event increased my motivation to expand my involvement in society. I try to create change by doing.

Interestingly, agency themes often emerged in immigrants' (and to a lesser extent in the majority group) narratives of military service. Two women, one an immigrant and the other a member of the majority group, narrate the following peak point stories:

When I become an officer. My family and friends were there and I felt that I contribute to Israel. (Tania, a 31-year-old female, immigrant)

In the army I was a commander in an officers' preparation course, and I was very proud. (Dana, a 22-year-old female, majority group).

In a society struggling with war and terrorism, military service is mandatory for men and women aged 18. This is a universal path for all Jewish Israelis. As such, it is a central part of the identity of Israeli adults and is experienced as the key to acceptance into the majority group and more broadly as a key to adjustment (Mayselless & Salomon, 2003). Becoming an officer (Tania) or a commander (Dana) reflects a proclivity to volunteer and be actively involved and is a recognition of excellence by higher officers who decide on promotions.

In all four narratives, agency is reflected in civic engagement; this may explain the close link we found between agency in peak and nadir narratives and higher scores in civic engagement. In addition, three of the four narrators mention outstanding personal achievements, which may be associated with higher self-esteem and more satisfaction with life.

Unexpectedly, we found no significant associations between the theme of communion and adjustment of either group. Communion appears in the following two peak narratives.



During the last war at the funeral of a lonely soldier [an immigrant who moves to Israel without parents or siblings]. I remember that I came across a post asking people to come to the funeral and give the respect that a warrior that fought and died for us deserves. When I saw that thousands of people came to his funeral, I felt an Israeli pride. Of course, I was not happy, the event was very sad, but I felt happiness for the cohesion of our people. (Rita, a 37-year-old female immigrant)

It was October 2011. My son was almost a year old. We were at home during the morning, and we did something that we rarely do - we turned on the TV. We saw Gilad Shalit returning home [a young Israeli soldier kidnaped by Hamas militants, held captive in the Gaza strip for five years, and released in October 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange]. I remember feeling a very strong sense of joy, euphoria. I thought to myself that I am living in a place that highly values life, that takes care of every son. I remember dancing with my son all over our house ...I felt that this is a feeling that only Israelis could feel - a simultaneous sadness and happiness. (Shira, a 34-year-old female, majority group)

A perception of social support may not be enough for positive adjustment, for reducing negative adjustment, or for motivating higher civic engagement, as even in a supportive environment, people can express themselves as passive or as victims in their narratives (Benish-Weisman, 2009). In addition, as in Rita and Shira's narratives, even in peak point narratives, communion themes may reflect feelings of unity as a result of war or death and a mixture of sadness and happiness. In general, in the context of terrorism and war, the national narrative has a significant role and is interwoven into personal narratives. Nevertheless, a person may feel part of a bigger group, but in the context of a traumatic life event, this feeling may not be positively associated with adjustment.

## Discussion

The study assessed the relations between the centrality of and private regard for national identity, agency and communion themes in autobiographical narratives on national identity and the adjustment of FSU immigrants and the majority group in Israel. Results suggest that private regard for national identity is associated with the adjustment of both groups and that agency in autobiographical narratives on events related to national identity is associated with adjustment, particularity among immigrants.

### *Differences between groups*

Although most of our immigrant participants immigrated to Israel as young children and had spent most of their lives in Israel, they felt more detached and were less well-adjusted than their native-born peers. They reported lower centrality of their national identity and articulated less social support from and solidarity with the larger society, as reflected in fewer communion themes in their peak narratives. Furthermore, although this was relatively rare, some did not identify as Israeli and thus reported that they could not narrate peak autobiographical events related to Israeli identity. These results are in accordance with previous research showing that FSU immigrants tend to self-identify less as Israelis than the majority or other immigrant groups (e.g., Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to note that, as shown in Table 1, immigrants' average centrality score was above the midpoint of the scale, indicating that Israeli identity was central to them to some extent.

Immigrants showed lower positive adjustment and lower civic engagement than the majority group. These differences are in line with research on immigrant and majority group adults (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015) and adolescents in Israel (Walsh, Harel-Fisch, & Fogel-Grinvald, 2010). Our study extends previous work by finding that immigrants show poorer adjustment not only in terms of psychological aspects of wellbeing, such as life satisfaction, but also in terms of civic engagement, a central aspect of adult competence (Obradović & Masten, 2007). Arguably, the assimilative atmosphere of Israeli society (Phinney et al., 2001) might be stressful for immigrants who wish to preserve their culture of origin (Roccas, Horenczyk, & Schwartz, 2000). This should be addressed in future studies.

We also found several group differences in narratives' topics. Immigrants were more likely than the majority group to include military service in their peak narrative. As explained earlier, the mandatory military service is considered a melting pot and represents an entry into Israeli society for minority groups (Mayselless & Salomon, 2003). Immigrants may be very positive about their military service, as it may be experienced as proof of their successful integration. As military service has been mandatory since the establishment of Israel, it is an inherent part of the life course in Israel. Thus, it may be taken for granted by the majority group and less addressed in their peak narratives. Majority group members had a greater tendency to narrate in their peak narratives the achievements of Israelis, for example, in sport. This tendency may be closely linked to the type of the narrative the participants were asked to provide, namely a good moment in which they felt proud of being Israeli. They were also more likely to include encounters with non-Israelis in their peak narratives. Being Israeli is likely taken for granted by majority group members in Israel. An encounter with non-Israelis may cause them to reflect on their Israeli identity from a new perspective, and this may inspire them to see the positive aspects of being Israeli. Immigrants may inherently hold an outsider perspective; thus, encounters with non-Israelis may be less salient in their sense of being Israeli.

Finally, we found group differences in the topics of nadir narratives. In particular, immigrants tended more than the majority group to talk about discrimination. Similarly, Syed and Azmitia (2008) found that ethnic minorities tended more than majority group members (and those of mixed ethnicity) to talk about prejudice when asked to narrate instances in which they became aware of their ethnicity when in the company of a friend. It seems that intolerance and discrimination have a powerful impact on the autobiographical memory of immigrants. Taken together, studying the differences in types of memories associated with national identity enriches our understanding of the meanings various cultural groups attribute to national identity.

### *National identity and adjustment*

The centrality and private regard for national identity were positively related with adjustment in both groups. This suggests that a better sense of being grounded (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) in the national group may serve as a psychological resource, helping both immigrants and majority group members to feel better about themselves and care more about their society. When included in the same regressions, however, private regard was significantly associated with adjustment, but centrality was not. This echoes the results of previous research on ethnic minorities which found private regard was more consistently associated with adjustment than centrality (e.g., Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006).

Our findings are also consistent with other work on the national identity of immigrants in Israel (Phinney et al., 2001; Shalom & Horenczyk, 2004). When a society emphasizes assimilation, as in Israel (Phinney et al., 2001), and expects minority groups to embrace the national identity (Roccas et al., 2000), lower adherence to national identity may relate to poorer adjustment. Israel has been under constant threat of war since its establishment. Thus, national identity may be particularly important for both immigrant and majority groups in Israel. As few studies have examined national identity among majority groups in the US and Europe, and these few have inconsistent results (e.g., Walker et al., 2008 vs. Phinney & Alipuria, 1990), more research in other countries is needed. Research using longitudinal designs is also needed to shed light on causality. We employed a concomitant assessment of identity and adjustment. This precluded inference of causality, and the effects could go in the opposite direction. Experiencing better adjustment and being involved in the society may enhance the sense of belonging to the group, while those with poorer adjustment and low civic engagement may separate themselves.

### *Autobiographical narratives on national identity and adjustment*

An innovative aspect of this study was its examination of agency and communion themes in autobiographical narratives on national identity. After controlling for centrality and private regard, we found that agency in peak narratives was related to higher civic engagement of the immigrants but not the majority group members. Agency in nadir narratives was related to higher civic engagement of both groups, as was more positive adjustment and less negative adjustment, but of immigrants only. These results echo studies finding agency in narratives of other life experiences, such as transitions in careers and religion (Bauer & McAdams, 2004) or psychotherapy (Adler, Skalina, & McAdams, 2008; Adler, 2012), to be associated with better adjustment.

Interestingly, agency was more consistently related to the adjustment of immigrants than the majority. The experience of immigration involves estrangement from the familiar and the predictable, and challenges immigrants with the unexpected and insecure. Indeed, immigration may be experienced as traumatic (Benish-Weisman, 2009), as immigrants may face threats in many physical and psychological aspects of their lives, including the construction of a new national identity. The experience of control, determination and self-efficacy (Huhtala, 2014) may help immigrants to overcome the hardships they encounter in the processes of adapting to the host country and constructing a new national identity, or at least, help them to interpret these obstacles as challenging and engaging (Plunkett, 2001). In support of this interpretation, previous study found a sense of agency was related to more adaptive coping among trauma survivors (Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2004).

As agency in the nadir narratives was associated with more adjustment indices than agency in peak narratives, agency may have a more important role in handling negative events. Put otherwise, when there is a potential for helplessness and despair, those who can reconstruct their negative autobiographical experiences in agentic terms may be able to cope better. In fact, others have found that the ability to narrate negative experiences in an autonomous and positive way is related to adjustment (e.g., McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001).

Communion themes in nadir narratives were extremely rare, and in peak narratives, they were not associated with adjustment. These results were unexpected for two reasons. First, FSU immigrant and majority groups in Israel have a mixture of individualistic and communal orientations (Realo & Allik, 1999; Sher-Censor, 2015; Smooha, 2008). Second, participants were asked to narrate on their group (national) identity, and we rather expected this would lead them to emphasize connection and solidarity with the group. It could be that experiencing communion decreases the negativity of nadir events. Thus, when asked to narrate nadir autobiographical events, narrators may be less likely to choose those in which they experienced communion. Indeed, as noted earlier, communion themes in peak narratives were often presented in the context of a narrative of a negative event, such as war or death, that was defined by the narrator as a peak point because of the communion experience. Notably, our study suggests that in the context of a traumatic life event, experiencing communion may enable the narrator to perceive the positivity in the event and define it as a peak point, but this is not enough to facilitate the narrator's adjustment. As this was, to the best of our knowledge, the first study to explore associations of agency and communion with adjustment in autobiographical narratives in the context of national identity, replication of results is needed. Nevertheless, together with the research of Syed and Azmitia (2008; 2010) who document links between narratives about ethnic identity and ethnic identity status, our findings highlight the value of assessing autobiographical narratives on group identity.

### *Strengths, limitations and implications*

The study has several noteworthy strengths. First, its mixed method design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) included close-ended self-report items and written narratives; all shed light on different aspects of the same phenomenon, offering an in-depth look at the associations between national identity and adjustment. Second, the adjustment assessment included a relatively wide range of indices: self-worth, satisfaction in life, depression and anxiety symptoms and civic engagement (Thoits & Hewitt, 2001).

Admittedly, the research has some limitations. First, participants completed written narratives as part of an Internet survey. Face-to-face interviews may prompt longer (oral) narratives. Although the results suggest the study procedure is valid and elicits narratives rich enough to accommodate ratings of agency and communion, further research is needed to compare the two procedures.

Second, as the study was cross-sectional, the relationship between national identity and adjustment may have been a product of a third variable. For example, personal characteristics, such as psychological robustness, might positively influence group belonging and adjustment. Future studies should apply a longitudinal design and include personal characteristics.

Third, we focused on national identity. As nationality in Israel overlaps religion, another identity potentially shared by immigrant and majority groups is a Jewish identity. Indeed, research on FSU immigrant adolescents in US (Birman, Persky & Chan, 2010) and FSU immigrant adults in Israel (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015) suggests that having a Jewish identity is related to better adjustment. These results call for further examination of the role of different group identities on the adjustment of immigrant and majority groups in Israel.

Fourth, the acculturation strategies of the hosting society and the features of a specific immigrant group could shape the role of national identity in the adjustment of immigrants (Berry, 1980). We focused on the largest immigrant group in Israel. Research on other immigrant groups (e.g., Ethiopians, North-Americans) and minority groups of non-immigrants (e.g., Arab-Israelis) would suggest the extent to which our results can be generalized. Examination of varied cultural groups is especially important in studying agency and communion themes in identity narratives, as agency may have a particularly significant role in cultures that emphasize autonomy and independence while communion may be more significant in collectivist cultures (Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008; Splevins, Cohen, Bowley, & Joseph, 2010).

Finally, this study shared the limitations of previous narrative research (e.g., Syed & Azmitia, 2008) by including a relatively small sample of mostly young adults with an academic degree (although the distribution of level of education is similar to the distribution among FSU adults in Israel; Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Further research is needed to determine whether our results can be generalized to older adults with lower educational attainments.

Despite these limitations, our work indicates the importance of studying national identity via autobiographic narratives to understand the adjustment of adults in general. It suggests Israeli policy makers need to take action, as immigrants seem to have long-lasting difficulties, even if raised from a very young age in Israel. Finally, it introduces a cost-effective narrative measure that can be used in future national identity research and practice. By detecting elements of agency in autobiographic narratives on national identity, therapists can help clients interpret their experiences while maintaining the memories' facts. Providing new interpretations of past events associated with national identity by emphasizing the active and potent role of a client may improve adjustment, particularly among immigrant clients.

## Declarations of interest

None.

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## Appendix A

### *Instructions for Peak and Nadir Autobiographical Narratives on National Identity*

We would like to ask you to write down two stories about events that happened to you and are related to being Israeli. The events could be from years ago or the recent past. For each of these events please describe what happened, what you thought, how you felt and what you did. The first story is about an event that reflects a peak point related to being Israeli, in other words, an event in which you felt happiness/joy for being Israeli. Please describe what happened and what you thought, felt, and did. The second story we invite you to write is about an event that reflects a nadir point related to being Israeli, in other words an event in which you felt sadness/anger/disappointment/ a crisis related to being Israeli. Please describe what happened and what you thought, felt, and did.

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