PERSONALITY TRAITS, MOTIVATION, AND THE MAKING OF MODERN IDENTITY

by

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Abstract

What is the nature of personhood? How is identity best understood? In this dissertation, these questions are explored. Drawing upon a conception of personality in which behavioral traits, goal motivation, and identities are recognized as equal and complementary partners, two proposals are considered. First, it is argued that insights into many psychological phenomena can be enhanced through tandem consideration of the aforementioned personological elements. Second, it is argued that personal identity is manifest within both narrative and non-narrative (i.e., paradigmatic) forms. Support for the first proposal is garnered over the course of three empirical studies. In each of these studies—which consider context variability in the manifestation of personality attributes (i.e., self-concept differentiation), the interplay between the meta-concepts of agency and communion in moral motivation, and the relation between personality and culture, respectively—the predictive ability of traits, goals, and identities is examined. Considerable gains in predictive power are made through consideration of these elements of personality. Support for the second proposal is garnered through the undertaking of the third study, wherein a method for assessing personal identity in its narrative and paradigmatic forms is adopted and applied to a cross-cultural examination of personality. The current endeavor thus aims to apply a necessary corrective to the field of personality psychology (wherein personality and personality traits are often equated) and developmental psychology (wherein identity has increasingly come to be construed solely in narrative terms).
Preface

Chapter 1 of this dissertation provides the conceptual framing and general literature review for the series of research projects that are reported in subsequent chapters. The three research chapters (Chapters 2–4) are each structured as stand-alone manuscripts for publication in peer-refereed journals. Given this format, the reader should expect some redundancies across chapters and some variations that are particular to specific journal foci and style requirements. This dissertation concludes with Chapter 5 wherein I summarize the findings across the various studies and set out the implications for the field. I am the sole author of the Introduction (Chapter 1) and the General Discussion (Chapter 5) and the senior author on all of the research chapters (Chapters 2–4). For those research chapters, I held the primary role in formulating hypotheses, designing the studies, analyzing the data, and writing the manuscripts. All three studies were conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lawrence J. Walker.

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An adapted version of the study reported in Chapter 4 is currently under review in a peer-refereed psychology journal. The research reported in Chapter 4 was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of UBC (BREB certificate # H11-02014).
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Dedication

To my parents.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

If there is to be a specialty called personality, its unique and therefore defining characteristic is traits.

(Buss, 1989, p. 1378)

In the last three decades, personality psychologists have come to rally around the study of traits through endorsement of the five-factor approach (FFA), one wherein five broad factors (viz., agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience) are recognized that, collectively, capture an individual’s behavioral tendencies.\(^1\) This is certainly not without good reason. The intervening years have shown that the personality traits subsumed within the FFA predict a wealth of important short- and long-term outcomes (Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Furthermore, endorsement of the FFA has brought coherence to the field, providing a framework that many believe to be “largely sufficient for characterizing normal and abnormal personality functioning” (Widiger, 1993, p. 82).

Although all of this may be as good as it gets, there continues to be a rub—perhaps several rubs. While the FFA may provide an adequate conceptual framework for the study of personality traits,\(^2\) it cannot be said to do the same for personality (McAdams, 1994). On the contrary, there are important aspects of the person that are incapable of being subsumed within trait-based models. In the work to be summarized here, attention is focused most squarely on two such aspects: motivation and identity. Drawing upon the theorizing of McAdams (1995) and others (e.g., Emmons, 1999; Little, 1996; Singer, 2004), it is argued that a consideration of these

\(^{1}\) Here, I use the term “five-factor approach” as Block (1995) did, to refer to Goldberg’s (1981) Big-Five Model and Costa and McCrae’s (1992) Five-Factor Model.

\(^{2}\) The central issue of the current work is to consider the importance of personological elements that are not subsumed within trait-based theories. For discussion on whether the FFA provides the most appropriate framework for the interpretation of traits, see Paunonen and Jackson (2000).
personological elements alongside the FFA offers a more complete understanding of the person. To support this claim, their predictive ability is contrasted within the domain of three distinct research topics. In what follows, efforts are made to couch the current enterprise within an appropriate historical and conceptual bedding. Before any and all of that, however, attention is briefly turned to the “three distinct research topics” that will serve as fodder for the argument in favor of a more encompassing conception of personhood.

**Three Phenomena at the Heart of Personhood**

*If* there existed a highly detailed map of the field of personality psychology and *if*, thereupon, the relevance of a given research topic was represented by both its elevation and location, *then*, from their centralized topographical positions, the topics of consistency, character, and culture would likely cast an intimidating shadow upon other topics both near and far. For as long as there have been psychologists, there have been psychologists who have exhibited considerable interest in the degree to which personality is consistent across contexts and through time, the description and development of character, and the mutually constitutive relation between selves and cultures (e.g., Hartshorne & May, 1928; James, 1890; Kluckhohn & Murray, 1948; Kardiner, 1939; Spiro, 1951). It seems fitting then to select these topics as the grounds on which to advance my central thesis.

In one of the most quoted passages within social psychology, James (1890) professed that a person “has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him [sic]” (p. 294). Following this provocative statement, he went on to (rightly) stress that, although we may behave in the most demure manner under some circumstances, under other circumstances our mannerisms are markedly different. James’s observation has been used as source material for several research enterprises considering phenomena such as context-specific self-concepts (or
aspects; e.g., McConnell, 2011), processes of self-presentation and impression management (e.g., Paulhus, 1984), and, more to the point of the current efforts, the implications that personological variability carries for psychological adjustment.

One would be hard pressed to find a social psychologist who would be unable to recite the aforementioned Jamesian dictum verbatim. What is perhaps lesser known about James’s choice phrase is that his summary of social selves included discussion of their relation to health and well-being. Specifically, James proposed that collections of social selves could come to constitute a discordant splitting of the person, whereby these selves are kept separate—and hidden—from select others within the social milieu. Alternatively, they could comprise a harmonious division of labor, whereby one’s arsenal of selves constitutes a concordant whole. The theorizing of those following in the wake of James, however, has rarely been this even-keeled.

There currently exist two distinct and non-overlapping positions regarding the benefit and burden of personological variability. The first, informed by theorists including Rogers (1961), proposes that such deviation is maladaptive. The second, informed by theorists including Goffman (1959), views such deviation as adaptive. Much to the chagrin of both positions, however, the hard truth of the matter is that there exists little concrete evidence for either position. The contention entertained in the first study reported in this dissertation is that this lack of evidence is at least partially attributable to a preoccupation with trait variability at the expense of other types of variability. We predict that a consideration of variability manifest among the additional elements of personality will yield insights about the nature of personological variability—and personhood—that a consideration of trait variability alone simply cannot.
A second topic intimately tied to the nature of personhood is character. As Lickona (1989) recognized, character is comprised of three constituents, “knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good” (p. 51). Like personological variability, the study of character has a seasoned footing within personality psychology (e.g., Hartshorne & May, 1928; James, 1890). Suffice it to say that, following the Second World War, the belief previously held by many (e.g., Baldwin, 1902; Mead, 1934; Watson, 1930) that character was manifest through the alignment of oneself with the environing social (i.e., cultural) world was the subject of a violent upheaval (Bauman, 1989). Leading this upheaval was Kohlberg (1958, 1981, 1984) who, through his work on the development of moral reasoning, argued that the principles of relativism were ultimately trumped by more advanced universal maxims.

During the moral reasoning–dominated focus of the Kohlbergian era, character and moral reasoning were largely synonymous. This was not without reason as Kohlberg’s paradigm provided ample sensitivity towards knowing the good. This coverage, however, came at the expense of a concern for desiring the good and doing the good. In the 1980s and 1990s, when the tenuous relation between reasoning and action—the so-called “judgment–action gap” (Walker, 2004, p. 1)—became known, many turned their attention to more encompassing conceptions of character (e.g., Blasi, 1984; Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 1984). Chief among these efforts were those attempting to resituate character in what was more generally known about personality and personhood.

Those setting out to reunite character and personality have essentially done so from one of two angles. The first and perhaps most prevalent originates from within personality psychology. From here, character is largely conceived of as some desirable admixture of traits (e.g., Markowitz, Goldberg, Ashton, & Lee, 2012; Noftle, Schnitker, & Robins, 2011) or a single
A consideration of the relation between agency and communion brings us considerably closer to an understanding of character. The driving nature of these constructs speaks directly to desiring the good. Furthermore, this nature is also intimately tied to knowing the good. Perhaps most importantly, however, in the manner in which the relation between agency and communion is considered in Study 2, it also corresponds to doing the good. Specifically, in the second study reported in this dissertation, the functioning of agency and communion among groups of moral exemplars—individuals who have devoted substantial efforts to helping others—are contrasted with groups of demographically matched individuals. In the interest of determining how this relation develops, moral exemplars at opposite ends of the moral career (and adult lifespan) will be considered. We predict that the relation between trait-based agency and communion (viz., extraversion and agreeableness; Wiggins, 1991) will provide relatively little insight into the psychology of those pursuing the moral career. The interplay between agency and communion manifest in terms of other elements of personhood, however, will better elucidate several aspects of those pursuing this career, as well as the nature of character.
Agency and communion represent but one example from a larger category of dualisms populating the social sciences (Wiggins, 1991). A second, equally prevalent dualism conceives of persons as fundamentally distinct from cultures (Overton, 2010); persons and cultures are necessarily separate, properly placed within their own exclusive compartments, never to be considered in tandem. Thankfully, this view has, of late, fallen on hard times. With increasing regularity, researchers have come to consider personality in relation to culture (e.g., LeVine, 2001).

The historical development of research examining personality and cultures is largely curvilinear in nature. Between the 1920s and the 1950s there existed a fertile interplay of personologists, anthropologists, and sociologists working in the area of culture and personality studies (LeVine, 2001). Due to the overzealous psychologizing of whole cultural communities (e.g., Benedict, 1946; Goer & Rickman, 1949), however, the field was largely abandoned, with psychologists coming to focus on persons and sociologists and anthropologists taking square aim at cultures. This division is now being surmounted by the second wave of researchers within the field (e.g., del Prado et al., 2007; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002).

Psychologists functioning within this second wave have focused predominantly on traits. The interpretation of trait-based data from distinct cultural groups, however, is anything but straightforward. When individuals are completing personality trait inventories they compare (or reference) themselves to groups of one kind or another (Heine et al., 2002). The reference groups of different cultural groups are distinct and, for this reason, a cultural comparison of mean-level differences of traits may reveal little about the psychological reality of the corresponding cultural citizens (Heine, Buchtel, & Norenzayan, 2008).
Thankfully, prospects regarding the cross-cultural comparison of personality are not uniformly bleak. On the contrary, as McAdams (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006) contends, the additional elements of personality that are considered in this dissertation (viz., motivation and identity) may be more fertile for cultural investigation. This fertility stems in part from an increased sensitivity to the larger cultural milieu. A second source of this fertility stems from the fact that motivation and identity do not as readily fall prey to the aforementioned “reference-group effect” (Heine et al., 2002, p. 902). In the third study reported in this dissertation, a cross-cultural examination of personality is undertaken among individuals of Western and Eastern descent. We predict that the trait profiles of these groups will provide little indication of their constituent cultures whereas the additional personological elements considered will yield substantial cultural insights.

To summarize the subject matter contained within this section, three topics lying close to the heart of personality psychology have been briefly reviewed. In each case, it has been suggested that a consideration of traits, motivation, and identity will afford insights that a consideration of traits alone will not. It is the contention here that these topics represent but three textbook cases drawn from a much larger of group of phenomena that could be similarly characterized. This seems to beg the question, however, how exactly did personality psychologists come to focus predominantly on traits at the expense of the other aspects of the person? Answering this question requires brief review of the history of personality psychology.

A Historical Summary of Personality Psychology

The psychologist would be wise to avoid claiming sole ownership of personality. Like many concepts within our discipline, an interest in personality predates the emergence of the field. Indeed, by all historical accounts, the psychologist has come to consider personality in a
tardy manner and, for this reason, must contend with the designation of “conceited intruder” (Allport, 1965, p. 157). The simple fact of the matter is that, since at least the 4th century BCE, interest in personality has manifest. This is not the place for an inclusive review of the study of personhood from ancient times until the present (for such a review, see Dumont, 2010). Rather, in the space permitted, the current review begins with what has been deemed the birth of personality psychology: the 1930s.

As McAdams (1997a) noted, during the 1930s, several events worked to forge the field of personality psychology. First, in 1932, the inaugural issue of the journal *Character and Personality* was published. This journal, which examined personality processes across and within persons, would eventually become what is known today as the *Journal of Personality*. Second, a host of now foundational personality textbooks were written (e.g., Allport, 1937; Lewin, 1935; Murray, 1938). These textbooks were bound together by way of a consideration of the whole person and the provision of “grand theories” (McAdams, 1997a) regarding the nature and proper assessment of the individual. Allport’s (1937) work is noteworthy insofar as he prioritized traits, arguing that they served as a causal force behind “adaptive and expressive behaviors” (Allport, 1961, p. 40).

**Personality Traits and the Lexical Hypothesis**

A personality trait corresponds to “a disposition to behave expressing itself in consistent patterns of functioning across a range of situations” (Pervin, 1994, p. 108). Thus, traits are predicated on the tendency to behave in a stable manner over time (Funder, 1991). It is for this reason that traits are often referred to as behavioral dispositions (e.g., Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). Such traits, or dispositions, are believed to be the product of specific biological structures and
processes (McCrae & Costa, 1999; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008), a notion that goes back in time at least as far as Allport (1937).

In the interest of deriving a list of personality traits that could be used “to distinguish the behavior of one human being from another” (p. 25), Allport and Odbert (1936) surveyed the 1925 unabridged edition of Webster’s New International Dictionary. The validity of such an effort hinges on the notion that “all aspects of human personality which are or have been of importance, interest, or utility have already become recorded in the substance of language” (Cattell, 1943b, p. 483), a view that would later be referred to as the “lexical hypothesis” (see Goldberg, 1982). Consulting the 400,000 words listed in Webster’s dictionary, Allport and Odbert (1936) identified over 17,000 descriptors, parsing them down into a curt list of just over 4,000 trait terms. Having made it that far, these researchers proffered their list to the field in the interest of personality assessment (see also Klages, 1926/1932).

Answering the call to action, Cattell (1943a, 1943b, 1945) referenced this list of trait terms in his efforts to map out the structure of personality. As Block (1995) recognized, however, Cattell took great liberties when doing so, choosing to add trait terms that corresponded to constructs in their heyday (e.g., ascendance/submission). Such a strategy, while understandable, threatened to jeopardize the representativeness of Cattell’s sample.

Adopting a rather opaque process that was predicated on a combination of personal judgment, cluster analysis, and factor analysis, Cattell next sought to whittle his list of trait terms down to a more manageable size, eventually arriving at a brief personality inventory comprised of 35 bipolar rating scales. Factor-analyzing ratings from this abbreviated measure, 12 underlying factors were noted. In turn, these factors were deemed to represent the primary
elements of personality. The 12 factors identified later became part of Cattell’s updated 16
Personality Factor (16PF) questionnaire (Cattell, Eber, & Tatsuoka, 1970).³

Unfortunately, the years since Cattell’s (1943a, 1943b) pioneering research have been
less than kind. More recent work has revealed that many of his analyses suffered from clerical
errors (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981). In addition, the underlying factor structure of his
35-variable measure has been called into question. Conducting eight factor analyses on this
measure, Tupes and Christal (1961/1992) noted the presence of five recurrent factors (rather than
12; for a similar finding, see Digman, 1963; D. W. Fiske, 1949), although the number of factors
derived varied between samples. This research was further buttressed by the work of Norman
(1963) who, after isolating the 20 elements from Cattell’s 35-variable measure best representing
the five recurrent factors noted by Tupes and Christal (1961/1992), derived a similar set of
factors within several undergraduate samples (see also Borgatta, 1964).

What were the five factors identified by Tupes and Christal (1961/1992) and others?
After Norman (1963), these factors were referred to as extraversion/surgency (e.g., being
assertive, talkative), agreeableness (e.g., being cooperative, good-natured), conscientiousness
(e.g., being dependable, responsible),⁴ emotional stability (e.g., being calm), and culture (e.g.,
being independent-minded, polished; see John et al., 2008). These constructs possessed a
notable correspondence to the factors constituting the later emerging FFA described below.
Indeed, as McCrae (1992) noted, it was the work of Tupes and Christal that laid “the
foundations” (p. 217) of subsequent FFA-based research.

³ Cattell himself proposed that his 16 factor measure could be used to derive five higher-order factors (see Russell &
Karol, 1994). These five factors, however, differed markedly from the factors that would come to constitute the
FFA.

⁴ Tupes and Christal (1961/1992) referred to this construct as dependability.
Researchers following in the footsteps of Tuples and Christal (1961/1992) and Norman (1963), however, did not progress unfettered. As a whole, the field of personality psychology experienced a noteworthy degree of turbulence during the 1960s and 1970s (McAdams, 1997a). Furthermore, evidence in favor of a five-factor structure of personality was, up to and including the work of Norman (1963), largely based on Cattell’s derivation of Allport and Odbert’s (1936) list of trait terms (recall concerns regarding the representativeness of this reduction). As we will come to see, the climate of the field in the 1960s and 70s, when considered in tandem with subsequent research on the lexical hypothesis, had a vital role to play in the formation of personality psychology as it is known today.

**Fire-Testing the Field**

In stride and in spirit, the personality psychology of the 1960s and 1970s was qualitatively different than it had been during previous decades. Gone were the grand theories and conceptions of the whole person. Standing in their place were interests in tight experimental control and the development/refinement of constructs (McAdams, 1997a). In addition, psychologists had begun to rebel against behaviorism, returning their attention to once vilified topics such as cognition (e.g., Kelly, 1955). McAdams (1997a) noted that a decreased interest in the whole person can be attributed, at least in part, to a growing chorus of scholars arguing that this person is simply comprised of the social roles he or she adopts and the presentation management strategies endorsed (e.g., Goffman, 1959). A concern for the refinement of constructs, by contrast, emerged on the basis of the belief that, once the constructs representing the parts of the person were known, the more ambitious orientation of the grand theorists could be reasserted.
If personality psychology now stood for precise methodology and the constant refinement of constructs, it did so while positioned in a defensive stance. Attacks and challenges were coming both from inside (e.g., Carlson, 1971; D. W. Fiske, 1974; Ullmann & Krasner, 1975) and outside the field (e.g., Mischel, 1968; Shweder, 1975). Within the field, commentaries regarding the increasingly trivial nature of personality research circulated (e.g., Carlson, 1971) as did questions regarding whether anything more could really be learned about the person (e.g., D. W. Fiske, 1974). Perhaps the most damning critique, however, was leveled from the periphery of personality psychology. In his now famous monograph, Mischel (1968) argued that the cross-situational consistency of personality traits was alarmingly low. The implication of this proposal drawn by many was that, if personality changed markedly across situations, then it must be situations (and not persons) that exhibit a causal influence on behavior. Predictably, this person–situation challenge (or debate) sparked a great deal of attention (e.g., Bem, 1972; Bem & Allen, 1974; Block, 1977).5

Personality psychology during the 1960s and 1970s, then, can best be categorized by a disconcerting sprawl of constructs (Sanford, 1963) and a crisis concerning the nature of the person. Under such dire conditions a coherent framework to align the disconcerting sprawl of concepts could serve as saving grace. After all, through the construction of such a framework, the very notion of the person (and belief in the benefit of considering the elements therein) stood

5 Indeed, even today the person–situation debate still looms heavily over many personality psychologists (e.g., Funder & Fast, 2010).
to be reinstated. By all accounts, then, the stage was set for the second wave of researchers seeking to unite the field through at least tacit reliance on the lexical hypothesis.\(^6\)

**The Lexical Hypothesis Redux**

Recognizing the limitation of reliance on Cattell’s constellation of traits, Norman (1967) set out to create an updated list of personal descriptors. His intent in doing so was to first factor analyze, and then derive an appropriate structure for personality, from this list. To do this, he supplemented Allport and Odbert’s (1936) work with an additional 175 terms taken from a more recent version of Webster’s dictionary. List in hand, he next sought to reduce the number of descriptors. This process was constituted by (a) deleting certain categories of terms (e.g., social roles, temporary states), (b) administering subsets of his omnibus list to undergraduate students, (c) removing certain unfamiliar terms, and (d) semantically sorting the remaining terms. The final product resulted in a five-factor structure not dissimilar to one identified by Tupes and Christal (1961/1992).

Goldberg\(^7\) (1971, 1981, 1990) also attempted to derive the factor structure of personal descriptors without reliance on Cattell’s refined list. Consistent with the research of Tupes and Christal (1961/1992), Goldberg noted the personality descriptors that he considered coalesced around a five-factor structure. Goldberg’s efforts have resulted in an influential and productive line of research. Satisfied with his own efforts, Goldberg (1990) has claimed that his work dispels “any qualms” (p. 1223) about the five-factored structure of personality.

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\(^6\) To be certain, several researchers attempted to provide a coherent foundation of personality without reliance on the lexical hypothesis (e.g., Eysenck, 1967, 1970). Due to the correspondence between the lexical hypothesis and the FFA, however, these efforts fall outside the purview of the current review.

\(^7\) As a result of chance circumstance, Norman served on Goldberg’s dissertation committee. Goldberg (2009) later asserted that this mentorship was the cause behind his desire to identify the structure of personality (traits).
All personality psychologists functioning in the wake of the 1960s and 1970s, however, were not so quick to distance themselves from the work of Cattell. On the contrary, Costa and McCrae (1976) called upon his 16PF (Cattell et al., 1970) in their attempts to derive the structure of personality. Factor analyzing the responses garnered from the administration of Cattell’s measure, they noted the existence of three factors. The first two factors mapped onto Eysenck’s (1970) dimensions of neuroticism (the inverse of emotional stability) and extraversion, whereas the third factor would later become referred to as openness to experience.

Costa and McCrae’s (1978) subsequent efforts were focused on refining the measurement of these three factors. To do this they followed the lead of likeminded scholars by considering 12 of the variables housed within Cattell’s 16PF. This subset of variables was supplemented with items specifically designed to tap their third, neophyte factor. From here, they next created a questionnaire poised to assess neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1983). This 144-item measure employed inventory statements as opposed to single-word descriptors.

What followed was a blending of the research conducted by Costa and McCrae with research placed more readily in the lexical tradition. Specifically, Costa and McCrae (1985) tested whether their three-factor model of personality structure could be placed within the five-factor framework noted by Goldberg (1981), Norman (1963), and others. Taking descriptor terms from Goldberg’s (1981) list deemed relevant for each of the five factors, they analyzed an 80-item set of trait terms. The results largely paralleled the factor structure identified by Norman (1963) save for the fact that the culture factor had been replaced with Costa and McCrae’s (1976) openness to experience dimension. In response, Costa and McCrae (1985) concluded that Norman’s (1963) efforts provided “an adequate taxonomy of personality” (p. 718) and set about
the task of creating an inventory-based assessment tool for these five factors, the NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI; Costa & McCrae, 1985).^8^

**The Modern-Day Zeitgeist of Personality Psychology**

The research of Goldberg (1981, 1982, 1990) and Costa and McCrae (1985, 1992) marked the tipping point of a paradigmatic shift within personality psychology (John et al., 2008). As a result of their efforts, the field moved beyond the disconcerting sprawl (Sanford, 1963) of constructs that promulgated throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s, rallying around the FFA to personality structure. Such a convergence is evident in the analysis provided by John and colleagues (2008) in which the use of the FFA relative to the 16PF (Cattell et al., 1970) and Eysenck’s Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1969) is considered between 1980 and 2004. During the mid-1990s, use of the FFA was roughly on par with the aforementioned measures. Following this time period, however, reliance on the FFA grew exponentially whereas Cattell’s and Eysenck’s measures decreased in popularity. This trend led John and colleagues to conclude that “after decades of research, the field has now achieved an initial consensus on a general taxonomy of personality traits” (p. 116; see also John & Naumann, 2010).

The FFA began its ascendence at a very opportune time. Earlier criticisms regarding the trivial nature of personality research (e.g., Carlson, 1971) still loomed heavily in the air, as did situationalist critiques (e.g., Mischel, 1968). The FFA worked to surmount these controversies by demonstrating that the broad factors comprising the structure of personality predicted many important outcomes (see Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006). In the years since personality psychology’s most recent paradigm shift, longitudinal examinations conducted in accordance

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^8^ For a revised version of the NEO-PI (i.e., the NEO-PI-R), see Costa and McCrae (1992).
with the FFA have provided important insights into the normative shifts that personality traits exhibit over the adult lifespan (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006), whereas cross-cultural replication of the five-factor structure of personality (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2007) has advanced arguments for its universality.

To be certain, within personality psychology, unanimous support for the structure purported by the FFA does not exist (e.g., Ashton & Lee, 2009; Block, 1995, 2010; Epstein, 2010). Most personality psychologists, however, are in agreement that the FFA provides “a good answer to the question of personality structure” (Digman, 1990, p. 436). An important and telling assumption underlying such a conclusion, however, is that personality traits and personality are synonymous. The degree to which this assumption is endorsed is widespread as “the majority of personality psychologists in the world” rely upon “trait discourse as the primary way to think and talk about personality” (McAdams & Walden, 2010, p. 53). This, of course, begs the question: Do personality traits represent the entirety of personality?

Is There More to Personality than Traits?

As has hopefully been articulated here, personality traits in general and the FFA in particular carry great historical import. It must be noted, however, that the history of personality psychology as told thus far represents but one thread of a much thicker rope. Although the foundational textbooks of the 1930s were united in their concern for the whole person and the provision of grand theories (McAdams, 1997a), the manner in which this person was construed, and the grand theories provided regarding his and her nature, were markedly different.

For example, Allport’s (1937) notion of the person as a coherent and rational whole clashed violently with Murray’s (1938) conception of the person as a polyphonic combination of the conscious and unconscious, “a motile, discriminating, valuating, assimilating, adapting,
integrating, differentiating [being] … within a changing environmental matrix” (p. 36). Whereas Allport’s (1937) theorizing was amenable to a consideration of personality traits, Murray’s (1938) theorizing, with recognition of driving forces that lay outside of conscious awareness, was more amenable to a consideration of needs and motivation, at least the type of motivation that enjoyed prominence during Murray’s time.9

Motivation and Personality

Motivations correspond to a person’s wishes, hopes, desires, and goals. Whereas personality traits represent dispositional patterns of overt behavior, motivations represent what one wants, as well as what one wants to become (Roberts & Robins, 2000). Although traits may provide insights regarding how one tends to behave, they are relatively silent when it comes to what one desires (or is driven) to do. For this reason, these two aspects of the person are irreducible to one another (Cantor, 1990; McAdams & Walden, 2010).

Traits and motives have largely led “separate lives” (Winter, John, Stewart, Klohnen, & Duncan, 1998, p. 230) since the field’s inception. Whereas Allport (1937) believed that motives were subservient to traits, Murray (1938) argued for their distinction, suggesting that the former were unconscious and could only be accessed indirectly through fantasy. To assess individuals’ motives, Murray (1938) employed the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Morgan & Murray, 1935). This projective10 measure involves presenting participants with a series of ambiguous pictures. They are then asked to create a story building up to and following the scene depicted.

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9 This is not to imply that Allport (1937) considered motivation to be unimportant. On the contrary, he professed that “the problem of motivation is central to the psychological study of personality” (p. 196). The differential emphasis on traits exhibited by Allport and Murray was most likely a product of Allport’s belief that traits subsumed motivation. This contention, however, has been more recently challenged (e.g., Roberts & Robins, 2000).

10 Here, projective is used in the Freudian sense of the word. This was the original intent of the term, one Murray (1958) later came to question.
Data generated from this measure can be analyzed for any number of the psychogenic needs specified by Murray, including achievement and affiliation.

And what of those who followed in Murray’s (1938) footsteps? Of the many researchers immediately subsequent to Murray, McClelland (1951, 1961) is the perhaps most noteworthy. McClelland’s efforts (e.g., McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953) resulted in the creation of objective scoring procedures for Murray’s (1938) achievement, affiliation, and power motives. These procedures have since been applied to the analysis of qualitative data manifest during speeches and interviews (e.g., Winter, 1987).

**Motivation in a time of crisis.** Just as trait-based theorists had to contend with a transition away from a consideration of the whole person and the grand theories during the 1960s and 1970s, so too did more motivationally oriented scholars. This shift influenced the consideration of motivation within personality psychology in at least two ways. First, due to the increased interest in the psychological construct relative to the whole person, inventories were developed that purported to assess the motives with which Murray and others had concerned themselves. As an example of one such inventory, Jackson (1967) created the Personality Research Form (PRF), a self-report measure assessing motives using a series of true–false items. Second, due in part to psychologists becoming more sensitive to cognitive processes (e.g., Kelly, 1955), conceptions of motivation began to align more readily with a schematic approach wherein the individual is pulled, rather than biologically driven, towards certain aims (McAdams, 1997a).

Although the PRF and the motives assessed via the TAT were referred to using similar terms, they have since proved to be quite different in nature. To begin, they rarely correlate with one another (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989). Second, and perhaps more to the point, they correspond with behavior in markedly different ways. McClelland and colleagues
(1989) refer to the motives assessed by way of the TAT as *implicit*\(^1\) due to the fact that the individual is not directly describing himself or herself. In contrast, the motives as assessed via the PRF (Jackson, 1967) and other self-report measures are *explicit* in nature as they are predicated on self-attribution. Implicit motives have been found to predict spontaneous behavioral trends over time, whereas self-attributed motives predict “immediate specific responses to specific situations or choice behavior” (McClelland et al., 1989, p. 691). This discrepancy is due to the fact that implicit motives are driven by task incentives whereas explicit motives are driven by social incentives.

**Motivation and Personality Psychology Today**

The most recent paradigm shift within personality psychology (i.e., the one John et al., 2008, place during the late 1980s and early 1990s) has brought with it an increased interest in the “building blocks of personality” (Freund & Riediger, 2006, p. 353)—personal goals. Consistent with the shift away from conceptions of motivation based on biological and unconscious drives and towards those routed in cognitive processes, researchers studying goal motivation tend to place less emphasis on the unconscious (Emmons, 1999; but see Emmons & McAdams, 1991, for the correspondence between goal content and implicit motives) as consciously accessible goals have been recognized as “the most optimal unit of analysis in motivational personality psychology” (Emmons, 1999, p. 23; see also Austin & Vancouver, 1996). In a manner similar to traits, goals have been linked to several important short- and long-term outcomes (e.g., Emmons & King, 1989).

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\(^{11}\) Implicit is a less than ideal term as it is used in multiple ways within psychology. For an examination of the relation between implicit motives as assessed via the TAT and the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), see Sheldon, King, Houser-Marko, Osbaldiston, and Gunz (2007).
Is There More to Personality than Traits and Motives?

Solace can be taken in the fact that I have now reviewed the two constructs argued to constitute personality psychology’s “dual nature” (Emmons, 1999, p. 17). Even though this brings us quite a ways towards understanding the person, however, there is still a significant cleft in need of bridging. I contend that, although the FFA offers an adequate structure with which to understand behavioral dispositions and a consideration of personal goals provides the optimal unit for considering motivation, neither is capable of capturing of what James (1890) referred to as psychology’s “most puzzling puzzle” (p. 213)—personal identity (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 1995). Explaining why this is so requires digging a bit deeper into the nature of identity.

Identity and Personality

If the magnitude of discourse that exists on a topic is any indication of its complexity, then deeming identity, a topic that has weighed heavy on the minds of many for centuries (Baumeister, 1986), as a most perplexing puzzle is undoubtedly appropriate. The literature on this construct is a long and unwieldy one. Suffice it to say that although philosophers, such as Locke (1690/1956), Dilthey (1962), and Updike (1989), may not necessarily have agreed as to where identity was to be found, they were in agreement that it was at least partially predicated on the individual’s persistence through time. Said differently, selves, or what are commonly considered to constitute selves, are necessarily temporally vectored in nature (Gallagher, 1998; Strawson, 1999). Thus, one constituent of identity is the personal persistence through time (or self-continuity; Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003).

Personal persistence is, however, not the sole constituent of identity. In addition to the requisite of persisting through time, one must also maintain some sense of differentiation from others (Baumeister, 1986). Identity is thus predicated on a sense of sameness or continuity
through time and the distinction or difference from others (Baumeister, 1986; Singer, 1997). As Côté (2006) rightly pointed out, these two elements require one another: “For a thing (or unit) to be the ‘same’ over time, by definition that thing has to be ‘different’ from other things that are themselves the same over time” (p. 6).

**Two ways of thinking about identity.** Bruner (1986) proposed that human beings interpret the world using two distinct modes of thought. One mode, the narrative mode, is called upon when attempting to understand human desires and purposeful behaviors. When functioning from this vantage, individuals strive to go beyond mere description or logical proof to reach a satisfying interpretation of a given phenomenon. In contrast, the other, paradigmatic, mode is enacted when attempting to produce a formal system of description, classification, and explanation. When functioning from this stance, categories are constructed and drawn together within larger systems in the interest of attaining empirical proof and good theory. Bruner contended that these modes of thought were not derivative of one another and instead represented “different natural kinds” (p. 11). A motivating factor behind Bruner’s efforts to highlight these two modes of thought, however, was his belief that, as a field, psychology had come to favor the paradigmatic mode of thought at the expense of the narrative mode. If the field were to advance, attention needed to be more evenly distributed between these modes.

**Identity within the narrative mode of thought.** Bruner’s (1986) call to action was warmly received by several narratively minded scholars (e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 1983; McAdams, 1988). Among other claims this group would come to make, it was proposed that the narrative mode of thought served as the track on which identity was created and maintained. Such creation and maintenance took the form of an integrative life story (McAdams, 1988).
The life story is the forum in which the narrator reasons about the connections between the self and his or her experiences (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). These instances of autobiographical reasoning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) can take one of two forms. In the first, stability-based form, a personal characteristic (e.g., being high in curiosity) is described as contributing to the occurrence of an event (e.g., choosing to spend a semester abroad). In the second, change-based form, an event (e.g., going to summer camp) is described as changing an element of the self (e.g., becoming more extraverted).

A life story—or rather a life story replete with instances of change-based and stability-based autobiographical reasoning—allows for both self-continuity and differentiation. By recognizing the events that have caused changes in the self, and the characteristics of the self that have caused events to occur, drastic personal and social developments become comprehensible. This allows for the maintenance of the belief that, despite the many changes that have transpired in life, the self is coherent, unified, and continuous (McAdams, 1995). Furthermore, although there are certainly similarities in the content and structure of life stories, no two people hold precisely the same personal story; each is a unique combination of the events that have transpired and the personal interpretations applied to them. Thus, a life story—or rather a life story replete with instances of change-based and stability-based autobiographical reasoning—allows for both self-continuity and differentiation.

Identity within the paradigmatic mode of thought. A consideration of identity within the narrative mode of thought, however, may not tell the whole story. In the last three decades, psychology has implemented a necessary corrective to its heavily paradigmatic focus. One repercussion of this shift is that theorizing pertaining to identity within the paradigmatic mode of thought has fallen largely out of favor. This is not entirely misguided, as the construction of the
life story represents a viable route to identity. In the renewed appreciation of the narrative mode of thought, however, have we overlooked an alternative strategy for thinking about our distinctiveness through time (Dunlop & Walker, in press)?

A potential answer to this question comes by way of Chandler’s research on self-continuity (e.g., Ball & Chandler, 1989; Chandler, 2000; Chandler et al., 2003). Before summarizing the results of this research, it is first prudent to entertain a brief review of the procedure Chandler and colleagues adopted. The success of this procedure ultimately turns on having the participant explain continuity in the face of stark personological change. This is accomplished in one of two ways. In the first, participants are read a fictional story depicting the accentuated development of the protagonist’s character (e.g., Scrooge in Dicken’s A Christmas Carol). They are next asked to describe this character at the beginning and end of the story, thereby producing two radically different descriptions. In the second, participants are asked to describe themselves as they were some time ago (e.g., 5 years earlier) and as they currently are. In a similar manner to the fictional character depicted, this commonly results in the provision of two drastically different self-descriptions. Faced with instances of noticeable personological change, the participant is next tasked with providing the reasons that make the character described, and/or themselves, the same people over the period of time considered.

When pressed to task, many participants reason about themselves or another within the narrative mode of thought. That is, they construct a narrative describing all the events that have led to the observed changes in the self. Many other participants, however, reason about the character considered (be it fictional or autobiographical) relying upon a strategy that is more categorical or paradigmatic in nature. That is, instead of weaving an elaborate tale that describes how one went from A to B, an appeal is made to some unchanged attribute within the person
(e.g., a distinctive birthmark or one’s eternal soul). The sophistication of this appeal shows development throughout adolescence (Chandler et al., 2003), though the endorsement of belief in an unchanging element or essence of the self remains constant.

Identity within a paradigmatic mode of thought, then, is manifest through appeal to a stable attribute of one kind or another. Such an appeal also allows for a sense of continuity and differentiation. The attribute considered has endured the ravages of time continuously. In addition, by their very nature, attributes work to distinguish an individual from the pack.

**Identity as distinct from traits and motives.** Identity corresponds to the phenomenological sense of distinctiveness through time (i.e., continuity and differentiation) and may be attained through narrative and non-narrative means. Although traits and motivation provide an understanding of how one tends to behave and what one is trying to do, respectively, neither element necessarily captures this sense of oneness. Individuals are not vexed with questions regarding their own identity because “they sometimes behave one way and at other times another” (Chandler & Proulx, 2007, p. 279) or are driven to do some things rather than others. These processes are conceptually and empirically distinct from “the experience, continuity, and vicissitudes of an embodied, sexual, gendered, enculturated, thinking, feeling self” (Norem, 2010, p. 66). Said another way, even if the traits and motivations of a person were known, we would still not know everything (or nearly enough) about him or her. The manner in which the sense of self through time was maintained would be sorely lacking (McAdams, 1995).

**On Personality and Personhood**

However many pages later, I have now reviewed the history and nature of three topics deemed relevant to an understanding of the person. First, the current dominance of traits was traced back to the pioneering research of Allport and Odbert (1936). Next, the study of human
motivation was reviewed from Murray (1938) to the present. Finally, commonality in the theorizing of identity was considered from the time of Locke (1690/1956) onwards. This review was undertaken with the intent of underscoring the fact that, contrary to the belief held by “the majority of personality psychologists in the world” (McAdams & Walden, 2010, p. 53), personality is not captured solely by personality traits. Rather, the person is most aptly understood in terms of the three distinct constituents: traits, motivation, and identity.

Even if this proposal is accepted full stop, however, the information presented thus far provides little indication as to how these constituents relate to one another. Here, McAdams’s (1995) multi-level framework of personality, which represents a modern-day grand theory, is useful.

McAdams proposes that personality is best understood in terms of three distinct levels of description. The lowest level of McAdams’s typology is comprised of personality traits. He, like most personality psychologists (John et al., 2008), deems the FFA an inclusive framework for this level. The second level of McAdams’s typology consists of characteristic adaptations, which refers to motivational and developmental constructs such as Emmons’s (1999) personal strivings and Loevinger’s (1976) ego development, respectively. Finally, the third level of McAdams’s typology consists of the integrative life narrative. Accounts at this level work to synthesize the many varied aspects of the self in the interest of constituting an individual’s identity (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). This third level is most commonly assessed by way of the life-story interview (McAdams, 2008).

There are two additional elements of McAdams’s (1995) typology that are worth noting here. First, the degree to which the variables at each level are contextualized varies systematically. Personality traits are broad and decontextualized. In contrast, characteristic
adaptations are, by their nature, embedded in context. These adaptations, “speak to what people want, often during particular periods in their lives or within particular domains of action” (McAdams, 1995, p. 376, emphasis added). Thus, their assessment demands sensitivity to the surrounding milieu. Finally, firmly embedded in local social discourse and etiquette, the life narrative represents the most contextualized element of personality.

A second (and related) aspect of McAdams’s typology worth noting is that his levels vary with regards to the degree they are held to be shaped by culture (McAdams, 1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006). Culture is thought to exert only a modest influence on the exhibition of personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1999). By way of contrast, recall that characteristic adaptations are couched within particular “social, cultural, and developmental contexts” (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 211). If this proposal is deemed valid, then it follows that culture exerts at least a moderate influence on the manner in which characteristic adaptations are manifest. Finally, the level of integrative life narrative is recognized as the most culturally sensitive element of personality. This is due to the belief that, when constructing a life story, culture provides “a menu of themes, images, and plots for the psychosocial construction of narrative identity” (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 211). Said another way, the life story is drawn from the normative elements of a culture, including its traditions, canonical images, and metaphors.

An Integrative Framework for the Study of Persons

McAdams’s (1995) model, although conceptually sound, may be enhanced by adopting the following two modifications: First, although breadth carries some benefit, in the case of characteristic adaptations, this breadth comes at considerable cost. Theorists have long noted that this level of personality description is “overly stretched” (Little, 1996, p. 340), suggesting that focus could be more profitably placed on goal motivation, arguably its most central feature.
These proposals have not gone unheeded by McAdams, as more recent iterations of his model have characterized the self present at this level as an “agent” (rather than an actor or author, which characterizes the self at the first and third levels, respectively; McAdams & Cox, 2010; McAdams & Olson, 2010).

The second modification corresponds to the third level of McAdams’s (1995) model. This level is represented by the integrative life narrative. Within this framework, the life narrative and identity are equated: “Identity … may itself be viewed as an internalized and evolving life story, a way of telling the self, to the self and others” (McAdams et al., 1997, p. 678). Drawing from Bruner’s (1986) recognition of two modes of thought as well as Chandler’s (2000; Chandler et al., 2003) research on self-continuity warranting strategies, it has been proposed that, although identity may be reasoned about within a narrative mode, it may also be considered within the paradigmatic mode. Incorporating this theorizing into the current discussion, the third level of McAdams’s (1995) model may be broadened to consider identity within both modes of thought. Again, McAdams (2006b) and others (e.g., Emmons, 1999) have perhaps anticipated this modification, as his third level is occasionally referred to as the level of identity rather than the integrative life narrative.

**Cutting to the Bone**

Each of the elements of McAdams’s (1995) model has received a fair amount of research attention (within personality psychology, this is most true of personality traits). Although these elements have often been considered, however, they have rarely been considered *side-by-side* (but see Dunlop, Walker, & Matsuba, 2012; Walker, Frimer, & Dunlop, 2010). Thus, few research endeavors have directly examined the proposal that there is something to be gained by going beyond traits and considering the person at each of the levels outlined by McAdams (e.g.,
McAdams, 1994, 1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006). The work to be summarized here does just that. Three distinct research topics, assembled in the form of three manuscripts, are considered while relying on McAdams’s (1995) framework of personhood. It is predicted that, in each case, a collective consideration of motivation and identity will inform understanding of the topic in ways that personality traits alone cannot.

To be clear, the argument being fastened is not that certain elements of personality are objectively better or more important than others. Rather, this collection of elements is akin to a palette to be drawn from on the basis of one’s research question. That is, dependent on the research question entertained, certain personological elements may be more appropriate than others. The topics considered in the current effort represent but a subset of areas of personality psychology where traits have proved relatively anemic (in the case of the studies reported in Chapters 2 and 3) and problematic (in the case of the study reported in Chapter 4). This commonality alludes to the true nature of the argument entertained, namely that personality and traits are not one and the same. Rather, the person is much more than a collection of traits and, by extension, the personologist’s palette is much more encompassing than many assume—in the case of the topics considered here, necessarily so.

Before turning attention to a brief summary of each of the empirical projects included in the current work, it is prudent to address, explicitly, the fact that one would be hard pressed to make any compelling argument for commonality in the research questions considered within these projects. Indeed, the focus of these topics range from the implications of variability in personality, through the lifespan development of moral motivation, and towards the manner in which personality differs across cultures. Though it may seem to the contrary, such scope was undertaken by design. This was done to showcase the viability of simultaneously considering
behavioral traits, personal goals, and identity. Thus, if one is looking for convergence across projects summarized, it is to be found in the encompassing manner by which personality is assessed, rather than by the substantive research to which each project contributes. It is hoped that such a strategy makes the argument fastened here all the more compelling.

Chapter 2: Self-Concept Differentiation at the Three Levels of Personality

The belief that personological inconsistency across contexts, or self-concept differentiation (SCD; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993),\(^\text{12}\) shares an impactful relationship with psychological adjustment has been around for some time (James, 1890). The traditional interpretation of this relationship, represented by the likes of Rogers (1961), is that personal inconsistency is indicative of a weak sense of self. Interpreted in this light, SCD should be inversely related to adjustment. This conception of inconsistency went largely unchallenged until the nascent emergence of postmodernity, wherein theorists such as Goffman (1959) recast personal inconsistency as evidence of sensitivity to the environing world. Interpreted in this light, SCD should be positively related to adjustment.

In the study that introduced the term SCD to psychology’s lexicon, Donahue et al. (1993) assessed participants’ self-reported behavioral traits across five nomothetic social roles. These authors reasoned that individuals who possessed a highly differentiated self-concept would rate themselves differently across these contexts. To determine the degree to which participants varied contextually, a principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted on each participant’s context-specific (e.g., “as a student,” “as a friend”) behavioral ratings. The first component

\(^{12}\) Personality manifests in terms of self-perception, the perception of the self held by others (i.e., reputation; Hogan, 1982) and by objective indicators of the self. The self-concept, in contrast, although related to the perceptions held by others and reality, corresponds to self-perception (Vazire & Carlson, 2010). In the context of this dissertation, attention is focused squarely on this element of the self. The implications the results observed here hold for other-perception and objective indicators of the self will be addressed in the General Discussion.
abstracted from such an analysis consists of the degree of shared variance in ratings, whereas the variance that is not shared among these ratings represents the amount of inconsistency (or SCD) present.

A high degree of shared variance in behavioral ratings requires a strong correlation among variables. A strong correlation among variables, in turn, requires both a high degree of consistency in item ratings across contexts as well as a high degree of variability in item ratings within each context. For this reason, to have a low level of SCD on the “traditional” measure of SCD, individuals must possess a small degree of variability across contexts and a high degree of variability within contexts (Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006). However, only the former is relevant to matters of differentiation across contexts; the traditional measure of SCD conflates inter-contextual variability with intra-contextual variability.

In response, some researchers (e.g., Diehl & Hay, 2007) have tapped inter-contextual variability in behavioral traits by considering the average degree of deviation in inventory item ratings across contexts. Reliance on this “deviation” measure, alone, however, does not completely disentangle true inter-contextual variability from mean-level information. As Baird et al. (2006) noted, the mean-level of an item dictates the amount of inter-contextual variability possible. When the distribution of means is skewed, an association between item means and cross-contextual variability will be observed (see also Eid & Diener, 1999; Paunonen & Jackson, 1985).

Baird et al. (2006) proposed an alternative method of assessing SCD which avoids the conflation present in the traditional and deviation measures. In this “corrected” measure the portion of an item’s standard deviation that is not predicted by mean-level information is targeted. The average amount of this remainder (or residual) across all items is then derived.
Researchers examining SCD in relation to well-being have most commonly measured
SCD using the method introduced by Donahue et al. (1993). Participants are prompted for
behavioral ratings in a series of contexts. Traditional or deviation measures are subsequently
employed. When such a strategy is adopted, a negative relationship between SCD and well-
being is commonly observed (e.g., Diehl & Hay, 2007; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi,
1997), supporting the fragmentation hypothesis. In contrast, when inter-contextual variability in
behavioral ratings is isolated from the sources of variance associated with mean-level
information (i.e., when the corrected measure of SCD is applied to behavioral ratings across
contexts), significant relationships between SCD and well-being typically disappear (e.g., Baird
et al., 2006; Diehl & Hay, 2007). This finding has led Baird et al. (2006) to conclude that
personality variability across contexts is, contrary to Erikson (1968), Goffman (1959), and others
(e.g., Gergen, 1991; James, 1890; Rogers, 1961), an irrelevant individual difference.

In Chapter 2, we revisit this relation with sensitivity to McAdams’s (1995) multi-level
conception of personality. Context-specific trait-profiles, personal goals, and narratives were
assessed among participants drawn from a survey-based website. In addition, these participants
were asked to indicate their level of adjustment by completing inventories assessing, among
other things, levels of depression and self-esteem.

Within McAdams’s (1995) model, it is manageable to offer affordances to the theorizing
of Rogers (1961) and Goffman (1959). Recognition of these perspectives, however, falls along
level lines. The distinctive element of the goal variables found in the middle level of personhood
is that they are most adept when attuned to extant social roles and contextual pressures. Thus,
here, SCD may be adaptive. The notion that diversity represents a virtue, however, loses
considerable traction when interpreted at the third level of personality. Here, unity and
consistency are championed in the interest of developing a coherent sense of self and identity. At this level, SCD may be maladaptive. Consistent with the work of Baird and colleagues (2006) and the theorizing of McAdams (1995), we predict that trait-based SCD will not correspond to adjustment, that goal-based SCD will correspond positively with adjustment, and that identity-based (viz., narrative-based) SCD will correspond negatively with adjustment.

**Chapter 3: Agency and Communion at the Three Levels of Personality**

What explains the behavior of those who choose to dedicate decades of their lives to the betterment of others? The reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009) posits that such moral exemplars have achieved a rarity in their psychological functioning, uniting the self and morality. Whereas, for ordinary persons, the self and morality—operationalized as agency and communion, respectively—are frequently in conflict, exemplars are understood to transcend this dualism, implementing their personal agency in service to communal ends. How does development toward this integrated end point unfold? What trajectory does it follow?

The reconciliation model predicts that, among exemplar and ordinary alike, agency and communion function in a largely independent manner throughout childhood and adolescence but, as they strengthen, reach a cardinal tension in young adulthood, leading either to the diminution of communion in favor of unmitigated agency or, in the case of moral exemplars, the synergistic channeling of agentic means towards communal ends.

Although the terms agency and communion have been applied to behavioral dispositions and/or self-professed attributes (e.g., Helgeson, 1993; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979; Wiggins, 1991), within the purview of the reconciliation model, agency and communion are operationalized through the thematic analysis of the goals they profess and the stories they tell. A consideration of such content allows for the prediction of long-term patterns of behavior (such
as those exerted during the “moral career”) because these constructs are intertwined with innate affective experiences (or so-called “natural tendencies;” McClelland et al., 1989, p. 697).

Irrespective of whether goals or narratives are considered, identifying these themes in qualitative text requires the recognition of phrases, statements, and/or words that map onto the applicable motivational category. When such an undertaking is made with narrative text, determining the functional relation between agency and communion is also possible; once the applicable phrases, statements, and words in the given narrative have been recognized, instrumental propositions can be distinguished from those that are terminal in nature (Rokeach, 1973). As an example of this, consider the following hypothetical statement: “I want to make a lot of money so that I’ll be able to make a contribution to help the homeless.” Here, one motivation (“make a lot of money”) is framed as being instrumental to another (“help the homeless”), which is terminal. The former would be coded for agency whereas the latter would be coded for communion. Thus, in this example, agency is instrumental to communion.

In the research reported in Chapter 3, we examined the personological profiles of a group of exemplary young adults who had shown early promise of pursuing the moral career of service to others. Exemplars were demographically matched on a case-by-case basis to non-exemplary young adults. Participants completed a measure of personality traits, goal motivation, and a life story interview. Goals and stories were coded for themes of agency and communion. Young adult profiles were contrasted with previously reported data from groups of older exemplary and comparison participants (Frimer, Walker, Dunlop, Lee, & Riches, 2011; Frimer, Walker, Lee, Riches, & Dunlop, 2012; Walker & Frimer, 2007). We predict that the relation between agency and communion considered at the level of motivation and identity will align with the proposals inherent in the reconciliation model (Frimer
& Walker, 2009). Specifically, young adult exemplars are expected to exhibit a profile suggestive of their transition towards the integrated end-state. Young adult comparisons, in contrast, are predicted to embody a fledgling manifestation of the unmitigated agential end-state. Furthermore, as evidence of the inherent tension between agency and communion present in young adulthood, both groups are predicted to actively segregate their agency from their communion. These patterns are predicted to manifest at both the motivation and identity levels of personality description. At the trait level, in comparison, it is anticipated that the relation between agency and communion (viz., extraversion and agreeableness) will not distinguish exemplars from non-exemplars (be they young or old).

Chapter 4: Cultural Psychology and the Three Levels of Personality

Erikson (1968) drew explicit ties between one’s identity and the larger cultural milieu, arguing that the construction of identity involves “the core of the individual … and the core of his [sic] communal culture” (p. 22). Consistent with this notion, McAdams (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006) has proposed that, identity exhibits a greater degree of cross-cultural variability than motivation which, in turn, exhibits a greater degree of cross-cultural variability than traits.

Selves functioning within the modern-day Western world possess a “faith in the inherent separateness of distinct persons” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). This manifests in a greater recognition of one’s own beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors rather than those of others. Furthermore, there exists a concern for personal consistency across situations and through time. Indeed, even in the face of rampant behavioral inconsistency, within the heart of dyed-in-the-wool Westerners (at least those Westerners who have yet to be swept away by the charms of postmodernism), there often lies a belief in an underlying and unchanging personal essence (see Harter & Monsour, 1992). In contrast, modern-day selves embodying the spirit of ancient
Eastern philosophy carry with them an appreciation of the functionally relational nature of the world, as well as the fact that change lies everywhere thick on the ground. The recognition of the relational nature of the world manifests in a greater concern for social relationships relative to personal beliefs or thoughts. Furthermore, the recognition of change over constancy manifests in the belief that people differ markedly across situations and through time (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Nisbett, 2003).

The differences explicated above likely carry over when thinking about oneself through time, and may manifest in one of at least two ways. First, there may be a “main effect” for culture within each mode of thought; Westerners, relative to Easterners, may exhibit a heightened proficiency within the paradigmatic mode, recognizing a greater number of attributes that have remained stable with the passage of time. Given their cultural emphasis on change, in contrast, Easterners may exhibit a greater proficiency, relative to Westerners, within the narrative mode of thought, manifest via a higher level of autobiographical reasoning. Alternatively, there may be an “interaction” between culture and elements of personal identity within each mode; within the paradigmatic mode of thought, Westerners may rely upon personal descriptors when engaging in the process of self-definition whereas Easterners may rely upon relational descriptors. Within the narrative mode, in contrast, Westerns may favor stability-based reasoning processes, choosing to describe the events that unfold in their lives as a product of the personal attributes they possess. In contrast, and consistent with the notion of a self consistently moved by context (e.g., Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Wang & Conway, 2004), Easterners may favor change-based reasoning processes, choosing to describe their sense of self as influenced by the events unfolding in their lives.
In the study reported in Chapter 4, these possibilities are examined. Euro-Canadian and Asian-Canadian participants completed measures of personality traits, goal motivation, a life story interview, and an interview assessing identity within the paradigmatic mode of thought. The magnitude of group differences at each level of personality will be considered. We predict that, at the level of traits, no group differences will be observed. At the level of goal motivation and identity, marked cultural differences will be noted (irrespective of whether these differences align with the “main effect” and “interaction” predictions outlined above).

**Summary**

Persons are a complex composition of behavioral dispositions, motivations, and identities. Within the field of personality psychology, however, efforts have been largely focused on one of these elements (viz., traits) at the expense of the others. While many recognize that this is problematic (e.g., Emmons, 1999; Little, 1996; McAdams, 1995), few have considered the predictive ability of each of these elements simultaneously. For this reason, calls to move the disciplinary bounds of personality psychology beyond traits have fallen on at least partially deaf ears.

In the confines of the current endeavor, the proposals of McAdams and others are met with empirical efforts designed to determine exactly what is gained by moving the study of personhood beyond the study of personality traits. In three research projects, we consider the predictive ability of variables at the trait, motivation, and identity levels of personality. The coherence of these topics, however, does not lie in their subject matter. Indeed, as a lot, they are, in many ways, largely heterogeneous. Rather the coherence of the current effort is manifest in the recognition of personality as a multi-level phenomenon. The results derived from this effort
hold the potential of informing discussion of the nature of personhood and the possibility of implementing an appropriate corrective within the field.
CHAPTER 2: EXAMINING SELF-CONCEPT DIFFERENTIATION AT THE THREE LEVELS OF PERSONALITY

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
– Walt Whitman

Evident from the quotation above, Whitman (1855/1959, §51) recognized that his complexities afforded him the possibility of inconsistency and, in the same breath, dismissed the notion that such inconsistencies were particularly impactful. Those who find this position puzzling will no doubt be able to seek comfort in numbers. For some time, psychologists and laypeople alike have exhibited strong intuitions that there is either something maladaptive about accentuated personological inconsistency (Rogers, 1961) or that such inconsistency is most appropriately considered boon rather than bane (Gergen, 1991). Few, however, have dismissed it as trivial or unimportant. Despite the prevalence of those championing personal inconsistency as vice or virtue, researchers have yet to identify a meaningful relation between inter-contextual variability in personality and psychological adjustment (Baird et al., 2006).

Before placing a feather in Whitman’s cap and moving on, it is prudent to note that investigations seeking such a relation have focused exclusively on variability with respect to one element of personality—behavioral traits. While traits are no doubt an important component in understanding the person, matters of consistency are incapable of being thoroughly assessed by focusing solely on one type of personality description—the degree to which behavior dispositions vary across contexts. Rather, an appropriately thorough assessment of inter-contextual variability requires a consideration of behavioral, goal, and narrative inter-contextual differentiation. In the current project, we assessed inter-contextual variability at each of these “levels” of personality description (McAdams, 1995) in relation to psychological adjustment.
Personological Inconsistency and Adjustment

The belief that personological inconsistency shares an impactful relation with psychological adjustment has permeated psychology since its inception. The traditional interpretation of this relation, represented by individuals including Rogers (1961) and Lecky (1945), is that personal inconsistency is indicative of a weak sense of self or lack of a core identity. Interpreted in this light, inconsistency represents a form of fragmentation and, thus, should be inversely related to adjustment. This conception of inconsistency went largely unchallenged until the nascent emergence of postmodernity, wherein theorists such as Goffman (1959) and Gergen (1991) recast personal inconsistency as adaptive and indicative of multiple specialized identities. Interpreted in this light, inconsistency represents a form of flexibility and, thus, should be positively related to adjustment.

To test hypotheses pertaining to flexibility and fragmentation, Donahue and colleagues (1993) examined the relation between self-concept differentiation (SCD; the tendency to perceive differing personality characteristics across contexts) and psychological adjustment. Operationalizing SCD as the degree of variability between context-specific ratings of behavioral traits, these researchers identified a negative relation between SCD and adjustment. Since this seminal paper, the relation observed by Donahue et al. (1993) has been replicated several times (e.g., Sheldon et al., 1997), concretizing the notion that personological inconsistency is, in fact, indicative of self-fragmentation.

There is, however, an important caveat to note when interpreting the work of Donahue and others. As Baird et al. (2006) have shown, the “traditional” method for calculating SCD

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13 For discussion of SCD in relation to other measures tapping the structure of the self, see Campbell, Assanand, and Di Paula (2003).
(using a principal component analysis; PCA) is influenced by the degree of personological variability both across and within contexts. By definition, however, only the former is relevant to matters of contextual differentiation. Thus, the traditional measure of SCD conflates inter-contextual variability with intra-contextual variability.

Two alternative methods of calculating SCD have been proposed to mitigate the conflation of inter-contextual variability and intra-contextual variability. The first, advanced by researchers including Diehl and Hay (2007), entails a consideration of inter-contextual standard deviations. In addition to obvious gains in face validity, this “deviation” measure removes some of the erroneous variance subsumed by the traditional measure of SCD. It does not, however, completely disentangle inter-contextual variability from mean-level information. As Baird et al. (2006) noted, the mean-level of an item dictates the amount of inter-contextual variability possible. When the distribution of means is skewed, an association between item means and variability will be observed. To mitigate this possibility, Baird et al. proposed a method of assessing SCD which avoids the conflation present in the traditional and deviation measures. In this “corrected” measure, SCD is assessed based on the portion of an item’s standard deviation that is not accounted for by mean-level information.

When a measure of SCD independent of mean-level information is considered—that is, when Baird et al.’s (2006) method is adopted—a significant relation between SCD and adjustment is typically not observed (see Diehl & Hay, 2007). Thus, Baird et al.’s (2006) results indicate that the relation between SCD and adjustment previously reported is the result of a methodological artifact. This finding leads to the somewhat nihilistic conclusion that personal inconsistency is, contrary to Rogers (1961), Goffman (1959), and others, an irrelevant individual difference.
The Landscape of Personality

SCD is defined as the tendency to see oneself as having different personality characteristics in different contexts. Researchers examining the relation between SCD and adjustment have operationalized this variable solely in terms of behavioral traits, thereby equating the two. The manner in which one behaves within and across contexts is no doubt an important characteristic of personality and the self-concept. Such behavioral displays, however, do not constitute the entirety of either construct (McAdams, 1995). Few would feel as though they truly knew someone if their knowledge of this person consisted solely of behavioral mannerisms. Indeed, as McAdams (1994) cautioned, examinations of personality and the self-concept based entirely on behavioral traits threaten to limit one to a consideration of “the psychology of a stranger” (p. 145).

If personality is not comprised solely of behavioral traits then of what, precisely, does it consist? Over the last two decades, researchers have largely converged on the notion that personality is most aptly conceived of entailing conceptually distinct levels (e.g., McAdams, 1995; Little, 1996). Of these conceptions, McAdams’s (1995) framework, in which behavioral traits, characteristic adaptations, and the integrative life narrative represent distinct yet related levels of personality, is particularly germane given its conceptual breadth and integrative nature. The foundational level of McAdams’s (1995) typology is comprised of behavioral dispositions (viz., traits), which are broad, decontextualized manifest tendencies. The Five-Factor Model (John & Srivastava, 1999) is a particularly compelling scheme for this level. The second level of McAdams’s typology consists of characteristic adaptations, which refers to motivational and developmental variables. Whereas behavioral traits are decontextualized in nature, characteristic adaptations are most aptly tuned when situated within specific contexts and
roles. These adaptations “speak to what people want, often during particular periods in their lives or within particular domains of action” (McAdams, 1995, p. 376). Viewed as “overly stretched” (Little, 1996, p. 340) by some, it has been proposed that this level of personality be focused primarily on personal goals (Little, 1996). Of the many means available to assess personal goals, Emmons’s (1999) personal strivings measure, which solicits recurrent goals, is particularly noteworthy due to its predictive ability and conceptual richness. The third level of McAdams’s typology consists of the integrative life narrative. The story produced at this personality level works to synthesize the many varied facets of the self-concept in the interest of consistency, unity, and coherence (McAdams, 1990, 1997b). Although variability exists in the assessment of the life narrative, the relevance that self-defining memories hold for this construct is largely uncontested by researchers within this field (see McLean & Fournier, 2008).

**Differentiation and the levels of personality description.** We contend that, within McAdams’s (1995) model, it is manageable to offer affordances to notions of both flexibility and fragmentation. The twist, however, is that recognition of these perspectives cuts largely along level lines. Recall the distinctive element of the goal variables found in the middle level of person description. These goals are most adept when specific to extant social roles and contextual pressures. Thus, here, personological flexibility receives import. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of someone as the picture of adjustment whose goals with his or her romantic partner and boss take the same form.

Interpreted at the second level of personality, Gergen’s (1991) assertion that life can be

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14 This, of course, is dependent on the level of abstraction considered. Very specific goals (e.g., completing a term paper due next week) are much more contextual than broad, far-reaching goals (e.g., being a nice person). Consistent with the premise of characteristic adaptations, the majority of goal constructs cater to the former rather than the latter (see Austin & Vancouver, 1996). In addition, broad, far-reaching goals are likely manifest differentially across contexts (e.g., trying to tell the truth in one context, trying to avoid confrontation in another) and, thus, not entirely devoid of contextual impetus.
“a candy store for one’s developing appetites” (p. 150), provided flexibility is maintained, becomes sensible. Ideally, ample variability in our goals should be exhibited within distinct domains. The notion that a pastiche, hodgepodge collection of elements represents a virtue, however, loses considerable traction when interpreted at the third level of personality. Here, unity and consistency are championed in the interest of developing a coherent understanding of the self in all of its “cheerfully multiple” manifestations (McAdams, 1997b, p. 51). At this level, inconsistency seems largely a matter of personological fragmentation. Whereas context-specific goals conjure up images of a candy store complete with countless aisles of potential pursuits, life narratives function much more like a restaurant menu (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Although there are many options available, it behooves one to pick and choose a collection that coheres to form a complete and congruent meal.

And what of behavioral traits? How does this level of personality relate to matters of flexibility, fragmentation, and adjustment? Although behavioral traits may constitute the bedrock of any viable typology of personality, the evidence available aligns with the conclusion that contextual variability in overt behaviors lies largely orthogonal to psychological adjustment (Baird et al., 2006). In this regard, a consideration of differentiation within McAdams’s (1995) typology allows for accommodation of more than just arguments of flexibility and fragmentation. Indeed, even Walt Whitman’s indifference gains recognition when differentiation is examined with sensitivity to traits, goals, and narratives.

The Assessment of Goal and Narrative Differentiation

Speculation of the manner in which goal and narrative differentiation relates to adjustment is common (e.g., McAdams, 1997b), but empirical examination of these relations is rare. Such an inquiry requires assessing goals and narratives in as comparable a manner as
possible to the approach adopted in research examining trait-based SCD. This necessitates the
elicitation of context-specific goals and narratives.

Researchers examining goals and narratives most commonly assess these constructs in a
relatively decontextualized manner (but see Sheldon & Elliot, 2000). In these assessments,
participants are prompted for a series of personal goals that they are pursuing (Emmons, 1999) or
stories constituting critical periods in their past (McAdams, 1993). Attempts to contextualize
these idiographic responses are made; however, they are almost invariably done after the fact by
way of conceptual coding (e.g., Kaiser & Ozer, 1994). As a result, the landscape of
contextualized goals and narratives remains relatively uncharted (Ashmore, Deaux, &
McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). By logical extension, empirical examinations of adjustment with
sensitivity to inter-contextual goal and narrative inconsistency have yet to be undertaken.

Assuming that such context-specific goals and narrations were assessed, the next
empirical hurdle would consist of quantifying these qualitative data in a logical and internally
consistent manner. Just as the assessment of trait SCD requires an inclusive set of overarching
dimensions (e.g., the “Big Five” personality dimensions; John & Srivastava, 1999), so too does
inter-contextual variability in goals and narratives require an encompassing and coherent
taxonomy. Drawing upon the writing of Bakan (1966), several research groups have deemed
agency and communion as sufficiently encompassing meta-concepts (e.g., McAdams, 1993;

Frimer et al. (2011) further proposed that agency can be subdivided into themes of self-
enhancement and independence, and that communion can be similarly subdivided into themes of
self-transcendence and relatedness. As Frimer and colleagues suggested, these themes roughly
align with the quadrants proposed by Schwartz (1992) in his values circumplex. Specifically,
self-enhancement is represented by themes of power and achievement, independence is represented by themes of stimulation and self-direction, self-transcendence is represented by themes of universalism and benevolence, and relatedness is represented by themes of tradition, conformity, and security.\textsuperscript{15} Given their conceptual depth and encompassing nature, the motivational duality of agency and communion in general, and their four manifestations identified by Frimer et al. (2011) in particular, represent a prime candidate for a coherent coding system to apply to both goals and narrations (see McAdams, 2006a).

**The Current Studies**

In the current studies, we examined SCD at the trait, goal, and narrative level of personality in relation to psychological adjustment. As specified above, such an examination requires both (a) a consideration of the personality characteristics associated at each descriptive level within two or more contexts and (b) an inclusive typology to categorize the idiographic data generated at the goal and narrative levels. These requisites were satisfied through (a) a consideration of goals undertaken within, and important memories from, two contexts in Study 1, and five contexts in Study 2, and (b) a coding system which tapped the four themes of self-enhancement, independence, self-transcendence, and relatedness (Frimer, Walker, & Dunlop, 2009). Trait SCD was also considered through the assessment of behavioral ratings within parallel contexts. Finally, trait, goal, and narrative SCD were all examined using a variety of measures (e.g., Diehl & Hay, 2007; Donahue et al., 1993), including those accounting for mean-level information (Baird et al., 2006).

In Study 1, we examined psychological adjustment in relation to trait, goal, and narrative

\textsuperscript{15} Schwartz (1992) places his tenth value (i.e., hedonism) as straddling the self-enhancement and independence quadrants. Due to this conceptual overlap, hedonism was not considered in the calculation of goal or narrative differentiation.
SCD concurrently. This study relied upon personality characteristics taken from two broad contexts (viz., one’s professional and personal life). In Study 2, we built upon and extended the results found in Study 1 by considering differences in SCD at the trait, goal, and narrative level between groups of individuals who had reported either low or high levels of psychological adjustment. In this subsequent study, we considered the five contexts most commonly assessed in previous research (e.g., Donahue et al., 1993; Sheldon et al., 1997).

In line with past research (Baird et al., 2006; Diehl & Hay, 2007), we predicted that a negative relation between adjustment and trait SCD would be observed when the traditional measures of differentiation were considered. We further predicted that such a relation would not be observed when employing a corrected measure of trait SCD, confirming the artifactual nature of prior findings. In contrast, given the context-specific and integrative nature of characteristic adaptations and life narratives respectively (McAdams, 1997b), we predicted that goal SCD would relate positively to adjustment whereas narrative SCD would relative negatively to this criterion.

Two final points are worth noting before transitioning to our empirical efforts. First, recall that, at the level of characteristic adaptations and life narratives, the focal constructs are agency and communion. At the level of behavioral traits, in contrast, five constructs are considered, with extraversion and agreeableness mapping onto the dimensions of agency and communion, respectively (Wiggins, 1991). For this reason, to determine whether any relation observed between SCD and adjustment at the second and third levels of McAdams’s (1995) model could be attributed to the nature of the levels themselves rather than the nature of agency and communion per se, in Studies 1 and 2 we also considered measures of SCD calculated through reliance on trait-based conceptions of agency and communion. We predicted that the
results observed when considering this flavor of trait SCD would parallel those noted when trait SCD was calculated on the basis on all five personality factors.

Second, and needless to say, a proper test of the above predictions requires at least a passing consideration of alternative explanations for any findings observed. At the level of characteristic adaptations and life narratives, such explanations manifest in decidedly distinct forms. With regards to differentiation at the level of characteristic adaptations (i.e., goal SCD), our account privileges inter-context variability in terms of thematic content, rather than simply the number of goals pursued. As outlined in detail below, participants in our studies were allowed to vary the number of goals they provided within each context (five to eight goals were requested within each context). Thus, to discount the possibility that any relation observed between goal SCD and adjustment was a product of variability in the number of goals pursued across contexts (rather than inter-contextual variability in the content of these goals), we relied upon the proportion (rather than the frequency) of goals entailing themes of agency and communion in each context. In contrast, at the level of life narratives, other elements of the narratives in question—elements noted in previous research to correspond with adjustment—may correlate strongly with narrative differentiation, as well as account for the relation between this form of differentiation and adjustment. The affective tone of the story told represents such an element (e.g., Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). To examine the possibility that the relation between narrative differentiation and adjustment is explained by the collective affective tone of participants’ stories, we also considered the correspondence between story valence and narrative SCD.

**Study 1**

In Study 1, we assessed the relation between adjustment and SCD at each level of
personality description. This was done through a consideration of the differentiation between participants’ personality characteristics in professional and personal domains. Traditional, deviation, and corrected measures of SCD were derived at each level. Our prediction was that a relation between trait SCD and adjustment would be observed using the traditional measure. It was anticipated, however, that this relation would disappear when the corrected measure of SCD was considered. We predicted a similar pattern of findings when scores of differentiation were based upon trait-based conceptions of agency and communion rather than the five factors considered in our main analyses. In contrast, drawing upon the writing of McAdams (1997b) and others (e.g., Little, 1996), we hypothesized that goal SCD and narrative SCD would relate to adjustment positively and negatively, respectively. We also predicted that the affective tone of participants’ stories would not correspond with narrative SCD and, therefore, not mediate the relation between narrative SCD and psychological adjustment. As a final objective, assuming that more than one indicator of SCD (assessed using the corrected measure) corresponded with psychological adjustment, we were interested in determining whether these measures independently predicted the outcome variable of interest. Such independent prediction would underscore the importance of conceptualizing personality at different levels of description.

**Method**

**Participants.** A sample of 92 adults volunteered to participate by way of an online survey-based website (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011, for a discussion of the appropriateness of collecting data from such sources). Their average age was 31.5 years ($SD = 10.8$, $range = 19–61$), 60 were women, and 71 self-identified as being of Euro-American descent. Participants received a $1 honorarium.

**Procedure.** Participants were informed that we were interested in their goals, stories,
and behaviors from within different contexts. Consistent with previous research (Baird et al., 2006; Donahue et al., 1993), participants completed measures of SCD prior to measures of adjustment. They were first asked for a list of goals they typically pursued in professional contexts and then a list of goals they typically pursued in personal contexts. Next, participants were asked to report an important personal memory from within a professional context and then an important personal memory from within a personal context. Participants were then prompted to rate their behavioral dispositions within professional contexts. This prompt was followed by a request for a report of their behavioral dispositions within personal contexts. Finally, participants completed three measures of psychological adjustment: self-esteem, depression, and satisfaction with life. Completion of these measures typically took about 30 minutes.

**Measures.** There were four sets of measures: behavioral traits, goals, narratives, and finally, psychological adjustment.

**Behavioral traits.** We assessed behavioral traits using John and Srivastava’s (1999) 44-item Big Five Inventory. In the interest of context specificity, participants were asked to complete this inventory based on how they saw themselves “in professional contexts” and “in personal contexts.” This inventory was completed twice (once for each context). An example of an item from this inventory is “I see myself as someone who is reserved.” Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Context-specific factor scores were then derived (average $\alpha = .82$; range $= .62–.88$).

**Goals.** We assessed goals using Emmons’s (1999) personal strivings measure. This measure was modified for context specificity by prompting participants to list the “things they are typically trying to do in professional contexts” and “… in personal contexts.” Five goals were requested for each context (space was provided for eight goals in each case). On average,
participants generated 5.58 goals ($SD = 0.97$) within each context. Examples of the professional and personal goals produced by participants include: “speak with more complicated words,” and “give my children everything they need but not everything they want,” respectively.

**Narratives.** We assessed life narratives using Singer and Moffitt’s (1991) Self-Defining Memory Questionnaire, which prompts participants to report emotionally salient memories that are (a) at least 1 year old, (b) in regards to a specific event, (c) relevant for self-understanding, (d) strongly emotive, and (e) thought about frequently. This questionnaire was modified to tap context-specific memories by prompting participants for self-defining memories both from a professional and personal context. Responses averaged 136.2 words ($SD = 134.6$) in length.

**Psychological adjustment.** Consistent with previous research on SCD (e.g., Baird et al., 2006; Donahue et al., 1993), we operationalized psychological adjustment as self-esteem, depression, and satisfaction with life. Self-esteem was assessed using Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .91$); depression was assessed using Dempsey’s (1964) 30-item revised Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory Depression scale ($\alpha = .93$); and satisfaction with life was assessed using Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin’s (1985) 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale ($\alpha = .93$). Example items from these three scales include: “I feel that I have a number of good qualities,” “I don’t seem to care what happens to me,” and “In most ways my life is close to ideal,” respectively. Participants rated items corresponding to measures of self-esteem and depression on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” A 7-point Likert-type scale, anchored with the same descriptors, was used when assessing satisfaction with life. Participants’ responses on the depression inventory were reflected such that higher scores were indicative of less depression. Adjustment measures were found to correlate at a level suggestive of multicollinearity ($rs \geq .67$). Thus, psychological
adjustment was taken as the average of the standardized scores from the three measures ($\alpha = .90$).

**Conceptual coding of goals and narratives.** Frimer et al.’s (2009) Values Embedded in Narrative (VEiNs) coding manual was drawn upon when coding participants’ goals and narratives for agential and communal themes. To assess affective tone, participants’ narratives were analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count computer program (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007).

**Goals.** Professional and personal goals were entered into a single spreadsheet, and their order was randomized. The primary coder determined the presence/absence of each of the 10 VEiNs considered in each goal produced. Thus, goals could be coded for multiple VEiNs. The agreement between the primary coder and the secondary coder (who independently coded a quarter of the sample) was substantial with 94% agreement for individual VEiNs ($range = 83–98\%$) and $\kappa = .69$ ($range = .60–.83$) across VEiNs. The presence/absence of a value reflecting each manifestation of agency or communion (viz., self-enhancement, independence, self-transcendence, and relatedness) was then determined. The proportion of strivings representing each of these four themes within each context was subsequently tabulated by dividing the number of strivings within a context exemplifying a specific theme by the total of number of strivings produced in that context.

**Narratives.** The order of participants’ narratives was randomized for blind coding. For each narrative, the coder determined the frequency of words, phrases, and statements embodying each of the 10 VEiNs outlined in the Frimer et al. (2009) VEiN coding manual. The agreement between the primary coder and the secondary coder (who independently coded a quarter of the sample) was substantial with $r = .85$, $range = .64–1.00$ on individual VEiNs, and no difference in
frequency threshold, $ps \geq .15$. The frequency of VEiNs for each of the four themes of agency and communion within each narrative was then determined.

The LIWC (Pennebaker et al., 2007), a software program which analyzes qualitative text along multiple dimensions, was used to quantify the affective tone of participants’ stories. In the current research, we made note of the proportion of positive and negative affective words in these stories (for a discussion of the relation between this narrative content and adjustment, see Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). For each participant, a single measure of positive affect and of negative affect was taken by averaging LIWC scores across narratives.

**Analyses and Results**

**Analyses.** The calculation of the traditional, deviation, and corrected measures of SCD was largely parallel across the levels. The data imputed into these equations were, however, quite different. Scores for trait SCD were derived using 10 factors (with each context entailing five factors). Scores for goal and narrative SCD were derived using the frequency of eight themes (with each context entailing four such themes).

To calculate the traditional measure of SCD, the factor/theme scores for each personality level were subjected to a single PCA. The percentage of variance that was not subsumed by the first factor of this analysis was then recorded (following Donahue et al., 1993). Conducting such analyses requires at least three values within each context. For this reason, we were unable to derive measures of traditional SCD when we considering trait-based conceptions of agency and communion (i.e., extraversion and agreeableness, respectively). To calculate the deviation measure of SCD, we derived and averaged the standard deviations (across contexts) of each applicable factor/theme score within each level of personality. Finally, to calculate the corrected measure of SCD (i.e., the measure of differentiation appropriately independent of mean-level
information), we regressed each of the standard deviations calculated in correspondence with the
deviation measure of SCD onto the mean and mean-squared cross-context score of the respective
factor/value. The unstandardized residuals resulting from these regression equations were
retained and averaged within each personality level.

**Results.** Measures of differentiation were largely independent across personality levels
(see Table 2-1, which presents descriptive statistics for, and the intercorrelations among, SCD
scores at each level of personality description considered in our main analyses and psychological
adjustment). Age and gender did not correspond with adjustment ($p_s \geq .39$) or corrected
measures of SCD ($p_s \geq .13$). As such, these demographic variables were not considered in
subsequent analyses.

**Trait SCD.** Consistent with previous research (Donahue et al., 1993; Diehl & Hay,
2007), a negative relation was observed between adjustment and scores on the traditional and
deviation measures of trait SCD, $r_s = -.21$ and $-.23$, $p_s = .04$ and .02, respectively. Also
consistent with past research (e.g., Baird et al., 2006), this relation disappeared when scores on
the corrected measure (i.e., the measure that isolates inter-contextual variability from all mean-
level information) of trait SCD were considered, $r = -.11$, $p = .30$.

**Agency and communion at the trait level.** Deviation and corrected scores of SCD based
on trait-based conceptions of agency (i.e., extraversion) and communion (i.e., agreeableness) did
not correspond with adjustment, $r_s = -.05$ and $-.04$, $p_s = .32$ and .35, respectively. Thus,
irrespective of whether trait SCD was calculated through reliance on five factors or proxies for
the “big two,” its relation with psychological adjustment was similarly anemic.

**Goal SCD.** Scores on the traditional measure of goal SCD did not correlate with
adjustment, $r = -.13$, $p = .22$. However, a positive correlation was observed between adjustment
and scores on the deviation, $r = .22, p = .03$, and corrected measures, $r = .25, p = .02$, of goal SCD, the latter indicating that those who evinced high levels of goal SCD tended to report higher levels of adjustment.

**Narrative SCD.** A marginally significant relation was observed between scores on the traditional measure of narrative SCD and adjustment, $r = -.19, p = .08$; no relation was observed between scores on the deviation measure of narrative SCD and adjustment, $r = -.12, p = .27$; and a significant negative relation was observed between scores on the corrected measure of narrative SCD and adjustment, $r = -.23, p = .03$. This indicates that those with high levels of narrative SCD tended to evidence lower levels of adjustment.

**Narrative differentiation or affective tone?** Narrative SCD (derived using the corrected measure) did not correspond with the proportion of positive affective words or negative affective words in participants’ stories, $r_s = .06$ and $.03, p_s = .28$ and .39. Thus, the relation observed between narrative SCD and adjustment cannot be attributed to the affective tone of participants’ stories.

**Do goal SCD and narrative SCD independently predict adjustment?** Scores on the corrected measures of goal SCD and narrative SCD each predicted psychological adjustment, albeit in different ways: Goal SCD evidenced a positive relation with adjustment whereas narrative SCD evidenced a negative relation. We were thus interested in examining whether these measures of inconsistency independently predicted this outcome variable. When the index of psychological adjustment was simultaneously regressed onto these predictors, goal SCD, $b = 10.12, SE = 3.94, \beta = .26, p = .01$, and narrative SCD, $b = -.58, SE = .29, \beta = -.20, p = .049$, each accounted for a significant portion of variance in adjustment. In addition to regressing adjustment onto goal and narrative SCD simultaneously, we performed two sequential
regressions wherein the additive predictive ability of each of these variables was considered. Goal SCD and narrative SCD each significantly contributed to the predictive ability of adjustment in these analyses, $R^2 = .07$ and $.04$, $F(1,85) = 6.62$ and 3.99, $p = .01$ and .049, respectively.

**Discussion**

In Study 1, the relation between SCD, conceptualized at each of the levels of personality identified by McAdams (1995), and adjustment was examined. Replicating past research, the negative relation observed between trait SCD and adjustment using a traditional measure of differentiation disappeared when the corrected measure of SCD (i.e., the measure of inter-context variability appropriately independent of mean-level information) was considered (Baird et al., 2006). Null effects also abound when SCD was calculated using only scores of trait-based conceptions of agency and communion rather than scores on all Big Five factors. At the level of characteristic adaptations, we observed a positive relation between goal SCD and adjustment when considering a corrected measure of differentiation. This relation could not be attributed to the degree of inter-contextual variability in the number of goals participants pursued. In contrast, at the level of life narratives, a negative relation was observed between narrative SCD and adjustment using the corrected measure. This relation similarly could not be accounted for by the affective tone of participants’ stories. Finally, goal and narrative SCD were found to be independent predictors of adjustment. The current findings thus add credence to conceptions of personal inconsistency as both virtue and vice, thereby offering concessions to both hypotheses of flexibility and of fragmentation in a manner consistent with the theorizing of McAdams (1997b).

The findings reported in Study 1 offer preliminary support for our proposal regarding a
differing relation between SCD and adjustment at each level of personality description. Personality functioning is dramatically different across these levels. Several features of this study, however, limit the ability to form definitive conclusions regarding this relation. First, given that all associations were observed within a single sample, it is possible that some of these associations were a product of capitalization on chance and/or artificial inflation. Second, our predictor and criterion variables were assessed concurrently, and it is possible that participants’ provision of context-specific traits, goals, and narrations influenced their subsequent report of adjustment. It is also possible that the completion of earlier measures (e.g., goals specific to professional contexts) carried downstream consequences for responses on subsequent measures (e.g., goals specific to personal contexts, context-specific narratives). Finally, we calculated differentiation on the basis of professional and personal domains. This is less than ideal insofar as (a) these domains may be relatively privileged compared to others (Sennett, 1998), and (b) this focus deviates from previous research examining SCD, which has conventionally entailed personality trait ratings from within five specific social roles (e.g., Donahue et al., 1993; Sheldon et al., 1997). These limitations were addressed in Study 2.

Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to build upon and extend the results of Study 1. First, to determine whether our preliminary results were the product of capitalization on chance or artificial inflation, we assessed psychological adjustment and SCD in different sessions. Second, to determine whether our results were a product of the order in which we administered measures of trait, goal, and narrative SCD, we used a between-subjects design in which different participants completed each of these measures. Furthermore, the order in which prompts for context-specific information were presented to participants varied within and across each level of personality
description. Third, to more readily align our results with previous research on SCD (e.g., Donahue et al., 1993), we considered differentiation across the five contexts most commonly assessed in this literature. Finally, to aid in interpretability, we compared the degree of SCD present at each level of personality description between groups of individuals reporting either high or low adjustment, rather than relating SCD to adjustment assessed continuously.

Drawing from the theoretical rationale outlined in the Introduction as well as the results observed in Study 1, we hypothesized that highly adjusted individuals would exhibit a greater degree of trait SCD than individuals low in adjustment when relying upon scores derived using the traditional measure of differentiation. This group difference, however, was predicted to dissipate when trait SCD was assessed via the corrected measure. We also predicted that, when SCD was calculated based solely on the trait-based dimensions of agency and communion, no relation would be observed between differentiation and adjustment. In contrast, at the level of characteristic adaptations, we hypothesized that, when the corrected measure was considered, highly adjusted individuals would exhibit greater goal SCD relative to those low in adjustment. Finally, at the level of life narratives, we hypothesized that highly adjusted individuals would exhibit more consistent themes in their stories relative to low-adjusted participants. We once again predicted that our measure of narrative differentiation would be independent of the affective tone of participants’ stories.

Method

**Participants and procedure.** A sample of 511 adults volunteered to participate in the first session of this study by way of an online survey-based website. Their average age was 33.1 years \((SD = 12.0, \text{range} = 18–70)\), 326 were women, and 383 self-identified as being of Euro-American descent. These participants received a $.50 honorarium and were told that, dependent...
on their responses, they may be asked to participate in a second session. In the first session of
this study, participants completed the measures of adjustment used in Study 1. As in Study 1,
responses were amalgamated to arrive at a single adjustment score for each individual.
Participants were then rank-ordered on the basis of their level of adjustment.

Approximately 1 month after their initial participation, individuals who evidenced a
relatively high or low level of adjustment were sent a request for participation in the second
session of our study, with an offer of a $2 honorarium. Doing so required rank-ordering persons
from the first session on the basis of psychological adjustment, then sending requests for
participation to those exhibiting the highest and lowest levels of this variable. Requests were
made in batches until approximately 75 highly adjusted and 75 lowly adjusted individuals had
participated. The response rate to our request for participation in this second session was 50%.
Although women were more likely to agree to our request than men (54% of women vs. 40% of
men), $\chi^2(1, N = 324) = 5.72, p = .02, \phi = .13$, those who did and did not participate in the second
session were similar in terms of psychological adjustment, $F(1,322) = 0.06, p = .80, \eta_p^2 = .00$;
age, $F(1,322) = 3.05, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .01$; and ethnicity, $\chi^2(1, N = 324) = 0.51, p = .42, \phi = .04$.
Thus, these groups were, by and large, comparable. In total, 159 people provided data in the
second session (the average interval between completion of the two sessions was 30 days, $SD =
12.5$; this span did not differ as a function of level of adjustment, $F(1,157) = 1.31, p = .25, \eta_p^2 =
.00$).

The highly adjusted group consisted of 83 participants, with an average age of 34.3 years
($SD = 11.8$, range = 18-67), 58 were female and 63 self-identified as being of Euro-American
descent. The low adjustment group consisted of 76 individuals, with an average age of 35.5
years ($SD = 11.9$, range = 18-62), 51 were female and 56 self-identified as Euro-American.
These groups did not differ in terms of age, $F(1,157) = 0.46, p = .50, \eta_p^2 = .00$; gender, $\chi^2(1, N = 159) = 0.04, p = .84, \varphi = .02$; or ethnicity, $\chi^2(1, N = 159) = 0.01, p = .92, \varphi = .01$. Of course, because of selection procedures, these groups were strongly differentiated in terms of level of psychological adjustment, $Ms = 1.04$ vs. $-1.20$, $SDs = 0.34$ and $0.52$, $F(1,157) = 10.25, p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .87$.

Participants reporting high and low adjustment were randomly assigned to complete measures corresponding to one of the three levels of personality description. Thus, for each of the trait, goal, and narrative SCD measures, we collected responses from approximately one third of the sample, half of whom were high in adjustment and half, low. The order in which participants provided context-specific personality characteristics within each level varied. The distribution of participants high and low in adjustment within levels and across order-based conditions, however, did not deviate from chance, $\chi^2(7, N = 159) = 10.58, p = .16$, Cramér’s $V = .26$.

Participants, irrespective of whether they were asked to produce context-specific traits, goals, or narratives, provided personality characteristics for five role contexts: employee/worker, friend, romantic partner, son or daughter, and student (Donahue et al., 1993).

**Measures.** There were four sets of measures: first, psychological adjustment, and then behavioral traits, goals, or narratives.

**Psychological adjustment.** In a manner analogous to Study 1, participants completed measures of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965; $\alpha = .93$), depression (Dempsey, 1964; $\alpha = .93$), and satisfaction with life (Diener et al., 1985; $\alpha = .93$). Scores on depression were subsequently reflected. Consistent with the results of our first study, these variables correlated at a level suggestive of multicollinearity ($rs \geq .68$). For this reason, psychological adjustment was taken as
the average of these measures (which were first standardized; \( \alpha = .90 \)).

**Behavioral traits.** We once again used John and Srivastava’s (1999) 44-item Big Five Inventory. In this study, however, participants were asked to complete this inventory based on how they saw themselves in each of the five contexts specified above. Context-specific factor scores were then derived by averaging responses on the applicable items (average \( \alpha = .87 \); range = .80–.91).

**Goals.** Emmons’s (1999) personal strivings measure was once again used to assess goal motivation at the level of characteristic adaptations. Participants were asked to list five things they were “typically trying to do” in each of the five contexts considered (consistent with Study 1, space was provided for eight goals in each case). On average, participants generated 5.49 goals \((SD = 0.95)\) within each context. Examples of the goals undertaken as an employee/worker, friend, romantic partner, son or daughter, and student include: “anticipate requirements and complete tasks independently,” “make time to share with them,” “do nice things for him because I want to and because he is special,” “understand my parents’ shortcomings and mistakes,” and “overcome my shyness and reclusive tendencies so I can exchange ideas,” respectively.

**Narratives.** We once again assessed life narratives using Singer and Moffitt’s (1991) Self-Defining Memory Questionnaire. In addition to modifying this measure for context-specificity (viz., the five role contexts noted above), we removed the stipulation that each memory must be at least 1 year old. This was done in the interest of making our narrative measure as comparable as possible to trait-based and goal-based measures of differentiation. Responses averaged 123.9 words \((SD = 82.8)\) in length. Examples of the narratives produced under these conditions are provided in the General Discussion.
Conceptual coding of goals and narratives. Goals and narrative coding paralleled that of Study 1, once again drawing upon Frimer et al.’s (2009) VEiN coding manual. The frequency of VEiNs for each of the four themes of agency and communion was then determined (self-enhancement, independence, self-transcendence, and relatedness). In the case of goals, to derive proportional scores, these frequencies were once again divided by the total number of strivings produced within the applicable context. Interrater reliability, calculated as before, was substantial at the goal level, with 94% agreement for individual VEiNs (range = 82–99%) and $\kappa = .68$ (range = .61–.83) across VEiNs, and at the narrative level, with $r = .79$, range = .65–.93 on individual VEiNs, and no difference in frequency threshold, $ps \geq .10$. As in Study 1, narratives were also coded for affective tone (viz., the proportion of positive and negative affective words) using the LIWC (Pennebaker et al., 2007).

Analyses and Results

Analyses. The calculation of the traditional, deviation, and corrected measures of trait and goal SCD paralleled that of Study 1. However, perhaps because participants were asked to supply self-defining memories in five contexts (rather than two, as in Study 1), it was found that their narratives contained fewer agentic and communal themes than the narratives produced by participants in Study 1, $Ms = 11.12$ and 17.03, $SDs = 5.60$ and 10.13, $F(1,136) = 14.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ (although the length of the narratives themselves did not differ across studies, $F(1,136) = 0.45, p = .50, \eta_p^2 = .00$). As a result, we treated the narrative data categorically, distinguishing narratives on the basis of whether they did, or did not, contain themes of self-enhancement, independence, self-transcendence, and relatedness (McLean & Fournier, 2008). To assess narrative consistency, we considered the proportion of each participant’s stories involving each of these four themes (i.e., if three of a given participant’s five narratives had themes of self-
enhancement, then this participant would receive a score of .60 on this variable). Thus, for each participant, four proportional scores were derived. To arrive at a single score of narrative consistency, these proportions were averaged. Due to this coding, and in contrast to the measures at the other levels of personality, higher values on this narrative measure correspond with greater consistency (rather than differentiation). Thus, although conceptually similar and boasting a higher degree of face validity, the computational logic informing the derivation of narrative consistency was largely unrelated to other measures of SCD.

Results. Table 2-2 presents the descriptive statistics for measures of context variability for both the high- and low-adjustment groups considered in our main analyses. At the level of behavioral traits and personal goals, scores on the corrected measure of SCD did not vary as a function of the order in which context-specific personality characteristics were requested, $F(2,51) = 0.02, p = .98, \eta^2_p = .00$, and $F(2,52) = 2.34, p = .11, \eta^2_p = .04$, respectively. The same was found regarding scores on the measure of narrative consistency, $F(1,48) = 1.24, p = .27, \eta^2_p = .03$. Thus, within our sample, no order effects were observed. Age and gender did not correspond with corrected measures of trait SCD and goal SCD ($p$s $\geq .28$) and, for this reason, these demographic variables were not considered in subsequent trait-based and goal-based analyses. In contrast, narrative consistency, although unrelated to age ($p = .98$), differed by gender, such that females exhibited a higher level of consistency than males, $F(1,48) = 8.16, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .15$. As a result, in a subsequent analysis, we considered the relation between adjustment and narrative consistency while controlling for this demographic difference.

Trait SCD. Consistent with hypotheses, when scores on the traditional measure of SCD were considered, highly adjusted individuals exhibiting less trait differentiation than those low in adjustment, $F(1,48) = 4.97, p = .03, \eta^2_p = .09$. This difference became non-significant, however,
when deviation and corrected measures were employed, $F_{s}(1,52) = 0.55$ and $0.10$, $p_{s} = .46$ and $.75$, $\eta_{p}^{2}s = .01$ and $.00$, respectively.

*Agency and communion at the trait level redux.* Also consistent with hypotheses, deviation and corrected measures of SCD derived using scores of trait-based conceptions of agency and communion (i.e., extraversion and agreeableness, respectively) did not distinguish high- and low-adjustment groups, $F_{s}(1,52) = 0.21$ and $0.04$, $p_{s} = .65$ and .85, both $\eta_{p}^{2}s = .00$, respectively.

*Goal SCD.* When comparing levels of SCD using the traditional measure, highly adjusted individuals and those low in adjustment did not differ, $F(1,51) = 1.10$, $p = .30$, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .02$. In contrast, when SCD scores based on the deviation measure were considered, highly adjusted individuals exhibited a significantly greater degree of goal differentiation relative to participants low in adjustment, $F(1,53) = 4.92$, $p = .03$, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .09$. Consistent with hypotheses, this result remained significant when we examined scores on the corrected measure of SCD, $F(1,53) = 4.38$, $p = .04$, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .08$.

*Narrative SCD.* Highly adjusted individuals exhibited a greater degree of consistency in their narrative themes than low-adjustment individuals, $F(1,48) = 4.58$, $p = .04$, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .09$. This relation remained significant after controlling for gender, $F(1,47) = 4.68$, $p = .04$, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .09$.

*Narrative consistency or affective tone?* Scores on the measure of narrative consistency did not correspond with either the positive or negative affective tone of participants’ stories, $r_{s} =$

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16 Although corrected measures of SCD control for mean-level information, this was not the case for our measure of narrative consistency. To examine whether such mean-level information might mediate the relation between consistency and adjustment noted here, we contrasted the mean-level of themes in the stories of our high- and low-adjustment groups. The groups did not differ along this dimension, $F(1,48) = 2.94$, $p = .09$, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .06$. Thus, the mean-level of themes in participants’ stories did not mediate the relation between narrative consistency and adjustment.
.02 and -.16, ps = .91 and .28, respectively. Thus, affective tone did not mediate the relation between narrative consistency and psychological adjustment.

**Discussion**

In Study 2, we sought to build upon and expand the results of Study 1 by considering the level of trait, goal, and narrative SCD across five role contexts and between those high and low in psychological adjustment. Consistent with previous research, when relying upon the traditional measure of trait SCD, we noted that highly adjusted individuals were less differentiated in their self-concept than those lower in adjustment. This difference disappeared, however, when a more appropriate measure of trait SCD was used. A relation between trait SCD and adjustment was also notably absent when relying exclusively upon trait-based conceptions of agency and communion.

In contrast, at the level of characteristic adaptations, highly adjusted individuals exhibited a greater degree of goal SCD relative to individuals low in adjustment. This group difference could not be attributed to the degree of inter-contextual variability in the number of goals proffered. Finally, at the level of life narratives, highly adjusted individuals evinced a greater level of thematic consistency in their personal narratives, relative to those low in adjustment. This group difference could not be attributed to the affective tone of participants’ stories. These results support our proposal that trait differentiation is largely orthogonal to psychological adjustment, whereas goal differentiation is positively related and narrative differentiation is negatively related to this criterion. This position steers a middle ground between proposals of fragmentation and of flexibility by way of sensitivity to the multi-level nature of personhood.

**General Discussion**

In one of the oft most cited passages within social and personality psychology, James
James (1890) himself recognized that the composition of one’s social selves could represent either a “discordant splitting” or a “perfectly harmonious division of labor” (p. 294). He was less equivocal when discussing the spiritual self, proposing that contextual variability in terms of this component of the self was maladaptive and led to a sense of self-alienation.
appropriately broad conception of the person is adopted, differentiation can be recognized as indicative of both flexibility and fragmentation.

On the Context-Specificity of Personal Goals

Goffman (1959) can be credited for introducing to the social sciences the metaphor of life as theatrical performance. Within this dramaturgical framework, adaptiveness is based on situational flexibility. Indeed, for Goffman, identity itself is something intertwined with context, devoid of personological signature. Such sentiments resonate well with the writings of Gergen (1991) who argued that, provided one was contextually varied, “the rewards can be substantial—the devotion of one’s intimates, happy children, professional success, the achievement of community goals, personal popularity and so on. All are possible if one avoids looking back to locate a true and enduring self, and simply acts to fulfill the moment at hand” (p. 150).

The fulfillment of the moment at hand is certainly evident in the goal profile of “Joan,” a participant from Study 1. Joan’s levels of goal SCD and adjustment were both approximately one SD above average. Her professional goals were flavored largely by themes of agency (e.g., self-enhancement). When asked to describe what she typically tried to do in professional settings, Joan produced goals such as “prepare myself for the work that needs to be done.” In contrast, her personal goals were largely communal in nature, flavored by themes of relatedness. When asked to describe what she typically tried to do in personal settings, Joan produced goals such as “be a loving wife and good mother.” For individuals such as Joan, a clear delineation exists between professional and personal goals, suggesting a varied pallet.

Joan’s profile contrasts sharply with the profile of “Lana,” another participant from Study 1. Lana’s levels of goal SCD and adjustment were approximately one SD below average. Her

18 All participant names reported are pseudonyms.
professional goals were largely communal in nature, exhibiting themes of relatedness (such as conformity and security). When asked to describe what she typically tried to do in professional settings, Lana produced goals such as “satisfy my superiors.” Consistent with this orientation, her personal goals, which included “maintain friendships from the past,” were also largely rife with communion. For individuals such as Lana, themes blur between contexts. The same values are pursued in professional and personal realms, suggesting a relatively monotonous palette.

**Inter-context variability or intra-context variability?** Here, an important clarification needs to be made regarding what is intended by “context-specificity.” In this article, we have equated the term with inter-context variability (i.e., the degree of variability *across* contexts) rather than intra-context variability (i.e., the degree of variability *within* contexts). Although our evidence aligns with the notion that inter-contextual variability in goals is adaptive, it is conceivable that the opposite is true for intra-contextual goal variability (for a similar distinction, see English & Chen, 2011). Indeed, such intra-contextual incongruence may be associated with inner turmoil and strife. For example, consider a student who both wishes to impress his professor in class while remaining unobtrusive to his fellow classmates.

The available empirical research on the topic is consistent with this possibility. Sheldon and Emmons (1995) examined variability in participants’ ratings of personal goal difficulty, past attainment, current progress, and commitment in relation to goal congruence with possible selves. Relying upon a non-contextualized prompt for personal goals—thus making their measure akin to the degree of goal differentiation within a single, broad context—they noted a negative relation between goal differentiation and the degree to which participants aligned their goals with possible selves. Although goal specificity within contexts appears to be adaptive, a dissonant composition of goals within a given context may hinder psychological functioning.
On the Integrative Nature of Life Narratives

Gergen’s (1991) notion of life as “candy store” in which one works to fulfill the moment at hand carries with it a certain appeal. One wonders, however, whether inter-level spillage in this overindulgence carries with it the danger of a tummy ache. The negative relation we observed between narrative SCD and adjustment suggests a limit to Gergen’s theorizing by offering support for more fragmented conceptions of personal inconsistency. It also offers credence to McAdams’s theorizing wherein the life narrative ideally “incorporates the reconstructed past and the imagined future into a more or less coherent whole in order to provide the person’s life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning” (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 209; see also McAdams, 1993).

Such unity is evident in the narrative profile of “Jeff,” a highly adjusted participant from Study 2 exhibiting an accentuated level of narrative consistency. Jeff’s narratives as a student and a romantic partner each involved themes of agency (viz., self-enhancement) corresponding to performing “so well that I didn’t even have to take the finals,” and confronting a partner who was cheating on him, noting that “It really hurt that she didn’t respect me enough to just tell the truth, but I guess you live and you learn.” The consistency present in Jeff’s narratives diverges significantly from the narratives of “Greg,” a participant from Study 2 who reported a low level of adjustment and exhibited a relatively diminished level of narrative consistency. His narrative as a student is largely absent of motivational themes, consisting instead of a pedestrian description of a time he attended a college party. In contrast, Greg’s narrative as a romantic partner, in which he describes organizing a Valentine’s Day dinner for him and his wife that was “picture perfect,” is flush with both agentic (viz., self-enhancement) and communal (viz., relatedness) content.
On the Contextualized Nature of Personhood

The significant relations observed between goal SCD, narrative SCD, and adjustment, when considered in light of the lack of relation observed between trait SCD and adjustment, add further vigor to calls to broaden the conceptualization of personality beyond behavioral traits. Traits are certainly an important part of personality. If one, however, is concerned with the “whole person” (McAdams, 1995, 1997b), then goals and narratives must be considered alongside traits. Furthermore, as the current results suggest, there are potential gains to be made by researchers considering goals and narratives in their contextualized forms.

In the current series of studies, we relied upon a non-experimental design and employed self-reported indices of psychological adjustment collected within a predominantly Westernized sample. In future, to disentangle the proposal that differentiation influences adjustment from the possibility that adjustment influences differentiation (as well as the possibility of a bi-directional relation between these variables and the potential for both to be influenced by some third variable, unmeasured in the current efforts) researchers are encouraged to test the casual relation between differentiation and adjustment by way of experimental designs. The relations observed here should also be replicated while relying upon more objective measures of adjustment (e.g., other-report). Furthermore, researchers may wish to consider these forms of differentiation within additional (i.e., non-Western) cultural contexts. East Asians have been found to be less concerned with inter-contextual consistency than Westerners (e.g., English & Chen, 2011). It follows that the correspondence between adjustment, goal SCD, and narrative SCD may vary cross-culturally.

The notion that certain persons, or certain groups of persons, value consistency more than others suggests the possibility of mediators in the relations observed here. A potentially fruitful
avenue for future research is to explore whether conscious, self-reported beliefs regarding the clarity and consistency of one’s self-concept (i.e., self-concept clarity; Campbell et al., 2003) correspond with measures of goal and narrative SCD and, furthermore, whether these self-reported beliefs mediate the relations between SCD and adjustment. In addition, it may be that perceived clarity itself takes a distinct form at different personality levels (i.e., clarity may manifest as context-specificity at the level of characteristic adaptations and unity/consistency at the level of life narratives). Researchers are encouraged to assess the viability of measures designed to tap self-concept clarity at each level of personality description.

Westerners may indeed value consistency. When asked to complete contextualized measures of trait-based personality description in the manner most common within the SCD literature, however, inter-contextual variability has been found to become artificially inflated (rather than truncated; Baird & Lucas, 2011). The same artificial inflation may lurk behind the measures of goal-based and narrative-based measures of contextualized personhood employed here. For this reason, subsequent research stimulated by the current studies should consider examining differentiation using the more subtle methods of assessment suggested by Heller, Watson, Komar, Min, and Perunivic (2007). These researchers have assessed trait SCD via the diary approach, experimentally “priming” the sensibilities particular to one context relative to another, or by asking participants to rate themselves as they function in their day-to-day lives, context-to-context. Greater reliance upon the diary approach and experience sampling will also increase the ecological validity of SCD-based research.

In our research, we sought to thematically code all qualitative material collected (i.e., participants’ goals and narratives) in a manner that was both conceptually and theoretically meaningful. As a final point, it is worth highlighting the difficulty (and perhaps the
impossibility) inherent in coding such material in a way that allows for the retention of the richness, complexities, and particularities therein. Although there is much to be gained by future idiographic–nomothetic research examining SCD, exclusively idiographic undertakings should also be pursued. These more descriptive accounts will no doubt help to flesh out the manner in which differentiation manifests within the framework of the individual life.

In sum, through a consideration of the association between goal SCD and adjustment, support was garnered for the notion of personal inconsistency as flexibility. Individuals who produced personal goals which deviated contextually tended to report higher levels of adjustment. Such findings align with Goffman’s (1959) notion of the socially constructed nature of personal identity. In contrast, through a consideration of the association between narrative SCD and adjustment, support was garnered for the notion of personal inconsistency as fragmentation. Individuals who produced narratives which deviated contextually tended to report lower levels of adjustment. Such findings align with McAdams’s (1995) notion of the life story as a unifying agent used to construct a coherent personal identity. Finally, the independent predictive ability of goal and narrative SCD provides support for broader conceptualizations of personhood. In light of these findings we would thus like to respectfully disagree with Whitman’s (1855/1959) poetic conclusion. When inconsistency is considered within an appropriately inclusive framework of personality, it is anything but dismissible.
### Table 2-1

*Intercorrelations among Variables (Study 1)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Trait SCD – traditional</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Trait SCD – deviation</td>
<td>.71**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Trait SCD – corrected</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.98**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Goal SCD – traditional</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Goal SCD – deviation</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Goal SCD – corrected</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.91**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Narrative SCD – traditional</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Narrative SCD – deviation</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Narrative SCD – corrected</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Adjustment</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>-.19†</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* M: 0.08 2.31 0.00 0.22 0.17 0.00 0.19 2.18 0.00 0.00  
  SD: 0.10 1.34 1.32 0.14 0.08 0.07 0.15 1.54 0.96 2.73  

† p < .10    * p < .05    ** p < .01
Table 2-2

 Means and Standard Deviations for the Variables at the Three Levels of Personality Description as a Function of Level of Adjustment (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Adjustment Group</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioral Dispositions (n = 54)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait SCD – traditional</td>
<td>0.18 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.29 (0.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait SCD – deviation</td>
<td>0.38 (0.18)</td>
<td>0.42 (0.21)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait SCD – corrected</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.20)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characteristic Adaptations (n = 55)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal SCD – traditional</td>
<td>0.36 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.32 (0.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal SCD – deviation</td>
<td>0.22 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.19 (0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal SCD – corrected</td>
<td>0.01 (0.03)</td>
<td>-0.01 (0.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Life Narratives (n = 50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative consistency</td>
<td>0.69 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.61 (0.14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL MOTIVATION ACROSS THE ADULT LIFESPAN

In all of us, there exists a desire to promote our own interests (i.e., agency) and the interests of others (i.e., communion; Bakan, 1966). For most of us, these desires are in tension, with the advancement of one limiting or restricting the other. The usual outcome of this friction is that the interests of others are overshadowed by the interests of the self. For some, however, this antagonism is absent; agency and communion are hierarchically integrated, with self-interest being furthered, rather than restricted, through the advancement of others.

We hold this motivational difference to be predictive of moral behavior. When agency and communion are in opposition, desires to contribute to the greater good lack the motivational impetus needed to move from thought to action. In contrast, when agency is channeled through communal concerns, the interests of others are pursued with the vigor more customary of personal desire.

Thus, differences in the relation between agency and communion offer an explanation as to why some people, but not most, pursue the “moral career” (i.e., dedicating oneself to the betterment of others). Given the hypothesized importance of this motivational mechanism, researchers are faced with a pressing question: Does the relation between agency and communion develop over the course of the adult lifespan? Put differently, were those who now use their agency to further communion and those consumed by agency always that way or is there evidence of developmental transformations in moral motivation? The reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009) proposes that the hierarchical integration of agency and communion (wherein agency is used to further communion) and unmitigated personal agency (wherein agency is used to attain more agency) represent distinct developmental end points, the
beginnings of which emerge from the psychosocial challenges that characterize young adulthood.

In two studies, we tested the reconciliation model’s proposals that agency and communion are largely segregated in early adulthood, and that different developmental trajectories emerge (but do not formalize) during this age period.

**Reconciling Agency and Communion**

Theorists have traditionally recognized self-interested agency as a stumbling block to moral action (Bakan, 1966; Kohlberg, 1984; Schwartz, 1992). Implicit (and often explicit) in these theories is the belief that personal interests and communal concerns are antithetical. If this is true, then the infrequency with which moral behavior is exhibited is easily understood.

A dualistic conception of agency and communion does not, however, adequately account for the behavior of those who dedicate their lives to the betterment of others. If one must counteract his or her personal agency to help others, then how does anyone come to exhibit such a long-term pattern of moral behavior? Speaking to this phenomenon, some scholars have proposed that, among the morally mature, these motives are integrated such that agential desires are fulfilled (not stymied) through the pursuit of communal concerns (e.g., Bergman, 2004; Blasi, 1984; Colby & Damon, 1992; Damon, 1984). In other words, morality is appropriated to the self (for a review of research on moral motivation and identity, see Walker, in press).

The reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009) incorporates both the dualistic and synergistic conceptions of agency and communion within a developmental framework: Agency and communion are conceived to function dualistically throughout childhood, adolescence, and into young adulthood. Furthermore, during these developmental periods, these motives remain largely segregated from each other, being actively kept apart. As these motives increase in salience and strength, however, this segregated development becomes unsustainable, ultimately
resulting in a motivational regression or the transition to one of three end-states. The most developmentally advanced end-state involves the synergistic channeling of personal agency through communal ends. Alternatively, communion may be forsaken in the interest of unabashed personal agency or, on rare occasion, agency may be jettisoned in favor of communion unadulterated.\(^{19}\)

To be certain, the reconciliation model is not the first to propose a developmental shift in the relation between concerns for the self and concerns for others. Indeed, in the model introduced by Eisenberg, Lennon, and Roth (1983), levels of prosocial reasoning span the “hedonic” (wherein the interests of the self and others are largely in conflict) to the “value oriented” (wherein violating principles of interpersonal responsibilities results in a loss of self-respect). The distinction between Eisenberg’s model and the one advanced here, however, is as follows: Even at the most advanced level of the former, the temptation exists to privilege personal, relative to collective, interest. With regards to the latter, such impetus is absent as concerns for others have become synergistically (and hierarchically) intertwined with concerns for the self.

**Young adulthood and moral motivation.** We contend that young adulthood serves as a motivational pivot-point; at this juncture in development the transition to the end-states outlined above typically begins. Erikson (1968) identified late adolescence and early adulthood as entailing substantial psychosocial change, in part, because during this developmental period,

\(^{19}\) Individuals who embody this stance are largely empathic and actionless. For this reason, this end-state of unmitigated communion will not be considered further here.
there exists an increased pressure to commit oneself to certain social roles.\textsuperscript{20} In this sense, early adulthood represents a developmental period in which individuals may feel as though they have to decide between lifestyles that advance the self and lifestyles that advance others, failing to yet grasp the possibility of integrating these orientations.

Frimer and colleagues (2011) found that older moral exemplars actively integrated their agency with communion whereas non-exemplary (comparison) older adults neither coupled nor segregated these motives. We predict that, although young adult exemplars are likely more motivated than their demographic comparisons, due to each group’s developmental level and the age-related pressures they face, young adult exemplars and comparisons will actively separate their agency and communion.

\textbf{The hierarchical integration of agency and communion.} From the real and imagined pressures of young adulthood emerge end-states comprised of distinct hierarchical relations between agency and communion. In one such end-state, the motivational duality is transcended and personal agency is used (i.e., it is instrumental) to further communal ends (which are terminal; Rokeach, 1973). In another, agentic means are used to attain agentic ends.

To determine whether the integrated and unmitigated agentic end-states account for moral excellence (and its absence), Frimer et al. (2012) assessed the motivation of a group of influential moral and comparison figures. They noted that moral exemplars used their agency to attain communion, whereas comparison subjects embodied a state of unmitigated agency. These results are consistent with the notion that the apex of moral maturity is defined by the integrated end-state.

\textsuperscript{20}Erikson (1968) wrote primarily about adolescence rather than early adulthood. More recently, however, the boundaries between adolescence and adulthood have become more permeable (Arnett, 2007).
The findings of Frimer and colleagues, when juxtaposed with the theorizing of the reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009), beg the question of the motivational roots of such exemplarity. What is the relation between agency and communion among nascent exemplars in early adulthood? We predict that, for exemplary young adults (i.e., those who have recently become significantly involved in prosocial activities), there exists a tension between desires to further their agency and their communion. Although those who engage in the moral career will often come to transcend this tension (choosing to put their agency behind communal ends), among young adult exemplars this tension manifests in a state such that instrumental agency is used to further terminal agency and communion with comparable zeal. In contrast, for ordinary (non-exemplary) young adults, the idea of pursuing communal ends carries a diminished level of appeal. Given the transitory nature of emerging adulthood, however, the predominance of agency at the terminal level is hypothesized to be attenuated when compared to older individuals occupying the end-state of unmitigated agency.

The Current Studies

In the current studies, we examined the relation between agency and communion among exemplary young adults and a group of demographically similar comparison participants, testing the predictions outlined above. In each study, this examination was supplemented by a consideration of this same relation among groups of older exemplary and comparison persons, yielding a developmental perspective. In Study 1, we considered the degree to which exemplars and comparisons, both young and old, actively segregated or coupled the agency and communion implicit in their personal goals. In Study 2, to map out the direction of the relation between

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21 For discussion of the appropriateness of considering the relation among variables within persons, see Frimer et al. (2011) and Magnusson (1999).
agency and communion among young adults, we considered the hierarchical relation between these motives among exemplary and non-exemplary young adults and older persons.

**Study 1**

The purpose of Study 1 was to test the proposal that agency and communion are segregated in young adulthood. This was accomplished by determining whether exemplary and non-exemplary younger and older adults actively couple or separate the agentic and communal motivation present in their personal goals. We predicted that, although exemplars would exhibit a greater number of goals entailing themes of agency and communion relative to comparison participants (thereby indicating a greater level of motivation on the part of exemplars), when differences in mean levels of motivation were accounted for, older exemplars would be found to actively couple their agency and communion, whereas older comparisons would neither couple nor segregate, and young adults would actively segregate, these motives. Thus, young adult exemplars were predicted to be more motivated than young comparison participants, though their treatment of agency and communion was hypothesized to be similar.

**Method**

**Participants and procedure—young adults.** Our group of 40 exemplary young adult participants was recruited from various social service organizations (e.g., Big Brothers, Ronald McDonald House) located in and around a large city in Western Canada. The executive director (or a similar authority) at each organization was asked to nominate a young adult in the organization who demonstrated “extraordinary moral commitment.” These participants averaged 25.4 years of age ($SD = 3.8$, $range = 19–30$), were primarily Euro-Canadian (83%) in their ethnic background, and had attained an average of 4.3 years ($SD = 2.2$) of post-secondary education. There were equal numbers of male and female exemplars. A group of 40 comparison
participants was recruited from psychology classes held at a large university in the same area. These participants were matched to the exemplary young adults on a case-by-case basis in terms of age, gender, education, and ethnicity. Each participant received a $40 honorarium (see Matsuba & Walker, 2004, for further details).

In the first of two sessions conducted in a university laboratory, a battery of questionnaires was administered. This battery included a measure assessing personal goals. In the second session (described in Study 2), participants engaged in a semi-structured life story interview.

Participants’ personal goals were assessed using Little’s (1983) measure of personal projects. Participants were first prompted to reflect upon their current activities and concerns, and then asked to write these down, producing, on average, 13.2 projects (SD = 4.7).

Participants and procedure—older adults. The older exemplary participant group consisted of 25 recipients of the Caring Canadian Award, a national award bestowed on individuals nominated from within their communities on the basis of exhibiting extraordinary long-term voluntary service for charitable or humanitarian causes. Thus, older exemplars were comparable to the younger exemplars insofar as the prosocial efforts of both had been recognized within their respective communities. Recent recipients of the Caring Canadian Award from across the country were contacted until 25 agreed to participate. These participants (12 women and 13 men) averaged 70.1 years of age (SD = 13.1, range = 43–91), were primarily Euro-Canadian (96%) in their ethnic background, and had attained an average of 14.2 years (SD = 3.0) of education in total. Comparison participants were recruited from among interested volunteers in the general community. These participants were matched to the older exemplars on a case-by-case basis in terms of age, gender, education, and ethnicity. Each participant received a $50
honorarium.

Older adult participants were mailed a battery of questionnaires to complete and return, including a measure of personal goals. Participants’ personal goals were elicited using Emmons’s (1999) measure of personal strivings (which is comparable to Little’s, 1983, measure). Participants were instructed to provide at least 10 strivings (i.e., things they were typically trying to do), with space provided for 15. On average, participants produced 12.8 strivings ($SD = 2.6$).

**Coding**

We coded personal goals from both samples for themes of agency (viz., power and achievement) and communion (viz., benevolence and universalism) using the Values Embedded in Narrative coding system (VEiNs; Frimer et al., 2009), a conceptualization validated by Frimer et al. (2011). Participants’ goals from each sample were randomized for blind and independent coding. The presence/absence of themes was assessed independently for each goal (i.e., goals could be coded for multiple VEiNs). Examples of agentic, communal, and integrated goals (i.e., goals containing both agency and communion) include: “be more assertive and sure of myself at work,” “pray for friends,” and “set up a mountain biking clinic with the Big Brothers,” respectively.

Interrater reliability was substantial, with 95% agreement for individual VEiNs ($range = 91–97\%$) and $\kappa = .76$ ($range = .68–.83$) across VEiNs within our sample of younger adults (Frimer et al., 2011, report comparable reliability for the coding applied to the older adult sample). Due to variability in the number of goals produced, we relied on the percentage of agentic, communal, and integrated goals from within participants’ motivational profiles.
Results

Prevalence of integrated goals. To examine whether exemplars evidenced a higher frequency of integrated goals relative to comparisons, we conducted an age (young adults, older adults) × group (exemplar, comparison) between-groups ANOVA, using the percentage of integrated goals as the dependent variable. This analysis revealed main effects for age and group, $F_{s}(1,126) = 8.29$ and $17.68$, $p_{s} = .005$ and < .001, $\eta_{p}^{2} = .06$ and .12, respectively; indicating that older adults and exemplars exhibited a greater frequency of integrated goals than young adults and comparison participants, in general (see Figure 3-1). An interaction between age and group was not observed.

Relation between agency and communion. Then, in two steps, we determined whether participants were actively coupling or separating their agency and communion. Doing so required accounting for the differing levels of motivation between our groups (i.e., if certain groups are more motivated, having higher levels of agency and communion, one would expect a greater degree of agency–communion co-occurrence on the basis of chance alone). To account for differences in mean levels of motivation, we derived the percentage of agency–communion co-occurrence that would be expected by chance by multiplying the percentage of observed agentic goals by the percentage of observed communal goals. To examine whether participants were associating or segregating these motives, we next subtracted the expected percentage of integrated goals from the observed percentage of these goals. Thus, a positive deviation score is indicative of active coupling (i.e., exceeding chance levels), whereas a negative deviation score is indicative of active separation.

In our analyses, deviation scores between the observed and expected frequency of integrated goals for each group were compared to the baseline (of 0; see Figure 3-2). We found
that both the younger exemplary and comparison participants actively segregated these modalities, \( t(39) = -2.15 \) and \(-2.28\), \( ps = .04 \) and \(.03\), \( ds = -0.69 \) and \(-0.73\), respectively. In contrast, the older exemplars actively congregated their agency and communion, \( t(24) = 4.51, p < .001, d = +1.12\), and the older comparisons neither actively congregated nor segregated their agency and communion (i.e., they did not differ from the baseline), \( t(24) = 1.56, p = .13, d = +0.52\).

**Discussion**

In Study 1, we tested the reconciliation model’s proposal that agency and communion are separated in young adulthood. Determining the manner in which exemplary and non-exemplary young adults handled the agency and communion in their personal goals, we noted that, although young adult exemplars were more motivated in general than young adult comparisons, both groups actively separated their agency and communion.

The segregation between themes of agency and communion observed in young adulthood may represent a necessary step in the transition to the end-states specified by the reconciliation model. In Study 2, we tested this assertion by examining the motivational profiles of our exemplary and comparison young adults, this time relying on narrative data from a life story interview. These comparisons were made with reference to another sample of older adults: a group of exemplary and comparison historical figures whose motivational profiles were assessed via archival speeches and interviews.

**Study 2**

The results of Study 1 provide support for the reconciliation model’s proposal that agency and communion are actively segregated among young adults. These results, however, offer little indication as to the functional relation between these motives. What is the directional
relation between agency and communion in young adulthood? Do young adult exemplars differ from comparison participants in their treatment of terminal communion? At this point in the lifespan is there evidence of a transition to the end-states specified by the reconciliation model? The purpose of Study 2 was to answer these questions by determining the direction and strength of the relation between agency and communion among exemplary and non-exemplary young adults, testing the assertion that these profiles change across adulthood. To do this, we also considered the motivational profile of groups of exemplary and comparison older persons. Although our older exemplars were expected to occupy the integrated end-state, we predicted that our young exemplars would yet to have transcended the dualism between agency and communion, instead using agency to pursue terminal agency and terminal communion with equal enthusiasm. With respect to our comparison participants, we predicted that both young and old alike would use their agency to further agency. Given that our non-exemplary young adults were considered to have just begun the transition to the unmitigated agentic end-state, however, we predicted that their unmitigated agency would be diminished relative to the older comparisons considered.

Method

Participants and procedure—young adults. The 80 young adults who participated in Study 1 also comprised the young adult contingent of the current study’s sample. During the second session of participation, they completed an audio-recorded semi-structured life story interview (which was later transcribed verbatim for coding). In this interview, among other things, participants were asked to provide a “future script” (McAdams, 1993); that is, a list of life goals they hoped to achieve. Once these goals had been generated, participants were next asked to explain the reason(s) why they wanted to attain these goals. Thus, during this portion of the
interview, we tapped both instrumental (i.e., motivations used to attain some other end) and terminal (i.e., ends in and of themselves) goals, respectively.

Participants and procedure—older adults. The sample of older adults was identified via a multi-step process (as previously reported by Frimer et al., 2012). First, potential exemplary and comparison target figures were taken from TIME magazine’s lists of the most influential leaders/revolutionaries and heroes/icons from the 20th century.

A large sample of Canadian academics in the social sciences then rated the moral exemplarity of these figures. To form our groups of exemplar and comparison subjects, we selected the 15 highest- and the 15 lowest-rated figures, respectively (see Frimer et al., 2012, for additional details). Examples of highly ranked figures include Aung San Suu Kyi and Andrei Sakharov, whereas among the lowly ranked figures were Donald Rumsfeld and Kim Jong Il. The motivational profiles of these figures were assessed by way of archival materials (viz., speeches and interviews) given that these historical figures were not available for research participation. The average age of the exemplary and comparison figures when they produced these materials did not differ, $F(1,28) = 1.41, p = .25, \eta^2_p = .05, M_s = 59.0$ and 53.1 years, $SD_s = 14.8$ and 12.6, respectively.

The four most recent speeches and interviews for each subject were located through database and online searches. We retained the final 300 words of each speech or interview for coding. Although the future scripts of the young adults and the speeches and interviews of older adults were, in some obvious respects, different, they were comparable insofar as both readily allowed for the coding of agentic and communal motivation in its instrumental and terminal forms.

Coding. To code data emerging from the young adult sample, the primary rater first
categorized the goals participants produced within their future scripts on the basis of whether they were instrumental or terminal in nature. Next, these goals were organized such that the stem(s) (i.e., the portion of the response which contained the core of the motivation) of each terminal concept was associated with the stem of the applicable instrumental goal. On average, participants produced 2.3 ($SD = 1.1$) instrumental goals and 5.6 ($SD = 3.6$) terminal goals. Using the VEiNs coding manual (Frimer et al., 2009), the rater next coded each stem for its dominant value, be it agential or communal in nature.$^{22}$

To assess interrater reliability, a second independent rater coded the transcripts of a randomly selected 25% of the sample. This rater first read the interview transcripts, noting the number of instrumental goals produced and the number of terminal goals associated with each of these instrumental goals. Working within the narrative structure identified by the primary coder, the secondary coder then noted the stems associated with each passage and coded their dominant value. The interrater reliability of coding for narrative structure was substantial ($r = .77$) with no difference in threshold ($p = .47$). The interrater reliability for the coding of values was also substantial, with 83% agreement and $\kappa = .68$.

The coding of the transcripts from the interviews and speeches of older adult subjects largely paralleled the coding of the future scripts from the young adult sample (e.g., the primary coder first identified all goals in each narrative passage, subsequently categorizing them as instrumental or terminal in nature, and then identifying their primary VEiN; for information pertaining to the interrater reliability of this coding, see Frimer et al., 2012).

**Metrics.** Four metrics were derived for each participant. At the instrumental level, we

$^{22}$ These numbers reflect cases in which participants specified a goal and the rationale(s) behind the goal. On average, participants produced an additional 2.1 goals ($SD = 1.8$) that were neither instrumental nor terminal in nature. As such, they were excluded from all analyses.
tabulated the percentage of goals that were (a) agentic and (b) communal in tone. This was similarly done at the terminal level for goals that were (c) agentic or (d) communal.

Results

We explored the within-person dynamics of agency and communion by conducting a mode (agency, communion) × level (instrumental, terminal) repeated-measures ANOVA, using the percentage of goals as the dependent variable, for each of the four groups: younger exemplars, younger comparisons, older exemplars, and older comparisons.

The motivational profile of younger exemplary participants. The ANOVA for this group revealed a mode × level interaction, $F(1,39) = 22.07, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$, which, when unpacked, indicated that young exemplars had a greater degree of instrumental agency relative to instrumental communion, $F(1,39) = 30.57, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .44$, whereas their levels of terminal agency and terminal communion did not differ, $p = .30$ (see Figure 3-3).

The motivational profile of younger comparison participants. A two-way interaction was found, $F(1,39) = 45.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .54$. Unpacked, this interaction revealed that young comparison participants evidenced more instrumental agency than instrumental communion, $F(1,39) = 87.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .69$, as well as more terminal agency than terminal communion, $F(1,39) = 14.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27$. The magnitude of this effect was, however, comparably reduced at the terminal level (see Figure 3-3).

The motivational profile of older exemplary subjects. A two-way interaction was observed, $F(1,14) = 87.88, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .86$, which indicated that older exemplars had more instrumental agency than instrumental communion, $F(1,14) = 161.72, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .92$, whereas they had more terminal communion than terminal agency, $F(1,14) = 26.29, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .65$ (see Figure 3-3).
The motivational profile of older comparison subjects. A main effect for mode was observed, $F(1,14) = 73.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .84$, indicating that comparison subjects had more agency than communion at both the instrumental and terminal levels (see Figure 3-3). No main effect for level nor interaction was found, $ps = .25$ and $.37$, respectively.

Discussion

In Study 2 we noted that our exemplary young adults occupied a divided state, pursuing agential and communal ends with equal vigor. Further along the moral career, our older exemplars occupied the integrated end-state, using their agency to further communion. Among comparison participants, young and old alike evidenced more agency than communion at both the instrumental and terminal levels. Comparison young adults, however, had a greater parity in their level of terminal agency and communion in relation to the older comparisons, who strongly typified the unmitigated agentic end-state.

The current results provide the first empirical evidence in support of the proposal that young adulthood marks a transitory point to the integrated or unmitigated end-states. They are, thus, consistent with the assertion that the integrated end-state represents a developmental achievement rather than a static personality characteristic. Further, they are suggestive of the possibility that the divided state observed among younger exemplars represents a precursor to this later state. Largely parallel implications exist for the progression to the unmitigated agentic end-state. However, it should be stressed that, although the older comparison groups were not moral exemplars, they were exemplary in many other respects (e.g., recognition, influence). For this reason, only speculative ties should be drawn between the psychological profiles of younger and older comparisons. All told, this initiative furthers understanding concerning the development of moral motivation across the adult lifespan.
General Discussion

This research project was framed by the following question: What explains the behavior of moral exemplars, particularly those who dedicate their lives to the betterment of others? The reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009) contends that a consideration of the developing relation between agency and communion offers acute insight in this regard. Although for most people agency and communion constitute a duality, for moral exemplars, these motives have become synergistically integrated such that agency is furthered (not stymied) through the pursuit of communal ends.

In the context of the current study, we sought to test two proposals put forth by this model: (a) young adulthood represents a period of segregation between agency and communion, and (b) the psychological profiles of full-fledged moral exemplars and comparison individuals represent developmental end-points, ones preceded by a divided state and a weakened form of unmitigated agency, respectively. In two studies, these proposals were examined among a sample of young adult exemplary and comparison participants and supplemented by reference to older exemplary and comparison persons. Our results were largely consistent with the proposals entertained. Specifically, we noted that (a) although young adult exemplars were more motivated than their demographically similar comparisons, both groups actively segregated their agency and communion, and (b) young adult exemplary and comparison participants exhibited motivational profiles that were the theoretical precursors to those of older exemplary and comparison participants. The findings from this research therefore help explicate the developmental patterning of moral motivation across adulthood.

Indicative of a heightened level of motivation, young adult exemplars exhibited more integrated projects relative to young adult comparisons. These groups were similar, however,
insofar as both segregated their agency and communion. Young adulthood has traditionally been recognized as a period rife with psychosocial change (e.g., Erikson, 1968). We contend that one such change transpiring during this period is the beginning transition to the end-states specified by the reconciliation model. Furthermore, the segregation between agency and communion manifest in young adulthood represents the opportune developmental context for the transition to these end-states.

Consistent with the notion outlined above, the current project (specifically Study 2) offers evidence for the reconciliation model’s proposal regarding the developing nature of agency and communion in the lives of exemplary and non-exemplary folks. A pressing objective for future research concerns the identification of the mechanism behind this progression. Why might terminal communion and agency increase as individuals progress in moral and non-moral careers, respectively? We contend that these developments represent the byproduct of interactions between the predilections of the individual and the characteristics of the broader environment. Said differently, for one to transition from the beginnings to the thick of the moral career, predilections must be met with environmental opportunity (Hart & Matsuba, 2009). This requires coming into contact with a prosocial cause with which one resonates. The same is true for non-exemplary individuals, who may require exposure to an agentic pursuit that is personally meaningful.

Despite the contributions made by the current project, inherent limitations must be recognized. First, when drawing comparisons between younger and older participants, we relied upon different samples and measures, limiting their direct comparability. This was particularly apparent in Study 2, wherein the instrumental and terminal profiles of a group of young persons were compared to those of highly influential historical figures. Given their relative level of
influence, it is possible that the older groups in this study differed from the younger groups on variables other than age. The current research, however, represents the first to purposefully contrast the psychological profiles of exemplars at different periods in the lifespan. This feature, coupled with the theoretically meaningful results derived from this contrast, reduces the import of the aforementioned limitation.

A second constraint concerns the fact that, although claims regarding development were made, this was done without the use of longitudinal data. To address this limitation, researchers are encouraged to examine the interplay between agency and communion among young adult exemplars over time, as they progress through midlife and beyond. These pursuits, when combined with the current project and research examining motivation profiles in the childhood and adolescent parts of the lifespan, hold the potential to provide insight regarding the nature of moral motivation and its role in the beginnings and maintenance of the moral career.
Figure 3-1. Percentage of agency–communion integrated goals (Study 1). Error bars denote 95% CIs.
Figure 3-2. Deviation scores between observed and expected percentage of agency–communion integrated goals (Study 1). Error bars denote 95% CIs.
Figure 3-3. Instrumental and terminal agency and communion profiles for the younger and older adult samples (Study 2). Error bars denote 95% CIs. The data for the older adult sample are adapted from “Hierarchical Integration of Agency and Communion: A Study of Influential Moral Figures,” by J. A. Frimer, L. J. Walker, B. H. Lee, A. Riches, and W. L. Dunlop, 2012, *Journal of Personality, 80*, p. 1136. Copyright 2012 by The Authors.
Supplement:

Predictive Ability of Agency and Communion as Behavioral Traits

In the context of Chapter 3, evidence was provided that, at the personological levels of personal goals and identity, examinations of the interplay between motives of agency and communion provide insight into (a) the roots of moral excellence and (b) the manner in which this excellence develops across adulthood. Dispositional indicators of agency and communion were assessed concurrently to these implicit motives, though not included in the manuscript constituting the body of Chapter 3. This omission was due to the focus and length constraints imposed by the journal in which this manuscript was published. In the current supplement, we examined whether these dispositional measures of agency and communion provided a similar level of predictive ability, in order to address the primary issue framing this dissertation.

The Assessment of Agency and Communion

There exists a long history of using the descriptive terms “agency” and “communion” to refer to certain behavioral dispositions and/or self-professed attributes (e.g., Helgeson, 1993; Spence et al., 1979; Wiggins, 1991). Within the purview of the reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009), however, agency and communion are more akin to the implicit motives considered by Murray (1938) and others (e.g., McClelland, 1961). It follows that predictions regarding the developing relations between agency and communion, as well as the correspondence between these relations and moral excellence, primarily entail a consideration of implicit motives, rather than behavioral dispositions. Despite this proposal, researchers have yet to directly examine whether, contrary to model predictions, the relation between trait-based conceptions of agency and communion varies with moral acumen and age. Here, we test the aforementioned possibility, predicting a null relation between this interplay, moral excellence,
and age—in contrast to the positive relation we predicted and found at the levels of goal motivation and identity in Chapter 3.

Method

The young adult and older adult exemplary and comparison groups reported in Study 1 of Chapter 3 served as the participants in the current project. In addition to completing measures of goal motivation, these participants also completed trait-based measures of agency and communion.

Young adult participants’ behavioral traits were assessed using the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992). Consistent with Wiggins’s (1991) theorizing, agency was operationalized as the extraversion factor of this inventory and communion was operationalized as the agreeableness factor. For each of these factors, T-scores were derived (see Matsuba & Walker, 2004, for information concerning the internal consistency of these factors).

Older adult participants’ behavioral traits were assessed using a comparable personality inventory (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997), the Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scale (IASR; Wiggins, 1995). In this measure, agency is operationalized in terms of the interpersonal circumplex dimension of dominance and communion is operationalized in terms of nurturance (see Walker & Frimer, 2007, for information concerning the internal consistency of these dimension scores).

Results

Previously reported analyses involved group comparisons for these behavioral traits. For the younger adult sample, Matsuba and Walker (2004) found that exemplar and comparison participants did not differ in terms of levels of extraversion, but were distinguished in terms of
agreeableness with exemplars being significantly higher on this factor. For the older adult sample, Walker and Frimer (2007) found no significant differences between exemplar and comparison groups in terms of either dominance or nurturance.

The analytic approach taken in the present analyses was to determine if there was a synergistic interactive effect between agency and communion, beyond the mean levels of these dispositions. We first examined whether the relation between trait-based agency and communion varied as a function of exemplar status by conducting a multi-step logistic regression equation. Prior to conducting our analyses, scores of agency and communion were standardized (to allow for comparability across younger and older samples).

In the first step of this equation, exemplar status (exemplar, comparison) was regressed on to mean levels of agency and communion. In the second step, the variance that could not be accounted for by the mean levels of these traits was regressed onto the interaction term. If this term accounted for a significant portion of variability in group status, then an interaction between agency and communion would be present. In this analysis, an interaction between trait-based agency and communion was not observed, $\Delta$ Nagelkerke $R^2 = .02$, block $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 1.98$, $p = .16$.

A second logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine whether the relation between trait-based agency and communion varied as a function of age. Here, age group (younger adult, older adult) took the place of exemplar status as the predictor variable. Save for this difference, the nature of this regression equation paralleled that of the first. In this analysis, an interaction between trait-based agency and communion was not found in relation to age group, $\Delta$ Nagelkerke $R^2 = .00$, block $\chi^2(1, N = 130) = 0.07$, $p = .93$. 
Discussion

In this supplement, we examined whether the interplay between trait-based conceptions of agency and communion varied as a function of moral excellence or age. It did not. This result accords with the reconciliation model’s implication that the relation between agency and communion is more aptly assessed in terms of the implicit motives found at the level of personal goals and identity (as was reported in the studies reported in Chapter 3). Not only do the present findings accord with the perspective advanced by the reconciliation model, they also reinforce the contention that forms the basis of this dissertation: appropriate attention to different levels of personality description (McAdams & Pals, 2006) can be profitable in explicating different aspects of human functioning. Although behavioral traits represent a necessary component of any viable conception of personhood (e.g., Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006), in the context of the outcome variables considered here, they are found wanting.
CHAPTER 4: A CROSS-CULTURAL EXAMINATION OF BEHAVIORAL TRAITS, PERSONAL GOALS, AND IDENTITIES

Culture exerts different effects on different levels of personality: It exerts a modest effect on the phenotypic expression of traits; it shows a stronger impact on the content and timing of characteristic adaptations; and it reveals its deepest and most profound influence on life stories.

(McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 211)

Psychologists have long been interested in the relation between personality and culture. Approximately 60 years ago, this interest manifest in the formation of culture and personality studies, home to an eclectic collection of anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists (LeVine, 2001). More recently, with cultural psychology coming into increasing favor, the field has experienced a renewed interest in this topic. Much, however, remains unknown or unclear regarding the relation between persons and cultural communities.

Representing the conceptual skew of personality psychology writ large, the majority of research efforts focused on identifying the personality characteristics of persons in this or that culture have considered differences in self-reported behavioral dispositions (e.g., del Prado et al., 2007; Schmidt et al., 2007). The results of these efforts have, however, proven somewhat difficult to interpret (e.g., Heine et al., 2002, 2008). Temporarily putting aside theoretical discussion as to whether behavioral dispositions carry the same weight in all cultures (e.g., English & Chen, 2011; Suh, 2002) and methodological discussion regarding the comparison of inventory responses across cultures (Heine et al., 2002, 2008), equating personality with personality traits may be particularly problematic within the forum of cross-cultural research for at least two reasons.

First, as McAdams (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006) has proposed, behavioral dispositions represent but one of three distinct “levels” of personality description. In his model, the
additional levels of personality are constituted by characteristic adaptations, which speak to what an individual desires or is driven to do in specific domains and periods of his or her life (i.e., personal goals or projects; Little, 1996),23 and the integrative life narrative, which represents the manner by which personal identity is constructed (McAdams & Olson, 2010). Second, of these three levels of personality description, behavioral dispositions are posited to be the least amenable to cultural influence, integrative life narratives represent the most culturally malleable level, and the extent of cultural variability inherent in characteristic adaptations falls somewhere between these other levels (McAdams & Pals, 2006). It follows that a consideration of cross-cultural differences at the levels of characteristic adaptations and the integrative life narrative may yield considerable insight regarding the nature of personality across cultures.

The current project considers two proposals regarding McAdams’s (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006) multi-leveled conception of personhood. The first is that, relative to the other levels within this model, integrative life narratives are more culturally variable than characteristic adaptations, which, in turn, are more culturally variable than behavioral dispositions. The second is that the life story and identity are synonymous (e.g., McAdams, 1988; McAdams et al., 1997). We consider these proposals among a group of young people evenly distributed between what comprise arguably two of psychology’s most frequently contrasted cultural groups (viz., Western and Eastern cultures). In what follows, we synthesize the literature on the relation between culture and personality with sensitivity to each of McAdams’s levels. From there, we review theorizing that, when considered on the whole, is suggestive of the possibility that the construction of a life story represents one of at least two viable strategies commonly used to

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23 As Little (1996) contended, the level of characteristic adaptations is a rather unwieldy one. In response, he recommended refining characteristic adaptations through a focus on personal goals. This recommendation is adopted here. Thus, the phrases “characteristic adaptations” and “personal goals” are used interchangeably.
foster a personal identity. We then go on to outline our hypotheses regarding the differing nature of the behavioral dispositions, personal goals, and identities manifest among individuals hailing from Western and Eastern heritage.

**What Do We Know When We Know a Person?**

McAdams (1995) proposed that personality is best understood in terms of three descriptive levels. From this perspective, we come to “know a person” once we have amassed information regarding his or her characteristics at each of these levels. The first level of McAdams’s model is comprised of behavioral dispositions. Here, broad, decontextualized tendencies and mannerisms are of principal interest. The five-factor approach, which concerns itself with agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience (John & Srivastava, 1999), serves as an appropriately encompassing framework at this level. Behavioral dispositions are no doubt important to the description and explanation of persons, having been associated concurrently and prospectively with a host of meaningful life outcomes (for a review, see Ozer & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Focusing exclusively on a consideration of overt behavioral patterns, however, threatens to confine one to the “psychology of the stranger” (McAdams, 1994, p. 145). When we know someone, we know far more than how he or she tends to behave within and between contexts.

Indeed, when we know someone, we likely also have an appreciation of this person’s hopes and desires, what he or she would like to accomplish both in the immediate future and over the course of his or her entire life. Recognition of these desires brings us to the second level of McAdams’s (1995) model. Here sit characteristic adaptations, developmental and motivational variables that “speak to what people want, often during particular periods in their lives or within particular domains of action … in order to get what they want or avoid getting
what they don’t want over time” (p. 376). Whereas there is general consensus regarding the proper interpretative framework for behavioral dispositions (but see Block, 1995), at the level of characteristic adaptations there exists a relative diversity in the variables and dimensions of interest (e.g., Emmons, 1999; Loevinger, 1976). Agreement is largely present, however, insofar as personal goals are deemed central to this level of personality description (Little, 1996).

A consideration of McAdams’s (1995) first and second levels allows for an appreciation of the “having” (traits) and “doing” (personal goals) aspects of personality (Cantor, 1990; Winter et al., 1998). McAdams (1995) argued, however, that there is an additional level of personality not subsumed by this dichotomy: the integrative life narrative. Whereas behavioral dispositions are represented by decontextualized mannerisms and characteristic adaptations are represented by contextualized concerns, the integrative life narrative is represented by the phenomenological embodiment of one’s past, present, and future. At this third level of personality description, individuals work to synthesize the many personal experiences they have amassed, in the interest of fostering a sense of unity, purpose, and meaning in life. Due to the conceptual overlap between unity/purpose and personal identity, within McAdams’s model, identity is itself “viewed as an internalized and evolving life story, a way of telling the self, to the self and others, through a story or set of stories complete with settings, scenes, characters, plots, and themes” (McAdams et al., 1997, p. 678).

**Cross-cultural variability at the three levels of personality.** In McAdams’s (1995) multi-tier model of personality, differential weight is placed on the intervening influence of culture at each level. Drawing upon the writings of McCrae and Costa (1999), in which behavioral dispositions are framed as largely unreceptive to broader social and cultural forces, McAdams and Pals (2006) proposed that the constructs at this level of personality are the least
culturally variable. In contrast, characteristic adaptations, given their contextualized nature, are readily amenable to cultural influence—goals and interests, as McAdams and Pals suggested, “reflect personal investments in activities, programs, and life trajectories that society makes available to the individual” (p. 211, emphasis added). It follows that such goals are largely intertwined with the broader structural constraints inherent in the enveloping cultural milieu. Although there is a presumed increase in cultural specificity as one shifts from Level 1 to Level 2, it is at Level 3, the level of the integrative life narrative, that cultural influence is understood to be most apparent. Here culture “provides each person with an extensive menu of stories about how to live, and each person chooses from the menu” (p. 212). Culture thus proffers the necessary confines on the form of the life story.

Two points concerning the above are worth clarifying. First, to be certain, McAdams and Pals (2006) did not propose, in any absolute sense, that dispositional traits are unresponsive to cultural influence. On the contrary, they argued that external influence is likely to manifest in the phenotypic expression of these behavioral mannerisms. The mean levels of these dispositions, however, are thought to be only modestly or subtly influenced by social and cultural factors. Second, at both Levels 2 and 3 of McAdams’s (1995) model, individuals are not conceived of as passive recipients of proximal cultural forces. Rather the goals and stories that come to be adopted are a product of a negotiation between persons and broader normative, or canonical, forces (see Gjerde, 2004).

Cross-Cultural Examinations of Personality

Culture and behavioral dispositions. How well does the available body of evidence align with McAdams’s (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006) proposal regarding the relation between culture and behavioral dispositions? Cross-cultural comparisons of behavioral dispositions have
yielded largely inconsistent results, with some noting differences in these dispositions (e.g., del Prado et al., 2007; Schmidt et al., 2007) and others failing to find any indication of such cultural variability (e.g., Heine & Buchtel, 2009; Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 2002).

The aforementioned inconsistency may be a product of any number of factors, one of the most likely being the methodological difficulty inherent in comparing mean levels of behavioral dispositions across cultures. Such comparisons are commonly conducted using self-reported responses (Heine et al., 2008). As Heine and colleagues (2002) noted, however, often individuals from different cultural groups rely upon different reference points when providing such responses. Thus, a Likert scale value of “7” in the mind of a person from one culture may actually correspond to a value of “4” in the mind of a person from another (a phenomenon this research group referred to as the “reference group effect”). Furthermore, as A. P. Fiske (2002) cautioned, the use of self-report measures to assess certain self-relevant constructs (specifically, those that are process-based) is often “worse than useless” (p. 200) as these reports are subject to significant biases and distortions. Finally, it remains unclear whether inventory items are interpreted in the same way (e.g., Church & Katigbak, 2002) or responded to in the same way (e.g., Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995), cross-culturally. In any manner, a definitive picture is largely absent regarding the differences that exist cross-culturally in the mean levels of behavioral dispositions. In this sense, the extant data on the topic do not directly contradict McAdams and Pals’s (2006) theorizing.

**Culture and personal goals.** At the level of characteristic adaptations a relatively clearer picture exists regarding cross-cultural differences in personal goals. Based on collective differences in the need for self-enhancement (Heine & Hamamura, 2007), Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, and Sheldon (2001) hypothesized and found variability in personal goals entailing avoidance
(relative to approach) motivation. Individuals from within cultures boasting a high, rather than low, desire for self-enhancement exhibited higher levels of avoidance motivation. The reason for this being that those with a strong need for self-enhancement are likely to avoid negative information, whereas those with a tempered need for self-enhancement are likely to approach said information.

**Culture and the integrative life narrative.** While there has been a substantial amount of research on cross-cultural variability in behavioral dispositions (e.g., del Prado et al., 2007; Schmidt et al., 2007) and some research on personal goals (e.g., Elliot et al., 2001), the hard truth of the matter is that there is a relative dearth of cross-cultural research on the integrative life narrative (for cross-cultural research on differences in the recall of life events and self-defining memories, see Wang & Conway, 2004, and Jobson & O’Kearney, 2008, respectively). In the pages that follow, we work our way to discussion of the manner in which the form of the life story may vary cross-culturally. Before any and all of that, however, we interject with a consideration of the second McAdamsian proposal evaluated in the current work: that identity and the integrative life narrative are one and the same.

To be certain, the timing of this interjection is not entirely without reason. After all, at least partial credit for interest in the life story as a psychological construct can be attributed to theorizing that yokes the construction of the life story with the sense of identity (e.g., Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McAdams, 1988, 1993, 1995). Such a notion holds considerable appeal but, as argued here, taken as an absolute goes too far (Dunlop & Walker, in press). To explicate why this is the case, more will have to be said of the nature of identity.

**What is identity?** Thinkers since the time of Locke (1690/1956) through Updike (1989) and Dilthey (1962) have generally agreed that identity was predicated on the individual’s
persistence through time. Said differently, the identity of an individual could hardly be thought to endure if this individual were a numerically different person than the one he or she used to be and the person he or she ultimately will become. Selves, or what are commonly considered to constitute selves, are necessarily temporally vectored in nature (Gallagher, 1998; Strawson, 1999). Thus, one defining criterion of identity is what James (1890) referred to as the “abstract numerical principle of identity” (p. 318): personal persistence through time (or self-continuity; Chandler et al., 2003).

Personal persistence alone, however, does not an identity make. In addition to the requisite of persisting through time, one must also maintain some sense of distinction, or differentiation, from others (Baumeister, 1986). This is what Grotevant (1998) meant when he defined identity as the “distinctive combination of personality characteristics and social style by which one defines him- or herself” (p. 1119).

There you have it then. Identity is predicated on the sense of sameness or continuity through time and the distinction or difference from others (Baumeister, 1986; Singer, 1997). As Côté (2006) rightly pointed out, these two elements require one another: “For a thing (or unit) to be the ‘same’ over time, by definition that thing has to be ‘different’ from other things that are themselves the same over time” (p. 6). But how is it that we go about fostering perceptions of continuity through time and differentiation from others?

Two ways of thinking about identity. Bruner (1986) proposed that human beings interpret the world using two modes of thought. One mode, the narrative mode, is called upon when attempting to understand human desires and purposeful behaviors. When functioning in this mode, individuals strive to go beyond mere description or logical proof to reach a satisfying interpretation of a given phenomenon. In contrast, the other, paradigmatic mode is enacted when
attempting to produce a formal system of description, classification, and explanation. When functioning in this mode, categories are constructed and drawn together within larger systems in the interest of attaining empirical proof and good theory. Bruner (1986) contended that these modes of thought were not derivative of one another and instead represented “different natural kinds” (p. 11).

The assertion that we possess the ability to reason within one of two modes of thought has a rich pedigree within American psychology. This is evident upon reflection of James’s (1890) declaration that “to say that all human thinking is essentially of two kinds—reasoning on the one hand, and narrative descriptive, contemplative thinking on the other—is to say only what every reader’s experience will corroborate” (p. 237) or Allport’s (1965) insistence that there are two “authentic” methods for analyzing behavior—“one in literature, the other in … science” (p. 158). A motivating factor behind Bruner’s (1986) efforts to distinguish these two modes of thought, however, was his belief that the momentum of the field of psychology had swung too closely to the paradigmatic mode of thought. If the field were to advance, attention needed to be more evenly distributed between these two modes.

Bruner’s call to action was warmly received by a group of like-minded scholars seeking a place for narrative within the psychological mainstream (e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 1983; McAdams, 1988). Among other claims made by this group, it was proposed that the narrative mode of thought served as the track on which identity was created and maintained. The manner that this identity manifest was, and is, a matter of considerable debate (e.g., Bamberg, 2010; McAdams, 1993); identity as defined here, however, is most commonly understood to exist in the form of a life story (e.g., McAdams, 1988; McAdams et al., 1997).

The life story, in turn, is constituted by the phenomenological representation of one’s
past, present, and future (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). Paralleling the course of identity
development proposed by Erikson (1968), individuals are thought to become concerned with
constructing their life stories in late adolescence and early adulthood (McAdams, 1993). It is at
this point that pressures to make substantive life commitments become coupled with a level of
cognitive sophistication that allows for the abstract consideration of the past and future.
Consistent with the proposal that the life story emerges in adolescence, at this point in
development, individuals begin to engage in the process of autobiographical reasoning, drawing
connections between their sense of self and experience when thinking and talking about the past
(Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008).

Connecting the self to experience (viz., autobiographical reasoning; Habermas & Bluck,
2000) can take one of two forms. In the first, stability-based form, a personal characteristic (e.g.,
being highly extraverted) is described as contributing to the occurrence of an event (e.g.,
choosing to engage in public speaking). In the second, change-based form, an event (e.g., going
to summer camp) is described as changing an element of the self (e.g., becoming more
extraverted).

A life story, or rather a life story replete with instances of change-based and stability-
based autobiographical reasoning, allows for both self-continuity and differentiation. By
recognizing the events that have caused changes in the self and the characteristics of the self that
have caused events to occur, drastic personal and social developments are comprehensible. This
allows for the maintenance of the belief that, despite the many changes that have transpired in
life, the self is coherent, unified, and continuous (McAdams, 1995, 1997b). Furthermore,
although there are certainly similarities in the content and structure of life stories, no two people
hold precisely the same personal story; each is a unique combination of the events that have
transpired and the personal interpretations applied to them. Thus, by creating a life story, the narrator carves out a “unique psychological territory” (Singer, 1997, p. 32).

A consideration of identity within the narrative mode of thought, however, may provide only half of the story. In the last 30 years, psychology has implemented a necessary corrective to its heavily paradigmatic focus. One, perhaps unanticipated, repercussion of this shift is that theorizing pertaining to identity within the paradigmatic mode has fallen largely on hard times. Indeed, momentum now lies squarely in the corner of identity theories steeped in the literary. This is certainly understandable, as the construction of the life story represents a viable route to identity. In our renewed zeal for narrativity, however, have we overlooked an alternative strategy for thinking about our distinctiveness through time?

A partial answer to this question is provided by Chandler’s work on self-continuity (e.g., Ball & Chandler, 1989; Chandler, 2000; Chandler et al., 2003). In the method employed by this research group, participants are asked to describe themselves as they were some time ago (e.g., 5 years earlier) and as they currently are. This frequently results in the provision of two drastically different self-descriptors. Faced with instances of noticeable personological change, participants are next asked to provide the reasons that make them the same people over the period of time considered.

When posed with such a question, many participants reason about themselves within the narrative mode of thought. That is, they produce a personal story describing all the events that have led to the observed changes in the self. Many other participants, however, reason about themselves by relying upon a strategy that is more categorical or paradigmatic in nature. That is, instead of weaving an elaborate tale that describes how one went from A to B, an appeal is made to an unchanged attribute within the person (e.g., a distinctive birthmark or one’s eternal soul)
that stands outside of the ravages of time. The sophistication of this appeal shows development throughout adolescence (Chandler et al., 2003), though remains constant via the endorsement of belief in an unchanging element or essence of the self.

Identity within a paradigmatic mode of thought, then, is manifest through appeal to a stable attribute of one kind or another. Such an appeal also allows for a sense of continuity and differentiation. The attribute considered has endured, unabated. In addition, by its very nature, this attribute works to distinguish one individual from another.

**Identity and Culture**

Given the argument focused on in the pages of this manuscript, we feel justified in recasting the third tier of McAdams’s (1995) model as the level of personal identity rather than the integrative life narrative. It should be noted that this maneuver is not entirely unanticipated by McAdams himself who, in more recent writing (e.g., McAdams, 2006b) has equated his third level of personality with identity (see also Emmons, 1999). Regardless, due to this interpretive move, our focus now shifts from a consideration of the relation between culture and the integrative life story to the relation between culture and identity in its narrative and paradigmatic forms.

Identity and culture share a long and storied history. Erikson (1968) drew explicit ties between one’s identity and the larger cultural milieu, arguing that the construction of identity involves “the core of the individual … and the core of his [sic] communal culture” (p. 22). As a starting point, the demand for the construction of an identity is at least partially stimulated by socio-cultural factors (see Baumeister, 1986). Furthermore, the nature of these demands, and the manner by which they are negotiated, is inseparable from the broader cultural context. Thus, discussion of identity without some appreciation of culture, or discussion of culture without
some appreciation of identity, is fundamentally myopic—they are inextricably intertwined.

At this point in the discussion, however, we seem to have gotten a bit ahead of ourselves. Indeed, we have now produced many pages of text steeped in talk of the relation between personality and culture all without providing a proper definition of culture or discussion of the classification system most commonly used when considering cultural groups. We seek to compensate for our overzealous enthusiasm here. At its root, culture is predicated on shared meaning between persons (Bruner, 1990; Shweder, 1990). Thus, two individuals may be thought to share a culture if they possess a comparable meaning framework. Second, with regards to the manner that cultures are most commonly categorized by academic psychologists, the dichotomy applied usually relies upon an East/West or collectivistic/individualistic distinction (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As we will come to see, persons that fall on either side of this divide likely possess very different identities within narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought.

The autonomous roots of the Western world. Those seeking to recognize the location that represents the birthplace of modern-day Western thought need look no further than ancient Greece. In a manner previously unseen, the Greeks endorsed the notion of personal control over one’s life. Consistent with this sense of agency, happiness was thought to be embodied through the application of personal ability “in pursuit of excellence in a life free from constraints” (Nisbett, 2003, p. 3). Such an orientation runs part-and-parcel with individuality, equality, and the precedence of personal beliefs and opinions. As a result, in ancient Greece, the expression of one’s thoughts and feelings was openly encouraged and, provided this expression was done within the context of debate, all could be subject to them (even royalty; Nisbett et al., 2001).

The Greeks’ thirst for independence and personal expression was rivaled if not surpassed by their curiosity regarding the world around them. Evident in Pythagoras’s discussion of body
and soul, but perhaps most focal in Plato’s theory of the forms, Greek philosophers often drew a distinction between the non-material and the material. Such a dichotomous classification is rather fitting as it served as conceptual analogue to the divide recognized by the Greeks between the individual and society. In any manner, this emphasis on division and dichotomy was congruent with a conception of the world in which objects are discrete and rightly placed in larger categories on the basis of the properties they share (Cromer, 1993).

Understandably, it would do little good if, once one had succeeded in applying a taxonomy of categories to the world, this world changed in such a way that previous application became outdated and obsolete. That is, the stock of this epistemic stance would likely fall prey to a precipitous decline in market value if everything that was suddenly became identical with something else. Thus, belief in the existence of discrete objects and categories requires at least tacit support of the notion that the objects within the world will remain largely as they are for the foreseeable future. It is for this reason that the Greeks commonly emphasized constancy over change, claiming, as Parmenides did, that everything that existed had always existed (Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001).

The West’s inheritance: The independent self. Selves functioning within the modern-day Western world inherited the Greeks’ concern with personal independence and the underlying (often unchanging) properties of objects and individuals (Heine & Buchtel, 2009). This “faith in the inherent separateness of distinct persons” (Markus & Katayama, 1991, p. 226) manifests in a greater concern for one’s own beliefs, thoughts, and behaviors rather than those of others. Furthermore, the preference for constancy over change manifests in a concern for personal

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24 As Ji et al. (2001) noted, the Greeks were not entirely uninterested in change. However, on the rather uncommon instances in which the Greeks concerned themselves with change, they focused primarily on linear progressions, rather than the vacillations and contradictions considered by those in the East.
consistency across situations and through time. Indeed, even in the face of rampant behavioral inconsistency, within the heart of dyed-in-the-wool Westerners, there often exists a belief in an underlying and unchanging personal essence (see Harter & Monsour, 1992) or, what Kierkegaard (1843/2000, p. 164) referred to as “the unifying power of self.” It is for this reason that, when pushed to task, Westerners will most commonly describe themselves through reliance on decontextualized personal attributes (e.g., being shy or a nice person) rather than the social roles they occupy (e.g., being a student or employee) or the relationships of which they are a part (e.g., being a son or mother; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995).

**A further nuance in the Western self?** In addition to emphasizing self-stability and independence, the Western self has also been characterized as being largely *redemptive* in nature (McAdams, 2006b). Redemption is present when a negative experience is construed as leading to something ultimately positive, beneficial, or good. In contrast, the inverse of redemption (i.e., contamination) is evident when an initial positive experience is irreconcilably tainted by a negative outcome. Speaking to the prevalence of the redemptive maneuver within Western contexts, McAdams asserted that,

> if you are looking for a redemptive self, you should know that it is not hard to find. You need go no further than the Oprah Winfrey show, the self-help aisle at your local book store, or Hollywood’s latest drama about the humble hero who overcame all the odds to find vivid expressions of the power of redemption in human lives. (p. 271)

Although redemption has been identified as a theme present primarily in Western contexts, the empirical basis of this claim remains largely untested. Researchers instead have been primarily concerned with examining the correspondence between redemptive themes and
psychological adjustment (e.g., McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001) or certain behaviors (e.g., generativity; McAdams et al., 1997).

**The relational foundation of the Eastern world.** Where the Greeks endorsed the notion of personal autonomy and freedom, ancient Eastern philosophers endorsed the belief that the person is fundamentally relational in nature, unable to be separated from the broader context in which he or she is located. Consistent with this conception, individuals were thought wise if they strived “to become one with Heaven and feel that there is no longer a distinction between oneself and others … to identify oneself with others … or to realize the identification of the individual with the Universal Mind” (Zhu & Han, 2008, p. 1802). Such an orientation runs part-and-parcel with relatedness and a lack of concern for self-expression. As a result, within the Eastern world, the expression of one’s own thoughts was considered irrelevant and, therefore, discouraged (Kim & Ko, 2007).

An interest in the external world was not the exclusive province of the Greeks. On the contrary, many in the East were also quite enamored with this topic. Where the Greeks saw a world comprised of discrete objects and categories, however, Eastern philosophers saw an interrelated collection of materials and substances in a constant flux (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Given the interrelated nature of the world, it made little sense to dichotomize or partition it into categories on the basis of shared properties. Furthermore, given that the world was conceived to be in constant flux, a greater emphasis was placed on change rather than constancy (Ji et al., 2001).

The emphasis that Easterners placed on relatedness and change was supplemented by a concern for harmony (Nisbett et al., 2001). Although in constant flux, the world was conceived to maintain an harmonious equilibrium. It was viewed as beneficial if this harmonious
equilibrium were emulated in one’s relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For this reason, deference to authority and a pressing concern for reciprocal social obligation were championed by many Eastern philosophers, including Confucius (Nisbett et al., 2001).

**The East’s inheritance: the interdependent self.** Modern-day selves embodying the spirit of ancient Eastern philosophy carry with them an appreciation of the functionally relational nature of the world as well as the fact that change lies everywhere thick on the ground. The recognition of the relational nature of the world manifests in a greater concern for social relationships relative to personal beliefs or thoughts. Furthermore, the recognition of change over constancy manifests in the belief that people differ markedly across situations and through time. Indeed, the idea of persons and situations as distinct entities is markedly foreign. It is for this reason that, when pushed to task, Easterners will more commonly describe themselves in terms of the social roles they occupy or relationships they share when compared to Westerners (Rhee et al., 1995).

**Two perspectives on the relation between identity and culture.** The characteristics attributed to those associated with East Asian and Western cultural contexts lend themselves to the development of reasonable predictions regarding the proficiencies members of these groups will exhibit when crafting a sense of self through time within the narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought. We contend that these predictions can be parsed down to anticipated “main effects” for culture, or “interactions” between culture and the applicable variables, within each mode of thought.

**Culture as a “main effect” within modes.** The research of Chandler et al. (2003) suggests that those hailing from collectivistic cultures (which include East Asian contexts) may more readily function within the narrative, relative to the paradigmatic, mode when reasoning
about themselves through time. This is due, in large part, to the relational nature of such cultures, manifest both in terms of an appreciation for the interplay between persons as well as between experiences and temporally distinct self-conceptions.

In contrast and given the essentialist underpinnings of the Western culture, those so entrenched have exhibited a preference for establishing an identity by way of the paradigmatic, relative to the narrative, mode of thought. Though the research of Chandler et al. (2003) speaks more to the mode of thought in which individuals will function, rather than their proficiency within each mode, we abstract from this work and research on the nature of selves within East Asian and Western cultural contexts (Nisbett, 2003), the prediction that those functioning in East Asian (relative to the Western) cultural contexts will exhibit a heightened degree of autobiographical reasoning within the narrative mode, whereas those from Western (relative to East Asian) cultural contexts will specify a greater number of self-continuity attributes within the paradigmatic mode.

Culture and process/attribute as an “interaction” with modes. Where there exists stability in the West, there exists change in the East. Indeed, within East Asian culture, “one would not think that a criminal will always be a criminal” (Ji et al., 2001, p. 455) whereas, within a Western mindset, the Platonic ideal of unchanging forms maintains credence. This difference may carry when cultural members are asked to narrate their past. Consistent with the notion of a self moved by context (Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett et al., 2001; Wang & Conway, 2004), those from East Asian cultural contexts may favor processes of self-change relative to self-stability, choosing to describe their sense of self as influenced by the events unfolding in their lives. In contrast and consistent with the notion of an unchanging and redemptive self, those from Western cultural contexts may favor processes of self-stability relative to self-change, choosing
to narrate the events unfolding in their lives as a product of the personal attributes they possess. The timbre of their stories may also be more redemptive relative to Easterners’ life narratives. Finally and again drawing upon the previous research noting the relational and independent nature of East Asian and Western selves (del Prado et al., 2007; Rhee et al., 1995), a divergent emphasis on relational and personal self-continuity attributes may be observed among members of these respective cultures, when prompted to reason about their persistent existence within the paradigmatic mode.

The Present Study

In the present study, we sought to determine the manner in which the identity of Westerners and Easterners manifest within the narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought. We also sought to test McAdams’s (1995) claim that the greatest cross-cultural differences are observed in the realm of identity, followed by personal goals and, finally, behavioral traits. To do this, we assessed the personalities of a group of young adults evenly distributed between Eastern and Western cultures (viz., Canadians of Asian and European descent, respectively). We chose to focus on the interplay between culture and personality among a sample of young adults because it is this period in the lifespan in which matters of identity and purpose are traditionally borne out (Erikson, 1968). To assess personality in a sufficiently broad manner, our participants completed measures designed to tap behavioral traits, personal goals, and life narratives, and responded to a measure sensitive to paradigmatic reasoning about self-continuity.

Our primary interest was to test predictions regarding culture’s influence on identity as a “main effect” and an “interaction.” Due to the relative emphasis on self-enhancement and independence in the Western world (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we also predict that, at the level of characteristic adaptations, Asian participants would exhibit fewer avoidance goals relative to
Western participants. Finally, consistent with McAdams (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006), we predicted that the magnitude of cross-cultural differences would be greatest among our measures of identity as compared to our measure of personal goals. Cross-cultural differences observed with regards to personal goals were, in turn, predicted to be greater than those assessed via behavioral dispositions.

**Method**

**Participants**

A sample of 35 Asian Canadian (74% female) and 35 (again, 74% female) European Canadian undergraduates at a large university in Western Canada participated in this study. The average age of these cultural groups did not differ significantly, $F(1,68) = 1.39, p = .24, M_s = 20.7$ and $20.1$ years, $SD_s = 2.7$ and $1.7$, respectively. As expected, a higher proportion of Asian-than Euro-Canadian participants were born outside of Canada, $69\%$ vs. $20\%$, $\chi^2(1, N = 70) = 14.82, p < .001, \varphi = .49$. Furthermore, Asian Canadians reported a shorter residency in Canada than Euro-Canadians, $F(1,68) = 9.57, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .12, M_s = 12.5$ vs. $17.5$ years, $SD_s = 7.1$ and $6.3$, respectively. Participants received partial course credit for their involvement with this study.

**Procedure**

Participants took part in two sessions. In the first session, which was completed online and involved non-narrative measures, participants provided demographic information and responded to John and Srivastava’s (1999) Big Five Inventory and Emmons’s (1999) Personal Strivings List.

In the second session, which was conducted in a university lab and took place approximately 2 days later, a semi-structured interview was administered. This interview was
based on Habermas and de Silveira’s (2008) measure of the seven most important life events, and excerpted measures from McAdams’s (2008) life story interview and Ball and Chandler’s (1989) self-continuity procedure. The interview typically took about 45 min to complete. Responses to this interview were audio-recorded and were transcribed verbatim.

Measures and Coding

**Behavioral traits.** To assess participants’ behavioral traits we relied upon John and Srivastava’s (1999) 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI). This measure corresponds to the five factors that constitute the BFI model (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience). Exemplary items from this inventory include “I see myself as someone who is reserved” and “I see myself as someone who is generally trusting.” Participants rated each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The applicable item responses were averaged to derive individual scores of the five factors (average $\alpha = .84$; range = .80–.89).

**Personal goals.** We administered Emmons’s (1999) Personal Strivings List (PSL) to assess participants’ personal goals. This measure prompts participants to report a list of things they are typically trying to do. Although 10 such “strivings” were requested, space was provided for 15 (and an average of 11.6, $SD = 2.1$, were produced). Cultural groups did not differ in the number of strivings produced, $F(1,68) = 0.16, p = .70, \eta^2_p = .00$. Exemplary strivings from the current dataset include “avoid being noticed by others” and “be as outgoing and happy as I can to others.”

Goals were entered into a single spreadsheet and their order was randomized for blind coding. The primary coder categorized goals as representing avoidance motivation using Emmons’s (1999) coding system. Examples of avoidance goals include “avoid awkward
situations” and “trying to avoid the feeling of insecurity.” Interrater reliability between the primary coder and secondary coder (who coded 50% of the goals) was substantial (with 94% agreement and κ = .64).

**Seven most important life events and life stories.** We relied upon Habermas and de Silveira’s (2008) methodology to assess participants’ life stories. This involved implementing the following two-stage process: first, participants were asked to reflect upon their lives and, while doing so, identify seven events that they considered to be particularly important to it. At this time, they were provided with seven cue cards and instructed to write a caption on each corresponding to one of these seven events. Once this task had been completed, participants were next asked to tell the interviewer a story that involved their whole lives. Participants were asked to integrate the seven important events that they had previously identified into these stories. They were told that they had 15 minutes to narrate their life and that, after 10 minutes had passed, the interviewer let them know that they had 5 minutes remaining (for complete instructions, see Habermas & de Silveira, 2008).

To determine the degree to which participants emphasized autobiographical reasoning processes of self-stability and self-change in their life stories, we relied upon Pasupathi, Mansour, and Brubaker’s (2007) self–event connection and McLean and Thorne’s (2001) meaning–making frameworks, respectively. The primary coder distinguished between life narratives that did and did not contain professions of self-stability (manifest when the narrator described a stable self-attribute; e.g., “I always really loved animals,” “I’ve always been a dancer,” “I always try to be quite well rounded in what I do,” and “I’ve always been a science person”) and self-change (manifest when the narrator described learning a lesson or insight; e.g., “I realized that … people die…. I didn’t know that before. So that was a big event.” “… but I
guess it really added to who I am because now I have memories from my whole life, being there, and I got that experience of a different culture.” “And after being in that class for 4 years I found that I was getting more confident in general, just more confident.”). Substantial interrater reliability (between the primary and secondary coder, who coded 25% of the sample) was observed for both self-stability and self-change reasoning processes (95% and 89% agreement, with $\kappa$s = .87 and .73, respectively).

**Nuclear episodes of the life story.** Participants were asked to describe in detail a series of three key (or nuclear) moments from their past. Specifically, we requested that each participant describe a high point (i.e., a joyous and exciting moment), a low point (i.e., an unpleasant moment), and a turning point (i.e., a moment when something changed) from his or her life. Interview prompts were taken directly from McAdams’s (2008) protocol for the life-story interview.

To determine whether European and Asian participants differed in their levels of redemption, the primary coder identified the presence/absence of redemption in the high-point, low-point, and turning-point experiences, for each participant. These scores were subsequently summed. Interrater reliability between the primary and secondary rater (the latter coding a quarter of the sample) was substantial (94% agreement and $\kappa$ = .81).  

**Self-continuity.** Participants described (in detail) the person that they believed they were 10 years ago. They next described the person that they believe themselves to be currently. Invariably, these descriptions differed to some extent. After this difference became salient to

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25 Although redemption concerns improvement (which is, in some sense, a form of change), it is distinct from self-change insofar as the entity that is improved may not necessarily be the self. As an example, redemption can occur if the description provided corresponds to the improvement in one’s social situation. Nevertheless, to disentangle our hypotheses regarding cultural differences in redemption and self-change, when coding for redemption in nuclear episodes, we made note of whether the redemption observed did or did not correspond to the self.
participants, they went on to identify the elements of the self that had remained the same over the period of time considered. The length of participants’ responses when identifying continuous elements of the self, \( M = 207 \) words, \( SD = 131 \), did not vary between cultural groups, \( F(1,68) = 0.42, p = .52, \eta^2_p = .01 \).

To examine the nature of participants’ responses, all specified self-continuity attributes were entered into a single spreadsheet (each attribute occupied a row in this file), and then randomized for blind coding. Our interest lay in assessing participants’ responses within the paradigmatic mode, as such (and distinct from the focus of Chandler et al., 2003), self-continuity attributes were classified as reflecting a personal orientation (e.g., “I’ve always tried to put effort into everything,” “I’ve always been athletic,” “I am still very shy”) or a relational orientation (e.g., “I’ve always had a little group of super close friends,” “My family has always had a big impact on me,” “Being an older sister”) using the self-continuity attribute coding manual (Dunlop, 2012). For each participant, the frequency of personal and relational attributes professed was noted. Substantial interrater reliability (here as well the secondary coder coded 25% of the sample) was observed (93% agreement and \( \kappa = .79 \)).

**Results**

**Behavioral traits.** Cultural groups did not differ in their level of extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, or neuroticism, \( Fs(1,68) = 1.26, 2.84, 1.98, \) and \( 2.01, ps = .26, .10, .16, \) and \( .16, \eta^2_p s = .02, .04, .03, \) and \( .03, \) respectively (see Figure 4-1). Asian-Canadian participants, however, exhibited a marginally significantly lower level of conscientiousness, \( F(1,68) = 3.73, p = .06, \eta^2_p = .05, \) relative to Euro-Canadians (for discussion of the appropriateness of comparing measures of conscientiousness across cultures, see Heine et al., 2008). Thus, these groups were largely comparable at the level of behavioral dispositions.
**Personal goals.** Contrary to hypotheses, Asian-Canadians and Euro-Canadians did not differ in their levels of avoidance goals, $M_s = 2.06$ and $1.74$, $SD_s = 1.75$ and $1.46$, respectively, $F(1,68) = 0.67$, $p = .42$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

**Autobiographical reasoning.** To examine whether culture exhibited a main effect on autobiographical reasoning, we categorized participants on the basis of their amount of autobiographical reasoning: Those who exhibited both self-stability and self-change types of reasoning received a score of “2,” those who exhibited a single form of reasoning (one type or the other) received a score of “1,” and those who did not exhibit any autobiographical reasoning received a score of “0.” A Mann-Whitney $U$ test was then conducted to consider the hypothesis that Asian-Canadians possess a heightened degree of autobiographical reasoning relative to Euro-Canadians. This analysis revealed a significant effect in the predicted direction, $z = 2.12$, $p = .03$, Cramér’s $V = .26$ (see Figure 4-2).

To test the “interaction” hypothesis, we next considered the relation between each form of reasoning and cultural group membership. If the resulting relations differed, then support for the interaction hypothesis would be amassed. Contrary to this position, however, neither the test pertaining to self-stability reasoning nor to self-change reasoning attained significance, $\chi^2 s(1, N = 70) = 0.55$ and $3.67$, $ps = .46$ and $.06$, $\phi s = .12$ and .26, respectively. Although neither of these tests reached significance, it should be noted, however, that the relation between culture and self-change reasoning approached significance, indicative of a trend whereby Asian-Canadians exhibited a higher level of this form of reasoning relative to Euro-Canadians. This caveat is returned to in our Discussion.

**Redemption.** We conducted a one-way ANOVA with culture serving as the predictor variable and the frequency of redemption sequences serving as the dependent variable. Asian-
Canadians and Euro-Canadians did not differ in the levels of redemption, $M_s = 0.97$ and $0.83$, $SD_s = 0.86$ and $0.82$, respectively, $F(1,68) = 0.51, p = .48, \eta^2_p = .01$.

**Self-continuity attributes.** We conducted a 2 (cultural group) $\times$ 2 (attribute type: personal, relational) mixed-model ANOVA with the frequency of the two types of self-continuity attributes as the dependent variable. Again consistent with the “main effect” hypothesis, this analysis revealed a main effect for cultural group such that Asian-Canadians provided fewer self-continuity attributes than Euro-Canadians, $F(1,68) = 6.28, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .09$ (see Figure 4-3). A main effect for attribute type was also observed: personal attributes were more commonly specified than relational attributes, $F(1,68) = 75.46, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .53$. Finally, a marginally significant interaction was noted between cultural group and attribute type, $F(1,68) = 3.78, p = .06, \eta^2_p = .05$, indicative of a trend whereby cultural differences were more pronounced when considering personal, rather than relational, attributes, $F_s(1,68) = 9.76$ and 0.06, $p_s = .003$ and .81, $\eta^2_p's = .13$ and .00, respectively.

**Discussion**

In the current project we sought to document the manner in which personality varies across East Asian and Western cultures. Doing so by targeting a group of young adults, we considered personality in terms of its three descriptive levels: behavioral dispositions, characteristic adaptations, and identity. Prior theorizing (e.g., McAdams & Pals, 2006) has suggested that the amount of cultural variation at each of these levels increases in a linear manner, with dispositions being the least culturally sensitive and identities, the most. Consistent with the writing of McAdams and Pals, cultural differences were absent at the level of behavioral dispositions. Inconsistent with this theorizing, however, cultural differences were also absent at the level of characteristic adaptations (as assessed here).
Partial support for the proposals put forth by McAdams and Pals (2006) was similarly found at the third level of personality (i.e., identity). When examining personality functioning at this level, we drew from the writing of Bruner (1986) to argue that identity can be crafted within both narratives and paradigmatic modes of thought (Chandler 2000; Chandler et al., 2003). Having made the case that identity can be attained either through the construction of a life narrative or a more paradigmatic appeal to a continuous essence or attribute, we next summarized two perspectives regarding the manner by which such identities may vary between individuals hailing from East Asian and Western cultural quarters.

The first perspective, consistent with the research of Chandler et al. (2003), proposed a main effect for culture such that East Asian participants would exhibit heightened levels of autobiographical reasoning in the narrative mode relative to Western participants, who would specify a greater number of self-continuity attributes while functioning within the paradigmatic mode. The second perspective, in contrast, predicted an interaction between culture and the applicable variables: those from East Asian cultural contexts were hypothesized to exhibit a greater degree of self-change reasoning and reliance upon relational attributes within the narrative and paradigmatic mode, respectively, relative to individuals from Western cultural contexts, who were anticipated to exhibit a greater degree of self-stability reasoning and redemption within the narrative mode, and a greater reliance upon personal attributes within the paradigmatic mode.

These possibilities were tested among a collection of demographically comparable Asian-Canadians and Euro-Canadians. Pace marginally significant interactions within the narrative and paradigmatic modes, support was garnered for the “main effect” perspective: Asian-Canadians exhibited heightened levels of autobiographical reasoning within the narrative mode, whereas
Euro-Canadians provided more self-attributes within the paradigmatic mode. Markedly absent were cultural differences in redemption. Nevertheless, interpreted as a collective whole, these results suggest that proficiencies in identity construction within narrative and paradigmatic modes vary as a function of culture.

**Culture, Behavioral Dispositions, and Characteristic Adaptations**

Consistent with the writing of McAdams and Pals (2006), no differences in behavioral dispositions were found among the cultural groups considered. Such dispositions are understood as largely unreceptive to broader social and cultural forces (McCrae & Costa, 1999) and, as such, represent a less than ideal forum in which to examine the relation between personality and culture (but see Schaller & Murray, 2008).

The relation between personality and culture at the level of behavioral dispositions is believed to contrast sharply with the relation between these constructs presumed at the level of characteristic adaptations (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Here, goals and motivations are fastened in tandem with the constraints and characteristics of the broader cultural context. Consistent with this notion, previous research has observed that individuals from East Asian cultural contexts tend to possess a lower number of avoidance (relative to approach) goals when compared to those from Western cultural contexts (Elliot et al., 2001). We failed, however, to replicate this finding in the current project. This failure may be the product of any number of causes. First, it remains possible that the cultural groups we considered did differ in terms of some dimension of goal motivation that was not assessed (e.g., autonomy). Second, given that all participants were residing in North America at the time of assessment, the cultural differences present in these groups may be diminished relative to groups residing in different contexts (e.g., East Asians living in Japan and Europeans living in the United States), a possibility to which we return
during the conclusion of our discussion. Researchers are encouraged to explore these possibilities in future.

**Identity and Culture Redux**

At the third level of personality, we examined the manner by which personal identities varied between cultural groups within the narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought. Indexing proficiency within the narrative mode based on the presence of self-stability and self-change reasoning processes, a main effect was observed for culture such that Asian-Canadians exhibited higher levels of autobiographical reasoning than did Euro-Canadians. Although this effect was particularly strong when self-change, relative to self-stability, reasoning processes were considered (a finding which aligns partially with the interaction hypothesis), these results are consistent with the work of Chandler et al. (2003) who found that, when given the opportunity to reason about the continuity of the self within the narrative or paradigmatic mode of thought, individuals from collectivist cultures more readily chose to do so while functioning within the narrative mode, whereas those from individualistic cultures more frequently chose to do so in concert with the paradigmatic mode. As such, the results of this research group, when combined with the current findings, suggest an intriguing possibility: Those from East Asian culture contexts may (a) more frequently engage in identity work within the narrative mode of thought relative to the paradigmatic mode, and (b) exhibit a heightened proficiency than those from Western cultural contexts while doing so.

This possibility runs contrary to certain theorizing regarding the nature of the life story—specifically that identity is most fervently manifest in this manner within contemporary Western contexts (e.g., Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1995; Sarbin, 1986). The discrepancy between this theorizing and our results may be a product of the fact that often narrative theorists equate
identity and the life story. If one endorses this premise, as well as the relatively uncontroversial claim that pressures to construct an identity are most intense within Western and independent social climates (Erikson, 1968), then it is logical to anticipate crafting a coherent personal story represents a particularly pressing agenda for those accustomed to Western ways. We contend, however, that said premise is in need of revision—identity exists in both storied and non-storied forms (Dunlop & Walker, in press).26 Once more, those from Western cultural contexts seem both highly reluctant and comparably ill-equipped to craft an identity through reliance on the narrative mode.

The heightened proficiency within the narrative mode observed among those from East Asian cultural contexts also contrasts with research examining the positive and negative implications stemming from explicitly narrating experiences (Kim, 2002; Knowles, Wearing, & Campos, 2011). Kim (2002) reported that, when completing reasoning problems, Asian-Americans, prompted to think aloud, exhibited a diminished level of performance relative to culturally comparable participants instructed otherwise (among Euro-Americans, performance did not vary as a function of this manipulation). Furthermore, Knowles et al. (2011) observed that, when run through the now-classic Pennebaker (1993) expressive writing paradigm, those from East Asian cultural contexts did not exhibit the same health gains observed among Western comparisons. Collectively, these results align with the proposal that narrative self-expression may be maladaptive among East Asians. As such, they create an interesting juxtaposition with our own findings: Members of East Asian cultural contexts may be more adept at narrative processing. Doing so, however, may carry with it certain negative implications. In future, this

26 Indeed, some narrative theorists, by introducing the term narrative identity, have alluded to the possibility of a non-narrative identity (e.g., McAdams & Cox, 2010). These theorists, however, rarely go on to elaborate on the nature of this non-narrative identity.
possibility should be explored in greater depth.

**Redemption and culture.** Although we observed cultural differences in participants’ recounts of the seven most important events in their lives, such differences were absent when we considered levels of redemption in their nuclear episodes. As was the case with the interpretation of results at the level of characteristic adaptations, this null effect could be the product of any number of sources. First, it could be the case that, contrary to the theorizing of McAdams (2006b), redemption not only represents the story Westerners live by but, rather, the story *everyone* lives by. Second, it may be the case that cultural differences do exist in redemption, just not among the cultural groups we considered here. We leave to future researchers the task of disentangling these possibilities.

**The Essence of Identity: Functioning within a Paradigmatic Mode**

A main effect for culture was also observed when responses within the paradigmatic mode were considered. In contrast to the above, however, within this mode, Euro-Canadians exhibited a heightened level of functioning relative to Asian-Canadians, proffering more personal and relational self-attributes. It must be noted, though, that this effect was driven primarily by group differences in the frequency of personal attributes (indicated by the marginally significant interaction between culture and attribute type). As such, this trend represents the saving grace of the “interaction” perspective, although even here, full support for this perspective was not garnered as Asian-Canadians did not outpace Euro-Canadians in the expression of relational self-continuity attributes.

In any manner, the finding that those from Western cultural contexts exhibit a greater tendency to describe themselves in terms of personal attributes relative to those from East Asian cultural contexts aligns with previous cross-cultural examinations of the self-concept (del Prado
et al., 2007; Rhee et al., 1995). Furthermore, our results are speculative of the possibility that, when working to establish a sense of personal persistence and differentiation, Westerners may be more likely to draw upon their presumed attributes (be they personal or relational in nature) relative to those from East Asian cultural contexts. When these results are considered in tandem with the work of Chandler et al. (2003), it thus seems to be that those immersed in Western culture are more likely to reason about their identities within a paradigmatic mode, and exhibit a heightened proficiency when doing so, relative to those with an East Asian cultural connection.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the conceptual and empirical contributions made by the current project, inherent limitations should be acknowledged. First and foremost, all participants completed study measures in English rather than one of the languages of East Asia. Given that cross-cultural differences are more pronounced when East Asians are permitted to participate in their native language (Wang, Shao, & Li, 2010), it is conceivable that our findings would have differed had we allowed for this possibility.

A second limitation corresponds to the relatively truncated age range of our sample. Although our intent was to consider a young adult sample (due to the heightened pressures for self-definition present at this period in the lifespan), the current data do not speak to the manner in which the personalities of individuals from East Asian and Western cultural contexts may differ at other periods in the lifespan. At the level of identity, research by Wang and Conway (2004) is suggestive of the possibility that the differences in self-change autobiographical reasoning processes noted here remain at midlife. Given that the prevalence of autobiographical reasoning has been found to vary as a function of age (Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006), however, researchers should more thoroughly consider cross-cultural differences in narrative identities in
the periods of the lifespan following young adulthood. By analogy, due to the fact that the
nature of self-definitional attributes changes with socio-cognitive maturity (Damon & Hart, 1988), these efforts should be coupled with a similar consideration of identity development
within the paradigmatic mode. These efforts, when combined with the current pursuit and efforts
to assess participants residing in different cultural locations, will continue to elucidate the
manner in which personality is related to the cultural contexts in which it is operative.
Figure 4-1. Mean levels of behavioral dispositions for the two cultural groups. Error bars denote 95% CIs.
Figure 4-2. Proportion of participants in the two cultural groups exhibiting stability-based and change-based autobiographical reasoning processes.
Figure 4-3. Frequency of personal and relational descriptors proffered in the interest of self-continuity, as a function of cultural group. Error bars denote 95% CIs.
CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the context of this dissertation, the argument was furthered that an appropriately encompassing conception of personhood, one in which equal weight is given to behavioral dispositions, personal goals, and identities, offers distinct advantage over perspectives which equate personality with personality traits (e.g., Buss, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1992). Over the span of three empirical undertakings, support for this assertion was amassed. In what is presented directly below, a brief summary of the conceptual and empirical thrust of the current project is presented. This is, in turn, followed by a more overarching commentary which recognizes a handful of questions left unanswered, avenues for subsequent research, and offers curt discussion concerning the future of personality psychology.

What is Personality?

What is personality? As history has proven (perhaps painfully), the viability of the field rests on providing an adequate answer to this question. The strife and turmoil of the 60s and 70s (e.g., D. W. Fiske, 1974; Mischel, 1968) led many to rally around a conceptual framework in which personality is understood in terms of five broad and recurrent behavioral dispositions—that is, the FFA (Block, 1995). All of this is, of course, not without good reason. In the absence of the FFA it is hard to imagine personality psychology being as viable as it is—or being at all—today.

The endorsement of the FFA, although perhaps necessary, was, however, not without cost. Its ascension, when fixed atop the wave of influence generated by the concern of psychologists within the 60s and 70s for the internal validity of personality measures, marked the recession of the grand theories of Murray (1938), Allport (1937), and others (e.g., Lecky, 1945). Ambition re-cast as naivety, these theories were tucked away, waiting for the day when
personality psychologists would come to collectively believe that they knew enough about the person—or felt secure enough in their pursuit of such knowledge—to return to them (McAdams, 1997a).

It is a matter of speculation as to whether such a day has (or will ever) come. Irrespective of this possibility, just as was the case that the viability of the field in the late 80s and early 90s required the endorsement of the FFA, so too does it now require moving beyond this approach, in the interest of uniting the grand theories of yesterday with the empirical rigor that has characterized the field since their departure. Given the research that has been conducted following the rise of the FFA on personal goals (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Cantor, 1990; Emmons, 1999; Little, 1996) and personal identity (Chandler, 2000; Chandler et al., 2003; McAdams, 1993; McAdams et al., 1997), it is simply no longer tenable to quantify the inherent complexities of the individual solely in terms of five behavioral tendencies, no matter how encompassing or broad.

All of the above, of course, begs the question: If the FFA is less than ideal, then what is the best way to conceptualize the person? McAdams’s (1995) multi-level conception of personhood, wherein behavioral dispositions, characteristic adaptations, and the integrative life narrative each represent distinct though conceptually related “levels,” represents a modern-day grand theory and, as such, provides at least a partial answer to this question. It was argued, however, that McAdams’s conception of personality can be enhanced by focusing the level of characteristic adaptations upon personal goals (Little, 1996) and broadening the level of the integrative life narrative to include both narrative and non-narrative forms of personal identity (Bruner, 1986; Dunlop & Walker, in press). This “rallying cry” was buttressed by three
demonstrations wherein a consideration of personal goals and/or identity provided predictive power over and above that of behavioral dispositions.

Why did I choose to consider the topics outlined fully in the preceding chapters and returned to briefly below? As is plainly apparent, my intent was not to consider three similar topics, showing, once, twice, and then a third time that personal goals and identity provided an oomph in predictive power not exhibited by traits. Indeed, it would be a challenge to identify three topics that were more different than the ones considered in the current work. This was precisely my point: To consider three distinct research topics central to the fields of developmental and personality psychology through reliance on a common, relatively inclusive, framework for operationalizing personality. Given the results observed, I find it difficult to conjure up a better way to showcase the importance of considering personal goals and identity alongside traits.

**Personality Variability: Vice or Virtue?**

In the first of these investigations, the now classic theorizing of Rogers (1961) and Goffman (1959) was considered in an attempt to address the question of whether it was burdensome or beneficial for personality to vary across social contexts. Rogers (1961) was of the mind that such variability was maladaptive whereas Goffman (1959) believed it indicative of an appropriate sensitivity to external confines. All previous efforts to determine the viability of these positions considered personality variability in terms of behavioral dispositions (Diehl & Hay, 2007; Donahue et al., 1993; Sheldon et al., 1997) and, in light of the discovery of a conflation in the measure used to quantify variability (Baird et al., 2006), were equivocal regarding the appropriateness of these theories. We contended that something was to be gained by going beyond dispositions to consider the goal and narrative elements of the person.
The “something to be gained,” however, was not presumed to come in the form of a simple main effect, providing support for one position while refuting the other. Instead, it was predicted that Roger’s (1961) and Goffman’s (1959) differing perspectives could both be accommodated at the level of identity (wherein unity and consistency are championed) and personal goals (wherein situational specificity is paramount), respectively. Across two studies, these predictions were borne out in our data.

**The Duality of Human Existence: Development and Prosociality**

In our second project, the relation between agency and communion was explored at each descriptive level of personality. The reconciliation model (Frimer & Walker, 2009) hypothesized that these motives come to a heightened level of conflict in young adulthood, ultimately resulting in the transition to one of three end-states. The first of these end-states entails the diminution of communion in the interest of personal agency (i.e., unmitigated agency), the second entails the opposite (i.e., agency is jettisoned in favor of communion; unmitigated communion), whereas the third consists of the hierarchical integration of agency and communion such that agency is used to attain broader prosocial concerns (i.e., integration). Unmitigated agency represents the most common path within modern Western contexts, unmitigated communion represents the least common such path (and, for this reason, is discussed no further here), and integration represents the functioning of those fully committed to the moral career.

Despite the developmental flavor of the reconciliation model, no cross-sectional or longitudinal research had been conducted which tested its predictions. To help address this wanting gap, we examined the manner in which the relation between agency and communion varied as a function of age and prosocial behavior, at each level of personality. We found that, at
the level of personal goals, tension in the relation between agency and communion was heightened in young adulthood relative to old age, providing support for this reconciliation model proposal. Once more, at the level of identity, we found evidence for the development of the progression towards integration and unmitigated agency among highly prosocial young adults and demographically comparable but less prosocial individuals, respectively. In contrast to these significant findings, no effect was observed with regards to changes in the relation between agency and communion at the level of behavioral dispositions as a function of age or of prosocial behavior. Thus, these findings are consistent with the notion that, if one is interested in assessing the relation between agency and communion, then this is best done through a consideration of personal goals and identities (relative to behavioral dispositions).

**Culture and Personality and the Three Levels of Personhood**

Our final empirical project sought to examine the manner in which personality varied as a function of culture at each descriptive level. Drawing from the writing of McAdams and Pals (2006), we sought to test the proposal that cultural differences would be most acute at the level of identity, somewhat diminished at the level of personal goals, and non-existent at the level of behavioral dispositions.

Partial support for this proposal was found. We did indeed find the most noteworthy cultural differences among participants’ personal identities. Contrary to the theorizing of McAdams and Pals (2006), as well as the empirical research of Elliot et al. (2001), however, we did not observe group differences in terms of personal goals. Rounding out these findings, and consistent with the writing of McAdams and Pals (2006) and McCrae et al. (1999), no differences were observed at the level of behavioral dispositions. Though, on the whole, these results did not directly align with prior theorizing, they nonetheless are consistent with the
proposal that, the most culturally sensitive element of the person may also be one of the least frequently considered. Thus, here, as well, a consideration of personality beyond behavioral dispositions bore fruit.

**Things Yet To Be Said**

**One or Many?**

Perhaps the biggest issue yet to be adequately addressed corresponds to the representativeness of the three projects summarized here: Are the issues considered in these undertakings (viz., personality variability, the relation between agency and communion, and the relation between personality and culture) the only ones in which something is to be gained by assessing more than behavioral dispositions or, alternatively, are they part of a much larger category of topics which would similarly benefit from the adoption of a broader conception of personhood? We contend that the latter is much closer to the truth than the former.

When selecting the issues to examine in this dissertation, the intent was not to “cherry pick” the three topics that were the most likely to unfold in a manner consistent with the conceptual argument furthered. On the contrary, I set my sights on the three subjects that I believed to be the most relevant—and important—to the field; given their long and rich history, each topic is bred in the very bone of personality psychology. It follows that, had other, less central, topics been considered, a similar pattern of findings would have likely emerged. All of the above being said, it is equally likely that, if one were so inclined, he or she could identify a small number of issues in which the argument advanced here would not be empirically supported. Such boundary conditions, however, represent a largely invariant attribute of most, if not all, phenomenon within the social sciences.
Independent, Related, or Both?

A second issue concerns the relation between personality levels. Are these levels independent of one another? More to the point, the proponent of the equation of personality with behavioral dispositions may challenge: Might the information attained at the level of personal goals and identity be redundant with that contained at the level of behavioral dispositions? Though the results reported in this dissertation directly conflict with this challenge (in the three cases considered, personal goals and/or identities predicted something that behavioral dispositions alone could not), it would certainly be fair to say that, until this point, too little attention has been given to outlining the relation between these descriptive levels.

Consistent with the writings of McAdams (1995), I contend that each descriptive level of personality is distinct. Said differently, even if one had a perfect read on a given target’s behavioral dispositions, this person would likely have a less than perfect grasp of the things the target wanted to accomplish in the immediate and distant future as well as the way in which said target understood his or her past.

This is not to suggest, however, that this person would know nothing about the target at the level of personal goals or identity provided that information regarding behavioral dispositions could be ascertained. Indeed, there exists a sizable (and growing) body of literature in which significant relations are drawn between characteristics across levels (McAdams, Anyidoho, Brown, Huang, Kaplan, & Machado, 2004; Roberts & Robins, 2000; Wilt, Olson, & McAdams, 2011). Roberts and Robins (2000), for example, have noted that extraversion and goals reflecting social power covary, whereas McAdams et al. (2004) found a positive relation between neuroticism and negative affective tone in participants’ life narratives.
Given these relations, I contend that it makes the most conceptual and empirical sense to consider simultaneously (a) the unique predictive ability of each personality level and (b) the manner in which elements across levels may interact to further predict the variable of interest. This assertion, if taken at face value, may lead one to the conclusion that, here, we have only done half the job, failing to consider the possibility of interactions between levels. To this challenge I would contend that the shift away from a sole focus on behavioral dispositions and towards a more encompassing conception of personhood is, by all objective accounts, likely to be a sequential one. The work summarized here represents the first step in this direction. It must be followed, however, by research in which the complexities of the individual are considered not only within each personality level but also between these levels.

**Things Yet to Be Done**

Talk of next steps leads nicely into a consideration of future research initiatives. I believe that the current work should be supplemented by efforts undertaken with focus on the conceptual and empirical issues outlined below.

**The Development of Personal Goals and Identity**

Pace anecdotal observation (Emmons, 1999), preliminary research summarized in handbook chapters (Negele & Habermas, 2011), and a sole published study (McAdams et al., 2006), few have considered the manner in which idiographic personal goals and identities (viz., life stories) develop with the passage of time. Though such an undertaking would no doubt be labor intensive, timely and costly, the potential rewards for doing so may be plentiful. An important component (dare one say, *the* important component) of personality consists of the degree to which it exhibits stability and change (McAdams et al., 2006). If we conceive equal weight to each of the three levels considered here, then, on the whole, it is logical to arrive at the
conclusion that the nature of this development remains largely unknown. Once more, if the longitudinal examination of personal goals and life stories are considered in tandem, then their dynamic relation can be explored (see above).

**Goals and Stories in Situ**

Evident from the paragraph directly above, the majority of efforts to assess personal goals and life narratives have been done by way of a single assessment (i.e., one list of goals is requested or an individual’s personal story is documented on a sole occasion). Evident from the results presented in Chapter 2, however, the functioning at these levels seems to show a meaningful degree of situational variability. Granted, the manner by which we assessed this variability was somewhat crass (i.e., we did not have participants produce goals or stories while within different contexts, instead requesting goals and stories pertaining to these different contexts). It is for this reason that future research should attempt what we did not by assessing participants’ idiographic goals and stories as these participants function in their day-to-day lives, context to context, and role to role.

Researchers interested in studying these elements of personality in context may wish to do so through reliance upon a combined diary/interview approach wherein life stories are assessed via an interview and these stories are supplanted via daily entries in a diary. Additionally, researchers may wish to consider the manner in which goals and stories change as a function of their method of elicitation. Recent research by Syed and Juan (2012) is suggestive of the possibility that written narratives contain higher levels of autobiographical reasoning than are spoken narratives. This distinction (between written and oral narratives) is often ignored by researchers. Due to the recent research of Syed and Juan, however, when attempting to assess the manner in which (goals and) stories change across situations, recognition of this distinction is
It is unlikely that personality psychology would have survived had the FFA not been (largely) endorsed. Nothing equivalent to this framework exists at the other personality levels, leading researchers to choose from any number of themes in a seemingly ad hoc manner. In this sense, the consensus present at the higher descriptive levels parallels that observed at the first level of personality during the 60s and 70s (i.e., the heyday of pet constructs and conceptual sprawl). Just as personality psychologists interested in behavioral dispositions benefited greatly from the introduction of a coherent framework for thinking about their phenomenon of interest, so too would those interested in goals and stories benefit from the introduction of a coherent and conceptually rich framework for interpreting these idiographic components of the person. This, of course, may be easier said than done. There is, however, some evidence of such a framework present in personal goals (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). When coupled with research suggesting that the structure of stories has a finite degree of variability (Polti, 1916/1921), it seems likely that, although certainly difficult, the task may be capable of being completed by someone foolhardy enough to attempt it.

**Personality Psychology: Beyond Behavioral Dispositions**

In the current project, attention was focused on providing a rationale for a conception of personhood in which equal play is given to behavioral dispositions, personal goals, and personal identities. Such an endorsement is necessary for the field of personality psychology to remain viable. It is no longer the case that these psychologists must function from a defensive stance, living in constant fear of the final blow being delivered by Mischel (1968) or one of his disciples. Rather, now is the time to embrace the bold and ambitious nature that characterized the work of
researchers within the grand theory era. We need to return to the big questions and not be afraid to look for their answers in once-upon-a-time taboo places such as case studies and idiographic goals and narratives. To do otherwise is to condemn personality psychology to a life of indifference (at the best) or irrelevance (at the worst).
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