SKUNKS, PUPPETS, AND HUMAN BEINGS: EXPLORING YOUNG PEOPLE’S UNDERSTANDING OF INDIVIDUAL AND KIND IDENTITY

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Psychology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2006

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ABSTRACT

Taking its cue from one of the oldest of the old philosophical discourses—the relationship of one’s body, and all of its determinations, to selfhood—the program of research reported here explores possible age-graded shifts in how young people, ordinarily understand the identity “objects” in the face of change. Trading upon earlier work by Gelman, (2003), Atran (2002), and Keil (1989), as well as Piaget (1983), the study reported here is intended as a means of getting clear about what are taken to be the persistent features of “objects” belonging to three ontologically distinct categories—categories that are standardly referred to as “things of a natural kind,” artifacts, and persons. What is particularly novel about this study effort is that target objects of these three distinct ontological sorts were presented (in story form), all in ways that emphasized their credentials as either a “Kind’ of thing, or their status as individuals. More particularly, I undertook to measure age-graded changes in the way that a building sample of 50 adolescents differently conceptualize such notions of kind and individual identity. The findings indicate that when young people were presented with tasks that required them to make judgments about the nature of “individual” and “kind” identity, they proved to be quite insensitive to matters of categorical membership. Instead, they tended to essentialize when these “objects” were described as kinds of things, but were significantly less ready to reason essentialistically when the individual character of these same objects was emphasized.
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INTRODUCTION

Developmental research literature concerned with matters of “Kind” identity has typically involved children in their pre-school and early school years. By contrast the much smaller literature on “Individual” identity has usually focused on high school and college students. Although, the program of research begun in this thesis must eventually involve respondents from all of these age-groups, for the purpose of this present study I have concentrated on adolescents, all in the hope that this age-group will serve to assist me in further refining the assessment strategy currently being developed, and help me begin to pick out important developmental transitions in the variable ways that young persons of this age group think about changes in, as Hirsch (1982) puts it, the “careers” of things of these distinct ontological sorts.

Trading upon earlier work by Atran (2002), Gelman, (1999), Hall, (1998), and Keil (1989), as well as Piaget (1968), I have developed and piloted a structured interview procedure meant to explore possible age-graded changes in the way that children and adolescents distinguish between two competing frameworks for understanding the persistence of “object’s”—frameworks that, as I intend to show, turn on the ontological status of the objects in question. It is hypothesized that, as they mature, young people will gradually come to reproduce the several ontologic conventions that lead the grown-ups among us to differentiate the identity preserving conditions that ordinarily allow them to understand sameness in: a) “things of a natural kind;” b) “artifacts;” and c) persons. The kernel idea to be pursued here is that while, in the ordinary folk conceptions of most
grown-ups, artifacts and so-called “things of a natural kind” are standardly understood to persist so long as they remain tokens of the same type (or kind), and while the persistence of individuals is commonly taken to depend on their representing some unbroken historical chain leading from earlier to later incarnations, young people are not born into the world maintaining this distinction. What makes arriving at such a distinction even more complicated is that fact that, in addition to being individuals, each and every human person also exists as a member of a biological kind, while other things of a natural kind (and even artifacts) can and often do possess uniquely individuating histories (e.g. the family pet, or great-grandpa’s time-piece). The open question, then, to be unfolded in the pages to follow is how young people sort out these heavily nuanced distinctions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The list of persons and organizations that facilitated the work reported here, to whom I am deeply indebted, roughly divides itself into three categories. First there are those that gave welcome and much appreciated commentary toward the refinement of this project. In this group I would like to express my deep thanks to Michael Chandler, Geoff Hall, and Susan Birch. A second category includes those persons and organizations who were particularly helpful in providing access to young persons that were critical to the completion of this project. In this group I am especially appreciative of the cooperation offered by the teachers and administrators of West Point Grey Academy, and the Jewish Community Centre. Group three in this list includes funding agencies: The Natural Science and Engineering Council of Canada, The Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, and The University of British Columbia.
DEDICATIONS

To my parents, whose stubborn, but always timely, words of encouragement and continued willingness to listen, together provided the patient support that not only made those late nights a little easier, but helped to give purpose when seemingly lost.

To my little sister Zoe, although still very early in life, your simple wisdom comforted well beyond your years.

To Michael, whose always “open door,” and inexhaustible guidance and commitment made the difference (and talked me off the ledge a few times too).
LITERATURE REVIEW

Commonly, most accounts of young children’s developing understanding of the identity of objects have emphasized the ontological distinction between the persistence of things of a so-called “natural kind,” on the one hand, and “artifacts,” on the other (e.g., Gelman, 2003, Keil, 1989)—accounts that surprisingly leave out any special consideration of what may be unique to the persistent identity of individual persons. That is, within the existing literature, there is a common and, I argue, an inappropriately narrow, concern with detailing the various properties on which young people rely when reasoning about the identity of so-called “naturally occurring” and “socially constructed” kinds. In particular, the attention of those who have made so-called “Psychological Essentialism” a central theme of their work has generally been limited to whatever individuation principles there might be that differentiate children’s thoughts about the persistence of “artifacts” versus things that are otherwise not artifactual.

By contrast, very little attention has been (at least within the research literature on “Psychological Essentialism”) given over to understanding the nature of young people’s changing beliefs about persistence as these apply to matters of “personal” identity. All of this seems especially unfortunate given that those trafficking in the study of “Psychological Essentialism,” typically present their findings as supportive of a broad framework—one reportedly meant to account for matters of “object” identity of every stripe. Such profligate claims for inclusiveness are, I argue, more sweeping than the available evidence allows.
Knowing When to Stop Counting

If all of the available “objects” in the world could be unambiguously categorized as either “natural,” or “artifact” kinds, then committing all of one’s research efforts to getting clear about young people’s developing understanding of just these two matters would be less problematic than, I argue, it is. In contrast to such easy claims, the guiding assumption behind the program of research developed here is that contributions to the research literature on “Psychological Essentialism” have been too quick, and likely mistaken, in sorting the world into just these two bins—bins that, I argue, leave out what is most humanly relevant in the world of sameness and change.

Part of the reason for challenging this either/or approach is that there is a long and honourable intellectual tradition predicated on the assumption that, while human individuals may well have an “animal” nature, they nevertheless constitute a richly distinct ontological category. They are as Rorty (1973) argues, “the natural kind that has no kind.” The presumptive grounds for such claims will be taken up in greater detail later. For the moment it is hopefully enough to say that “batch processing” human individuals, along with all of the other things in the world that can be said to be “things of a natural kind” (i.e., elements on the periodic table, the birds and the bees, the family dog), does considerable violence to the way in which persons ordinarily understand themselves and others. As Blok, Newman, and Rips (in press) recently pointed out “we also represent...individuals themselves, not just the categories they belong to” (pg. 2). Any attempt to reduce individuals to instances of a category, (see, for example, Carey, 1985; Gelman, 2002; Keil, 1989), does injury, I argue, to what it ordinarily means to be a person. Certainly, the prospects for humankind are bleak if the full complexity that we
take ourselves to be is imagined to reduce to nothing more than an elaborate recursion of physical identity, or just another turn of the essentialist wheel.

Driving a Wedge Between Individual and Kind Identity

The pointed complaint being registered here is that, in not honouring the classic distinction between people and everything else, the available literature on “Psychological Essentialism” has not only thrown persons and non-persons into the same broad natural kind category, but has lost, along the way, the important distinction between matters of “Kind” and “Individual” identity. The “sin,” then, of which the available literature is presently being accused is primarily a sin of omission. Insofar as there has been any studied attempt to actively paint “personal” identity into the already broad picture of “Psychological Essentialism,” it is usually done in very broad strokes—with people being folded into the existing “natural kind” mix as an afterthought. Unfortunately, this practice seems to overlook potential telling differences between the identity conferring kind characteristics of “natural things,” on the one hand, and the particular domain of individual human identity, on the other. The alternative approach pursued here aims to empirically determine the conceptual fit between young persons developing understanding of personal identity, on the one hand, and all of those remaining things that alternatively populate the artifactual and non-artifactual world, on the other.

Counting Questions

The broad tendency in the available research literature—the tendency to ignore the matter of your and my personal persistence, and lump it together with other things of a so-called natural kind, begs the open research question of where and when in young
people’s maturing folk conceptions of growing persons—the distinction between “individual” and “kind” identity—is initially made. What threatens to collapse these two intimately related, but separate matters, is that, while what qualifies as human or not human is ordinarily above board, and while all human individuals have some sort of individualized nature, not all individuals are also human individuals. That is, what threatens to becloud these two otherwise separate matters is the suspect prospect that human individuals might conceivably be understood as simply generic kinds of things, in which the kind in question has only one exemplar. As it is, non-human living things, and even artifacts, can and do often qualify as “individuals” of a sort, at least insofar as they can be shown to have an individuating history that sets them apart from things of a similar “kind” (Blok, Newman, Rips, in press). With few exceptions (see Hall, in preparation, and Blok, Newman, Rips, in press), however, there is no real body of research concerned with whether young people appreciate that others are unique in their tendency to possess some “individual,” as well as, “kind” identity. In short, I argue that it is important to differentiate two related but distinctive questions. The first asks whether young people’s maturing assumptions about the persistence of human individuals rest on the same or different criterion of satisfaction from their accounts of the persistence of non-human things of various descriptions. The second asks whether persisting as the same individual (whether human or not human) is similarly seen to differ in meaningful ways from persisting as the same kind of individual.

A More Pointed Review

Before proceeding, it needs to be pointed out that not all of the contributors to the literature on “Psychological Essentialism” have been entirely silent concerning the matter
of personal persistence. It also needs to be said that a quite separate line of research into children’s claims about personal persistence (e.g., Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol & Hallett, 2003) suggest that young persons do sometimes emphasize what was earlier referred to as their “animal” nature, by emphasizing, that what makes each of us the “same” across time is some perduring thing like our unchanging DNA, or fingerprints, or strawberry birthmark. Although such physicalistic markers can potentially serve as unique identifiers, or as rigid designators (Kripke, 1971; Putnam, 1996), these bodily markers work when they do, by reducing each of us to a category or “Kind”—a “Kind” that potentially has only one member. While such earmarks have some functional utility in helping to pick one another out, and even “re”-identify us on later occasions, few adults would be prepared to assume that their actual sense of personal identity would be lost following something like a bout of chromosomal alteration, or the unexpected loss of ones fingertips.

For those who fail to hold such more differentiated views—young children perhaps—personal human identity may well reduce to a matter of physical or even kind persistence, in which the number of available tokens simply boils down to one. By such lights, human individuals would not be seen to be especially different from, for example, Atran’s skunks (2002), whose ongoing classification as persistent tokens of the same type is similarly said, by young school-aged children, to be dependent on something like their enduring white stripe or their ability to “have skunk babies”—things that, of course, are also true of every member of the same numerous “kind.” What is really at stake, however, in matters of personal persistence, and what will be explored in the research to be detailed here, is whether people’s usual understanding—including young people’s
developing understanding—of questions about their own and others’ survival as enduring physical beings is the same thing as, or something different from, their survival as individual “persons.”

In an effort to shed light on these matters, the working hypothesis adopted here is that, at least by adolescence, a meaningful difference emerges between young people’s understanding of the identity of kinds of things, on the one hand, and the identity of individuals, including human individuals, on the other. The structured interview procedure detailed below is intended as a way of testing this hypothesis by assessing adolescent’s potentially different understanding of similarities and differences between various ontological categories, all of which will be portrayed as either having or not having an individuating personal history.

Methodologic Challenges

The special challenges in carrying out this line of research lie in successfully developing measures of personal persistence that roughly parallel already existing measures of kind identity—both natural and artifactual.

To begin with, stimulus materials that are intended to cue young people’s most serious thoughts about matters of personal persistence, or at least measures of the sort that have been employed for this purpose by Chandler and his colleagues (e.g., Chandler, et al., 2003), have typically involved the presentation of story materials in which a given target character undergoes some gradual transformation in the context of an extended narrative account meant to make such changes potentially comprehensible. Such full bodied methods are sharply different from standard measures of “Psychological
Essentialism”—measures that tend to be more threadbare in that they typically involve abrupt and unheralded changes that are unaccountably visited upon an “object” by some outside agency (e.g., a skunk, for unspecified reasons, receiving an identity altering operation).

Beyond these scenic differences, the literature on “Psychological Essentialism,” because of its focus on matters of kind identity, tends to feature changes that are categoric in nature. For example, things of a natural kind (a skunk, for instance) are unceremoniously subjected to radical surgery (e.g. Gelman, 2003; Atran, 2002; Keil 1989; Carey, 1985), or, alternatively, artifacts are functionally re-engineered so that what was once a garbage can, is re-modeled as a chair (e.g., Keil, 1989). The open question that is put to young research participants in such studies of “Psychological Essentialism” is not whether, when all is said and done, the skunk or chair under consideration persists as one and the same individual object, but rather whether they go on being instances or tokens of the same ontological class or type—is it still some kind of skunk or chair. Such questions, I argue, are something altogether separate from distinctive efforts to explore whether children’s maturing conceptions about what it could mean to persist as one and the same individual person, or even the same individual artifact. In short, continuing as the same kind of thing, I hypothesize, counts, at least for your typical adolescent, as meaningfully different from continuing as the same individual, human or otherwise.

Conflating Individual and Kind Identity

Although it is possible for particular “artifacts,” or things of a natural kind, as well as persons, to persist as one and the same individual “thing” across changing circumstance, their doing so is not equivalent to their continuing to be members of the
same "Kind." As such, the question of whether or not a given study is a study of "kind" or "individual" persistence cannot be decided by simply taking note of whether actual people are involved. Dressing children up to look like "Eskimos" before questioning them regarding their ethnic identity, as did Aboud and Ruble (1987), remains a study of kind identity, despite their having asked about changes to human individuals, and is in principle no different from Keil’s (1989) efforts to dress up a lion in a tiger’s outfit before questioning children on whether they believed a real lion is still afoot. Nor are either of these efforts formally different from attempts to re-engineer a garbage can as a chair, before questioning young people about its conventional identity (Keil, 1989); or from efforts to explore whether young subjects would consider a skunk that had its white stripe painted out still a skunk (Gelman, 1999; Keil, 1989; Wellman, 1990).

In all of these cases, the working question was not whether the object that persisted was still the same child, or lion, or garbage can or skunk, but whether they continued to be acceptable tokens of the same type. This approach to the study of "identity" takes "identity" to be preserved if and only if some transformed object $A'$ is still the same $F$ (where $F$ constitutes a kind term) as was the original object $A$. While this sort of transitive framework is perhaps the preferred method for computing logical identity (see, for example, Piaget, 1997), it seems to come up short when individual persons are under consideration. Personal continuity is not, I argue, simply a quick and ready equation easily calculated on the basis of some lowest common denominator. Instead, reducing the grounds for persisting as the same individual to a "common currency" capable of being cashed out at each and every point in time, seems to cheat selfhood of the full richness it is ordinarily understood to enjoy.
In short, although this sort of measurement strategy is reasonable enough as a way of exploring how young people come to understand kind identity, it offers very little or no real information regarding their maturing appreciation of their own and others personal persistence or self-continuity. That is, the impersonal accounts of personal identity available in the literature on “Psychological Essentialism,” seem to represent only half a loaf, leaving out everything to do with the identification and re-identification of the very “same” individual person or thing across time.

That said, it is important to stress that matters of individual identity are not exclusive to people, and can apply as well to other objects, at least insofar as such non-human objects have some remarkable “personal” history. Keil’s garbage can, for example, might turn out to be a family’s beloved heirloom, and the skunk so often asked about could, in addition to being a token of the skunk type, also be that rascal Pepe LePu from the Saturday morning cartoons. In short, questions of kind persistence can be asked of people and, conversely, questions of personal identity can be asked of artifacts and “things of natural kind.”

This point is brought out by the work of Hall, (in preparation), and Blok et al. (in press), that demonstrated that it is possible (with the application of the right sort of personal history) to ask questions about kind and individual identity of the same object. Specifically, Hall presented young children with two scenarios involving a racing car that had undergone a systematic, part-by-part, replacement of its several “bits and pieces.” In one experimental condition, college-aged subjects were not given any additional information about the car, other than what was minimally required to answer whether it did or did not persist as the same car. In Hall’s other experimental condition, by contrast,
children were given a short history of the many previous races the car had won. That is, the racing car was provided with a personal history, in addition to its status as a token of a particular type of car. In this work, Hall has interestingly shown that, by introducing a referable past, it is possible to ask both individual identity and kind identity questions concerning the very same object—in this case an artifactual object.

Relatively, the insightful research carried out by Blok et al., similarly works to document what they hypothesize to be a previously misconceptualized distinction—a distinction considered regnant in the available philosophical and psychological literature on sortal identity—between an “object’s” persistence as an ontological kind, on the one hand, and its concomitant persistent individual identity, on the other. On their account, an “object”—whether it be a thing of a natural kind, an artifact, or a person—potentially enjoys a certain status as an “individual” that is independent of whatever basic-level category it might be said to belong to.

To explore this prospect, Blok et al. conducted a series of experiments that, while often involving some dramatic altering of the kind membership of the target object, otherwise left some individuating feature of an otherwise featureless individual identity intact. Trading, for example, on the seminal work of John Locke (1690/1956), the author's introduced subjects (college-aged subjects) to a series of images, that were accompanied by a narrative account of events, involving a man who met with unfortunate circumstance, resulting in the destruction of his body. Despite their radical physical change, the protagonists’ memories were said to be rescued before they were irredeemably lost, copied onto a computer, and subsequently uploaded to some sort of machine. Conceptually similar studies were carried out on things of a natural kind and
artifacts. Like the intuitions guiding the current study, Blok et al.’s procedure was meant to differentiate what they, along with the philosopher Strawson (1974), refer to as the “physical” and “individual” identity of one and the same thing.

Much like a range of philosophers before them (e.g., Parfit, 1975; Wiggins, 1967), both Hall (in preparation) and Blok et al. (in press) interpret their findings as indicating the importance of history in uniting the different instances of one and the same individual object. Specifically, Blok Newman and Rips underscored the importance of memories in preserving individual identity. Otherwise considered a memory account of individual identity, this psychological type of reductionism is meant to highlight the “mind” as opposed to the “body.” John Locke, in his classic chapter entitled “On Identity and Diversity,” from *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694/1975), set the tone, not only epistemologically (Taylor, 1990), but also in terms of puzzling cases that concerned personal identity (Ricoeur, 1994), for a long and time-honoured tradition of reductionist philosophies to follow.

Epistemologically, Locke seems to suggest that personal identity amounts to nothing more than persistent “self” consciousness, which he understood as consisting in links of memory. This point is made clear by what amounts to Locke’s mission statement for the thought experiments he famously created—“As far as this consciousness can be extended backward to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person” (sec. 9). Various editions of this fashion of reductionism are echoed by the more contemporary, so-called “Neo-Lockean” philosophy of, for example, Grice (1941), Parfit (1975), Perry (2005), the later, but not early, work of Shoemaker (1970a), and the early, but not later, work of Wiggins (1967)—all of whom generally considered individual
continuity preserved insofar as one maintains some degree of psychological connectedness to, or bare reflexive awareness of, the past. The nuanced differences between these theories can be chalked up to the amount of attention given the person responsible for causing these memories. If put on a continuum, at one extreme, the person is largely irrelevant and individual continuity is stripped down to mere co-consciousness between earlier and later ways of being (see, for example, Parfit, 1971), and at the other extreme people are understood to be in possession of their memories—that is, there is someone doing the remembering (see, for example, Perry, 2002), while the rest are peppered somewhere in between.

Steps Toward a Better Methodological Path

It is a central contention of this research that personal history often provides the sort of unifying glue that cements together what might otherwise be taken to be identity disrupting transformations. What complicates this otherwise straightforward proposition is that not all histories are created equal. The kind of “history” that Hall and Blok et al. make use of in their research is arguably more like a perduring essence, or some other supposedly enduring feature that manages to withstand time, than it is an actual narrative network. That is, the “celebrity” status assigned to the championship car, by Hall and his colleagues, is more like a badge of honour than it is the sort of narrative history that most real people drag behind. Although it is not a mistake to register the fact that some among us have some point-to-able badge of honour, or carry some “mark of Cain,” more commonly our histories amount to a kind of “beading” (James, 1891/2002) together of events from one’s past—some trail of one’s earlier comings and goings; choices and decisions. Given this contrast, the scenario utilized by Hall seems to inadvertently stack
the deck in favour of various sorts of essentialist solution strategies. That is, by having arranged matters in such a way that the individuating feature of the car in question is some singular stamp of approval—some indelible stain—conferred on the championship car (and perhaps all of its parts) at some earlier moment in history, this particular measurement strategy could be said to prejudice the case in favour of what is referred to here as a kind of essentialist solution.

The philosopher Caroline Bynum (2001) characterizes historical markers such as the ones employed by Hall as “time saturated” events that, because of their singularity, manage to stand apart from time. On such accounts, change is quantitative and continuous, during which “something is added to something else that perdures” (pg. 17). In Hall’s study, the remarkable historicality of having been earmarked as a “champion” is the “something else that perdures” to which other less essential bits and pieces are added or taken away. The upshot of all of this, according to Bynum (2001), is that in such quarters, time is actually defeated by the essential identity conferring feature that persists. Like Bynum, Ricoeur (1994) understands this sort of persistence as trading on a notion of oneness (in contrast to notions of plurality, diversity, difference or multiplicity)—frameworks of understanding that presupposes the uninterrupted continuity of whatever it is that is held to constitute one’s persistence. In elaborating her “hybrid” model of change—a blending of old with new—Bynum argues that all hybrid notions of change (familiar examples of which are centaurs or ox-men) succeed when they do by suggesting change is only partial. On this account Hall’s celebrated car, or Blok et al’s. memories or proper names can be seen to prejudice the case by presenting participants with test cases that effectively combine old parts with new ones.
The alternative approach, adopted here, is to administer test materials that, while not literally replicating Hall's or Blok, et al.'s measurement paradigm borrows from them the plan of crediting non-human objects with some sort of individuating history. That is, my point of departure is to work to ensure that the "objects" I inquire about (Humans or otherwise) all possess enough of a real "history" that the question of how one might reason about their temporal persistence is truly open. That is, I aim to be an equal-opportunity employer who allows subjects their choice of how they might "ante up" when dealt questions of change and persistence.

That said, and armed with the distinctions just outlined, the program of research described here means to document what is arguably an important difference between what it could possibly mean to persist as the same kind of individual, on the one hand, and as the same individual, on the other. In particular, the sort of questions that subject's are invited to answer are framed in such a way as to explore their developing understanding of these two very different ways of construing the persistence of identity. Specifically, I mean to explore the question of whether matters of individual and kind persistence are applied in the same or different ways to the separate ontologic domains of artifacts, persons, and things of a natural kind.

Measurement-Problems and Controversies

Getting these two distinct, yet intimately related parts of my single research hypothesis all on the same methodologic page required finding roughly comparable ways of asking about both kind and individual identity, as well as human and non-human identity—ways close enough that any differences that do emerge can not be laid easily at the door of simple methods differences.
Recall that the hypothesis tested insists that asking whether something persists as a token of the same type is, in point of fact, a different question than inquiring about an “object’s” individual persistence—whether the object in question happens to be a human individual or not.

As previously pointed out, this current research objective divides into two conceptually distinct, yet confluent streams. On the one hand, there is the general matter of kind persistence (perhaps as it applies to distinctions between artifacts and things of both a human and non-human natural kind)—a problem that has been taken up by a long train of touchstone philosophers (e.g., Hirsch, Kripke, Putnam, Quine, Williams, to name just a few), and an equal complement of distinguished psychologists (e.g., Bloom, Carey, Deisendruck, Gelman, German, Keil, Pinker, again to name only a few). On the other hand, there is the issue of personal or individual persistence as opposed to kind persistence—a topic that similarly has a rich philosophical tradition (e.g., Dilthey, Flanagan, Habermas, Harre, James, Perry, Ricoeur, Searle, Strawson and Wiggins to name but only a handful). However, when it comes to a list of psychologists that have taken up the job of exploring young people’s changing conception of individual persistence, the list becomes rather short (e.g., Chandler, Hall, Lalonde, Marcia, to name most of the available players).

Supporting philosophical foundations aside, the usual lop-sided focus on kind as opposed to individual identity has resulted in a lack of well-practiced methodological tools. This proposed program of research aims to reduce this gross imbalance by exploring all of these matters in a common measurement context.
Measurement as Dialectic

As already detailed, the bulk of the available literature offers an especially skewed picture, one largely preoccupied with issues of "kind" identity. The "up-side" of this one-sided history is that there naturally exists a variety of well-practiced measurement strategies for exploring matters of kind identity.

By contrast, those few research programs meant to explore how individuals vouchsafe a sense of individual identity are thin on the ground, and have almost always taken people as their point of departure (see for example, Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol & Hallett, 2003). Assuming, along with James (1891/2002), and Ricoeur (1994) that people's understanding of physical persistence stands in some close relation to their understanding of personal continuity, this research proceeded on the prospect that the persistence of persons as both physical entities and as selves amounts to two different lines of sight on one and the same object (Overton, 1998)—objects that "we ourselves are constitute" (Ricoeur, 1994; pg. 33). To gather possible support for the claim being put forward here that persisting as the same kind of individual is only one of the ways that "objects" are ordinarily understood to be self-same, a counterpart measurement sequence needed to be added to the standard one ordinarily focused on kind identity. This is, of course easier said than done. As mentioned earlier, the key problem with developing a measure that aims to get at children's shifting understanding of individual identity is that the already available measures of individual identity focus almost exclusively on the persistence of people.

As a way around this difficulty, two separate, but interrelated lines of inquiry were carried out that have as their common purpose: assessing the nature of the
relationship between how young persons ordinarily understand what it means to persist as the *same kind* of individual, on the one hand, and on the other, how they understand persistence as one and the *same individual*. The general approach adopted here is to explore how participants of varying ages attribute continuities of all of these sorts with regard to a mixed set of objects that belong to each of three ontologically distinct categories: artifacts; things of a natural kind; and persons.

In the first of these conditions, where the focus is on matters of kind identity, the aim is primarily to replicate (in a common measurement context) findings that have already been recently reported elsewhere in the literature. While it is possible to give artifacts, things of a natural kind, and persons an individuating history, and so inquire about their individual persistence, how do you test for "kind" persistence in individuals? One way, it is proposed, is to ask about "kind" persistence in two sorts of living things, only one of which happens to be a person.

The second line of inquiry concerns age-graded differences in ideas about the persistence of *individuals* (rather than kinds). I explored this related matter by again focusing on dramatic changes in carefully individuated artifacts, things of a natural kind and human kinds. This was accomplished by outfitting examples of artifacts, things of a natural kind, and persons with an individuating history adequate to support questions about individual persistence in time. Here my intention was to replicate, as much as possible, the measurement details of the first (or kind) condition, save for the incorporation of an individual history into the stories associated with the ontologically distinct test objects.
Results from both of these assessment conditions were compared to see if adding a personal history in any way alters participants' response patterns, and how the persistence of "objects" of different ontological stripes is similarly or differently understood.
METHODOLOGY

The data reported here was gathered in an effort to explore whether young people ordinarily differentiate between "kind" identity, on the one hand, and "individual" identity, on the other. The most straightforward way of approaching such a question would have been to present respondents with story problems rich enough in historical detail to support answers that especially emphasized persistence as either: a) a function of an "object’s" idiosyncratic personal history; or b) its status as members of a particular "kind."

Initially, procedural steps were taken in this "minimally complex" assessment direction. Early findings, however, suggested that, when pressed, pilot subjects failed to differentiate between these conditions, and, instead responded similarly across both research conditions. In short, as soon as even minimal personal/historical details are provided, respondents answered as if only questions concerning "individual" identity were being asked. This is presumably because something unique happens when an otherwise ordinary "object" is outfitted with personologic details, any number of which appear sufficient to hijack or override participant’s otherwise operative beliefs about kind identity. So, it seems that possession of a sufficiently individuating personal history functions as a prime that triggers what may be a default strategy—a strategy that involves resorting to the sort of responses typically offered in response to questions about individual identity. As a result, administering reasonably well-embellished stories, richly
layered with personal detail, seems not to work, but, rather, automatically triggers a tendency to default to a more individualized agenda.

Consequently, to properly explore both matters of “kind” and “individual” persistence, a more personologically impoverished “kind” narrative is also required. Although, it would be ideal to employ a single set of stories, measurement difficulties evidently arise that force a retreat to a more cumbersome strategy involving two sets of stories.

That said, as a means of continuing to explore whether young people have within their cognitive repertoire an appreciation that matters of persistent individual identity are importantly different from those of its kind counterpart, two experimental conditions were incorporated into the present measurement protocol. These two measurement conditions have as their central point of departure variations in the sort of historicized “personal” detail not only capable of driving a wedge between kind and individual identity, but that clue people to the particular mode of persistence being asked about. These differences, I argue, capture what is ordinarily understood to be unique about kind identity, on the one hand, and individual continuity, on the other.

This new division of labour, however, is not without risk. One possible criticism of this “two-story” approach is that response differences are due solely to variations in the story materials, and not our respondents. Nevertheless, this division of labour controls, I argue, for the seemingly biased “default response” that frustrated earlier attempts to explore potential differences between “kind” and “individual” identity.
Participants

The participants in this study were 50 young people between the ages of 11 and 19 years. Of these respondents, 17 are between 11- and 13-years-old (mean age =12.8 year-old), 20 are between 14-and 16-years-old (mean age =15) and 13 are between 17- and 19-years-old (mean age =17.5). The participants were recruited from West Point Grey Academy and various community centres around Vancouver.

Materials

It should be noted from the start that the stimulus materials used for all three stories in both conditions detailed below are presented to participants in a comic-book format—a series of illustrated images each highlighting important aspects of an accompanying narrative.

Condition One – “Without” History (Kind Identity)

Non-Human Natural Kinds

To measure young people’s changing conception of “natural kinds,” a sequence of professionally rendered illustrations were presented to participants. Borrowing loosely from Hall (in preparation), and Keil (1989) the series of pictures depicted a skunk—a skunk that resembles the familiar cartoon character Pepe LePu—undergoing some sort of radical transformation that left it looking as much as possible like a cat (see Appendix A). Initially, participants were shown a depiction of a skunk in the forest with his skunk family. The second image portrayed the skunk engaged in typical skunk activities—for example bounding through the forest and playing with other animals. Next, the skunk was shown settling down to sleep. In the fourth image, the “same” skunk was shown
waking up from its sleep looking to the naked eye, like a cat. Finally, subjects were presented with a picture of this “cat” playing with other cats.

Artifacts

Again, trading upon the work of Hall (in preparation), I presented subjects with a series of professionally fashioned illustrations that depicted the transformation of an artifact kind—in this case a wooden doll marionette similar to *Pinnochio*. This marionette, across an ordered sequence of images, underwent a fundamental transformation (again, see appendix A). In the earliest of these picture frames, the marionette was shown in various situations in its creator’s workshop. For example, in the first image, the marionette was depicted heaped over on its creator’s worktable. The next image portrayed the creator playing with the wooden puppet. The subsequent two captions illustrated the creator working on the marionette. In the last of these images, the “very same” marionette was shown as having been transformed into what appeared to be a real boy.

Persons

Trading upon the work of Chandler et al. (2003), I meant to illustrate young persons’ developing understanding of personal identity by employing an adaptation of Franz Kafka’s classic story—*The Metamorphosis*. The adapted story (i.e., Lawrence David’s *Beetle Boy*) is modeled after Kafka’s original story, and depicts a young boy undergoing a radical transformation from a typical, school-aged child into a beetle (see Appendix A). In the first of these images the boy is shown going about his usual day (e.g., going to school, attending class, playing with his friends, and then returning home
from school). The final images depict the boy going to bed and waking up to discover that he has transformed into what appears to be a giant beetle.

In all of these assessment contexts, the questions that were put to respondents concerned the particular “Kind” of thing that Pepe LePu, Pinnochio, and Beetle Boy are meant to be, both before and after the transformation depicted.

**Condition Two – “With” History (Individual Identity)**

As just outlined, the first of this two-part study deals exclusively with matters of kind identity. That is, it attempts to replicate many previous studies that provide documentation of children’s developing understanding of how an object persists as the same kind of individual despite what is often radical change. Part two of study replicates the first in every way except that a narrative accompanied the series of illustrated drawings that provided, a personal history for each of the story characters (see Appendix A). That is, captions were added to the stories that are meant to provide characters with a personal history. Probative question focused on how participants understand an object to persist as the same individual despite diverse and changing circumstance.

**Procedure**

The interview process was standard across both Condition One (Kind Identity) and Condition Two (Individual Identity). Each participant was instructed to read through each of the three stories. Participants were randomly assigned to either receive a stimulus package concerning “Kind” or “Individual” identity, but never both. That said, after each individual story was read, the same trained research assistant asked the participant to stop, before moving on to the next one, and posed a series of standardized questions
meant to get at their reasons for judging the post-transformation object as either the same or different.

Participants responses were recorded, both in note form by the research assistant and, on audiotape. After each interview, the research assistant transcribed what was on the tape for scoring purposes.

Since there were three stories presented to subjects in each of the two study conditions, it seemed appropriate to control for a possible order effect. There are six possible ways to order three stories. These six possible permutations were reflected in the organization of the stimulus packages. For example, there were six different stimulus packages in each condition, each representing one of the figured orders. The six stories operated on a cyclical format. This process was repeated until the conclusion of data collection.
RESULTS

By way of a brief reminder, the key hypothesis tested in this program of research is that, in struggling to understand how “objects,” belonging to differing ontologic categories, might be best understood to preserve their identity in the face of transformative changes, young people will distinguish and respond differently to cases where emphasis is placed on the “individual identity” of such objects, as opposed to their “class” or “kind” membership or classification. What this hypothesis is meant to capture is the fact that, although human individuals are, no doubt, responded to differently than are artifacts or non-human instances of “things of a natural kind,” this distinction can be, and often is, overridden by the fact that it is not only possible to treat humans as mere “objects,” but that entities belonging to various impersonal ontologic categories are sometimes accorded individualized personal histories more commonly reserved for persons. That is, what complicates any more straightforward analyses of any distinction between persons and non-persons is the fact that, not only can individual persons be “objectified,” or otherwise reated as interchangeable tokens of a common type (e.g. you are, in addition to being yourself, also male or female, young or old, shy or gregarious, etc), but so too can non-human “objects” be personalized or historicized in irreducible and important ways that emphasize their unique individuality. That is, non-human artifacts (e.g., a family heirloom), and “things of a natural kind” (e.g., Lassie, or Holy Water) can sometimes be valued for their differentiated personal histories (i.e., the
distinctive autobiographical details that set them apart from otherwise interchangeable tokens of the same kind).

In a better effort to unpack these complete relations, the design of the present experiment aimed to provide for the possibilities: a) that the continuity of things with and without a defining personal history might be understood differently; b) that the continuity of things occupying different ontological statuses (e.g., human individuals, artifacts, and things of a natural kind) might be responded to differently; and c) that both of these matters might interact in complex ways.

What the following analyses hopefully serve to make clear is that the personalized or historicized instances of artifacts or non-human things of a natural kind can be, and often are, treated as unique individuals; just as it happens that individual persons (because they are bodies too) are sometimes understood in terms of their object or classifiable animal nature.

Before working to determine whether young people do, as hypothesized, demonstrate an understanding of the difference between “Kind” and “Individual” identity (to be presented in Part One immediately to follow) it was first necessary to conduct a series of precautionary analyses, all in an effort to rule out possible confounds. More particularly, this prefatory stage of analysis was meant to identify possible interaction effects embedded in the data, the presence of which could potentially obscure analysis of the research question. The upshot of these analyses will be presented in Part Two. It should, however, suffice at this point to say that, in light of the ontologically diverse nature of the target “objects” portrayed here, it came as little surprise that participants displayed moderate, but still ascertainable differences in their understanding of the
continuities and discontinuities of the three distinct types of target characters employed (i.e. human individuals, as opposed to kinds of things). In short, the available evidence supports, among other things, the existence of real difference between how young people ordinarily think about human and non-human “objects,” despite their apparent readiness to accord individual states to artifacts and other things of a natural kind when these were gifted with idiosyncratic features and histories.

To report on these complete findings, I will begin in Part One by first dealing with the main effects, which are directly pertinent to sorting out whether young people do or do not consider the proposed ontological distinction between “Kind” and “Individual” or personal identity to be meaningful, all before moving on in Part Two, where I will report separately on various within condition responses to questions about the peculiar matter of personal history.

Main Effects

Notwithstanding intra-condition differences (i.e. interactions among descriptive condition and target character) detailed later, the inter-condition analyses of main effects that explored the relation between an “object’s” ontologic type and associated continuity warranting strategies yielded findings consistent with the research hypothesis. That is, while an “object’s” distinct ontological class was observed to interact with experimental condition and to influence respondents’ assumptions about the basis for continuities and discontinuities of identity, the comparative analyses carried out on these same target stimuli between descriptive conditions revealed significant differences on all counts. The main effects for each comparison are recorded in Table 1 below.
Table 1: Comparison Between Ontological Categories “With” and Without” a History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Artifact (Puppet)</th>
<th>Persons (Beetle Boy)</th>
<th>TNK (Skunk)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>With History</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Individual” Responses</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kind” Responses</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Without History</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Individual” Responses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Kind” Responses</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2_1 = 109.377 \] \[ \chi^2_1 = 57.693 \] \[ \chi^2_1 = 144.274 \]

It should be made clear from the start that, unlike in the analyses to follow, the comparison here is not between different ontological categories within the same descriptive condition. Rather, the comparison is between the same ontological categories under different test conditions—conditions all but guaranteed to submerge all but the strongest of “main effects.”

Notwithstanding the importance of these main effects just described, the comparison between research conditions that left undifferentiated participants thoughts on persistence and change (as these matters pertain to the separate categories of “artifacts,” things of a natural kind,” and persons), is not, under the present testing conditions, meaningful in the own right. For this reason, the following data analysis strategy was adopted. First, when an “artifact” (e.g. a Puppet) was described simply as a kind of thing, all of the respondents reacted as if its ontology as a categorical kind and this was the sole basis for assessing its continued existence. By contrast, when described as an “individual,” participants responded in one or the other of two ways. That is,
approximately half of the participants went on to evaluate the “artifact” as if it was merely a kind of thing, while the balance responded in ways consistent with its characterization as an individual. That said, although an artifact’s status as token of a particular ontologic type dictated, more often than not, how questions about its possible persistence were answered, gifting it with a personal history often made a statistically significance difference in the way that it was responded to ($\chi^2_{11} = 109.377$, $p=.001$).

People, by contrast, were ordinarily judged to differ significantly from both “artifacts” and “things of a natural kind” in that, regardless of how they were described, participants regularly responded primarily to their status as individual persons. Not surprisingly, however, this effect was strongest in the condition that foregrounded these “objects’” status as a unique individual ($\chi^2_{11} = 57.693$, $p=.001$).

Sandwiched somewhere in between what turned out to be the extreme of participants’ responses to people, on the one end, and artifacts, on the other, is the category of things of a natural kind. In both experimental conditions this particular class of “objects” was observed to be most at the mercy of the particular way in which they were described. For example, those who were shown so-called “things of a natural kind” as “individualized” were, on average, more inclined to base their claims for persistence on some uniquely personal grounds. By contrast, participants for whom the target’s status as an ontologic “kind” was foregrounded, ordinarily responded as if continuity was dependent on various kind-conferring attributes. The upshot of such “within condition” patterning was a fairly clear-cut distinction between conditions ($\chi^2_{11} = 144.274$, $p=.001$).
**Interaction Effects**

In review, preliminary analyses were conducted to determine whether a straightforward comparison of aggregated responses to “Kind” and “Individual” identity resulted in significant effects. The findings reported, however, failed to justify conducting such a general comparison between conditions. More specifically, because there were significant differences in how participants reacted to questions about the persistence across changes in the ontologic status of the target characters, (Kind and Individual), an overall comparison of whether respondents considered persisting as a token of a particular type is the same thing as, or different from, continuing as an individual person was not warranted. This was not wholly unexpected.

**Kind Identity – “Without” history, within condition analysis**

That said, Table 2 presented below details the comparison of responses to characters that, while of a different “kind,” were not outfitted with a personal history. In brief, Table 2 represents the Chi Square values of the separate comparisons carried out between otherwise ontologically distinct “objects” similarly characterized as “kinds” of things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Without History</th>
<th>Artifact (Puppet)</th>
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<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Response Frequency Distribution for “Without” History Condition

30
In particular, this table indicates that, the formally distinct categories of "Artifacts" and "Things of a Natural Kind" are generally understood in the same way by respondents ($\chi^2_{1,1} = 1.174, p=.28$). By contrast, these same respondents seem to differently understand relationships of these two distinct classes of things of a "Human" kind. That is, things of a "Human" kind were responded to in ways that were significantly different from "Artifact" kind ($\chi^2_{1,1} = 27.563, p=.001$), and "Things of a Natural Kind" ($\chi^2_{1,1} = 7.502, p=.005$). In short, "Artifacts," and "Things of a Natural Kind," were seen as alike but different from "Human" beings.

**Individual Identity – "With" history, within condition analysis**

Not surprisingly, the preceding analyses demonstrated an interaction between experimental condition and belonging to the ontological category of "human being." The current and last set of analyses to be reported was similarly concerned with uncovering possible interactions in these data. Table 3 features the distribution of responses observed when objects of different ontological sorts were credited with a personal history:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With History</th>
<th>Artifact (Puppet)</th>
<th>Persons (Beetle Boy)</th>
<th>TNK (Skunk)</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Kind&quot; Responses</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, as in the preceding analysis, there is evidence of interactions occurring within the data. More particularly, these findings reveal that there is an interaction between each of the three stories. That is, responses to individualized "Artifacts" and
“Things of a Natural Kind” were found to differ significantly ($\chi^2 = 9.86, p = .002$), as were responses to “Artifacts” and “Human” individuals ($\chi^2 = 157.293, p = .001$). Finally, participants also judged “Things of a Natural Kind” and “Human” individuals to be different ($\chi^2 = 17.719, p = .000$).

In brief, these analyses make it clear that, although there is a general tendency for participants to respond differently to questions about the persistence of things of a natural kind, artifacts, and human beings, these differences are primarily shaped by the extent to which objects of these ontologically distinct sorts are or are not provided with some sort of individuating personal history.
Catching Up

In review, the central hypothesis pursued in this thesis is that young persons ordinarily maintain a distinction between, and respond differently to, what it means to persist as an individual, on the one hand, and as a kind of thing on the other. From the start, the business of testing this hypothesis was complicated by the facts that: a) not all "individuals" are necessarily human persons; and b) that, whatever else may be true of them, human individuals are also things of a "natural kind." Given that the "individual vs. kind" distinction, and the dichotomy between "human and non-human" are strongly overlapping, the fundamental question to be explored was not, as is commonly supposed, whether young people ordinarily do or do not make distinctions between persons, artifacts and things of a natural kind (which they almost certainly do on a regular basis). Rather, the open question dealt with here has been whether young people’s assumptions about persistence are also ordinarily determined by questions of individual (vs. kind) persistence, whatever the ontological status of the objects in question.

By way of a reminder, the procedural means of trying to get clear about this proposed “individual vs. kind” distinction has involved presenting—in comic-book form—tokens of three distinct ontologically classes or types of “objects,” all of which were depicted as undergoing dramatic change. These story characters included a human boy, a skunk (as a token of a particular natural kind or type), and a sometimes artifactual puppet. Because the purpose of this study was to explore young people’s everyday
Consequently, the procedure eventually adopted involved using two separate, but largely equivalent story sets—one that concerned individual identity and a second that concerned only kind identity.

As previously mentioned, although three ontologically distinct classes of “objects” were employed, there was something about possessing an individualized history that, despite, the inclusion of biological characteristics in the story, seemed to prime participants to respond in ways consistent with what one might expect when thinking only about matters of personal identity. That said, there were within condition variations between the different categories of objects. These differences seem to be due to the relative hesitation on the part of subjects to consider some objects as individuals. That is, people were more likely to be viewed as individuals than were animals, which, in turn were more regularly viewed as individuals than were artifacts. Similarly, respondents were generally unwilling to view persons as merely corporeal entities—a view that they more readily attached to animals and, finally artifacts.

Still, judging from the main effects reported earlier, it seems that young people hold sentiments similar to those of Frankfurt (1988), who argued that it is conceivable to imagine beings other than human individuals worthy of being ascribed various mental predicates. As a consequence, under specifiable circumstances, objects of various ontological types all seem qualified to sometimes be considered as bona fide individuals. By the same token, human beings share with non-human entities a unique corporeal existence—one that subscribes to its own conditions of satisfactions.

The key finding to emerge from this research project is that young people, while being somewhat impacted by the particular ontological class of the target object under
appreciation of the difference between what it ordinarily means to persist as an individual or "self," on the one hand, and membership in a kind of thing, on the other, the story materials developed portrayed these same three examples of persons, artifacts and kinds in each of two distinctive ways. One of the story conditions outfitted the target character (whatever its ontological status) with a history rich in personal detail, embroidered with the sorts of idiosyncratic matters that one might ordinarily expect to find sewn into the fabric of particular lives. The other story condition, while equally "wordy," was intentionally somewhat more impoverished with respect to such individuation details, and told a history of a different sort—one that restrictively highlighted only the protagonist's physical and/or biological circumstance. It should be noted that subjects were randomly assigned to only one or the other of these two experimental conditions.

Having been presented study materials in one or the other of conditions, participants were systematically questioned about whether they felt that the target characters persisted despite suffering dramatic changes. The questions, although carefully worded to explore the sort of identity transformations spontaneously emphasized, were otherwise equivalent in terms of question order and general structure.

For the sake of easy comparison, it would have been methodologically more elegant if the stimulus materials could have been identical, and only the particular questions posed had varied (i.e., questions directed towards exploring individual identity vs. kind identity). Awkwardly, pilot work indicated that this could not be made to work. As it turned out, when respondents were provided with any of the personal details required to convey stories of particular individuals, they always answered in the same way—that is, they answered as if only individual identity was being queried.
scrutiny, they were only impacted negligibly, and so on the whole, differentiated between what is ordinarily means to persist as a categorical kind of thing, as opposed to an individual. Having demonstrated an ability to sufficiently warrant as continuous three ontologically distinct objects irrespective of the particular way of being in which they were described, the young people sampled seem to respond in ways that lend justification to the research efforts undertaken to explore kind and individual persistence. They fail, however, to justify approaching problems of sameness and change (particularly as these matters apply to what it ordinarily means for someone or something to persist) in an either/or fashion. Instead, as the results go some distance toward showing, young people have within their repertoire the capacity to think about themselves and others as potentially continuing in diverse ways. This dynamic mode of thinking about identity challenges, I argue, the more usual singular focus and, presents the very real possibility that under the right circumstances, most things are capable of being regarded as more than merely one-dimensional beings.

In short, the “body” (as the bearer of one’s ontological kind), on the one hand, and the individuating “mind,” on the other, were found to qualify as two equally relevant, yet distinctive ways of being. Equally present in young people’s repertoire is the capacity to think about these diverse ways of being as operating on two related, yet different planes, that, while meaningfully disparate, coexist as two possible interdependent means of remaining the same.

Of course, future research might well include comparisons involving other sorts of artifacts and things of a “natural kind. The particular examples used here are by no means exhaustive. Perhaps, young people might think differently about plants, for
example, or cars. Further, the sample tested, while perhaps adequate to note any
distinction between “individual vs. kind identity,” does not provide a developmental
account of children’s growing understanding of these differences. That said, the results
do provide a promising direction for future research in how young people ordinarily think
about issues of personal and corporeal persistence.

What the Others Have had to Say on the Matter of Individual Versus
Kind Identity

The present study sets itself apart from others typically found in the available
research literature on individual identity, on the one hand, and from studies of kind
identity, on the other—studies that have served to especially underscore the primacy of
one or the other of these two response modes. What this project has in common with
these earlier studies is: a) a set of stimuli depicting the dramatic transformation of some
physical aspect of the target protagonist; and, b) some subsequent line of questioning as
to whether the identity of a particular target has somehow been preserved. As suggested,
these studies can be divided into two broad groups.

On the one hand, some of these earlier research efforts effectively submerge
matters of individual identity by robbing the target characters of any personal uniqueness,
emphasizing instead the degree to which the “targets” in question did or did not continue
as tokens of one and the same type (e.g., is a given skunk still a token of its type after
having its white stripe painted out?). On the other hand, there is a body of research that,
while still “stripped down” (Ricoeur, 1994; Taylor 1991), more directly engage matters
of individual identity by emphasizing various mental matters by means of which personal
connectedness might be ensured (e.g., an individual potentially survives change so long as her or his memories remain intact).

Despite such differences, both of these two lines of inquiry can be seen to support an equally threadbare stance—one that assumes that what it ordinarily means for some “object” to persist in the face of change is restricted to some spatio-temporal connection between earlier and later ways of being (Ricoeur, 1994).

Just A Material Person Living in a Material World, Or Getting Skinned Alive?

As mentioned earlier, the available research most often subscribes (implicitly or explicitly) to some materialistic vision that ordinarily groups matters of sameness and change under the broad heading of “psychological essentialism.” In this research tradition some unheralded, and typically radical physical transformation victimizes target characters belonging to this or that ontological kind. A skunk, for example, is disembowelled, or has its white stripe painted out, and so ends up looking less like a skunk than a cat. Alternatively, a chair is dramatically re-engineered to serve as a garbage can (Keil, 1989). Afterwards, a sample of young people is queried as to whether the “object” in question somehow managed to survive the experience to still qualify as a skunk or chair. According to Gelman (2002) the answer to such questions depends upon the subject’s competency at tracking what are often assumed to be recondite attributes of the individual being targeted.
Unlike questions about Kind of persistence, tracking the “sameness” of changing “individuals,” as is made evident by the present study, is ordinarily thought to involve more directly attending to some followable personal history¹.

**Getting Comfortable Again in One’s Skin**

Given the tendency in the literature to understand the relationship between the “before and after” of a single “object” as owed to either the persistence of some material or to some psychological “entity,” (some constant body part or mental state) both of these views appear more fundamentally alike than different. For materialists, it may be, for example, DNA, or some genetic code, and for those supporting one of the several possible variations on a common psychical theme, it could range from memories to particularly salient beliefs.

Given their common commitment to some form of essentialising, research from either of these camps seemingly prejudices the case in favour of whatever version of reductionism is being advocated. By contrast, the work pursued here, aimed at getting clear on young people’s understanding of the relationship between “kind” and “individual” identity, has proceeded on the different assumption that this either/or strategy fails to capture what real persons have in mind. Instead, the results reported here

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¹ On either of these “exclusionary” accounts, solving continuity problems is regularly held out to be a matter of this or that. That is, persistence is regularly said to be owed to either some perduring (and often essential) part, or to some relational connectedness of distinctive but interlocking parts. What has almost never been considered is the possibility that, depending on the circumstances, both of these possibilities might, in their own turn, be true. On such accounts, the ontological kind that one belongs to is routinely treated as insignificant and given the greatest degree of freedom to vary while something mental is preserved. Scenarios typically involve some tragic circumstance involving a person undergoing, for example, a brain transplant, fusion, fission, atomizer machines, and memory transplants. The upshot of these thought experiments is to drive a wedge between the corporeal, on the one hand, and the person, on the other, with the express purpose of, not only gifting the latter with pride of place over the former, but also establishing the minimally sufficient conditions of individual persistence.
support the view that young people seem to understand that individuals, and the
ontological category to which they belong, represent two different, yet parallel, ways of
construing identity. As such, and regardless of the ontological stripe of the target
character in question, given the opportunity, participants, evidently acknowledge a two-
tiered account of what it ordinarily means to persist in the face of change.
REFERENCES


