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Contextualizing Narrative Identity

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
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by

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It is hard to imagine that the goal I set out to attain as a teenager has come to be. Throughout the years I always considered the pursuit of an advanced degree in psychology to be *my* goal. Without the people in my life, however, I would not have been able to succeed in this accomplishment. As I prepare to complete the final degree requirement, submission of this dissertation, I am realizing that each important person in my life made it a goal of *theirs*, in either small or large part, to help me succeed. Here are a few of the people who did so and who deserve an immense amount of thanks.

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He offered me the much needed support in order to do well. Will was patient as I learned to code narratives, analyze data, and much more. He was also encouraging when I set my eye on a teaching career. I also want to mention that Will provided me with many opportunities to improve my skills by way of side research projects and collaborations with other faculty members; oftentimes more than I had time for. All of these acts shows how much he cares for his students professionally and personally. I will always be grateful for the risk he took on me.

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As I continue to write these acknowledgments, I realize how many people I have to thank. So, if you are still reading this, way to go! Anyway, I spent about half my time in graduate school without lab mates. Once a lab started to form, our group was a perfect combination of personalities which included Grace Hanley and Nicole Harake. Both were wonderfully reassuring and helpful in my pursuits. Grace is a great person to have around for her positive energy and truly sympathetic responses. Nicole is one of the most professional and organized individuals I have met, which was very helpful with the many tasks I asked for her assistance in. Each of them are such capable women; they will be

very successful in their professions. It is my hope that they continue to follow their passions and believe in their capabilities.

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Parts of the present dissertation may be found in published articles in the journals of Memory and Journal of Research in Personality. Here are the acknowledgements to those journals. Please see the reference section for complete citations for both articles.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, who may be gone but will never be forgotten. All of their teachings are what have allowed me to come this far and continue to attempt to put my best foot forward.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Contextualizing Narrative Identity

by

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Personality has been assessed in relation to situational changes primarily using a trait approach; this has offered great insight into the contextualized factors regarding these aspects of personality. Little work, however, has explored personality utilizing narrative identity in relation to contextualized changes. Therefore; the present dissertation, in three studies, explored the impact and relations between situations and personality byway of narrative identity. In Study 1 I investigated the impact of assessment context on autobiographical narratives across four experimental conditions. I found that the expression of individuals' narrative identity is impacted by the way in which their narrative is elicited within a research setting. In Study 2 I explored the narrative differences between Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs) and Adult Children of non-Alcoholics (non-ACOAs). All participants shared three narratives regarding anything from their lives and three narratives specifically including parents. Results indicated that ACOAs tended to depict less control in their narratives compared to non-ACOAs. They also tended to have less positivity when discussing narratives which

included parents than non-ACOAs. In Study 3 I considered the social context of narratives by investigating the similarity between participant and informant reported narratives; this similarity was referred to as Narrative Interpersonal Congruency (NIC). I also assessed the relations between NIC and participants' well-being variables and relationship closeness among participants and informants. I found that the NIC rating between participants and informants was relatively high, however, NIC was only trending in significance to well-being and no associations were found between NIC and relationship closeness. Each of these studies depicts the highly contextualized nature of narrative identity.

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Contextualizing Narrative Identity

Personality and social psychology have not always coexisted in harmony (Funder & Ozer, 1983). Some researchers, such as Zimbardo (2004) have suggested that the situation is the most important determinant of behavior. Other researchers, such as Ross and Nisbett (2011) have continued to challenge the strength of personality traits, suggesting that, in new situations, having information regarding dispositions will be less than helpful. Another example of this mindset has existed within related areas, such as Industrial/Organizational Psychology. Researchers have taken this situationist approach to studying workplace behaviors, arguing the workplace environment is the primary cause of behavior (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977; Baker, Hunt, Andrews, 2006). Many of these attitudes flourished from popular studies investigating situational effects on behavior, such as Milgram's shock study (1963) or Zimbardo's "Stanford Prison Experiment" (1973). They also came to grow following Mishel's (1968) comments which downplayed the importance of dispositional effects on behavior (Kamtekar, 2004).

Mischel's (1968) argument was derived from the moderate correlations observed in personality traits across situations. His concern, however, laid primarily in the way in which personality was being measured at the time. A majority of *r* effects observed did not exceed .30 or .40 (Funder & Colvin, 1991). This suggested that individuals' behavior, situation to situation, was unreliable. Mischel (1968) suggested that the only reliable aspect of personality that could be observed was individuals' own perceptions of continuity. However, these perceptions were falsehoods. These interpretations, arguably,

caused the person-situation debate which left people wondering, is personality worth researching if the correlates with behavior are so small (Fleeson & Noftle, 2008)?

This mentality, that personality was not worth examining, clearly undermined the importance of examining individual differences. In response, Funder and Ozer (1983) argued that even highly revered social psychological studies did not exhibit effects greater than those seen in personality research. Personality researchers, in an effort to show that individual differences were worthwhile, placed emphasis on considering personality in combination with situations (Benet & Waller, 1995; Epstein, 1979; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). Hence, a movement toward the interactionist approach began.

Benet and Waller (1995), for example, applied the interactionist theoretical framework to the investigation of personality trait consistencies across cultures with American and Spanish participants. They found that, although the use of trait measures were created by way of the American vocabulary, consistencies across cultures were still noted. They suggested, however, that although support for personality traits was found between cultures, use of an "emic design that is sensitive to culturally specific aspects of personality organization in Spain" (p. 713) is necessary to know how well trait measures in one culture may be applied to another[1]. This conclusion provides support for trait stability while considering a situational caveat, culture. An additional situational factor researchers have considered includes participants' age. Trait stability seems to increase as age increases. Participants tend to peak in consistency at mid-adulthood (Roberts &

[1] The emic approach is defined as using an insider's perspective to learn about a specific culture, compared to an etic approach which uses an outside member's perspective in understanding the culture. Both are considered to be important to the study of culture (Pike, 1967; Berry, 1989).

DelVecchio, 2000). This finding suggests that contextual variations, especially those seen at younger ages, should be minded.

An important finding to emerge during the person-situation debate was that aggregating trait responses across situations allowed for a much more reliable estimate of behavior. Epstein (1979) demonstrated that, even when considering traits and situations in combinations, measurement error should be considered. Partially validating Funder and Ozer's (1983) findings, low correlations will emerge among both personality and social psychology if attention is not directed toward error. To better understand the complexities within personality and situations, Mischel and Shoda (1995) developed the Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality which was, ultimately, comprised a system of "if-then" contingency statements to help explain individual variability across situations while maintaining internal consistency. This treated behavior as an outcome of both the person and situation.

In time, personality and social psychology became viewed as two areas with more similarities than differences. Researchers in both areas often try to answer the same questions while attempting to incorporate both personality and social angles. Now, much personality research is assessing individual differences with consideration toward social factors, which is a necessity. In order for personality psychology to remain relevant is to understand and "predict differences in social behavior" (Baumeister, 1999, p. 369). Funder (2006) discussed the importance of recognizing that personality and social psychology should not be in competition as both, persons and situations, are required to fully comprehend individuals' behavior. To meet this demand, in recent years some

research has begun to focus on the contextualized nature of personality traits (Donahue et al., 1993; Heller et al., 2007). In fact, it has been argued that contextualized approaches to studying personality should be prioritized, particularly when considering the correlates or outcomes of personality (Heggestad & Gordon, 2008).

How are personality traits, such as the five-factor model, studied in a contextualized manner? Considering individuals' personality within their specific social roles tends to be a common and acceptable approach (Roberts, 2007; Bleidorn, 2009). Previous research has, primarily, elicited a particular social role or context (Heller et al., 2007). This can be done in two ways, in an experimental laboratory setting wherein participants are asked to imagine a particular social or cultural context (e.g., write about an experience with your parents) or in a naturalistic setting where participants are placed within the social or cultural context of interest. Personality variations across roles is due to individuals' tendency to view themselves differently among various social situations (Donahue et al., 1993). Socials roles likely place specific demands and expectations upon individuals requiring them behave in certain ways. This is argued to, potentially, impact personality traits (Roberts & Pomerantz, 2004).

Holtrop and colleagues (2014) found some support for the above notion. They indicated that the more contextualized an approach was when assessing personality traits, the greater criterion validity it encompassed. In other words, the more specific the assessment was to the social role the researchers were eliciting for, the greater its predictive ability was for assessing domain specific outcomes. This finding is directly related to the bandwidth-fidelity tradeoff (Roberts & Donahue, 1994). It has been

suggested precise measurements (e.g., fidelity) predict outcomes for specific aspects of personality better than all-inclusive measurements (e.g., bandwidth). For instance, Roberts and Donahue (1994) found that using role-specific measures of positive affect better predicted outcomes within that role than the general measures of positive affect.

The trade-off between fidelity and bandwidth within personality psychology, however, must be reviewed. The fidelity-bandwidth dilemma suggests that researchers gain less information, overall, when aiming for fidelity (Hogan & Roberts, 1996). This trade-off, for personality researchers, is acceptable when assessing personality in a contextualized way. Researchers who make predictions using consistent and specific personality assessments, emphasizing fidelity is suggested. Those who focus on global personality predictions, emphasizing bandwidth is recommended (Roberts & Donahue, 1994).

With social roles having important implications within personality assessment, researchers have begun investigating both personality characteristics and social roles in combination. Considerable amounts of this research have actually occurred or emphasized the workplace. One such example, included suggestions to prime individuals to think of the workplace, rather than an aggregate of personality across multiple contexts, when interested in employee personality specifically (Heggestad & Gordon, 2008). This concept is consistent with findings from other researchers. McCoy and Sy (unpublished) found that employees and managers view themselves as having both leader and follower social roles within the workplace, even when these roles are inconsistent with their assigned position. Shaffer and Postlethwaite (2012) found that contextualized

personality assessments of traits were more predictive of employee performance than non-contextualized assessments. Heller and Watson (2005) also found that personality traits change on the basis of social roles; individuals at work reported being more conscientious than when at home.

Support for personality investigations within social roles have been found in other foci beyond the workplace. Min and Heller (2006) noted that when participants completed a measure of personality traits within an academic context, they reported higher rates of neuroticism compared with a social context. They also found that when participants completed the same measure of personality within the social context they reported higher rates of agreeableness than in the academic context. Bleidorn (2009) found that participants' personality reports, using an experience-sample design, substantially varied across social roles, specifically between those of 'friend' and 'student'[2]. Lastly, Statcher and Vazire (2009) found that contextualized personality within a romantic domain was better at predicating relationship satisfaction compared to global personality traits. For example, contextualized neuroticism was predictive of lower relationship satisfaction, whereas global satisfaction was not, even though these two forms of personality were highly related (r = .64).

As indicated by the research studies on contextualized personality presented above, the field has evolved in productive manner. However, Heller and colleagues (2007) suggest that future research still needs to investigate contextualized approaches

[2] Although this research has shown mean level differences across roles, it should be noted that traits across roles tend to be highly associated (see Donahue & Harary, 1998; Donahue, Robins, Robert, & John, 1993; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997).

within personality further. Specifically, the need to understand antecedents as well as implications of context specific personality. Dunlop (2015a) directly suggests that contextualized personality assessment should investigate other forms of personality, such as goals and life narratives.

In my dissertation I aim to fulfill these suggestions, utilizing narrative approaches to study personality contextually. It almost goes without saying that assessing personality byway of traits has been a dominant methodology of the field of personality psychology. Although more consideration has been given to their contextualized nature in recent years, there are pitfalls to focusing solely on personality traits, particularly from a contextualized perspective. McAdams (1992) identified a few key areas where traits may be a limited approach to studying personality, depending on one's primary goals. He stated "[…] the five-factor model of personality would not appear to be well positioned to shed light on the organization of personality in the whole person" (p. 348). In essence, McAdams (1992) is suggesting that the trait approach to studying personality may be too simplistic to assess personality if one is interested in studying a more complete picture of a person.

Another reason to provide greater focus on narratives is that they are considered to be the most contextualized level of personality and hence should be more sensitive to the context than personality traits (see McAdams, 1995). Traits, although they have been assessed in contextualized manners, are far less contextualized in nature than narrative identity. Although research has found that if individuals desire to change their personality, they can (Hudson & Fraley, 2015). Investigating personality by way of

narratives grants an opportunity to understand the perceptions individuals have of their lives, as a whole, and of their individual experiences at a specific time. Dunlop (2015a) stated that once recognition is given toward the contextualized "flavours" which are expressed in life stories beyond highly structured laboratory settings, "the possibility becomes tenable that individuals possess a series of life narratives pertaining to the specific contexts most relevant to their lives." (p. 314). The goals of the present dissertation are to examine the contextualized nature of individuals' identity, utilizing the narrative approach.

Narrative Development

In late adolescence and early adulthood, individuals begin to construct life stories, or narrative identities. Narrative identities, defined as the conscious representations of individuals' personal pasts, presents, and imagined futures, are an important component of personality (McAdams, 1995). Constructing a narrative identity provides the narrator with a sense of meaning and purpose as it allows for an explanation of his or her past to the self and others (McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer, 2004). When researchers are interested in assessing narrative identity they commonly prompt participants for descriptions of key autobiographical scenes, such as high points, low points, and turning points (e.g., McAdams, 2008).

As representations of narrative identity, key autobiographical scenes offer a unique vantage point to examine personality and individual differences. In contrast to some of the more commonly considered constructs within personality psychology (e.g., dispositional traits; John & Srivastava, 1999), however, autobiographical narratives have

been flagged as being particularly sensitive to the contexts in which they are produced (e.g., Bamberg, 2010; Bamberg, 2006; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Pasupathi & Oldroyd, 2015). Relatedly, individuals' self-representations often vary as a function of social role or context (Dunlop, 2015a).

Context then can refer to many different things, from the assessment settings in which personality measures are administered to the social contexts an individual associates with his or her sense of self. These features, such as the contexts in which the applicable narratives permeate, or the domain or context to which an individual's personal narrative pertains (e.g., their work life, personal life), likely impact the nature of participants' storied sense of self (Dunlop, 2015a). It is uncommon, however, for researchers to acknowledge the contextualized nature of narratives.

I aimed to gain a better understanding of the relation between narrative identity and context. In three studies, I investigated how various types of contexts are related to, and influence, such identity. In Study 1, I considered the manner in which assessment contexts (i.e., how narratives are gathered) may influence the content of participants' narratives. In Study 2, I considered whether and the degree to which the content of participants' narratives vary as a function of the domain they are discussing (i.e., domain-specific stories). Lastly, in Study 3, I investigated the manner in which personal narratives are perceived by close others (i.e., how personal narratives ripple throughout one's social contexts). I did so by utilizing self and informant reports of individuals' narrative scenes. It is my hope the presented studies will serve as a bridge between

narrative psychology and more contextualized approaches to the study of personality and the self.

Narrative Identity and Personality

Before diving into the specifics of each study, it is necessary to outline narrative identity in relation to personality. Personality is best understood in terms of three conceptual levels (McAdams, 1995, 2013). At the first and broadest level, there exist *dispositional traits* such as extraversion and agreeableness. The second level contains *characteristic adaptations*, which include motivational and developmental variables such as goals, beliefs, and values. The third level is represented by *narrative identity*, an internal and evolving story about the life the narrator is in the process of leading. Constructing a narrative identity provides individuals with a sense of continuity to allow for explanation of change to one's self and others (McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). As previously mentioned, when researchers elicit individuals' narrative identity, they do so by prompted participants for descriptions of key autobiographical scenes (e.g., McAdams, 2008).

In order to quantify narrative identity, themes embedded within autobiographical narratives are quantified by way of conceptual coding (see Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2015). Themes are defined here as overarching concepts or ideas that are present within narratives (McAdams, 1993). These themes are prudent to consider since they have been found to relate to various outcomes, including psychological functioning (Adler et al., 2015; McAdams, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). To give a few examples, thematic content of narratives have been found to predict subsequent sobriety

among individuals addicted to alcohol (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013), prosocial behaviors (Cox & McAdams, 2014), and self-reported personal growth (King et al., 2000).

As a representation of personality, it becomes necessary to understand the consistency of autobiographical narratives under differential contexts and circumstances. Indeed, this represents a major area of study at personality's other "levels" (see Dunlop et al., 2013; Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martínez, 2007; Soto, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2008). These previous works have led to a more complete understanding of the functioning of these personality characteristics, as well as the ways in which they relate to various outcome variables. It is likely that similar benefits would accrue via a more contextualized approach to the study of narrative identity. The three studies included in my dissertation aim to do just that, through a consideration of narratives in relation to assessment contexts (Study 1), domain-specificity and domain-generality (Study 2), and social contexts (Study 3).

Study 1: Assessment Contexts

Study 1 focused on differences in narratives as a function of assessment contexts (McCoy & Dunlop, 2016a). The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in both linguistic and thematic content of narratives as a functioning of these assessment contexts.

Recently, researchers have begun to flag the necessity of considering narratives as a representation, not only of identity, but of the context in which it is told (McLean et al., 2007). It has been suggested that the key autobiographical scenes collected through the research process do not reflect "an assessment of internal representations but rather as an

emergent product of representations and features in which narratives are told" (McLean et al., 2007, p. 264). That is, when key autobiographical scenes from a narrative identity are disclosed, they are not 'pure' manifestations of aspects of this identity but, rather, partial reflections of participants' internalized stories as well as the contexts in which these stories are produced. If this theorizing is correct, then contexts carry important implications for narrative identity research (Dunlop, 2015a,b).

The derivation of a typology for contexts, however, has proven difficult (Dunlop, 2015a; Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015; Roberts, 2007). As a result, in Study 1, I focus on the more tractable *assessment* contexts, which represent the varying ways in which key autobiographical scenes are collected by researchers. These scenes have been gathered in numerous ways, such as through the use of handwritten responses provided outside of laboratory settings (King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000; McAdams et al., 2006), written responses in a university setting (Pasupathi, McLean, & Weeks, 2009), interviews conducted in university setting and video recorded (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013) or audio recorded (Dunlop & Walker, 2014; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008), interviews conducted in participants' homes (Walker & Frimer, 2007), and written responses collected through internet survey sites (Dunlop et al., 2013). Thus, there is no standard method in the assessment of key autobiographical scenes. This, in and of itself, is not problematic. It remains necessary, however, to consider how variations in assessment settings may impact the nature of the autobiographical narratives disclosed. Although the assessment contexts used by researchers have varied considerably, it is apt to draw a

distinction between disclosing key scenes in the company of others (most commonly an interviewer) relative to alone and by means of written or spoken response.

Social and Isolated Disclosure. One factor, or dimension, in which assessment contexts vary pertains to the presence/absence of someone else (e.g., an interviewer) during the disclosure process. Only a small number of studies, however, have investigated differences in narratives as a function of social context. Instead, the few studies that have considered differing social contexts more commonly focus on the impact of varying levels of social support on the disclosure of various autobiographical experiences. Pennebaker, Hughes, and O'Heeron (1987), for example, found that participants were less likely to disclose traumatic events in the presence of a listener as compared to when they these participants were left in a laboratory room alone and prompted to describe their experiences while being recorded by a tape recorder.

Distinct from the research examining the disclosure of traumatic events, variations in listeners' behavior have also been found to influence the production of participants' narratives. Pasupathi and Hoyt (2009), for example, observed that individuals were more likely to provide autobiographical scenes that included interpretative or explanatory, as opposed to simply factual, information when in the presence of an attentive listener. In a separate study (Pasupathi, Stallworth and Murdoch, 1998), participants were instructed to watch video excerpts from several popular movies and describe what had occurred in these excerpts to either an attentive, or inattentive, listener. When providing summaries to attentive listeners, participants offered more elaborate information than when describing these video clips to a listener who was

inattentive. Pasupathi et al. (1998) also found that attentive listeners elicited more accurate recall of details from the video excerpts than did inattentive listeners. Although these researchers did not consider the disclosure of autobiographical narratives, their work does provide some indication that even minor changes in the social environment of the assessment context, such as the listener's presence and behavior, can influence the narratives participants choose to share.

Written and Spoken Response Formats. The format, in which participants provide their narratives, be it written or spoken may also influence the content of the information that is disclosed. To date though, few have assessed differences in the *content* of key scenes as a function of response format, instead choosing to focus on differences in certain outcome variables across response formats. Lumley and colleagues (2011), for example, observed differences in the recovery of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients on the basis of whether participants divulged their stressful experiences through written or verbal expression. Patients with RA reported less pain and exhibited greater walking speed when they disclosed experiences through writing as opposed to speaking. In contrast, Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, and Schneiderman (1994) found that undergraduates with Epstein-Barr virus showed greater improvements in their health when asked to discuss stressful life events verbally, rather than write about these events.

Contrary to the differing implications of writing or orally-producing autobiographical experiences, Pennebaker (1997) has argued that individuals who disclose difficult experiences will benefit equally, irrespective of response format. There exists some research consistent with the broader point that response format bears little

impact on participants' functioning (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997; Lyubomirsky, Sousa, & Dickerhoof, 2006; Murray & Segal, 1994). For example, Lyubomirsky and colleagues (2006) noted that participants who reported their worst life experiences increased in life satisfaction and self-reported health regardless of whether they wrote or spoke about these experiences. Furthermore, Murray and Segal (1994) observed that individuals experienced reduced negative affect after disclosing traumatic memories irrespective of whether these disclosures were written or spoken. As a collective whole, then, these findings illustrate that there are some circumstances in which the response format individuals use to disclose information corresponds with divergent outcomes. These findings, however, do not speak directly to the possibility that the *content* of these narratives may differ across response formats.

The Present Study (Study 1)

In Study 1, I investigated differences in the linguistic and thematic content of autobiographical narratives as a function of assessment context. There were two factors of interest in regards to these contexts: the sociality of the situation (i.e., the presence or absence of an interviewer) and the response format (i.e., written vs. spoken). I considered differences in the linguistic and thematic content of participants' key scenes across four assessment contexts varying systematically along these two factors (i.e., a 2 x 2 study design was used). Although some researchers have considered the ways in which the mannerisms of the interviewer influence the nature of the autobiographical narratives disclosed (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009; Pasupathi et al., 1998), the present research represents the first experiment to examine differences in the content of narratives as a

function of the presence or absence of an interviewer and the format in which responses are collected. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I did not entertain directional hypotheses concerning the manner in which narrative content may vary across assessment contexts.

Method

Participants

Four hundred and thirteen undergraduate students were recruited for this study from a public university in Southern California. They received course credit in exchange for doing so. Ten participants did not complete all portions of the study and one participant was visually impaired which did not allow for random assignment to all conditions. As a result, these 11 participants were excluded from all subsequent analyses, leaving a sample of 402 individuals. Our sample had a mean age of 19.44 (*SD* = 1.81) and 69% of our participants were female. This sample was ethnically diverse, consisting of participants who self-identified as Asian-American (40%), Hispanic/Latino (35%), White/Caucasian (9%), African-American (6%), and Pacific Islander (2%).

Procedures

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions from within a 2 (interviewer; present, absent) X 2 (response type; verbal, written) study design. For the various conditions, participants were either interviewed (interviewer present) or left alone in the interview room (interviewer absent). Conditions also varied as a function of response type such that participants were either asked to provide their narratives orally (verbal) or type them via a computer (written). It should be noted, that although some of

these conditions are not frequently within the narrative psychology literature, they represent common situations in which narratives could be elicited. For example, often during class instruction, students are required to take verbal directions from an instructor and compose a written response.

In each of these four conditions, participants were asked to provide three key scenes from their lives, reflecting high points, low points, and turning points. The prompts used to solicit descriptions of these scenes were taken directly from the Life Story Interview (LSI; McAdams, 1998). An example of the high point prompt appears directly below.

> Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life story that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person and your life.

All research assistants for this project (including the interviewers) were female. This was done (a) in order to maintain consistency across experimental conditions and (b) because both men and women feel more comfortable disclosing information to females (Habermas, 2011; Kaplan, Becker, & Tenke, 1991). Participants took approximately 30

minutes to provide their narratives for both written and spoken formats. Following this, they completed a battery of questionnaires and provided basic demographic information.

Quantification of Autobiographical Narratives

Once the data for the study was collected, which included 1206 autobiographical scenes with an average of 247 words per narrative (for a total of approximately 297,880 words), all audio recorded narrative responses (i.e., the responses from within the verbal conditions), were transcribed verbatim whereas all written responses were downloaded from the survey-based website in which they were housed. Following the quantification of each narrative (described in detail directly below), I averaged scores across each participant's stories to arrive at a single score for each linguistic and thematic category. This was done because we were most interested in determining the influence of assessment contexts on participants' life narratives in general, rather than in regards to any one category, or type, of narrative (see also Dunlop & Tracy, 2013b; Frost, 2013).

Analytic Strategy

The differences within linguistic and thematic content, which may emerge among four assessment settings between individuals, was our primary interest. Since the question we aimed to answer was how individuals' autobiographical narratives, when averaged, changed across assessment contexts we opted to utilize a 2 (interviewer presence; absent, presence) X 2 (response type; written, spoken) analysis of variance (ANOVA). This design affords us the opportunity to determine whether an effect is being driven by an underlying feature of the assessment context (e.g., the presence/absence of the interview) or some combination of features (i.e., an interaction). Although some could

argue that multilevel modeling procedures would be more appropriate, we were not interested in how each individuals' narrative (highpoint, low point, and turning point) vary within the individual across assessment conditions. Also, most narrative research has considered the aggregate of narratives to be a better representation of narrative identity (Cox & McAdams, 2014; Dunlop & Tracy, 2013b; Frost, 2013).

Linguistic content. I utilized the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count software (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth & Francis, 2007) to investigate linguistic differences in autobiographical narratives as a function of assessment context. Prior to analyzing our data with the LIWC, narrative transcripts were formatted in accordance with Pennebaker and colleagues (2007) operation manual. This included, for example, correcting for misspellings, removing transcriber comments (e.g., "participant sighs"), and marking nonfluent words (e.g., "like" when used as a filler word).

The LIWC offers over 70 word categories for examination. Pennebaker and King (1999), however, have identified 15 of these categories as being particularly reliable. In the current study, I considered these 15 reliable categories which included *singular first person pronouns, positive emotions* and *tentative* words (a complete list of these categories is presented in Table 1).

Thematic content. Participants' narratives were coded for six conceptual categories, drawn from three prevalent coding paradigms. In the interest of blind coding, identifying information from these narratives was first removed. These narratives were then entered in a single spreadsheet and their order was randomized. Next, the primary coder rated the entirety of the sample, whereas a secondary coded rated approximately

25% of this sample. This secondary coder was used to establish the degree of reliability in the primary coder's ratings.

Agency and communion. Agency is represented by themes including, but not limited to, power, control, and achievement (McAdams, Hoffman, Day, & Mansfield, 1996). Communion, in contrast, is represented by themes such as love, care, and belonging (McAdams et al., 1996). Following McAdams' (2001) agency and communion coding system, four types of agency and four types of communion were recognized. Each narrative was scored for the presence/absence of each of these 'types', resulting in a possible score for both agency and communion ranging from 0 (no agency or communion) to 4 (each of the four themes of agency or communion). Consistent with previous research (e.g., McAdams et al., 2006) it was rare to observe a narrative which housed more than a single type of agency or communion. Inter-rater reliability was acceptable for both agency and communion (*ICC*s = .67).

Redemption and contamination. The presence/absence of redemptive and contaminated sequences in participants' narratives were coded in correspondence with McAdams' (1998, 1999) manuals. A redemptive sequence manifests when bad beginnings leads to positive endings: the narrator starts his or her story negatively, but ultimately ends on a positive note. Examples of redemptive sequences include experiencing the loss of a parent only to be brought closer to a sibling, diagnoses of cancer leading to a more positive outlook on life, and having a difficult start at college but ultimately graduating with honors (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). Contamination sequences are, in some sense, the opposite of redemptive

sequences insofar as good beginnings are construed to be spoiled by bad endings. A few examples include getting a new job only to realize it is more difficult than expected, receiving a gift but then losing it, or a happy marriage ending in divorce (McAdams et al, 2001). The inter-rater reliability for redemption (86% agreement, $\kappa = .69$) and communion (93% agreement, $\kappa = .66$) was substantial.

Affective tone and complexity. The affective tone of narratives was coded on a scale from 1 (*very negative*) to 5 (*very positive*) using McAdams' (n.d.) coding manual. The complexity of participants' narratives, in contrast, was quantified by adapting Baker-Brown, Ballard, Bluck, de Vries, Suedfeld, and Telock's (1990) integrative complexity framework (see McAdams et al., 2006). Complexity represents the degree to which individuals are able to recognize, and integrate, multiple viewpoints, emotions, motivations, or cognitions (Suedfeld, Tetlock, Siegfried, 1992). Each narrative was rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 *(no recognition of multiple viewpoints*) to 5 (*harmonious integration of differentiated perspectives*). Inter-rater reliability was acceptable for both tone (*ICC* = .82) and complexity (*ICC* = .61).

Results

In what follows, I first examine differences in the linguistic content of participants' autobiographical narratives as a function of assessment context. Next, I present a summary of the analyses examining differences in the thematic content of participants' stories across contexts. For each linguistic and thematic narrative variable, we conducted a 2(interviewer; present, absent) x 2(response format; written, spoken)

ANOVA with the mean-level of this narrative variable serving as the dependent variable. I adopted a significance level of $p = .05$ in all analyses.

Assessment Contexts and Linguistic Content

The complete list of linguistic word categories can be found in Table 1. Among the 15 word categories considered, 14 (i.e., 93%) were found to exhibit a main effect of, or interaction with, assessment context (see Table 1). Thirteen categories yield a main effect for response format (i.e., written/spoken; see Table 1). Of these 13 main effects, eight took the form of higher linguistic content in the written relative to spoken conditions. Individuals, for example, used more articles (e.g., a, an, the) when their narratives were written ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.27$) compared to the participants who disclosed their narratives verbally ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.16$). Furthermore, there were three significant differences found in the linguistic content of narratives on the basis of the presence/absence of an interviewer. All main effects pertaining to interviewer presence corresponded to instances in which participants used a greater proportions of a particular linguistic category when they were alone, compared to being interviewed. For example, participants who provided their responses while alone (i.e., no interviewer present) exhibited a higher percentage of positive emotion words in their stories ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.09$) compared to participants who were interviewed ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.17$).

Finally, I noted that five of the 13 linguistic categories exhibited an interaction between response type and interviewer presence. I explored each of these interactions by contrasting levels of linguistic content between written and spoken formats and within the interviewer present and interviewer absent conditions. In each of these five cases, the

difference between the linguistic content of written and spoken responses was greater when the interviewer was present, rather than absent. For example, there was a significantly higher proportion of insight words used among participants who were interviewed and provided written responses (M = 3.11, SD = 0.91) when compared to those participants who provided oral narratives in response to interviewers' prompts (M = 2.73, SD = 1.01), $F(1, 398) = 7.14$, $p = .01$. A significant difference, in contrast, was not found in the proportion of insight words between the written (M = 2.92, SD = 0.88) and spoken (M = 2.92, SD = 1.09) conditions when participants were alone (in the absence of an interviewer), $F(1, 398) = 0.00$, $p = .94$.

Thematic Differences

Five of the six thematic categories considered (i.e., 83%) yielded significant differences across assessment contexts in the form of a main effect or an interaction (see Table 1). Below, I expand upon these effects separately within each coding system.

Agency and communion. With regards to agency, I noted an interaction between interviewer presence/absence and response type, trending in significance ($p = .054$). Breaking this interaction down within the interviewer present and interviewer absent conditions, lower levels of agency were observed (trending in significance) within written (M =0.49, SD = 0.27), compared to spoken (M = 0.55, SD = 0.26), narratives when participants were alone, $F(1, 398) = 3.34$, $p = .07$. When individuals were in the presence of an interviewer, in contrast, no difference was noted in the agentic content of narratives between these response formats, $F(1, 398) = 0.92$, $p = .34$. Communion did not exhibit a main effect or interaction across assessment contexts.

Redemption and contamination. Both redemption and contamination exhibited significant main effects for response type. Participants who wrote their narratives exhibited higher levels of redemption ($M = 0.37$, $SD = 0.28$) than participants who produced their narratives orally ($M = 0.31$, $SD = 0.25$). Similarly, individuals who wrote their narratives exhibited higher levels of contamination ($M = 0.15$, $SD = 0.19$) relative to those who provided spoken narratives ($M = 0.09$, $SD = 0.15$).

Tone and complexity. With respect to affective tone, I found a main effect for interviewer presence/absence. Participants who provided their narratives, outside the company of an interviewer, exhibited a higher level of affective tone ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.35$) than those participants who were interviewed ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.40$). I also observed that the complexity of participants' narratives differed significantly on the basis of interviewer presence, with participants who provided their responses outside the company of an interviewer exhibiting higher levels of complexity ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.67$) than those who were interviewed ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.66$).

Discussion

For some time, researchers have recognized the importance of the relation between personality and contexts (Dunlop, 2015a,b; Rauthmann et al., 2015). This is particularly so for narrative psychologists, wherein the disclosure of autobiographical narratives has been flagged as sensitive to the nature of the immediate environment (e.g., McLean et al., 2007). Despite the many writings suggesting that context is important in the study of narrative identity, however, very few empirical studies have systematically

assessed the manner in which the content of autobiographical narratives differ across assessment contexts.

In the current study (Study 1), fifteen linguistic categories and six prominent conceptual themes were abstracted from the participants' key autobiographical scenes. Results indicated that 14 of the 15 linguistic categories exhibited a main effect for, or interaction with, assessment context while five of the six conceptual themes also varied by way of a main effect or interaction. Based on these results, it seems apparent that the linguistic and thematic content narrative identity, as manifest in research contexts, is rather malleable. These results are explored in greater detail below.

Contexts Matter

Of the two dimensions of assessment contexts considered in the current work (viz. interviewer presence/absence, written/spoken responses), the majority of differences in narrative content were noted across the response format variable (rather than interviewer presence/absence variable). Nine of the original 15 linguistic categories exhibited a main effect for response format and, if we consider the number of linguistic categories qualified by interactions, 13 differed on the basis of whether the applicable narrative material was written or spoken. A main effect for response type was also found for two of our six conceptual themes. Although the direction of this effect was not uniform across all linguistic and thematic categories, the proportion and levels of linguistic and thematic content tended to be higher when narratives were written rather than spoken. Thus, painting with a broad brush, individuals' tended to provide autobiographical narratives

with more detailed information when given the opportunity to write their narratives as opposed to speaking them.

The nature of the data does not allow for determining *why* individuals provided a greater amount of linguistic and thematic content during written as opposed to spoken disclosure. Several potential processes, however, may be relevant. First, the opportunity to write about past experiences may be seen as a time of reflection, one that allows for revision throughout the disclosure process (i.e., when writing key autobiographical scenes, participants have the ability to revisit what they have written and modify their assertions accordingly. The same cannot be said for oral responses). Second, individuals may have perceived differences in the amount of time available to provide key autobiographical scenes between written and spoken conditions. Specifically, the use of an audio recorder may have increased the subjective time pressure participants experienced.

Of the 15 linguistic categories we considered, three exhibited a main effect for interviewer presence. Two of the six conceptual themes also exhibited a main effect for interview presence. Interestingly, the direction of the effect was consistent for each word category and theme, such that there was a higher proportion of linguistic and thematic content when the interviewer was absent. Consider the linguistic categories pertaining to positive and negative emotion words. Here, participants employed more emotional words when providing their narratives outside the presence of an interviewer.

Again, the nature of the data does not allow for determining why these differences emerged. One possible explanation, however, is that when participants were by

themselves, they felt more comfortable disclosing the emotional details of their self-defining memories. Life experiences can be quite personal and the disclosure process holds the potential to leave the narrator feeling vulnerable. Previous research has shown that individuals use different word types if they are trying to distance themselves from the event (Pennebaker, 2011), which may be occurring while an interviewer is present in order to "save face". Alternatively, the greater use of emotion words may have been used to emphasize different parts of the participants' life stories which would have otherwise been conveyed through non-verbal cues to an interviewer. Facial expressions (e.g., smile), hand gestures (e.g., thumbs-up), and physiological reactions (e.g., crying) portray details of individuals stories to others, especially their emotional interpretation of the event.

It was noted that five linguistic categories and one conceptual theme exhibited an interaction between response format and interviewer presence. Three of these five linguistic categories exhibited interaction effects in the same direction. In the presence of an interviewer, there was greater word usage for a particular category when the narrative was written as compared to spoken. For two of these four categories, there was also greater word usage when key scenes were written as opposed to spoken while outside the presence of the interviewer. The magnitude of the difference between narrative content across written and spoken conditions, however, was greater when an interviewer was present rather than absent. Several of the possibilities recognized above in accordance with our main effects may be relevant here as well. For example, participants providing spoken responses while being interviewed may have felt a heightened sense of time

pressure when forming their responses. Again, the main purpose in the current study was to document the magnitude with which narrative identity changes across assessment contexts. It falls to future research to test the possible explanations recognized above. It is to these and other future directions that we now turn.

Contextualizing Narrative Identity

In Study 1, each participant was asked to provide us with a high point, low point, and turning point from his or her life. These key scenes, however, represent only a subset of those relevant to the understanding of narrative identity (e.g., McAdams, 2008). By gathering additional autobiographical memories such as a positive childhood memory or a religious experience, I may have derived a more detailed account of our participants' narrative identities. I opted to use the three key scenes in the present study, instead of additional autobiographical memories, however, because these scenes are most commonly used and, ultimately, associated with narrative identity (Cox & McAdams, 2014; McLean & Pratt, 2006). This practice is common within narrative psychology, as several noteworthy studies have focused on a pertinent subset of prompts from the LSI (McAdams et al., 2006; McAdams, Hoffman, Day, & Mansfield, 1996) or variants of a single prompt (e.g., Dunlop & Tracy, 2013; Pals, 2006).

An additional reflective point concerns the nature of the study design. Specifically, this design allowed for only between-group comparisons across assessment contexts. Although from a methodological standpoint such a design represent one of the 'cleanest' possible, it remains an open question as to how consistent individuals' narrative identities would be if the same individuals provided their stories across multiple

assessment contexts (i.e., if a within-group study design was used). It is, for example, possible that the mean-level of the various dimensions of narrative content would differ substantially across contexts though the rank-order consistency of these dimensions would be significantly high. A complete picture of contextualized narratives requires consideration of this possibility (Dunlop, 2015a).

The limitations inherent in the demographics of the sample must also be recognized. Though ethnically diverse, this sample was made up entirely of college students populating the developmental stage known as 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000). Certain aspects of narrative identity have been found to vary substantially throughout the adult lifespan (Dunlop, McAdams, & Guo, 2016; Dunlop, Walker, & Matsuba, 2013; McAdams et al., 2006; McAdams, et al., 2001; McLean, 2008). When this fact is coupled with recognition that emerging adults have just begun to form their narrative identities (arguably making these identities more malleable; Dunlop et al., 2015), it remains possible that autobiographical key scenes provided by individuals at later periods in the lifespan may exhibited less variability across assessment contexts than that observed in the current study. The choice to consider emerging adults was based both on convenience as well as the fact that a large portion of previous narrative research has considered samples drawn from this population (e.g., Habermas & de Silviera, 2008; McAdams et al. 2006). Nevertheless, researchers should entertain the aforementioned empirical question in subsequent research.

Continuing with this developmental trend, it is important to recognize that narratives and narrative identity are constantly in flux, changing and growing on the basis

of life developments as well as through the storytelling process itself (Dunlop, 2015a; McLean et al., 2007). McLean and colleagues (2007), for example, proposed that storytelling represents a forum in which individuals can share their current narrative understandings in the interest of honing these stories. If differing assessment contexts pull for different narrative content, then it follows that participants across our different conditions may have modified and revised their narrative identities in different, and potentially meaningful, ways (Johnson, 2015; Pasupathi & Oldroyd, 2015). This represents an exciting possibility for researchers to explore in future.

Beyond the limitations recognized above lies the question which I sought to answer in Study 1: does assessment context matter when gathering autobiographical narratives? The shorter answer is yes. The longer answer is that more research needs to be conducted in which additional dimensions of assessment contexts are considered. I presented data on narratives which were collected in a university setting. Several researchers conduct interviews in the participants' homes (Walker & Frimer, 2007) or gather information online, without ever meeting a single participant (Dunlop, Walker, & Weins, 2013). Due to this technological advance, examining differences between responses collected online, in participants' homes, and laboratory settings represents an imperative next step.

Study 2: Domain-Specificity of Narratives

In Study 1, I compared narratives (e.g., high point, low point, and turning point) across four different assessment conditions. It was found that the nature of assessment contexts influenced the linguistic and thematic context of such narratives. In contrast, in

Study 2, I collected narratives within the same assessment context. I then contrasted the content of domain-general narratives (i.e., life high points, low points, and turning points) with that of domain-specific narratives (i.e., key autobiographical scenes pertaining to participants' relationships with their parents).

Stories from specific roles within participants' lives, as compared to their lives more generally, may give way to differences in thematic content. Although this possibility has not been explored empirically, previous research has contrasted the content of narratives pertaining to different domains. For instance, Dunlop, Hanley and McCoy (unpublished manuscript) found that narratives pertaining to participants' love lives, compared to their work lives, showed greater themes of communion. The same individuals' work narratives, alternatively; showed greater instances of agency, rather than communion. Findings from this studied replicated those of Dunlop, Walker, and Wiens (2014). Although these findings may not be that surprising, they do lend themselves to the idea that narrative identity exists along various levels of specificity. A primary goal of narrative research is to understand individuals' identities and self-concepts in the most complete manner possible. In order to do so, it is critical to consider narrative identity as it varies on the basis of the domains considered.

In Dunlop's (2017) paper, he outlined a model suggesting that individuals' narrative identity can be considered on the bases of three hierarchical levels. The highest most level is captured through individuals' general life stories titled *generalized narrative identity*. For this level, no specific context or role is requested; stories are drawn from any

domain the narrator chooses. An example excerpt from the LSI prompt representing this level includes

> "Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story" (McAdams, 2008).

The second level represents narratives belonging to certain aspects of life, referred to as *contextualized narrative identity* (e.g., love life). This level allows individuals to describe their stories from within a particular context. Through modification of the LSI, researchers are able to derive stories from this level. An example modification of the LSI (pertaining to the romantic domain or role) includes

> "Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your love life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire love life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story" (Dunlop, Hanley, & McCoy, under review).

Finally, the most specific level of narrative identity includes *role-specific narrative identities* which express individuals' narrative identity through certain roles embedded within a context (e.g., narrative of relationship with person A, as opposed to relationship with person B). To elicit such stories, the prompt becomes more specific. Here is an example of a modification of the LSI for this level:

> "Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in regarding your most recent romantic relationship that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire most recent romantic relationship, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story"

For Study 2, generalized narrative identities (level 1) and role specific (level 3) narrative identities were targeted. Furthermore, these two categories of narrative identity were considered among two social groups: Adult Children of Alcoholics or Adult Children of non-Alcoholics.

Adult Children of Alcoholics: A Brief Review

The social and psychological functioning of Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOAs) and Adult Children of non-Alcoholics (non-ACOAs) has been contrasted in several research programs (Braitman et al., 2009; Richards & Nelson, 2012). In some cases, no significant differences have been observed between these groups (e.g., Ferraro & Gabriel, 2003; Hall, 2007; Hunt, 1997; Jones et al., 2007). In other cases, however, differences emerge (e.g., Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002; Chassin, Pitts, DeLucia, & Todd, 1999; Latendresse et al., 2008; Pagano et al., 2007).

When significant differences have been noted between ACOAs and non-ACOAs, the former tend to exhibit reduced functioning relative to the latter (e.g., Beesley & Stoltenberg, 2002; Latendresse et al., 2008; Pagano et al., 2007). For example, relative to non-ACOAs, ACOAs have more problems related to mental health, such as greater rates of depression and anxiety (Hinz, 1990; Pagano et al., 2007), and a higher propensity for

substance abuse (Chassin, Pitts, DeLucia, & Todd, 1999; Latendresse et al., 2008). Although researchers have considered many outcomes in relation to participants' designated status as ACOAs and non-ACOAs, they have yet to consider aspects of their life stories, or narrative identities. For this reason, I opted to focus on ACOA participants. Investigating the life stories of ACOAs, compared to non-ACOAs, may help us to understand the discrepancies of past research. If differences emerge across domains or social groupings, it will provide reason to investigate narrative identity in a context specific manner more consistently, whether it be to consider the domain in which the story is told or the social grouping of the narrator.

The Present Study (Study 2)

In the present study, I examined differences in the content of ACOAs' and non-ACOAs' generalized and role-specific narrative identities (McCoy & Dunlop, 2016b). By investigating ACOAs and non-ACOAs I was able to focus attention toward the various narrative domains, non-specific general narratives and role-based narratives of being an adult child. Additionally, it afforded the opportunity to examine the social grouping of being a child of an alcoholic by requesting stories from ACOAs and non-ACOAs.

By employing a 2(group; ACOA, non-ACOA) X 2(narrative domain; general, parent) quasi-experimental design I was able to investigate: a) the mean level differences of narrative themes between ACOAs and non-ACOAs b) the mean level differences of narrative themes between general and parent narrative domains and c) the interaction effects between group and narrative domain. I quantified the resulting narratives in terms of redemptive imagery (McAdams et al., 2001), contaminated imagery (McAdams et al.,

2001), agentic imagery (Adler, Skalina, & McAdams, 2008), and affective tone (McAdams, n.d.; see Study 1 for definitions of these constructs).

These narrative themes were the primary focus for investigations due to their relations to various life outcomes and their popularity amongst narrative researchers. Special attention, however, should be directed towards redemption. The redemptive story is socially desirable, so much so, that it is considered a "master narrative" within American culture (McAdams, 2006). Due to this status, in certain cases individuals align their narrative identities with the redemptive story irrespective of whether they resonate with this story or have led a life consistent with the optimism, hope, and promise inherent in redemptive sequences (Dunlop & Tracy, 2013a). Such incongruence, between the way individuals phenomenologically perceives their lives and the way society demands they narrate these lives, is likely maladaptive and emotionally distressing.

This aforementioned incongruence may be particularly prevalent among so-called vulnerable populations, defined as those who are at an “increased potential for loss in a hazardous situation, including reduced capability to respond effectivity” (Vaughan & Tinker, 2009, p. S324). Indeed, vulnerable individuals, including ACOAs, will likely have their own master narratives (Breen & McLean, 2017) that may, or may not, mirror the master narratives of the mainstream. Consistent with this notion, Breen and McLean (2017) observed very few instances of redemptive imagery in the stories provided by participants drawn from vulnerable populations.

Among a sample of college students with histories of personal abuse, McLean (2014) found that higher rates of redemptive imagery in their personal stories were

associated with greater Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A comparable relationship, however, was not observed among non-abused participants (see also, McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). McLean et al., (2013) also observed that levels of meaning making (a key process in the formation of redemptive stories; Lodi-Smith et al., 2009) in participants' narratives were associated with greater rates of risky behavior while rates of agency were positively associated with desistance for vulnerable individuals (i.e., persons who have experienced particularly harsh life circumstances; see Frohlich & Potvin, 2008). These findings suggest that, among ACOAs, the tendency to construct redemptive, and to some degree, agentic personal stories may actually predict reduced psychological functioning. This may lead ACOAs to pursue stories of non-redemptive and agentic natures.

Drawing from the work of Breen and McLean (2017), I predicted that narrative redemption and agency would be lower among ACOAs compared to non-ACOAs whereas the former group would exhibit higher levels of narrative contamination relative to the latter group. Additionally, affective tone would be lower for ACOAs than non-ACOAs but especially for stories regarding parents.

Method

Participants

One-hundred and sixty-five undergraduate participants took part in this study in exchange for course credit. Nineteen of these participants did not complete all portions of the study and were excluded from subsequent analyses. Our ACOA sample had a mean age of 19.71 (SD = 2.00) and 64% were female. This sample was ethnically diverse,

consisting of participants who self-identified as Asian-American (20%), Hispanic/Latino (49%), White/Caucasian (15%), African-American (7%), and Pacific Islander (2%). Our non-ACOA sample had a mean age of 19.47 (*SD* = 1.85) and 71% were female. This sample was also ethnically diverse, consisting of individuals who identified as Asian-American (42%), Hispanic/Latino (30%), White/Caucasian (12%), African-American (2%), and Pacific Islander (2%). Thus, the demographic composition of our groups was largely comparable.

Procedure

ACOAs and non-ACOAs were recruited using two different study advertisements. This was done to first allow participants to self-identify as an ACOA or non-ACOA. At the study, after providing informed consent, participants completed the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test (CAST; Hodgins et al., 1993). This was to verify participants' status as ACOA or non-ACOA. This scale contains six yes/no questions (e.g., "Have you ever thought one of your parents had a drinking problem") that are summed (i.e., "yes" = 1, "no" = 0) leading to a score between 0 and 6. Individuals are designated as ACOAs if their scores on this measure fall between 3 and 6, and non-ACOAs if their scores range from 0 to 2.

Participants then composed, via a computer, written accounts of six key autobiographical scenes, with three scenes pertaining to their lives in general (i.e., high point, low point and turning point) and three scenes pertaining to their relationships with their parents (i.e., high point with parent, low point with parent, and turning point with parent). The prompts used to solicit the 'general' scenes were taken directly from the Life

Story Interview (LSI; McAdams, 2008). These prompts were then edited to target three parallel scenes pertaining to participants' experiences with parents. Prompts were identical among ACOAs and non-ACOAs, except ACOA participants were requested to provide three parent-based stories pertaining to their alcohol abusing parent. Following the production of these scenes, participants completed several measures pertinent to emotional functioning and provided general demographic information. Below includes the prompt used to elicit high points from ACOA participants' parent-based stories.

> Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience which involved your parent who abuses alcohol in some way. This might be the high point scene of your entire life involving your parent, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please include a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good, what the scene may show about who you are as a person and your relationship with your parent.

Quantification of Narrative Responses

Narratives were entered into a single spreadsheet. Their order was then randomized to avoid blatant indication of participant group (i.e., ACOA vs. non-ACOA) or narrative domain (e.g., general high point vs. high point involving parent). A primary coder then rated the entire sample for thematic content, which is outlined below, while a

secondary coder, used to establish the degree of reliability, coded approximately 25% of the sample.

Redemptive and contaminated imagery. Coding for contaminated and redemptive imagery was done using McAdams' (1998, 1999) scoring manuals, respectively. In each narrative, the presence/absence of redemptive and contaminated imagery was determined. Inter-rater reliability for redemption and contamination was substantial (97% and 96% agreement, κs = .89 and .78, respectively). For each participant, a single score for redemptive and contaminated imagery was then derived by taking the sum of the number of narratives that contained said imagery.

Agency and affective tone. Agency and affective tone were coded using Adler, Skalina, and McAdams', (2008) and McAdams' (n.d.) scoring manuals. Agency was coded for on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 to 3 where a lower score was indicative of less agentic imagery. Tone was coded for on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 to 5 where a lower score represents less positivity. Intra-class correlations for agency and tone were .60 and .83, respectively. A single score for themes of agency and tone were also derived by obtaining the average score for each participant.

Results

The self-identification of 13 participants was at odds with their CAST score and, as a result, these 13 individuals were excluded from all subsequent analyses, resulting in a final sample of 53 ACOA and 80 non-ACOA participants.[3] I utilized a 2(Narratives:

[3] The results were comparable, irrespective of whether these participants were excluded.

Domain-general, domain-specific) X 2(Group: ACOAs, non-ACOAs) ANOVA as we were investigating the influence of narrative domain (i.e., generalized or role-specific) on the prevalence of four narrative themes as well as social grouping (i.e., ACOA and non-ACOA).

Results indicated that there were no main effects or interactions for the themes of redemption or contamination Fs(131) ≤ 2.03, ps ≥ .16, η^2s ≤ .01. For agency, however, there was a main effect for group $F(1, 131) = 6.93$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$. ACOA participants had lower rates of agency ($M = 1.08$, $SD = 0.35$) compared to non-ACOAs ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 0.31$). There was also a main effect for story type. General stories ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.49$) contained greater amounts of agency compared to parent stories ($M = 1.03$, $SD = 0.46$), $F(1, 131) = 26.11$, p = <.000, $\eta^2 = .17$. A similar effect was observed for tone. A main effect for group and narrative domain occurred, although these effects were qualified by an interaction. ACOAs had lower rates of tone ($M = 2.97$. $SD = 0.29$) than non-ACOAs ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.26$), $F(1, 131) = 17.37$, p = <.000, $\eta^2 = .12$. When considering the narrative domain of the stories, participants had higher rates of tone when providing narratives from their lives, generally ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.36$) compared to narratives incorporating their parents ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.43$), $F(1, 131) = 15.04$, p = <.000, $\eta^2 = .10$. Breaking these effects down within each social group, I found that among ACOAs, there were higher rates of tone reported for general stories ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.36$) than for parent stories ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.42$), $F(1, 52) = 22.85$, p = <.00, η^2 =.30 (i.e., their general stories were more positive than their stories pertaining to their parents). For the non-ACOA group, there were no differences between narrative domain for

general stories (M = 3.18, SD = 0.36) or parent stories (M = 3.17, SD = 0.37), $F(1, 79)$ = .02, p =.87, η^2 = <.00.

Discussion

In Study 2, I compared mean levels of thematic content between groups (i.e., ACOAs and non-ACOAs) and story type (i.e., general and parental stories). The primary themes of interest for the present study (Study 2) were redemption, contamination, agency, and affective tone. These themes were chosen for assessment because researchers have found relations to well-being outcomes previously (see Adler et al., 2016 for review). Investigating mean differences in thematic content between groups was intended to speak to the mixed findings pertaining to the dissimilarities of ACOAs and non-ACOAs (e.g., Fischer et al., 2000; Harter & Taylor, 2000). Mean-level variations among some of the themes did emerge between ACOAs and non-ACOAs and for story type. Below, these findings are explored in greater detail.

Mean-level differences in the frequency of redemptive and contaminated stories were not observed between ACOAs and non-ACOAs. No mean level differences were noted for story type either. This is a surprising finding as previous research has found mean differences for redemption and contamination when comparing groups who had shown variations in well-being. For example, in their second study, Dunlop and Tracy (2013b) found that individuals who maintained sobriety from alcohol had higher rates of redemption. Lower rates of contamination and higher rates of redemption have also been found for adults who are highly generative (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). Also, Breen and McLean (2017) suggested that individuals from

vulnerable groups may exhibit lower levels of redemptive imagery as it is relatively difficult to continually 'redeem' negative experiences and harsh life circumstances.

Based on the previous findings presented here, I expected ACOAs to exhibit lower mean levels of redemption and higher levels contamination when compared to non-ACOAs. In many cases, however, the redemptive story's status as a master narrative may counteract the tendency to construct redemptive stories. This is due to the fact that cultural agents feel pressure to endorse master narratives, even if their personal experiences and lives are at odds with these schemas. This explanation also aligns with the noted group differences in mean levels of narrative agency, as agency is not a master narrative of American culture.

Thematic variations between ACOAs and non-ACOAs was found for agency. Agency represents the amount of control one perceives within his/her life (Adler, Skalina, & McAdams, 2008). As hypothesized, ACOAs demonstrated lower rates of agency across both story types compared to non-ACOAs. Consistent with the results reported here, Bush, Ballard, and Fremouw (1995) found that ACOAs, when compared to non-COAs (i.e., Children of non-Alcoholics), had a greater tendency to attribute failure to chronic and internal causes. Bush et al.'s (1995) ACOAs were ascribing personal let downs to their "enduring circumstances" and likely perceiving less control over those circumstances.

Affective tone was also variable among ACOAs and non-ACOAs. As expected, ACOAs depicted lower rates of tone than non-ACOAs. This main effect, however, was qualified by an interaction. ACOAs' mean level of tone was lower within their parent

stories compared to their general stories. Non-ACOAs showed no differences in tone among story type. Asking ACOAs to elicit stories from within their family role, not only as a child but as a child of an alcoholic, likely served as a reminder of the trials and tribulations they have endured. For example, research has shown that having a status as an ACOA, by way of meeting qualifications on the CAST, has been found to be a predictor of significant stress using regression analyses (Fischer et al., 2000). This highlights how dysfunction in the home, specifically parental alcohol use, relates to lower emotional functioning (i.e., higher stress). This may also reflect the fact that ACOAs are more likely to have a poorer relationship with their parents (Kelley, Pearson, Trinh, Klostermann, & Krakowski, 2011).

Implications

Comparing group type was an important next step as much research within ACOA investigations has been inconsistent. These findings, generally speaking, reflect the importance of context when considering narratives and narrative identity. Context in this study (Study 2) was observed in two fashions: the status of participants (i.e., ACOAs or non-ACOAs) and the story domain (i.e., general or parental stories).

The findings replicate previous conclusions suggesting that individuals of various social backgrounds narrate their experiences differently (McAdams, et al., 2001; McLean & Breen, 2009). Additionally, ACOAs reflect a unique group for consideration. ACOAs tend to comprise a larger majority of individuals than expected (e.g., 10% of U.S. children, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2016). Many of these individuals must learn to function similarly to their counterparts, however, they still have poorer

outcomes at times (Hinz, 1990; Pagano et al., 2007). Through furthering our understanding of ACOAs' perceptions of their circumstances, specifically the way ACOAs construct life narratives, will allow for greater understanding in why variations between ACOAs and non-ACOAs life outcomes only sometimes occur. This could help researchers within applied areas to create interventions to increase functioning and improving such outcomes.

These findings also suggest that the domain-specificity of autobiographical narratives may be important when considering certain aspects of narrative identity, beyond that of ACOA status. A variation in thematic content was observed between domain-general and domain-specific narratives when comparing affective tone among ACOAs' general and parent stories. These findings highlight the complexity of narrative identity, as certain aspects of said identity likely vary in a systematic way across contexts. It remains possible that measures of narrative identity derived from domain-specific stories will relate to domain-specific outcomes in divergent ways (e.g., McCoy & Dunlop, 2016b). In summary, information regarding individuals' social roles and analysis of specific domains (rather than aggregation of all) may be important to consider when assessing individuals' identities.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was a vital step for understanding the differences between thematic content of individuals' narratives while considering important contextual elements. Despite the insights gained from the current research, inherent limitations must be noted. Although this study investigated context in terms of narrative domain, not all possible

levels of narrative identity were assessed. For the present study (Study 2), I investigated general narratives (level 1) and role based narratives (level 3). I did not assess strictly contextualized narratives (level 2). This could have been done by asking participants to provide narratives regarding their family. Research investigating contextual differences between narrative levels should continue to do so by incorporating all three narrative domain levels.

This study, although addressing gaps in literature, did not include a large sample of ACOAs (i.e., $n = 53$). This is likely due to the potential dislike for discussing topics of such sensitive nature. Therefore, it is possible that individuals who were eligible for this study may have opted out of participation leading to an under-representation in the sample. Additionally, I elected to recruit only individuals who, at minimum, identified as an ACOA. This excluded individuals with parents who solely engage in drug abusing tendencies other than alcohol (e.g., narcotics). This is an avenue for future research as it could be assumed that any form of substance abuse by parents would incur similar narrative tendencies. However, this may not be the case. Alcohol abuse tends to be more common, approximately 15 million people identified as having an alcohol use disorder compared to about 8 million people identifying has having an illicit substance abuse disorder (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2016). By having a larger social network of individuals from similar circumstances may relate to life outcomes differently for ACOAs compared to adult children of illicit drug users. For this reason, it is crucial to assess the similarities between narrative identity among ACOAs and adult children of illegal drug users. Considering the legality of the situation, however, I opted to exclude

recruiting participants who fit this description. It was important to ensure participants felt secure in the stories they were sharing, understanding that alcohol use is not illegal, although use of other substances tend to be.

Lastly, the present study investigated only students who were enrolled in college. This is an important time to investigate life stories of ACOAs. First, narrative identity emerges in late adolescence/young adulthood, precisely the time that individuals are typically attending college (Habermas & de Silviera, 2008). Recent research is suggestive of the possibility that attending college itself may stimulate the development of this identity (Dunlop, Guo, & McAdams, 2016). Thus, the college years likely represent the context in which ACOAs begin to grapple with, and attempt to make sense of, their personal histories. Second, during this period of narrative construction and consolidation, ACOAs may have additional stressors (e.g., concern for alcohol abusing parent) relative to non-ACOAs that make the transition to college particularly difficult and the identity work that occurs during this period particularly important. Nonetheless, a large proportion of ACOAs were absent from Study 2. Including a wider variation in age among the ACOA group would highlight changes in narrative identity within this social status during development across adulthood. An important avenue for future research may include determining if differences within narrative themes during emerging adulthood occur during mid-adulthood as well.

Study 3: Social Context of Narratives

Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated the malleability of narrative identity across contexts. Study 2 resulted in a greater understanding of how individuals with various

parental upbringings vary systematically in their narrative identities. This was seen in the thematic variations noted between ACOAs and non-ACOA participants. Although this was important, Study 2 only assessed the participants' (i.e., adult children's) narratives from their own perspective, these are known as *personal life stories*.

In most cases, however, aspects of life stories are shared with other individuals (Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). The degree to which individuals' life narratives are accurately perceived by their social contacts may carry implications for well-being. Many researchers have explored how individuals make judgements of other people through investigating social settings (see Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000). This is known as person perception. However, very little research has explored person perceptions of narrative identity as most work in this area has focused on traits. Expanding upon this area of research by bridging the gap between the person perception and narrative identity literatures is the central aim for Study 3.

In providing justification for Study 3, I will review the person perception literature. First, I will explore relevant research within social and personality psychology. Then, this section will conclude with discussion of person perception within narrative psychology and specific information about the present study (Study 3).

Person Perception

People have been shown to have a remarkable skill to perceive other individuals' personalities. Informant reports, also known as other reports, have been one of the primary ways in which person perception has been assessed. Informant reports are defined as personality assessments completed for a participant by another individual

(Vazire, 2006). For example, Ambady and Rosenthal (1993) found that trait ratings provided by participants who viewed a 30 second clip of instructors corresponded with the ratings provided by the instructors' full-time students. In a similar vein, participants who listened to a 20 second audio clip of sales managers were able to accurately predict the managers' sales effectiveness (Ambady, Krabbenhoft, & Hogan, 2006). Additionally, it was found that, when participants were shown pictures of political candidates' faces for only a brief moment, they were able to predict the outcome of the subsequent corresponding elections at a rate better than chance. This was due to the participants' perceptions of each politicians' level of competence (Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). This and similar research highlights the relative ease individuals' have in making judgements of other people when considering dispositions.

As within social psychology, when investigating person perception within personality psychology, most researchers have focused on personality traits (Kolar, Funder, & Colvin, 1996). This is likely because traits are foundational to personality research (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Funder (1980) was one of the first personality researchers to assess the convergence between self and other reports of traits. In his foundational study, he found that self and other reports tended to be highly positively correlated. Both types of reports also had similar mean levels of trait ratings. Researchers continuing in this area have collected informant reports in numerous ways. For example, informant reports have been gathered by requesting that informers complete a five factor model questionnaire for social contacts (Bernieri, Zuckerman, Koestner, & Rosenthal,

1994). Researchers have also requested informants to complete a Q-sort for close (Kolar, Funder, & Colvin, 1996) and unacquainted individuals (Funder & Sneed, 1993).

Utilizing informant reports to assess individuals' personality traits has been quite fruitful. Researchers have shown, time and time again, that such reports are reliable and tend converge with target self-reports (Connelly & Ones, 2010; Kolar, Funder, & Colvin, 1996; Fast & Funder, 2008; Funder & Colvin, 1988). For instance, Kolar and colleagues (1996) gathered personality reports from friends and family members of target participants using the California Q-sort. By aggregating the informant reports, the predictive ability of these ratings was greater than that of target's own self-reported personality in estimating "purposive behavior" (i.e., "nervous withdrawal, domineeringness, [and] serious intelligence"; p. 319 & p. 320). Vazire and Mehl (2008) requested target and informant reports on daily behaviors. They found that informant reports were as accurate in predicting daily behavior as self-reports. Although Kolar et al., (1996) and Vazire and Mehl (2008) used informants who were well-known (i.e., friends and family members) to the target participants, which is typically considered ideal, this is not necessary.

Bernieri and colleagues (1994) found that trait ratings of targets and informants were consistent, regardless of how long the individuals knew each other. Informants may also be completely unknown to the targets. Funder and Sneed (1993) found that, by viewing a brief videotaped interaction, strangers could accurately rate targets' personality. Informant reports are very useful, however, they have only begun to be used

in recent decades. Funder's pursuit to understand the accuracy between self and other reports led to the creation of the Realistic Accuracy Model (RAM; Funder, 1995).

The RAM was constructed to describe the process by which accurate personality judgements are made (Funder, 2012). RAM outlines four steps necessary for accurate personality judgements to occur. First, the person under judgement needs to be engaging in behavior that is pertinent to the trait in question. For example, if an individual is being judged for his/her level of organization, that person needs to be doing something relevant to being organized (or disorganized). Second, the judge must be present within the necessary context able to observe the behavior, this is referred to as "availability". Third, the judge must actually detect the behavior relevant to the trait. Lastly, the judge must use this information correctly. The behavior needs to be interpreted appropriately (Funder, 1995; Funder, 2012).

The RAM describes an important process for understanding person perception. Person perception of personality, at the narrative level, would be wise to use the RAM as a foundational framework for understanding identity perception. The steps, however, would likely differ due to the fact the RAM only deals with traits. All of the requirements Funder (2012) outlines for accurate personality judgement require little interaction between people. For example, an individual's set of traits can be assessed by an onlooker who is unable to do anything but observe behaviors. When dealing with narratives, a person must share either a self-defining event or life narrative with another individual for an accurate judgement to be made. The sharing of narratives requires some interaction between people, unlike strict behavioral observations. Alternatively, it could be argued

that individuals who co-experience an important event would also have the capacity to share an individual's key autobiographical event in narrative form. I would argue, however, that this would not be ideal. Even though two (or more) individuals may be experiencing the same event, their perception of said event and importance drawn from it would likely vary. The importance elicited from an experience is one of the key factors in forming narrative identity (McAdams, 1995). Therefore, I suggest a narrative must be shared in order for an accurate judgement to be made.

Person Perception and Narratives

Very little research has applied a person perception approach to informants' interpretations of individuals' life stories (but see, Thomsen & Pillemer, 2016). I argue that aspects of person perception, specifically having life narratives accurately interpreted, carries important implications for well-being. For example, researchers found that parents who had intellectually disabled children, were better able to cope with challenges when the parents perceived that they were understood by others (Fox, Vaughn, Wyatte, & Dunlap, 2002).

To assess person perception within narrative identity, the use of vicarious stories is required. Vicarious life stories are defined as "mental representations" of *other* individuals' stories and storied aspects (e.g., themes, events, and plot) (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2016). In the current study (Study 3), I was interested in examining how friends and family members perceived and recall the narrators' *key autobiographical events*. This is an appropriate way to expand knowledge within the area of narrative identity in a contextualized manner as "vicarious life stories are important to both personality and

social cognition, in that they shape and expand the construction of the self and facilitate interpersonal interactions" (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2016, p. 3).

It should be mentioned that in order to assess aspects of narrative identity, it is not necessary to collect individuals' complete life narratives. There are many different components of these identities (Thomsen, 2009). For example, Blagov and Singer (2004) found that memories could be reliably rated for their specificity, personal meaning, affect and event type (i.e., content). Thomsen, Olesen, Schnieber, Jensen, and Tonnesvang (2012) found that event type was important for narrative construction. They identified various "event characteristics" which increased the likelihood of a particular event being included in an individual's life narrative. Event characteristics included the emotional intensity and importance of the event, amount of rehearsal, and relevance to current goals. These findings relate to Thomsen, Olesen, Schnieber, and Tonnesvang (2014) comment that "Most life story and autobiographical memory research focuses on specific memories, i.e., events located to a single day in the individual's life" (p. 261). Self-defining events of individuals' life stories are relevant to the understanding of narrative identity.

Singer and Bluck (2001) suggested events are key components to life narratives. They outlined two aspects for the formation of narratives: 1) narrative processing and 2) autobiographical reasoning. Autobiographical reasoning, (i.e., interpreting memories), tends to gain more attention than narrative processing (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). However, narrative processing is also crucial to narrative formation. Narrative processing is defined as selecting events relevant to an individual's' life,

placing these events in a particular order, and identifying causal links between them. These events are, essentially, the foundation of narrative processing (Singer & Bluck, 2001). For Study 3 I aimed to assess congruency of personal and vicarious key autobiographical events.

Speaking to this aim, in the current study, the term Narrative Interpersonal Congruency (NIC) was created to reference the similarities between the key autobiographical events identified by targets and informants. I am interested in the consistency of informants' perceptions of target participants' key autobiographical events. I felt that taking a bottom-up approach, which focuses on the most basic aspect of narratives, their specific content, would provide an initial framework with which to lay the foundation for subsequent investigations of NIC.

Although personality traits, as well as other individual characteristics, have been long investigated via both self- and other-report, understanding the NIC between individuals' scenes has only recently drawn the attention of researchers (Pillemer, Steiner, Kuwabara, Thomsen, & Svob, 2015; Thomsen & Pillemer, 2016). In the interest of providing a complete picture of narrative identity, it is necessary to determine whether the perceptual accuracy or *congruency* we see within other substantive areas, such as trait research (Connelly & Ones, 2010) expands to autobiographical narratives. Within the domain of narrative psychology, congruent perceptions (i.e., high NIC) could relate to significant outcome variables such as well-being or interpersonal closeness (Pillemer et al., 2015). After all, one of the reasons we tell stories is to be understood by others (Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007).

Attempting to understand other individuals is inherent in our nature as humans (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). We do not only desire to understand others, we also hope to be understood. Being understood by others is an important aspect of human behavior which has been found to be related to various outcomes. For example, reports of connectedness, have been found to be associated to well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe & Ryan, 2000). Weber, Johnson, and Corrigan (2004) found that feeling understood is related to sensing emotional support, having higher trust within a relationship, and positivity. Additionally, Lun, Kesebir, and Oishi (2008) observed that, on days individuals reported feeling understood, they also reported higher levels of life satisfaction and lower rates of negative physical symptoms (e.g., headaches). These studies lend support to the idea that increases in individuals' feelings of being understood are beneficial. Thus, it stands to reason that those with the highest levels of NIC will be the most well-adjusted.

Investigating vicarious key autobiographical events is an essential next step for life story research as it will allow for greater understanding of the social construction of narrative identity. Storytelling is an integral part of the human experience (Bruner, 1990). To focus only on personal stories (or events), while ignoring vicarious ones, is to dismiss the importance that the *interpretation* made by others of an individual's story could have on the creation of the life story itself. This point is highlighted when considering person perception, "[…] targets do assume different identities within different situation and at different times, in social relations a belief can be true for one perceiver but not for another" (Swann, 1984, p. 461). By directing attention toward both personal and

vicarious events we will have a more thorough picture of the social construction of life story narratives.

I sought to understand how congruency between personal and vicarious autobiographical key events relate to personal well-being and relationship closeness. I was interested in the events recognized as salient moments in the targets' lives rather than narrative descriptions of these events. This approach was adopted in Study 3 due to the novel nature of vicarious life stories, and specifically that of NIC.

Narratives and Informant Reports

Turning attention away from traits and towards narratives, questions which have yet to be answered are as follows: how congruent are informants' perceptions of targets' narrative identities? Does congruency correspond to any relevant personal or social outcomes? Vazire (2006) noted that self-reports allow for individuals to express their identity whereas informant reports allow for assessments of reputation. Within trait research, many of the items used to assess personality are based on behaviors (John & Srivastava, 1999). Narratives, on the other hand, have less to do with specific behaviors (e.g., tends to arrive to work on time) and more to do with the perceptions and, ultimately, importance of individuals' previous events and experiences (McAdams, 1995). To be clear, many narratives depict aspects of people's behaviors. However, the focus of individuals' stories tends to be placed on *how* the story was expressed, rather *what* behavior was exhibited.

The way in which we perceive the world, although more abstract than concrete behaviors, may be apparent to the individuals with whom we interact with regularly.

Highly significant moments in our lives are likely to be shared with others (Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004). Even moments we do not share with others still encompass thematic and plot similarities to those we do share, with the exception of severe trauma (Pasupathi, McLean, & Weeks, 2009). Therefore, it is reasonable to use informant reports as supplemental material to individuals' personal narratives. Specifically, the congruency between informants and targets, either in terms of content or themes, may be an important predictor of individuals' outcomes.

A recent series of studies assessed the similarities between personal and vicarious life stories (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2016). Researchers asked participants to share up to 20 memories spanning beyond a single day (i.e., "chapters") and up to 5 event memories which occurred on a single day. Using a between-subjects design wherein participants provided personal or vicarious memories, the researchers found that personal life stories included a greater number of memories than vicarious life stories. Additionally, personal stories tended to be more positive and more important for self-awareness than vicarious stories. Subsequently using a within-subjects design where participants provided both personal and vicarious memories, Thomsen and Pillemer (2016) found a positive relationship between the number of personal and vicarious memories shared. A positive correlation between perceptions of importance for self-awareness between both story types was also noted. Their research suggests that individuals may use the same narrative construction mechanisms when constructing personal stories as vicarious ones. This research, however, did not asses the congruency between personal and vicarious stories.

The Present Study (Study 3)

The primary questions I aimed to answer include: How congruent are vicarious autobiographical key events (shared by informants) with the personal autobiographical key events shared by targets. How does the NIC (congruency) relate to certain target-relevant outcome variables (e.g., relationship closeness, life satisfaction)? And finally, how does NIC relate to the target participants' personality traits? I present two primary assumptions; due to the novelty of the present research, I refrained from providing hypotheses.

Assumption 1: Greater ratings of relationship closeness will correspond with increased congruency between informant and target participants. Self-disclosure, the sharing of personally relevant information with another person, is associated with a heightened sense of closeness and intimacy between individuals (Laurenceau et al., 2004). Morry (2005), for example, found that individuals' self-disclosure and perceptions of disclosure were significantly associated with ratings of closeness. In addition, by experiencing feelings of closeness, individuals will likely be more comfortable sharing personal information to those around them. I argue, however, that congruency and closeness will only be moderately related. Closeness and congruency are distinct constructs. Knowing much about an individual (congruency) does not inherently suggest a high degree of intimacy (closeness). Given this information, a second assumption regarding congruency and well-being is necessary.

Assumption 2: Greater congruency between targets and informants will be related to increased well-being among targets. When individuals' identity is accurately perceived

by those whom he/she associates with could be an important factor in levels well-being. For example, among patients receiving mental health treatment, feeling misunderstood is related to heightened sense of vulnerability and frustration (Gaillard, Shattell, & Thomas, 2009). As noted earlier, there are several studies linking feelings of being understood with that of higher well-being (Reis et al., 2000; Weber et al., 2004; & Lun et al., 2008).

Method

Participants

One hundred and forty-six students were recruited to be *target* participants in exchange for course credit. In order for students to receive full credit for participating, they were required to recruit at least three additional persons to serve as *informant* participants. Students recruited between one and four participants (M = 3.06 informants). With respect to inclusion criteria, informant participants were required to be 18 years of age or older, fluent in English, have known the target participant for at least one year, have spoken to the target participant within the past three months, and could not be enrolled in the same course as the target participants from which they were receiving additional credit. Informant participants could, however, be friends or family members enrolled or employed at the same university as the targets. Research assistants called all participants recruited (i.e., informants) for this study in order to ensure valid responses.

Targets had a mean age of 21.90 (SD = 3.76) with a range between 18 and 52. Seventy percent of the targets were female. The targets were also ethnically diverse consisting of 40% Asian American, 34% Hispanic/Latino, 13% White, 3% African American, with the remaining identifying as "Other". Informants had a mean age of

25.66 (*SD* = 10.35) with a range between 18 and 67. Sixty percent of informants identified as female. Additionally, informants were ethnically diverse consisting of 34% Asian American, 33% Hispanic/Latino, 18% White, 5% African American and the remaining percentage identifying as "Other".

Procedure

Once informants were recruited, target and informants received their respective surveys by e-mail. All participants were informed they were completing a survey about personality and well-being. Targets were prompted to list the events that represented the high points, low points, and turning points from their own lives (i.e., three events were requested from each target participant). Informants were requested to provide the same autobiographical events (i.e., high point, low point, turning point) but for the lives of the target participants. These responses were limited to a maximum of 30 words. This was done to ensure participants could not describe experiences in detail as well as to control for word count.

Autobiographical narratives may be examined in numerous ways; most commonly through conceptual and thematic categories (see Studies 1 and 2). Narratives may also be examined in terms of their manifest content. It was unclear how much detail about targets' key scenes informants would provide. By asking for short content-only scenes, we avoided potential complications that may arise from requesting full narratives with the intention to use conceptual coding for this initial assessment of interpersonal congruency. For this reason, in the current study, we focused on the manifest content of participants' key autobiographical events. Following the completion of autobiographical

scenes, all participants were requested to complete several additional measures listed below.

Non-Narrative Measures Completed by All Participants

The measures listed here were completed by all participants; however, target participants completed them in regards to themselves whereas informant participants completed the measures referencing the target participants.

Personality Traits. Personality traits were assessed using the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999). This is a 44-item 5-point Likert type scale ranging from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly*, used to assess five different personality characteristics including agreeableness (e.g., "Is helpful and unselfish with others"), conscientiousness (e.g., "Does a thorough job"), extraversion (e.g., "Is talkative"), neuroticism (e.g., "Is depressed, blue"), and openness (e.g., "Is curious about many different things"). The Cronbach alphas for each personality characteristic as reported by the targets ranged between $\alpha = .73$ and .88. The reliability alphas for each personality characteristic as reported by informants ranged between $\alpha = .75$ and .86.

Relationship Closeness. The Unidimensional Relationship Closeness Scale (URC; Dibble et al., 2012) was used to measure relationship closeness between target and informant participants. This measured was selected because the creators had an inclusive definition of closeness involving many aspects which would be well suited for both romantic and platonic relationships. Dibble and colleagues (2012) defined relationship closeness as "the degree of affective, cognitive, and behavioral mutual dependence between two people, including the frequency of their impact on one another and the

strength of impact per occurrence" (p. 565). In this 12-item Likert-type measure participants are asked rate their closeness to one person on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). An example item include "My relationship with _____ is close." The average reliability for target participants' across their informants was α = .93. The average reliability for informants' was α = .93.

Non-Narrative Measures Completed only by Target Participants

The following two measures were completed only by the target participants. We opted to keep these measures absent from the informants' survey in the consideration of the informant participants' time and potential exhaustion. Additionally, these measures are most useful when considering the target participants' own self-perceptions.

Depression. The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) was utilized to measure depression. In this 20-item measure, participants indicate the frequency of negative feelings or thoughts (e.g., " I thought my life had been a failure") on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*Rarely or none of the time*) to 4 (*Most or all of the time*; α = .83).

Subjective Well-being. The Satisfaction with Life scale (Diener et al., 1985) was used to measure target participants' subjective well-being. This 5-item scale prompts participants to indicate their agreement on a scale regarding their life satisfaction (e.g., In most ways my life is close to ideal) from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*; α = .91)

Quantification of Autobiographical Scenes

Participants' responses were downloaded from the survey site from which they were collected. This led to a total of over 1,800 scenes provided by all targets and informants. All identifying information reported within the autobiographical scenes was first removed. Then, target and informant scenes were matched. Target participants' reports of past experiences were arranged in a spreadsheet file with the corresponding informant reports of the target participants' past experiences. Each scene described by an informant was read and compared to the scene provided by the target. Informant reports of autobiographical scenes were coded for accuracy in a dichotomous fashion. A "1" was assigned when an informant and target participants' scene aligned and a "0" was allocated if the scenes did not match. An example code of "1" included when a target participant reported "A turning point is when I decided to become a Christian". One of the informants reported "When she/he went with a friend to a Bible Study and found Christ". Each individual scene type (i.e., high point, low point, turning point) was assessed for congruency between the target participants and each of their informants. This provided us with 1,682 codes. Once all scenes were coded, informants' congruency scores were averaged across scene type for each individual informant. These means were then averaged across all informants for each target participants.

Results

Exploratory analyses were examined based on the associations between target participants' self-reports of their personality (trait and narrative identity) and informant reports of target participants' personality (trait and narrative identity). Furthermore, the

accuracy of informants' reports regarding target participants' autobiographical scenes was examined in relation to target participants' self-reports of trait personality, relationship closeness, and well-being.

Narrative Congruency of Informant Reports of Target Scenes

On average, informant participants accurately reported target participants' autobiographical scenes 24% of the time. This did vary slightly between the types of autobiographical events elicited; informants were congruent with targets' high points, low points, and turning points, 26%, 29%, and 19% of the time, respectively. A twenty-four percent accuracy rate may appear relatively low. It is important to consider, however, that target participants were able to report only three autobiographical scenes out of all the significant memories from their lives. For this reason, a 24% accuracy rate is relatively high. Additionally, we would not expect the degree of accuracy to be error-free as individuals' perceptions, and ultimately life stories, will fluctuate over time (McAdams & Olsen, 2010).

Interpersonal Congruency and Outcome Variables

Congruency was related to target participants' self-reports of life satisfaction, trending in significance. Congruency between targets' scenes and informants' reports were not related to any other well-being measures (see Table 2).

Supplemental Analyses: Interpersonal Congruency and Personality

Consistent with previous research (Connelly & Ones, 2010), all trait personality characteristics reported by target participants and informant participants of target participants' personality were significantly related (see Table 3). These results indicate

that personality, at the trait level, is reliably perceived by informants. This suggests that our data is consistent with past findings; therefore, we proceeded to examine the relationship between personality traits, as rated by the self and informant, to interpersonal congruency between the targets and informants. Congruency between targets and informants was significantly related the target participants' self-reports of openness (see Table 3).

Discussion

The purpose of Study 3 was to investigate the interpersonal congruency between informant and target participants. I assessed the accuracy of informants in reporting three of the target participants' autobiographical scenes. It was assumed that interpersonal congruency would be related to targets' and informants' relationship closeness. Additionally, it was assumed that congruency would be positively related to target participants' ratings of well-being. Findings from this study, however, did not support either assumption. The only significant relation noted in our sample was between interpersonal continuity and targets' self-reported openness.

This finding may suggest that individuals who are higher in openness to experience are more likely to share their autobiographical narratives with those around them, leading to greater accuracy rates. In line with this assumption, Thorne, Korobov, and Morgan (2007) found a relationship between extraversion and disclosure. Participants with higher rates of extraversion initiated their telling of personal narratives more frequently than introverted participants. Extraverted participants also tended to tell longer stories and stories that could be considered more sensitive in nature (i.e., romantic

relationships) than did introverted participants. This study does not directly assess openness, however, openness to experience has been assessed in relation to narratives only a few times. For example, McAdams and colleagues (2004) found openness to be positively related to narrative complexity. Adler, Wagner, and McAdams (2007) found a positive relationship between openness and narrative coherence. Coherence is defined in many different ways leading researchers to assess this concept differently across studies (Adler et al., 2007). Generally coherence is identified on a continuum based on the consistency of a narrative (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). Coherence may help explain the association between openness and NIC in study 3. Individuals who tell stories in a coherent manner are well received by listeners (McAdams, 2006b). These stories may be more likely remembered.

There are several explanations to account for the lack of support for assumptions 1 and 2. Such explanations include (1) the brief narrative information requested from participants and (2) the inconsistent types of relationships between targets and informants. Both assumptions being unsupported may be due, in part, to the emphasis placed on the content of targets' autobiographical narratives instead of focusing on the thematic aspects of the corresponding narratives. I requested one sentence responses from targets and informants regarding the high points, low points, and turning points from target participants lives. These responses were limited to 30 words. Many narratives reported in my previous studies included lengths between 4 – 10 sentences which is approximately 60 to 150 words. This grants participants opportunity to provide greater details about their experience. The specific event reported by the targets', may be less

important for informants to know relative to *how* targets construe those experiences. By using conceptual coding to investigate the thematic aspects of the targets' narratives, I will be able to understand how informants perceive the construction of said narratives. Thematic assessment is the primary way in which narrative identity has been investigated in relation to well-being (Adler et al., 2016). As mentioned previously, it was necessary to begin with a more simplistic assessment of NIC byway of starting with content assessment.

The unsupported assumptions, specifically assumption 1, may also be caused by the inconsistent relationship types exhibited between targets and informants. I requested target participants to recruit informants from any type of relationship (e.g., sibling, parent, and friend). This was done as a precautionary measure in order for target participants to be able to recruit informants from their personal pool of contacts who best met the screening measures. However, this also lead individuals to have inconsistent types of relationships. Utilizing ratings of closeness may not be specific enough to showcase a correlation between relationship closeness and NIC. Therefore, the type of relationship is another factor that may need to be used in combination with level of closeness in order to detect an effect. For example, having a high relationship closeness rating with an opposite gendered sibling may have very different implications for narrative sharing, and ultimately NIC, than having a close relationship to a same gendered close friend.

Implications

Study 3 served as an initial step into the realm of informant assessment within narrative identity. This study offers the research community a foundation to begin further investigations into vicarious key life events as well as vicarious life narratives. Although assumptions were unsupported, the methodology utilized is an aspect for future researchers to apply to their own research questions. First, through use of the "snowball" method, I was able to recruit almost 150 dyads or groups of individuals to serve as targets and informants at no-cost.

Second, beyond methodology, another implication this study offers is to highlight the potential lack of importance content of key autobiographical events has on well-being and relationship closeness. Although themes were not assessed in this study due to the very brief statements elicited by participant, it appears that the psychological variables of well-being and closeness do not rely on whether an informant remembered what event a target considered his or her high point, low point, or turning point. Collecting full narrative accounts from participants would appear to be most appropriate. Brief statements regarding what event occurred, rather than how the event was interpreted, does not seem to provide adequate information. Future researchers can use the average NIC rate obtained here (i.e., 24%) as a starting point for comparison in assessing complete narratives. Researchers, however, must be mindful of projection when assessing NIC between targets and informants. It is possible, that informants may project their own thematic aspects onto targets' narratives (Thomsen & Pillemer, 2016). Therefore, it is important for researchers to gather self and vicarious narratives from informants.

Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation to this study was the lack of dictating the type of relationship a target participant could recruit for the study. Although relationship type was reported, the vast numbers of different relationships described by participants would make any statistical analyses on this factor prone to high rates of error given the sample size. Future researchers should restrict the relationship categories to those of most prevalent to the study. I would recommend target participants recruiting a parental figure, close friend, and romantic partner (if applicable) in order to assess caregiving relationships (e.g., child-parent), platonic, and romantic relationships.

Another limitation was not specifically requesting target participants to report how understood they felt by their informants. I have suggested that one of the essential mechanisms important for individuals' well-being is having their identities perceived accurately; I tried to examine this by way of interpersonal congruency between targets' and informants' reports of targets' autobiographical scenes. It would have been fruitful, however, to explicitly ask targets if they felt understood. By doing so, I could have determined the relationship between interpersonal congruency and feeling understood by informants. Future studies investigating interpersonal congruency should attempt to understand the mechanisms by which interpersonal congruency functions and whether it relates to other outcome variables for target participants beyond personality and well-being.

Another direction for future researchers could explore the connection between ego development, coherence and NIC. Adler, Wagner, and McAdams (2007) found that those

who scored higher in openness to experience also scored higher on narrative coherence when sharing stories about therapy. This relationship, however, did not remain when ego development was included. Participants with higher rates of ego development told more coherent stories. It is a reasonable assumption that a relationship between ego development and NIC could emerge with coherence as a mediating variable. Congruency relies on informants to remember targets' narratives; a story that holds greater consistency is likely to be better remembered, as mentioned previously.

A last future direction and limitation of Study 3 was the absence of information regarding how frequently the targets and informants had contact with each other. Although it was required that, for participation, individuals must have known each other for a minimum of one year and have talked within the past three months, this does not provide information about how often targets and informants communicated. Life stories change over time with the addition and subtraction of important life events (McAdams, 1995). Targets and informants who are in greater contact with each other will be more likely to know about important events occurring. Therefore, a positive relationship between frequency of contact and NIC would likely emerge. This contact would not necessary need to include face-to-face sharing of life narratives. Accurate reports of personality have been derived by having individuals review personal websites (Vazire & Gosling, 2004) and Facebook profiles of target individuals (Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007). With technology, such as social media, allowing individuals to remain connected in ways other than direct communication such as talking, texting, e-mailing, etc., could even allow for informants to be more accurate in describing targets' stories.

Contextualized Narrative Identity: Moving Forward

In sum, the results from three studies indicated that the manifestation of narrative identity differs in meaningful ways across contexts. In Study 1, I found that narratives differed across assessment contexts. For instance, there tended to be greater linguistic and thematic content observed when individuals reported their narratives via writing as opposed to producing their narratives orally. In Study 2 I found that certain aspects of participants' narrative identities varied on the basis of domain-specificity. Finally, in Study 3 I found targets' key autobiographical events were recognized by social contacts with about 24% accuracy. It was also found that NIC, based on narrative *content*, bears little relation to individuals' relationship closeness and well-being. It did, however, relate to self-reported levels of openness to experience.

This work, overall, carries implications for theorizing pertaining to narrative identity. These studies emphasized the importance of considering contexts. The assessment context, narrative domain, and social context all play important roles in the development and expression of individuals' life stories. For this reason, it is necessary that narrative research begin to consider the weight contextual differences have on the understanding of narrative identity. Lives are lived contextually (Dunlop, 2015a,b). The field should place greater emphasis upon understanding of the contextualized nature of narrative identity.

Importance of Present Studies and Findings

Consideration and investigation of narrative identity is a relatively new area of research. McAdams' (1995) paper was one of the key theoretical articles to describe

narratives as a form of personality, as well as the manner by which narrative identity may exist in relation to other aspects of individual differences. Following this paper, a majority of research emphasizing narrative identity has focused on the relationship between thematic content and mental health (Adler et al., 2016). For example, narrative themes of agency (Adler, 2012), meaning-making (McLean & Pratt, 2006), redemption (Adler & Poulin, 2009; McAdams et al., 2001) and contamination (McAdams et al., 2001) have all been found to be related to well-being, an important aspect in mental health. These articles, in combination, have allowed for a more extensive understanding of the use and implications of narrative identity, especially when considering mental health. I would argue, however, that much of the work within in this field has had a narrow scope, at least in regard to contextual pursuits. This is reasonable as narrative identity is classified as a level of personality. As mentioned earlier, personality psychology has, historically, been subjected to scrutiny when considering the variations, statistically, across contexts (Funder & Ozer, 1983). These and related critiques almost led to the demise of the field itself. As I also mentioned, however, personality psychology has (thankfully) come a long a way since the infamous Mischel (1968) paper. It is now time to devote greater attention toward how personality, at the narrative level, might vary due to context.

Although more attention is warranted, some narrative researchers have, directly or indirectly, considered context. Two notable examples include Maruna, Wilson, and Curran (2006) and Hammack (2008) studies. Maruna and colleagues (2006) investigated conversion narratives of prison inmates. Conversion narratives are akin to stories

including themes of redemption, except the process by which a negative event is redeemed is specifically by finding religion. Maruna (et al., 2006) suggested that prison inmates have special circumstances regarding their narrative development because they are stripped of their identity by losing their existing social ties, belongings, and freedom. Most inmates, who have a conversion narrative, describe a disconnection between who they believed themselves to be and the crimes they have committed. By finding religion and creating a redemptive narrative, it is argued that this process grants inmates an opportunity to reconcile the disconnect between their former and current identity (Maruna et al., 2006).

This noteworthy research conducted by Maruna and his colleagues (2006) grants attention toward a highly specific context, the social status of being a prisoner. They provided specific details regarding the mechanisms at play for a particular group of people (i.e., prisoners). This is an important consideration to highlight as narrative identity is exceedingly specific to each individual or group of individuals. As we develop methods to compare individuals' narratives, either by way of thematic or linguistic content, it is crucial to incorporate certain socials roles which may be key to narrative identity development.

Exhibiting an appreciation for context, albeit in a different manner, Hammack (2008) sought to emphasize the importance of culture when investigating individuals' narrative identity. He provided a tripartite model which incorporates personality, social, and cultural psychology to define and assess this form of identity. Ultimately, he recommended that narratives are a representation of one's culture but the way in which

we research it is not conducive to generalizations that are applicable to all cultures or cultural dichotomies (i.e., individualist vs. collectivist). Rather, our current investigations have been better suited to understand the stories and the individual people which are represented instead of their connections to culture.

Although Hammack (2008) is making recommendations for the consideration of culture, there is still an argument to be made regarding the current external validity of present narrative findings. If we should refrain from making broad generalizations regarding narratives and their representations of cultures outside of the American context, then it stands to reason that generalizing findings from one context to another should be made with caution until more research concerning contextual variations has been completed. An example of an instance in which this would be important is included in McCoy and Dunlop's (2016b) paper. These researchers showed that redemption and contamination, two narrative themes which tend to have positive and negative relationships to well-being, respectively, have opposite associations to well-being when considering a vulnerable population. Most research prior to this study, with the exception of Breen and McLean's (2017) work, would not have theorized this relationship.

Implications of Present Research

Each of the three studies presented here offers information for researchers to incorporate into their own investigations into narrative identity. At a specific, study by study level, each offers important considerations. Study 1 showcased the highly malleable nature of individuals' narratives based upon the assessment context. I withheld offering many suggestions based on Study 1 as I did not want researchers to take the

findings as guidelines for how they should assess narratives. Rather, Study 1 was meant to offer additionally information for how narrative research can be assessed and the potential implications. However, for researchers who wish to elicit narrative themes which tend to have low occurrences (e.g., redemption, contamination), prompting participants via a computer generated survey seems to draw forth greater amount of such themes.

Study 2 demonstrated variations within narrative themes among narrative domain and social group belonging. It is my suggestion for narrative researchers to consider identifying whether the prompts they are using are, in fact, provoking narratives from within specific domains. Typically, when the LSI (and its modifications) are used, researchers tend to aggregate across all stories when calculating the mean level of thematic content. This is standard procedure because it allows for the most reliable assessment of an individuals' general narrative identity (Frost, 2013). Identity is made of up multiple facets, however, such as various social roles (Stets & Burke, 2000). Keeping this mind, it is important to ensure investigators considering narrative identity are also giving due attention to these intricacies of identity. Although aggregation allows for a more accurate measure of narrative identity, as a whole, we may be glossing over meaningful variability between stories regarding different domains. This may be done by assessing narratives for various domains which may have been inadvertently collected.

Study 3 highlighted that informants are moderately able to identify close others' key autobiographical events. It also offers a glimpse into how congruency may relate to well-being and personality variables. Although Study 3 was a relatively new form of

narrative investigation, researchers can use the information gained to their advantage. First, the "snowball" methodology implemented was highly successful at gathering information from numerous participant dyads. Second, researchers should consider gathering informant reports or vicarious stories, alongside personal stories. It is necessary to know whether vicarious stories are a fruitful avenue for continued research. We still need to determine whether using informants for assessing narrative identity will yield high reliabilities when assessing narrative themes. If so, then there are greater possibilities for gathering narrative identity from alternative sources from the individual of interest. This would be beneficial for researchers interested in the narrative identity of individuals who are deceased or unreachable.

Future Research

There are numerous avenues for future research regarding narratives and context. Considering a majority of personality research within narratives has emphasized the connection between thematic content and health, prospective research should attempt to replicate these findings. One form of variation to consider is social group belonging. Thus far, researchers have primarily focused on demographic differences such as gender (McLean & Breen, 2009) and age (McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). For example, Mclean and Breen (2009) found that boys who constructed meaning within their narratives during mid-adolescence was negatively associated with well-being. However, this relationship was not noted in girls. Although demographic differences are important information. Social statuses are key components involved with identity conceptualization (Stets & Burke, 2000). Narrative research should continue investigating more nuanced

group belongings. For example, investigating individuals who consider themselves to be part of various occupations might significantly impact one's identity (e.g., military members, professional fighters, police officers) would be an important future step when considering narrative-health relationships.

Another major avenue for future research regarding context includes culture, as suggested by Hammack (2008). Traditional cultural investigations could begin by comparing individualistic-collectivistic differences and similarities of narratives. Within this realm, I would recommend investigating the inter-individual malleability of narrative identity across such cultures. Individualistic cultures tend to have an independent self-construal which, theoretically, should lend individuals' narratives from individualistic cultures to be more static across social roles (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The same trend should not be scene within collectivistic cultures which tend to encompass an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In collectivistic cultures it is likely that individuals' narratives would vary in terms of their thematic and conceptual content across social roles. Providing support for this notion, English and Chen (2007) assessed self-descriptors similar to personality traits. They found that European Americans reported consistent descriptors of themselves across situations (e.g., gym, party) and relationships (e.g., friend, parent). For Asian Americans they reported different self-descriptors of themselves across relationships. However, although they reported various self-descriptors between relationships, the descriptors they provided remained for those relationships remained consistent overtime.

Investigating cultural differences among individualistic and collectivistic cultures would be worthwhile. Due to the novel nature of narratives within cultural contexts, however, I would recommend taking a less focused approach to start. There is little to no understanding on how narrative identity may exist in different cultures. Additionally, narrative prompts used within American culture may require modification, not only to accommodate language, but to accommodate cultural traditions. For example, when inquiring about important key events within Hispanic culture, consideration for Quinceaneras may be appropriate.

In sum, assessing narrative identity in a contextualized way allows researchers an avenue to investigate personality and social psychological concepts. Narrative identity, compared to other constructs, is entering its adolescence within the field. It is still quite young and a majority of research has focused on relationships among health factors and narrative themes. Contextualized narrative identity, in comparison, is in its infancy. Although more research exists now, than previously, it is still an area of much needed growth.

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Table 1

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Interviewer Presence and Response Format (Study 1)

	Interviewer Present		Interviewer Absent		Inferential Statistics					
	Written	Spoken	Written	Spoken	Interviewer		Response		Interaction	
Narrative Indice	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*F* (1, 398)	Partial η^2	*F* (1, 398)	Partial η^2	*F* (1, 398)	Partial η^2
				LIWC Categories						
1. Articles	5.65 (1.24)	4.30 (1.23)	5.63 (1.30)	4.59 (1.30)	1.24	0.00	97.61**	0.20	1.58	0.00
2. Causation	2.02 (0.94)	2.07 (0.84)	2.08 (0.78)	2.17 (0.85)	0.79	0.00	0.68	0.00	0.03	0.00
3. Discrepancies	1.68 (0.91)	1.40 (0.65)	1.63 (0.71)	1.41 (0.68)	0.08	0.00	11.29**	0.03	0.25	0.00
4. Exclusive	2.04 (0.94)	3.83 (1.50)	2.08 (0.88)	3.45 (1.17)	2.19	0.00	189.47**	0.32	3.43^{+}	0.01
5. First person pronoun	11.83 (1.88)	10.35 (2.16)	11.68 (1.89)	11.29 (2.29)	3.64^{+}	0.01	20.47**	0.05	6.97**	0.02
6. Inclusive	5.43 (1.46)	6.42 (1.65)	5.58 (1.25)	6.15 (1.42)	0.20	0.00	28.72**	0.07	2.10	0.00
7. Insight	3.11 (0.91)	2.73 (1.01)	2.91 (0.87)	2.92 (1.09)	0.00	0.00	3.50^{+}	0.01	3.88*	0.01
8. Negations	1.47 (0.72)	1.63 (0.76)	1.57 (0.66)	1.63 (0.63)	0.60	0.00	2.53^{+}	0.01	0.64	0.00
9. Negative emotions	2.07 (0.86)	1.57 (0.84)	2.22 (0.92)	1.77 (0.74)	4.46*	0.01	31.73**	0.07	0.62	0.00
10. Past tense	9.10 (2.05)	7.73 (1.80)	8.68 (1.57)	8.09 (2.12)	0.02	0.00	26.26**	0.06	4.15*	0.01
11. Positive emotions	3.33 (1.16)	2.74 (1.10)	3.49 (1.09)	3.25 (1.08)	8.90**	0.02	13.81**	0.03	2.54	0.01

12. Present tense	4.22 (1.84)	6.47 (2.26)	4.43 (1.61)	6.16 (2.02)	0.07	0.00	104.33**	0.21	1.75	0.00
13. Social	8.07 (2.56)	7.48 (2.45)	8.20 (2.61)	7.26 (2.43)	0.03	0.00	9.28**	0.02	0.46	0.00
14. Tentative	1.49 (0.73)	2.87 (1.25)	1.66 (0.69)	2.43 (1.11)	2.03	0.00	120.00**	0.23	9.55**	0.02
15. Words with 6+ letters	14.97 (2.45)	11.69 (2.15)	15.01 (2.40)	13.92 (2.46)	7.95**	0.02	139.08**	0.26	7.04*	0.02
Conceptual Themes										
1. Agency	0.52 (0.28)	0.49 (0.28)	0.49 (0.27)	0.55 (0.26)	0.33	0.00	0.23	0.00	3.74^{+}	0.01
2. Communion	0.32 (0.27)	0.26 (0.27)	0.29 (0.27)	0.28 (0.27)	0.00	0.00	1.80	0.00	0.87	0.00
3. Contamination	0.15 (0.18)	0.09 (0.15)	0.15 (0.19)	0.08 (0.16)	0.05	0.00	12.94**	0.03	0.12	0.00
4. Redemption	0.38 (0.26)	0.29 (0.27)	0.36 (0.29)	0.33 (0.23)	0.14	0.00	4.15*	0.01	1.13	0.00
5. Tone	3.14 (0.42)	3.06 (0.38)	3.19 (0.37)	3.18 (0.34)	5.07*	0.01	1.52	0.01	0.87	0.00
6. Complexity	1.78 (0.69)	1.67 (0.63)	1.86 (0.59)	1.94 (0.74)	6.87**	0.02	0.11	0.00	2.07	0.00

Note. $^{+} = p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 2
Correlations of Trait Personality of Target and Informant Participants (Study 3)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Target Extraversion	3.21	0.85	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Target Agreeableness	3.84	0.58	-.02	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Target Conscientiousness	3.61	0.57	.07	-.29*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Target Neuroticism	3.01	0.83	-.13	-.29**	-.25***	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Target Openness	3.62	0.62	.28**	.13	.15*	-.13	-	-	-	-	-
6. Informant Extraversion	3.53	0.69	**.64****	-.06	-.08	-.20*	.16*	-	-	-	-
7. Informant Agreeableness	4.04	0.52	-.14^{+}	**.42****	.07	-.15	.06	-.01	-	-	-
8. Informant Conscientiousness	3.88	0.51	-.06	.14^{+}	**.48****	-.05	.08	-.12	.36**	-	-
9. Informant Neuroticism	2.72	0.60	-.05	-.16*	-.03	**.58****	-.04	-.24**	-.47**	-.20*	-
10. Informant Openness	3.65	0.40	.11	.15	.06	-.10	**.50****	.21**	.16*	.22**	-.14^{+}

Note. Target = target's self-reported traits. Informant = informant's reported traits of the target participant.
Boldface values are those of primary importance. $^{+}$= $p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$

Table 3
Interpersonal Congruency and Target Outcomes (Study 3)

	M	*SD*	r
1. Target Extraversion	3.01	0.86	.07
2. Target Agreeableness	3.84	0.58	.13
3. Target Conscientiousness	3.61	0.57	.05
4. Target Neuroticism	3.01	0.83	-.10
5. Target Openness	3.62	0.63	.19*
6. Target Closeness	5.39	1.05	.08
7. Target Depression	1.98	0.50	-.09
8. Target Life Satisfaction	4.76	1.47	.14^{+}
9. Informant Closeness	5.57	0.95	.04

Note. $^{+} = p < .10$, * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$