

Remembering Your (im)Moral Past: Narrative Construction and the Moral Self

by

Maureen Mosleh

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Abstract

A broad array of research suggests that late adolescence and young adulthood brings about the emergence of the necessary skills and motives for narrative integration of self-defining memories. The current research identified two aspects of the moral self, moral centrality and internal motivation, and explored the interplay of moral identity and autobiographical reasoning associated with narrative construction across three different age groups. Forty-two adolescents ($M = 16.49$, $SD = 1.21$), 40 young adults ($M = 19.78$, $SD = .81$) and 49 adults over 35 years ($M = 47.95$, $SD = 9.7$) were asked to recall situations in which they did something right/wrong and felt good/bad. Recollections were coded for self-relevance and narrative integration and were compared with levels of moral centrality and internal moral motivation. Internal moral motivation and age predicted both self-relevance of memories across all events and narrative integration. Inconsistent with previous findings, midlife adults showed more self – event connections than both adolescents and young adults, although these connections did not lead to increases in narrative integration. These findings suggest that the construction of the moral narrative identity is not unique to late adolescence and/or young adulthood, but is an ongoing developmental phenomenon that is constantly revisited through narrative reconstruction.

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In efforts to bridge the gap between moral judgment and action many researchers have turned to the development of the moral self as the mediator between thoughts of what one ought to do, what one wants to do and what one does. In his self-model of moral functioning, Blasi (1983) suggests that the moral self behaves according to specific moral values and the level to which they have been integrated into one's self concept. Decisions to act are based on a strong desire for self-consistency. As the moral self matures and moral values become more central and essential to the self, behaviours inconsistent with these values are experienced as "betrayals of the self" (Bergman, 2002). This need for self-consistency motivates moral behaviour and varies across individuals depending on the level of moral integration (Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Lapsley, 1996). Blasi's (1983) self-model of moral functioning has provided a framework within which researchers have produced a knowledge base around moral values and their contribution to motivating moral action (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Arnold, 1993; Colby & Damon, 1992; Frimer & Walker, 2009; Hardy, 2006; Krettenauer, 2010; Pratt, Arnold, & Lawford, 2009).

McAdams (1995, 2009) suggests three levels to the moral personality: a) dispositional traits, b) characteristic adaptations and c) integrative life stories. Dispositional traits refer to aspects of the personality believed to be non-contingent and stable across situations and contexts. According to McAdams (2009), people high in conscientiousness and agreeableness, and moderately high in openness to experience are likely to exhibit behaviours indicative of "high moral functioning". The second level, characteristic adaptations, refers to the contextual elements of the moral personality. This level includes motivational, social-cognitive and developmental constructs that explain

variations in behaviours across time, place and social roles. The third level of the moral personality, integrative life stories, refers to the “internalized and evolving story of the reconstructed past and imagined future that aims to provide life with unity, coherence, and purpose” (McAdams, 2009, p. 19). Identity is therefore developed as a result of the meaning made from the “internalized life story or collection of stories” that is intentionally compiled to organize the content of one’s life so that it makes sense to both the self and others.

Much of the knowledge in the development of the moral self has come from the use of autobiographical memories and the reasoning associated to them in personal narratives (Frimer & Walker, 2009; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010; Pratt, Norris, Arnold & Filyer 1999; Walker & Frimer, 2007). Participants have provided an array of recollections ranging from life turning points, high and low points, earliest memories and other self-relevant events. Meticulous coding schemes have been designed and applied to each story so that themes, connections, and meanings are a few of the many constructs that have been extracted and used to build a knowledge base around moral development and associations between the moral self and moral actions. People’s stories of past events have been associated with generativity (Pratt et al., 2009), moral exemplarity (Colby & Damon, 1992; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Matsuba & Walker, 2005; Walker & Frimer, 2007), altruism (Frimer & Walker, 2009), self-restraint, distress and repressive defensiveness (Blagov & Singer, 2004).

However, there is little research that investigates how the moral self influences the construction of autobiographical memories and life-stories. While predicting future behaviour is paramount to the field of psychology, the current research turns to the

construction of the past as a vital source for gaining further insight into the development and maintenance of the moral self. The present study explores the complex interplay between the moral self, autobiographical reasoning, and the integration of past socio-moral events in personal narratives.

Initial discussions present research done to date on the moral self with the aim of providing a theoretical context within which key components of the moral self are clearly identified. Narrative identity is subsequently introduced as the framework within which autobiographical reasoning occurs and the moral self develops. The discussion then turns to the bidirectional relationship between the moral self and narrative identity development and their combined influence on autobiographic reasoning. These discussions provide the milieu within which age and developmental trajectories are discussed, leading to the formulation of specific research questions.

The Moral Self

In efforts to close the divide between moral judgment and action, the moral self emerged as an impetus for researchers. Blasi's Self-Model of moral functioning (1983) has provided a sound theoretical foundation in which moral identity provided a context for understanding the relationship between cognitive judgment, motivation and moral action. Blasi (1983) suggests that a decision to act is derived from a perception that the action is relevant to the self, thus reflecting "essential characteristics that define one's self" (p. 200). Action is thus based on a strong desire for self-consistency, a need to maintain one's identity. Moral behaviour is motivated according to the specific moral values and the level to which they have been integrated into one's self-concept. To act against one's moral values is to experience a form of self-betrayal, "identity consists of

managing one's life and shaping oneself in order to approximate one's ideals.

Commitment to these ideals, fidelity in action, and concern with self-consistency become, then, important aspects of the sense of self" (Blasi, & Glodis, 1995, p. 424).

Colby and Damon's analyses of moral exemplars support Blasi's self-model providing evidence that the unity between self and morality creates a bridge between judgment and action. Damon proposed that the self and morality were two separate psychological systems that operated independently throughout childhood but came together (to varying degrees) during adolescence (Bergman, 2002). This is conducive to Blasi's (1983) assertion that the "moral self...does not appear before a certain age and undergoes significant developmental changes" (p. 201). According to Colby and Damon (1992), the unity between self and morality varies from one person to the next, not in content but in the degree to which the integration occurs. In their exploration of moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) observed that moral development continued into adulthood, with their subject-matter experts showing continued personal growth. High levels of moral integration became apparent in these exemplary individuals in their "endorsement" of their moral commitments in that they became "convinced that they have no choice but to act accordingly" (p. 294). Their moral beliefs became intertwined with their sense of self.

Frimer and Walker (2009) reported similar findings in their investigation of self and morality in young adults, thus supporting Colby and Damon's theory of integration. Using narrative coding, Frimer and Walker (2009) measured themes of self-interested agency (i.e., personal success, competence, dominance and wealth) and communal values (i.e., concerns for others and the environment). The authors suggested that these two

motivational systems operated separately and in opposition to one another in childhood, and as the individual matures the two systems become more elaborate and central to the sense of self. As the tension between the two conflicting systems develops, a crisis evolves resulting in either the destabilization of one of the systems or a reconciliation of the two, thus signifying the integration of morality and self. Results reported that participants who scored high in morally relevant behaviours showed stronger moral identity integration as measured by the tendency to integrate both agentic and communal themes into a cohesive narrative. Frimer et al. (2009) suggest that the reconciliation process reinforces Blasi's argument that when moral concerns/goals are of primary importance to one's self-concept, agency tends to amplify the motives thus bridging the gap between moral judgment and action.

While Blasi's model introduces the centrality of moral values, and discusses the level to which they are integrated into one's self-concept, there has been limited research in differentiating these two processes. It is widely accepted among researchers that moral values have varying degrees of importance in peoples' lives but efforts have not been made to measure the source of this importance (i.e., intrinsic versus extrinsic). According to Blasi (2004), the understanding of moral norms and morality in general contain the element of intrinsic desirability: "a person who knows moral norms but does not see that they are good and demand compliance for their own sake does not really understand morality" (p. 341). Krettenauer (2010) suggests that the moral self-concept is comprised of three distinct aspects: moral centrality, internal moral motivation and narrative moral identity. These aspects are representative of the three levels of moral personality proposed by McAdams. Evidence suggests that moral centrality shows a stability that

resonates with other dispositional traits common to Level 1 (Krettenauer, in press).

Internal motivation is a characteristic adaptation that influences the commitment to act according to personal goals and projects. The current research uses Krettenauer's template, differentiating moral centrality and internal moral motivation while investigating their relationship with narrative identity and the development of the moral self (see Figure 1).

Moral Centrality. As per the self-model, if moral values are identified as a crucial element of the self, one is motivated to act according to those values. Blasi et al. (1995) suggest that deep emotional responses and life-long commitments result from the selection of these core characteristics. In their case study analyses of moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) surmised that the difference between the subjects of their research and the general population was the strength of the commitment to their moral values: "the strength and extensivity is a true uniting of self and morality" (p. 301). This would suggest that moral values have differing degrees of importance in peoples' lives. In her investigation of the link between self importance of moral concerns and moral behaviour in adolescents, Arnold (1993) found that teenagers who identified closely with moral values were reported by their teachers as demonstrating more ethical behaviours than those with less concern for morality. Similar findings have been reported between moral self-relevance and self reported volunteering (Aquino & Reed, 2002), generativity (Pratt et al., 2009), and prosocial behaviour in moral exemplars compared to non-exemplars (Hardy, 2006).

In their investigation of the moral self, Frimer and Walker (2009) advocated that "the weaving together of themes of agency and communion into the same thought" were

empirical manifestations of moral centrality. The authors created an extensive measure for moral centrality in which personal narratives were coded for competing themes of agency and communion. The codes were incorporated into a moral centrality indicator (MCI score). Upon completion of individual interviews, participants were directed to a research assistant who paid \$10 more than the promised \$20 honorarium. Results showed that moral centrality was strongly associated with moral behaviour as indicated by participants who refused overpayments scoring higher MCI scores than those who accepted overpayment.

Johnston and Krettenauer (2011) reported that the self-importance of moral values was correlated with both self-reported prosocial and antisocial behaviour in their adolescent sample. Mediation analyses further identified that moral centrality was the primary variable associated with self-reported prosocial behaviour, while moral emotion expectancies mediated the relationship between centrality and self-reports of antisocial behaviour. These findings indicate the relevance of the perceived importance of moral values (i.e., moral centrality), and moral emotions in the regulation of moral behaviour.

According to Blasi (1999), “the important question to ask about emotion is not what effects it produces, but what motives (needs, desires, values, interests) it reflects and serves” (p. 4). In a cross-sectional and partly longitudinal sample of adolescents and young adults, Krettenauer (in press) further explored the relationship between moral centrality and moral emotion expectancies in conjunction with moral motivation. The author interviewed 155 students ranging from Grades 7 through first year university, assessing levels of moral centrality (the importance of moral values), moral motivation, and moral emotion expectancies across nine moral vignettes. Cross-sectional regression

analyses showed internally motivated participants, who considered moral values as central to the self, were more likely to experience moral emotions in response to committing moral transgressions than those who were externally motivated. This resonates with Ryan and Deci's (2000) claim that internally motivated individuals tend to employ more self-determined regulatory styles, thus giving rise to morally responsible agency. Krettenauer's longitudinal analysis (in press), conducted on 66 of the original 155 students, revealed that moral centrality predicted an increase in internal moral motivation over a one-year time interval, while the reverse was not significant. The author suggests this might be an indication "that moral self development is a co-ordinated process where different aspects of the moral self become more consistent over time."

Internal Moral Motivation. Bergman (2002) summarizes that Blasi's self-model relies on the premise that "moral understanding acquires motivational power through its integration into the structures of the self, into one's identity" (p. 121). True morality is an intrinsic desire to commit to moral values for their own sake, not simply in compliance with external contingencies (Blasi, 2009). Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (2000) reflects this process of internalization or integration as a source of motivation. Self-determination theory asserts that motivation is reflected by the degree to which behaviour is internalized and integrated, so that it ideally "emanates from the sense of self." This would suggest that the degree to which one's moral values are internalized and thus become self-motivating is a likely determinant of the commitment to act according to that value. Since the self-model claims that the moral decision to act is made according to the level to which one's moral values have been integrated into the self-concept (Hardy & Carlo, 2005), this theory might offer some insight into the judgment-action gap.

In their investigations based on self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci (2000, 2003) constructed a self-regulation measure to identify the varying levels with which people integrate extrinsic contingencies and values, and the degree to which they become more internal and self-motivating. The continuum consists of six regulatory styles that vary in the amount of autonomy experienced by the individual in each. At one end of the continuum is amotivation (see Figure 2) in which one lacks the intent to act, with no internalization and/or intentionality. On the other extreme is intrinsic motivation, defined by the authors as “doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions” (Ryan et al., 2000) and is alleged to be the epitome of self-determination. Between amotivation and intrinsic motivation are four regulatory styles of extrinsically motivated behaviour, ranging from the less autonomous, external styles to those that are more self-determined and internal. The most self-determined regulatory style within this range of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation. Although this style is considered highly autonomous and self-regulated, it still requires an internalization of extrinsic motivation, (i.e., the behaviour is instrumental in achieving a specific outcome), thus differing from intrinsically motivated behaviour, which requires no internalization due to an inherent interest (Ryan et al., 2003). The current research assumes that these extrinsic styles are more reflective of relative autonomy levels as experienced in the moral domain. It is thought to be highly unlikely that people behave morally for any sense of inherent enjoyment or satisfaction, since some moral behaviours involve unpleasant outcomes and/or affective responses. Being honest does not always offer a sense of satisfaction if the consequences have serious negative ramifications. Take for example, a person who has embraced honesty as a core value and is faced with the dilemma of advising a friend of her husband’s

infidelity. The decision to act is not one motivated by an inherent pleasure or sense of satisfaction, but most likely involves consideration and exploration of other, somewhat competing, values.

While moral centrality talks to the importance of moral values in one's conceptualization of self, internal moral motivation refers to the varying forms of self-regulation explaining differences in the quality of one's moral commitment.

Narrative Moral Identity

According to McAdams (2009) the narrative identity is the third level of the moral personality that sits atop of dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations. People construct an internalized and evolving narrative or story in which different aspects of the self are configured into a meaningful whole. The life story develops through the addition of new events and the continuous re-interpretation of events from the past (Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007), and is considered essential to providing a sense of unity and purpose to life (Habermas, & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Narrative moral identity is the moral context provided by the life story within which one experiences the world. Krettenauer (2010) suggests that this is the structure of the self-concept that provides individuals with a sense of continuity across time and unity across contexts. Although the life story is based on biographical facts, people actively construe the past, present and the future to construct stories that make sense to them (McAdams, 2001). McLean (2008) suggests that autobiographical reasoning is the "mechanism through which narrative identity develops" (p. 254). This section turns first to cognitive psychology and its contribution to an account of the construction of life narratives and then to research on narrative identity.

The Self Memory System (SMS) account of autobiographical memory, asserts that the retrieval of memories is the result of an interaction between an autobiographical knowledge base and the conceptual self (Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004). According to the SMS model, the self functions as a control mechanism that modifies the construction of memories while the autobiographical knowledge base informs and constrains the working self-concept (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). This reciprocating cycle works to construct and control the retrieval of *self-defining memories*. These specific types of memories are “integrated representation(s) of the self” (Conway et al., 2004, p. 509) and can thus be considered units of the life story (McLean, 2005). According to the SMS model, the characteristics attributed to self-defining memories include emotional intensity, vividness, increased rehearsal, connection to other events, and connection to salient concerns, including unresolved conflicts (Conway et al., 2004). The encoding and retrieval models for these types of memories are generated according to personal goals, and as a result can either facilitate or prevent accessibility.

Self-defining memories (e.g., high points, low points, turning points) have been the source of coding schemes for moral identity researchers in their investigations of personal narratives and associations to specific moral behaviours. In their investigation of generativity and narrative moral identity, Pratt, et al. (2009) reported the frequency with which specific moral stories were recalled and their association with generativity and narrative moral identity scores. They found that generative participants were more likely to recall stories of moral courage compared to other types, (moral goodness, moral failure, moral dilemma, and moral cowardice), while participants with stronger moral narrative identity were more likely to recall stories of moral goodness and courage. This

type of thematic recall testifies to the bias in the retrieval of memories more consistent with current goals (Conway et al., 2000).

In their research on personal stories of empathy, Soucie, Lawford and Pratt (in press) found that empathic stories were reported more frequently overall than non-empathic stories. The authors suggest that this retrieval bias was either indicative of impression management motives or the result of the interplay between the conceptual self (as empathic) and the autobiographical knowledge base. At the same time, participants with high dispositional empathy were not more likely to recall empathic and non-empathic experiences than were those with lower rates of empathy. However, the nature of the narratives was significantly different, with high dispositional empathy predicting increased levels of meaning making, higher prosocial engagement, and a stronger sense of empathic identity as reflected in the coding of the narratives. This corresponds with Habermas and Bluck's (2000) suggestion that in addition to the biased retrieval of memories, the life story also evolves from the global coherence that occurs between the self and the selected memories. Adolescents with higher investment in an empathic identity reflected this in the nature of the stories that they recalled.

Habermas et al. (2000) propose four types of global coherence (temporal, biographical, causal, and thematic), each emerging within different age ranges. Temporal coherence (observed to develop in children between the ages of 5 and 10 years) refers to the temporal organization of single events. During the later childhood years and into early adolescence, biographical coherence develops with the emergence of a culturally normative sequence of events, (e.g., in North America redemption sequences (when bad turns to good) are common in personal narratives (McAdams, 2009). Causal and thematic

coherence reflect connections made between the self and the event, (i.e., the events are considered self-relevant) and those made between sequences of events and the self (e.g., underlying themes), and as such, are thought to involve higher levels of cognitive functioning that are not present until early adolescence. Habermas et al. (2000) argue that until causal and thematic coherence develop, life narratives consist of a series of isolated stories that are not integrated with each other or the self.

Evidence of linear age-trends in the linguistic measures of global coherence was reported by Habermas and Paha (2001) in their cross-sectional sample of 12-, 15-, and 18 year olds. Older participants exhibited more causal self – event links, compared to younger participants who presented more biographical facts that related to moments in time. This is corroborated by McLean’s (2008) research on narrative identity, in which she measured causal and thematic coherence taken from the narratives of three self-defining memories in older (over the age of 65 years) and younger (ranging from 17 – 35 years of age) participants. Causal coherence was measured according to the number of self – event connections that were made, (e.g., “I learned that I could enjoy life again”), while thematic coherence (as defined by Habermas et al., 2000) was measured according to the number of event – event connections present and the associated themes that were reported as important to the participant, (e.g., “sometimes you blame someone for accidents and I think I blamed my husband...eventually, we were divorced”). Although there was no main effect of age found in the frequency of self – event or event – event connections, significant differences were found in the presence of underlying themes. Older adults were more likely to report a theme, (e.g., overcoming obstacles, personal

independence, relational themes), than were the younger participants, thus exhibiting a more integrated and continuous sense of self.

Meaning making is often postulated as a process through which causal coherence occurs thus resulting in the integration of the specific event into the life narrative (McLean, 2005). Two types of meaning making have emerged in narrative research: lessons learned and gaining insight. Lessons learned are defined as lessons that result in a change of behaviour in future situations that might be similar to that remembered, while gaining insight refers to a “transformation” of an aspect of the self that goes beyond the specific event being recalled (McLean & Thorne, 2003). Research with adolescents and emerging adults has presented empirical evidence of an association between age and increased meaning making (McLean & Breen, 2009; Soucie, Lawford & Pratt, in press). In a longitudinal study McLean and Pratt (2006) found that higher levels of identity development at 17, 19 and 23 years of age were positively associated with meaning making found in turning point narratives at 23 years. Although age changes in meaning making were not directly measured, these results suggest that personal narratives containing these kinds of connections are more likely to be associated with a stronger sense of the self, which is widely accepted as emerging in late adolescence to early adulthood.

In sum, narrative identity appears to provide an impetus for the retrieval and (re)construction of autobiographical memories according to the personal goals and beliefs on which the identity is comprised. These reconstructed memories are either integrated into the life narrative (as self-defining memories) or dismissed as irrelevant to the self.

These processes do not occur without having a reciprocating influence on the narrative identity. (Figure 3 provides a schematization of this process).

To elucidate this bidirectional relationship between narrative identity and the construction of the narrative, we turn our discussions to the focal point of the current research, the *moral* narrative identity. The present study investigates moral narrative identity, in particular with respect to the construction of narratives around emotion eliciting socio-moral events. Pasupathi and Wainryb (2010) refer to moral agency as “people’s understanding and experience of themselves (and others) as agents whose morally relevant actions are based on goals and beliefs” (p. 55). Moral agency is developed through the ongoing construction of personal narratives that require the reflection of the beliefs, desires and emotions underlying the specific behavioural outcome. This reflective process further informs one’s moral identity in terms of understanding one’s own (im)moral action in the presence of competing goals or beliefs and can “restore the sense of being a good, though imperfect, person and promote the sense of being an agent that makes choices” (Pasupathi et al., 2010, p.68). However, narratives that solely attribute external factors to the action, thus diminishing any sense of choice (i.e., either there exists no self – event connection or the connection is dismissed as irrelevant), detract from the development of moral agency.

Weinstein, Deci and Ryan (2011) conducted a series of empirical studies to examine the effect of motivation, (i.e., autonomous vs. control-oriented), on the integration of positive and negative memories and/or past characteristics in young adults. Integration of the recalled events/characteristics was measured based on a composite score that combined participant’s level of acceptance of the event with an average

perspective score (i.e., actor vs. observer). Studies 1 and 2 investigated the effects of trait motivation (autonomous and control-oriented) on integration, while the remaining studies examined the effects of primed motivation. Among the results reported in Study 1, the authors found that autonomously oriented participants (using trait measures) better integrated both positive and negative events and characteristics, while control-oriented participants were more likely to integrate positive events and characteristics than negative. Study 2 introduced, as a measure of defensiveness in narratives, the use of nonpersonal pronouns. The findings corroborated those in Study 1. Moreover, personalizing pronouns predicted integration of past events and characteristics. People high in controlled motivation were low in defense toward positive events and characteristics, whereas autonomy-oriented participants were low in defense in both positive and negative events and characteristics. These findings testify to the likelihood that moral responsibility is hindered by external motivation whereby defensive cognitive strategies prevent the integration of negative experiences that are often the source of valuable learning. The current research aimed to investigate and compare differences in the constructive narrative processes employed by people with various levels of commitment to moral identities.

The present study

The primary purpose of the current study was to investigate how the moral self influences the construction of moral memories in personal narratives. By differentiating internal moral motivation from moral centrality we hoped to further enhance the understanding of the development of the narrative moral identity. The scope of the

current study is outlined by the following research questions accompanied by expected empirical findings.

How do people with strong moral identities, (i.e., people who hold moral values as important to themselves and are internally motivated in their commitment to those values) connect with their past moral and immoral actions compared to those with less concerns for morality?

In their examination of the relationship between the identity status model and the narrative life story model, McLean et al. (2006) found that participants who were reported as having lower levels of identity statuses were more likely to produce turning point narratives that were devoid of meaning making as opposed to participants with higher levelled statuses. This corroborates the postulated relationship between the self-concept and the autobiographical knowledge base as outlined in the SMS model, whereby the self-concept contributes to the organization and thematic grouping of life events and periods (Conway et al. 2004). When the self-concept is unclear or not fully developed, retrieval and integration of self-defining memories is less likely to occur. According to Habermas et al. (2000), “the more integrative one’s self-conception, the more one’s characteristics can be used to explain a variety of events and actions, thereby contributing to coherence in life narratives” (p. 756). In accordance with these findings, and as per the SMS model, the current research anticipated stronger connections between the self and the recalled events in those participants with stronger moral identities than those with less concern for morality.

While self – event connections indicated the relevance of the recalled event to the self-concept, (i.e., self-defining), narrative integration aimed to measure the differences in

the efforts made to integrate the recollections that were inconsistent with one another and the moral self, thus contributing to a cohesive life story. Consistent with the findings reported by Weinstein et al. (2011) it was anticipated that participants with stronger moral identities would demonstrate more effort to reconcile the inconsistent information provided by the various memories than would those with less of a moral focus, thus showing higher levels of narrative integration.

How do connections between the self and the past vary depending on the type of socio-moral memory, (i.e., consistent vs. inconsistent, and moral vs. immoral)?

When people are presented with life experiences that challenge the narrative identity, they tend to follow one of two paths. They might examine/explore the challenge in an effort to make sense out of it, or they may minimize its impact by distancing the self from the event (e.g., dismissing it as unimportant) (Pals, 2006). In their research of motivational determinants of integration, Weinstein et al. (2011) found that autonomous rather than controlled participants demonstrated equal integration of both positive and negative past events and identities. Similarly, we expected to find more explicit connections between the self and both the moral and immoral stories, as well as the stories in which the emotional and moral components were inconsistent (e.g., did something wrong but did not feel bad) for those participants with stronger moral identities compared to those who have less regard for moral concerns.

To what extent might differences in narrative construction be attributed to age as opposed to varying levels of moral identity?

It is widely accepted that narrative identity emerges in late adolescence and early adulthood. The development of the “cognitive tools” required for the more sophisticated

levels of global coherence is one of several factors that link the emergence of narrative identity to this life phase (Habermas et al. 2000; McAdams, 2001). Other factors include social and cultural pressures/norms imposed on people during this time span (see McAdams, 2001 for a more detailed overview). In her comparison of narrative identities in younger ($M = 21.41$, $SD = 4.76$) and older ($M = 72.43$ $SD = 4.72$) participants, McLean (2008) reported no main effect of age on the frequency of self – event connections, whereas significant main effects of age on the frequency of event – event connections and thematic coherence were reported. This supports the notion that causal (as is evident in the event – event connections) and thematic coherence represent more sophisticated levels of cognitive processing that are not predominant in adolescents. It was expected that due to cognitive limitations, adolescents' life narratives would be less integrated or coherent, therefore they would make fewer reconciliatory connections between the events and the self-concept than adults.

It was unclear as to how the different aspects of the moral self might influence the constructive processes in adults' moral narratives. In Krettenauer's (in press) longitudinal research moral centrality and internal motivation were assessed twice in adolescent participants ($M = 14.83$ years, $SD = 2.21$) over a 1 – year period. While there was no correlation reported between moral centrality and age, there was a slight positive correlation between age and internal motivation. Furthermore, moral centrality predicted internal moral motivation over the 1-year period. The current research aimed to expand on these findings to determine if the development of internal moral motivation goes beyond adolescence and its continued impact on moral centrality and narrative integration.

In their investigation of age differences in conceptions of self-unity in young people, Proulx and Chandler (2009) found that teenagers (13 – 15 years) reported more internal than external attributions for previous good and bad behaviours. However, young adolescents (16 – 18 years) reported more external than internal attributions for previous bad behaviour, and more internal than external for good. The authors proposed that this differentiation in how positive and negative events are related to the self is a normative developmental outcome of adolescence. The current research investigates whether the development of a moral identity might counteract the developmental trend proposed by Proulx et al. (2009).

Method

Participants

A total of 133 participants were recruited from the Kitchener/Waterloo area. Data from two participants were omitted due to incomplete information (the audio tape of one participant was incomprehensible and could not be transcribed, and one participant failed to return the accompanying questionnaire). The targeted age ranges included adolescents aged 14 to 17 years, young adults aged 19 to 21 years, and adults over 35 years. Several participants fell outside the targeted ranges: two adolescents were 18 years whereas one young adult was 17 years, resulting in a slight overlap between these two age-groups. Moreover, three adults were younger than 35 years, with the youngest adult participant being 28 years old. To protect the integrity of potential effects of age groups, the adolescents and young adults were reclassified into the appropriate age groups. The three adults under 35 years remained in the adult sample. The final sample thus consisted of 131 participants across the three age groups: adolescents ($n = 42$, $M = 16.49$, $SD = 1.21$),

young adults ($n = 40$, $M = 19.78$, $SD = .81$) and adults ($n = 49$, $M = 47.95$, $SD = 9.7$).

Each age group was represented by males and females, with females making up 38.1% of the adolescent group, 57.5% of the young adults, and 67.3% of the adults. Overall, females made up 55% of the sample. As there was a slight imbalance for gender groups across age, a marginally significant correlation between gender and exact age in the sample was obtained, $r = -.16$, $p = .07$.

Different strategies were used to recruit participants for each age group.

Adolescents were contacted in response to interest they had expressed when participating in a prior large-scale questionnaire study at local schools that was unrelated to the present research. The young adults were drawn from a university participation program in which course credits were issued toward the participant's introductory psychology course in return for research participation. Adults were recruited through advertisements placed in a local newspaper. The group of adult participants were asked to provide information on their most recent occupation in an open-ended format. The following occupational areas were reported: clerical (e.g. Customer Service Representative, $n = 7$), health care (e.g. Health Care Attendant, $n = 6$), professionals (e.g. Consultant, $n = 5$), teaching/instructing (e.g. Teaching Assistant, $n = 4$), retail ($n = 4$), manufacturing, skilled trades, distribution, homemakers and graduate students (reported $n = 2$ in each). Five participants in the adult group were retired, whereas four indicated they were currently unemployed. Information on occupation was missing for four participants.

With regard to ethnicity, the majority of participants identified themselves as Canadian (77.9%). Other ethnic identities included Asian (9%), European (3%), Native American (1.5%) and South American (1.5%).

Procedure

Participants were interviewed either in a meeting room within a local university or at their place of residence, depending on their mobility and access to transportation. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. In those cases in which participants were younger than 16 years old, parents/guardians were asked to provide written consent as well. Study participation consisted of an oral interview and a written questionnaire. In the interview, participants were asked to recall various memories about emotion eliciting socio-moral events (e.g., “Please remember a situation when you did something wrong and felt bad about it afterwards”). In addition, the centrality of moral values for the individuals’ self-concept was assessed. On conclusion of the interview, participants completed a short questionnaire. The interview and questionnaire together, on average, took approximately 100 – 120 minutes. Upon completion of the questionnaires the participants were thanked, debriefed and compensated for their participation. University students were given the option of \$30 cash or 2 course credits, while the remaining participants were given \$50 cash. The entire interview was recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted by two research assistants fully trained to follow the provided interview schedule.

Measures

Interview. The interview consisted of four separate sections: A warming up exercise, the recall of various socio-moral events, personal reflection about these events, and an interview to assess the self-centrality of moral values. The warming up exercise was always at the beginning of the interview and the personal reflection at the end. Participants were asked to recall eight events in total, four of which they selected to

discuss in detail. This process was divided evenly into two blocks; each block consisted of four events. The moral-self task was conducted between the blocks. The order of the types of events participants were asked to remember was counter-balanced to minimize any effects of task ordering. Interview data were used to derive various codes reflecting the relevance and narrative integration of the recalled events. These codes are described in detail in the following sections followed by the measure assessing self-centrality of moral values.

Emotion eliciting socio-moral events. Participants were asked to recall situations in which they did something right/wrong and in which they felt good/bad, (e.g., “tell me about a situation when you did the right thing and felt good about it”). The type of situation (right/wrong) was alternated with each emotional response, (e.g., “tell me about a situation when you did the right thing and felt good; tell me about a situation when you did the right thing and did not feel good”), so that participants were asked to recall situations that fell into four different scenarios (right/good, right/not good, wrong/bad, wrong/not bad). Participants were provided with four work sheets in total, each containing a different situation/emotion scenario. They were presented with one worksheet at a time and instructed to briefly write down two situations or events for the scenario presented. Once completed, the two situations were briefly discussed. Participants then selected the event that was more important to him/her and this was explored in detail. Upon completion of the personal narrative, depending on the content discussed, follow up prompts included: “What exactly did you feel?” “Why did you feel that way?”, “Did you feel anything other than _____?” “Would you still feel the same today, if not why?” “Why do you think it was right/wrong?” This process was completed

for each worksheet. Of 131 participants, nine were unable to recall all four stories (two of these participants failed to recall two of the four stories). Two were unable to recall wrong/bad stories, four were unable recall wrong/not bad, while three were missing right/not good and two were not able to recall right/good stories.

Stories were coded with one of 18 themes. A total of 461 memories were coded into the 18 categories. Inter coder reliability was determined using a randomly selected subsample of 40 interviews ($k = .85$). There were some common themes evident across the different situations. (See Table 1 for a complete listing of themes by story type). For the situations in which participants reported doing something wrong and feeling bad, common themes included, hurting someone's feelings/being inconsiderate to others' needs (24.4%), lying and/or being dishonest (12.2%), cheating (8.4%) and stealing (6.1%). While the nature of these acts was similar, there was a significant range in their severity, (e.g., stealing Lego from a friend and stealing a neighbour's skidoo). These same themes were also present, but with varying levels of frequency, in the inconsistent *wrong/not feel bad* scenarios: hurting someone's feelings/being inconsiderate to others' needs (13.7%), lying and/or being dishonest (9.9%), and stealing (9.9%), however, more prevalent themes in this story type included physically harming others (10.7%), and doing something forbidden (13.7%). These themes were consistent across all three age categories.

The most prevalent themes present across age groups in the *right/feel good* scenarios included helping (16%), and assisting (33.6%). These two themes were differentiated by the time period in which the participant was involved, assisting referred to a single event and helping occurred over an extended period of time. Similarly,

assisting was one of the most common themes in the *right/not feel good* situations (11.5%). Standing up for others/own beliefs/truth was the most prevalent theme (17.6%) and hurting someone's feelings/being inconsiderate (10.7%) was also in the top three theme categories in this story type. There were no age differences found in the themes present across story types.¹

Each of the stories was coded for self-relevance and narrative integration. For each code a set of 40 randomly selected interviews was used to determine intercoder reliability. The subsamples of interviews were coded by two coders in private who then met to discuss the codes. For those cases in which there was disagreement, the coding manual was used to reach consensus on the final code. Kappas and correlations are reported for each code below.

Narrative self-relevance of events. Each of the selected stories was coded for its narrative self-relevance. This coding was determined by the participant's connection between the sense of self and the event/story. Self-relevance was coded on two dimensions. The first dimension concerned the strength of the connection and the second measured its effect on the self-concept. The strength of the connection was measured on a 4-point scale (0 = *dismiss*, 1 = *no self-event connection*, 2 = *implicit self-event connection*, 3 = *explicit self-event connection*). A dismissal was indicative of some level of cognitive processing that occurred which led the participant to actively dismiss the event as either unimportant or not self-relevant. The following is an example of a story in which the participant denied any connection between the self and the event:

¹ The coding and data presented here was adapted from *Memorizing self-evaluative moral emotions: Themes and timing of events*. A thesis submitted by Gabrielle Willems to the Department of Psychology in partial fulfillment of her Honours Bachelor of Science Degree at Wilfrid Laurier University.

I didn't really care, like we were laughing about it after and it was like a high five because we got away with it, it's not like we robbed a bank or something it was just an overpriced \$20 movie, so I don't know, I didn't really care it was such a little thing and I feel like it would be the same now.

Stories that were coded with no connection showed no thought by the participant pertaining to his/her moral role in the event, (i.e., no moral self-relevance). For example:

...it was more important because she's my friend and the other person was a stranger... uhm, because like she needed to know that people were talking behind her back and she was hanging out with them and they weren't being very nice to her.

An implicit connection was coded to those stories in which participants showed evidence of some reflection of the event and its relevance to the self although a direct connection between the self and the event was not made. An explicit connection was allocated to those stories in which participants talked freely about the event and how it impacted the self and/or future events, thus showing a direct connection. Stories coded with an implicit or explicit connection were further coded on the second dimension which measured the relayed effect of the event on the participant's self conceptualization, (1 = *maintained self concept*, 2 = *changed self concept*). Following is an example of an implicit connection in which the self-concept was maintained,

...looking back I'm a person like I follow the rules enough that I am not going to cause problems so I feel like I have the right to go and bend the rules a bit as long as I stay in control but the rules are there for those who go out of control which means people have to suffer.

The following example was coded as an explicit connection that changed the self-concept,

Today that situation wouldn't happen. After going through it as a child I act quickly...seeing how it affected me in my life and seeing how it affected other people and looking back at it now and seeing how severe the consequences can be.

For detailed descriptions of each code and further interview examples refer to the Appendix.

Cohen's Kappa was calculated in the randomly selected subsample of 40 interviews to determine the intercoder reliability between two independent coders for the effects of the connections (maintain vs. change). The effects of the connections could be reliably scored in the right/feel good, right/not feel good, and wrong/not feel bad scenarios and was somewhat lower in the wrong/feel bad scenarios (Cohen's $k = 1, p < .001$; $k = .82, p = .004$ $k = .84, p = .001$; $k = .64, p = .01$ respectively.) The lower score possibly reflects a higher level of difficulty in separating the emotional involvement (that was often more prevalent in the wrong/feel bad stories) and self – event connections.

Pearson correlations were performed to investigate intercoder reliability for coding the strength of the connections. Correlations indicated acceptable reliability in the wrong/feel bad, wrong/not feel bad, right/not feel good and right/feel good scenarios ($r = .63, p < .01$; $r = .66, p < .01$; $r = .71, p < .01$, $r = .69, p < .01$ respectively). When the four events were combined into one overall score (see Results section), intercoder reliability was $r = .74, p < .01$.

Narrative integration of events. Once participants completed discussing all four situations, the interviewer asked questions to encourage reflection and possible integration of these events into the life narrative. Participants were asked "Do you think these stories are related to each other in any way and if so, how?", "What do these stories tell about you?"

Responses were coded to examine the efforts participants made to reconcile perceived inconsistencies between their self-concept and the socio-moral act discussed in the situations. Responses were coded according to how participants perceived the self in relation to the events. (0 = *no self connection*, 1 = *singular self*, 2 = *multiple self*, 3 = *conflictual self*, 4 = *reconciliatory self*.) No self connection was coded for participants who made no reference to the self in response to the reflective questions. Examples ranged from: "I don't know" to "I think they are related in each situation has to do with someone else it didn't affect me it affected other people. It never really affects me it's just in the ripple." Singular self codings were assigned to responses that indicated a simplified reflection whereby the participant focuses solely on one story or on one specific theme they identified across some or all of the stories. Following is an example of a singular coded reflection:

I'm like looking out for peoples' best interest and what other people are doing in most situations, like I was helping out the person who was intoxicated, I was helping out the person in the wheel chair and the person with the buggy and was trying to mediate the situation between friends.

Codings for multiple self were devoted to those participants who noticed and explained how the different stories demonstrated different aspects of the self, with no attempt being made to connect the stories to one another. For example, "I was a crazy child. I know that. My parents call me the black sheep so um, I did a lot of silly things when I was a young person but now I'm an older more mature adult." The conflictual self was coded to responses in which either inconsistencies in the stories were recognized or there was a sense of ambivalence in terms of how the self was related to the inconsistencies. In either case, participants did not offer an explanation for this sense of conflict. An example of a conflictual self coding follows:

That I can do some good in this world a little bit of good. But I know I have to change there are certain things I have to change and certain ways I have to change. Like there are things I think I can do but I can't. I try. I cried with some of them with the dog and the one being arrested. I try to control my situations as I can and I haven't been consistent with it. I help other people but this situation I should have gave the money back.

The reconciliatory self coding was assigned to those responses that were attempts to explain the perceived inconsistencies, thus effort was made to bridge the stories so that they could be organized into a cohesive sense of self. For example:

There is a depth to me, there is not just he is nice or he is bad, these events have changed or created some decisions that will help me in the future for sure. And the experience that I have had really helps.

In the randomly selected subsample of 40 interviews, intercoder reliability for narrative integration was $r = .69$, $p < .01$.

Socio-moral event. The last question asked of participants during the interview was to select the event that “tells the most about you” and to explain their selection. The event selected was coded accordingly (1 = *wrong/bad*, 2 = *right/good*, 3 = *wrong/good*, 4 = *right/bad*). The effect of the self – event connection was also coded to evaluate the impact of the connection on the self-concept. Event effect was coded into one of four categories: 0 = *no connection*, 1 = *confirm*, in which case the event confirmed an already existing belief about the self; 2 = *cause*, whereby the event caused a change in self-concept; and 3 = *reveal*, a case in which the event revealed new information regarding an already existing or possibly latent quality. Cohen’s Kappa revealed low intercoder reliability (Cohen’s $k = .55$, $p < .001$). Cause and reveal codes were then combined into one scale indicating change for which Cohen’s k showed adequate intercoder reliability (Cohen’s $k = .67$, $p < .001$).

Moral-centrality. The moral-self interview is a pictorial task in which participants are required to identify specific characteristics (both moral and non-moral) and their level of importance to the self (Arnold, 1993). This scale was developed to measure the importance of moral values to an individual's self-concept. Participants were presented with a bag of 16 labels (eight moral and eight non-moral characteristics) along with a diagram titled "How do you view yourself?" The moral characteristics included responsible, honest, fair, generous, kind, respectful, considerate and compassionate. The non-moral characteristics included active, athletic, creative, funny, hardworking, independent, outgoing and rational. The diagram contained three nested circles labelled with varying levels of importance. The inner circle represented those characteristics that were "very important to me", the second circle captured characteristics that were "important to me", the third circle was labelled "somewhat important to me", whereas the area outside the circle represented characteristics "not important to me". Participants were instructed to place each characteristic label in the circle that signified its level of importance to them. There were two blank labels included in the bag and participants were informed to create their own labels if they felt any important characteristics were missing. The interviewer recorded the location of each characteristic and then asked the participant to select the one core characteristic, from those categorized as very important as key to him or herself, ("Among those characteristics you consider very important, is there any quality that is crucial to you, so that without this quality you would not be the same person?"). Upon selection, the interviewer asked the participant to explain the meaning of that characteristic and why it was crucial. The importance of each moral value was coded from 1 (*not important*) to 4 (*very important*).

According to Johnston et al. (2010), this moral centrality scale has good internal consistency with a Cronbach alpha coefficient for the eight moral values of .80. In the current study the Cronbach alpha coefficient was .73. All eight values were therefore combined into one scale of moral centrality. The overall mean score for moral centrality was 3.34 ($SD = .41$).

Questionnaire. Upon conclusion of the interview, participants were left alone to complete a short questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three components: 1) demographic questions pertaining to age, gender, ethnicity, and current occupation, 2) a social desirability scale, and 3) external versus internal motivation. The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete in total and was handed to the interviewer upon completion.

External and internal motivation. External versus internal moral motivation was assessed using a questionnaire similar to that used by Krettenauer (in press). Krettenauer's measure was an adaptation of a procedure used by Hardy, Padilla-Walker and Carlo (2008) to measure the internalization of moral values. In the current study, participants were presented with a total of six situations (cheating, returning a lost object, causing bodily harm, telling the truth, revenge, stealing). For each situation participants were asked to rate on a 5-point scale, the level of importance (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*) of specific reasons for why they might behave in either a prosocial or moral manner. Each reason represents a different point on Ryan & Deci's (2003) self-determination continuum; *external*, *introjected*, *identified* and *integrated*. An example of a scenario and corresponding reasons is as follows: "How important is each of the following reasons for why you might decide not to cheat on a test in school?" Reasons

included: “Because if I get caught, I could get an F on my test” (External); “because I would not want my teacher to think I am a cheater” (Introjected); “Because I personally think people should be honest” (Identified); “Because I don’t want to be a dishonest person” (Integrated).

Cronbach alpha coefficient for external reasons was .84 across all six items ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .91$), introjected reasons ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .69$) had an alpha of .75, alphas for identified ($M = 4.25$, $SD = .65$) and integrated ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .65$) reasons were .78 and .74 respectively.

Social desirability scale. Social desirability bias was measured using a well-validated questionnaire (Blake, Valdiserri, Neuendorf, & Nemeth, 2006). Participants were presented with 17 statements and, using a true-false response format, were asked to indicate if the statement described them. Sample statements included, “I sometimes litter” and “I always accept others’ opinions, even when they don’t agree with my own.” After reverse scoring the negative items, a sum score was calculated with higher scores representing a greater socially desirable response bias. Scores on this measure ranged from 1 to 17 ($M = 7.3$, $SD = 3.23$) and the Cronbach’s alpha was .69.

Results

We begin the results section by firstly reporting preliminary analyses of the various measures and their correlations. Age related findings are then reported followed by analyses of narrative self-relevance and integration as indicators of how people with varying levels of moral identity connect with their past. We finally conclude this section with results pertaining to the differences found across the four types of socio-moral memories.

Preliminary analyses

Narrative self-relevance codings showed some context dependency but also moderate overall consistency in the strength of the self – event connections across the four different scenarios. Participants made the strongest connections in the wrong/feel bad scenarios ($M = 1.80, SD = .79$) followed by the right/feel good ($M = 1.69, SD = .73$) and the right/not feel good scenarios ($M = 1.67, SD = .74$). Participants made the weakest connections in the wrong/not feel bad situations ($M = 1.53, SD = .89$). However, differences in self-relevance scores across the four scenarios were not significant ($F(3, 104) = 1.76, ns$). Significant Spearman's rank order correlations showed low to moderate correlations across all four situations (see Table 2). Given the consistency with which participants made connections across the varying scenarios, self-relevance scores were grouped into one overall strength scale ($M = 1.67, SD = .55, n = 130$). There was a significant correlation found between age and self-relevance ($r = .43, p < .001$). No significant correlations were found between gender and these self – event connections.

Codings relating to the effect of self – event connections were limited to those participants who made connections between the self and the story (either implicit or explicit) and measured the effect of the event on the participant's self-conceptualization, (1 = *maintained self-concept*, 2 = *changed self concept*). The types of effects reported did not show the same level of consistency as was evident in the strength of the self-relevance across the different scenarios. There was a significant effect for the consequence of the event to the self ($F(3, 21) = 9.62, p < .01$, multivariate partial eta squared = .58) such that participants were more likely to experience change to the self-concept in the immoral stories than in the moral. The means and standard deviations are

presented in Table 3. Significant correlations were found between the effect and strength of the self – event connection in the wrong/not feel bad ($r = .38, p < .01$) and the right/feel good scenarios ($r = .41, p < .01$). (See Table 4 for a full list of correlations).

With respect to levels of moral motivation, integrated reasons showed a strong positive correlation with identified reasons ($r(131) = .85, p < .01$) and a moderate positive correlation with introjected reasons ($r(131) = .42, p < .01$). Moderate positive correlations were reported between introjected and identified ($r(131) = .50, p < .01$) as well as external reasons ($r(131) = .45, p < .01$). External and introjected reasons were combined into an overall *external* score ($M = 3.69, SD = .68$), while identified and integrated reasons formed an *internal* score ($M = 4.19, SD = .63$). Internal motivation was significantly correlated with moral-centrality, ($r = .63, p < .01$), overall mean self-relevance ($r = .40, p < .01$), and age ($r = .38, p < .01$). Moral-centrality was also significantly correlated with self-relevance and age. (See Table 4).

Toward the end of the interview, participants were asked questions to encourage reflection and possible integration of the recalled events into the life narrative. Narrative integration was coded according to how participants perceived the self in relation to the events, (0 = *no self connection*, 1 = *singular self*, 2 = *multiple self*, 3 = *conflictual self*, 4 = *reconciliatory self*). Significant positive correlations were found between narrative integration and self-relevance in the wrong/not feel bad stories only ($r = .29, p < .01$) while there were no significant correlations found across the other three stories. Narrative integration was also significantly correlated with exact age ($r = .18, p < .05$) and internal motivation ($r = .21, p < .05$).

The final question in the interview asked participants to select the one event that told the most about them. The type of event selected (e.g., right/feel bad) was coded as was the effect of the event on the self-concept. The effect was coded according to whether the event confirmed or changed an aspect of the self. Chi-square tests for independence were conducted to explore associations between the types of stories selected with age, gender and effect. There were no significant relationships between the frequencies of the types of socio-moral events selected and age ($\chi^2(6, N = 124) = 8.28, p = .22$), gender ($\chi^2(3, N = 124) = .23, p = .97$) or effect ($\chi^2(6, N = 124) = 9.31, p = .16$). The minimum expected cell frequency was violated in the latter test with 58.3% of the cells containing expected counts of less than five.

Age differences

A general linear model was used to test for main effects of age on the dependent variables: narrative self-relevance, narrative integration, internal moral motivation and moral centrality. There was a main effect of age on moral centrality, $F(2, 128) = 15.66, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$, whereby older adults showed significantly higher levels of moral centrality ($M = 3.56, SD = .28$) than both young adults ($M = 3.29, SD = .38$) and adolescents ($M = 3.13, SD = .45$), while there were no significant differences between the two younger groups. The bivariate correlation between moral centrality and exact age (as a continuous variable) was $r = .36, p < .01$.

A main effect of age was also found for the level of internal moral motivation, $F(2, 128) = 16.18, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .20$, such that adolescents showed significantly lower levels of internal motivation ($M = 3.82, SD = .73$) than both young adults ($M = 4.21, SD = .54$) and older adults ($M = 4.49, SD = .39$), while there were no significant

differences between the two older groups. The bivariate correlation between internal motivation and exact age (as a continuous variable) was $r = .38, p < .01$.

A main effect of age was found on self-relevance scores, $F(2, 127) = 18.67, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. Older adults showed stronger self – event connections ($M = 2.01, SD = .59$) than both younger adults ($M = 1.52, SD = .43$) and adolescents ($M = 1.43, SD = .39$), while there were no significant differences between the two younger groups. The bivariate correlation between exact age (as a continuous variable) and narrative self-relevance was $r = .43, p < .01$.

There was no effect of age on narrative integration, $F(2, 119) = 2.40, p = .09$, although there was a significant (albeit weak) bivariate correlation between exact age (as a continuous variable) and narrative integration, $r = .18, p < .05$.

Narrative self-relevance, integration and the moral self

To investigate how measures of moral identity relate to narrative self-construction, variables that were not significantly correlated with narrative self-relevance or narrative integration (see Table 4) were dropped for the subsequent analyses.

For self-relevance, a standard multiple regression was used to test if exact age, gender, moral-centrality and internal moral motivation predicted the strength of narrative self-relevance. The results of the regression indicated that internal motivation ($\beta = .28, t(123) = 2.75, p < .01$) and age ($\beta = .39, t(123) = 4.64, p < .001$) significantly predicted the strength of the self – event connections ($R^2 = .263, F(4,123) = 10.98, p < .001$) whereas moral centrality did not contribute significantly to the model ($\beta = -.07, p = .45$). A second regression was run with social desirability entered as a control. Social desirability made no significant contribution ($\beta = .01, ns$) to the model and reduced the effect of

internal motivation only slightly ($\beta = .27, p < .01$) while making no difference for the effect of age ($\beta = .39$). Thus, the relationship between narrative self-relevance of emotion eliciting events and internal moral motivation as well as age did not depend on social-desirability response bias.

The internal motivation scale was split into high, medium and low scores at the 33 and 66 percentiles. In an attempt to further elucidate the relationships between the variables as obtained in the regression procedure, codes for the various self-relevance categories were tallied across all four events and then cross-tabulated across the three age groups (adolescents, young adults, adults) and again across the three levels of internal motivation (high, medium and low). Adults made more implicit (43%) and explicit (69%) connections than young adults (32% and 21% respectively) and adolescents (25% and 10% respectively) (see Figure 4). As shown in Figure 5, participants with high levels of internal motivation showed more implicit (51%) and explicit connections (63%) than those with medium (26% and 21% respectively) and low (24% and 16%) levels.

A standard multiple regression was also used to test if internal motivation and age predicted narrative integration. Results indicated that although significant, the model explained only a small proportion of variance in narrative integration scores, $R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 117) = 3.45, p = .04$. Neither age ($\beta = .12, t(117) = 1.25, p = .21$) nor internal motivation ($\beta = .16, t(117) = 1.70, p = .09$) were significant unique predictors. The somewhat higher t-value indicated that internal motivation was slightly stronger in its predictive effect than age.

Similar to the analyses on narrative self-relevance, high, medium and low levels of internal motivation were cross-tabulated with the various categories of narrative

integration. As can be seen in Figure 6, 54.5% of participants who were coded as making *no connections* between the different socio-moral events and the self were classified as low in internal moral motivation, while 18.2% were considered to have medium levels and the remaining 27.3% were rated as high, (i.e., rated internal reasons as important in their decisions to act in the listed hypothetical situations). Increases in the level of narrative integration were accompanied by increases in the proportion of participants with high levels of internal motivation, with 59.1% of participants who made reconciliatory connections classified as high in internal motivation, while 31.8% were at medium levels and the remaining 9.1% were low.

The levels of narrative integration were also cross-tabulated by age group (see Figure 7). Higher levels of narrative integration were more frequently found in older adults' narratives than in those of young adults and adolescents. Older adults had the highest proportion of reconciliatory (54.5%) conflictual (42.9%) and multiple connections (44.4%), while adolescents were reported as having the highest proportion of no connections (45.5%) and young adults the highest of singular connections (41.2%).

Differences between socio-moral events

The final question in the interview asked participants to select the one story that told the most about them. Codes were assigned according to the type of event selected (e.g., right/feel bad) and any effect on the self-concept (0 = *no connection*, 1 = *confirm*, 2 = *change*). Chi-square tests for independence found no significant relationships between internal motivation and the type of story selected, $\chi^2(6, N = 124) = 10.02, p = .12$. The right/feel good event was the most commonly selected event overall (59.7%) which was consistent across high (62%), medium (63.9%) and low (52.6%) levels of internal

motivation. The wrong/not feel bad event was the least selected event overall (8.9%) with the lowest selection rates in both high (6%) and medium (5.6%) levels of internal motivation. Participants with low levels of internal motivation were least likely to select the right/feel bad (13.2%) as opposed to the wrong/not feel bad (15.8%).

No significant relationships were found between internal motivation and the effect of the story, $\chi^2(4, N = 124) = 3.20, p = .52$. Overall participants were more likely to report confirmation of the self (71%) as opposed to change (22.6%) or no connection at all (6.5%). The only event that did not reflect this response trend was the wrong/not feel bad situation, in which case both confirmations and change were evenly split (45.5%), with the remaining 9.1% making no connection at all. Out of those participants who reported change as a result of the event, 42.9% were high in internal motivation, 25% were medium and 32.1% were low.

To explore variations in the relevance of the various events for narrative self-integration, self-relevance scores for each story type were used as a predictor of narrative integration. A standard multiple regression indicated that the final model ($R^2 = .09, F(4, 97) = 2.43, p = .05$) showed that self-relevance of the wrong/not feel bad situation was the only predictor that made a significant unique contribution to the model ($\beta = .27, t(97) = 2.74, p < .05$).

Discussion

This section begins with a discussion around the differences observed in the content of the narrative disclosures, followed by discussions of the empirical findings as per the research expectations outlined at the end of the introduction.

Most participants were consistent in their ability and desire to recall all four socio-moral memories. In general, it appeared that adults' narratives revealed a deeper level of reflection than those disclosed by young adults and adolescents. When asked how all four stories were related, adults were more apt to make an effort to weave a cohesive narrative that integrated the stories (or aspects thereof) while sometimes incorporating components of the self. For example a 73 year-old man's response to the reflective prompt included:

This shows that I am being who I want to be who I think I am. The part that I am working on right now is being non judgmental. For years I was judgmental so if you let that go, if you don't judge yourself you won't judge others, and if you don't judge others you won't judge yourself. It seems to be some kind of a circle that if you allow yourself to make mistakes then you won't judge other people. That seems to be something I am aware of having to still correct.

A 56 year-old female shows similar efforts in identifying a sense of meaning out of the stories and how they relate to her self:

They are related because I am a people person. And I have a feeling for people greatly. That I can do some good in this world a little bit of good. But I know I have to change there are certain things I have to change and certain ways I have to change. Like

there are things I think I can do but I can't. I try. I cried with some of them with the dog and the one being arrested. I try to control my situations as I can and I haven't been consistent with it. I help other people but this situation I should have gave the money back. Sometimes I get out of my scope when it's none of my business.

While the adults did not all necessarily reconcile the inconsistencies present in the stories, they made more of an effort to begin this process of self-understanding. In comparison, the following example is from an 18 year-old male who identifies similarities or common themes across his stories, but there is no mention of himself as an active agent:

I think I seem to find myself in uh aspects of dishonesty. Here is my girlfriend that was dishonest to me and cheated on me, here I saw my friend cheating on a test and told, and currently right now I'm seeing this thing happen with a guy and my best friend so more dishonesty.

Although a theme of dishonesty was present, no conclusions were drawn, nor was any conflict identified as a result of inconsistencies between the stories and/or the self. Dissociation between the events and the self appeared to be more prevalent in the narratives offered by young adults and adolescents than those disclosed by older adults:

It just makes me come to the conclusion that you do the right or wrong thing it just depends on how it makes you feel. And the morals and things we're conditioned with don't really matter it's more like what hormones are secreted. (21 year-old female).

Upon conclusion of the interview, the older adults expressed a sense of satisfaction and/or enjoyment in the process. It appeared that the reflection in conjunction with the moral-centrality task offered some personal insight. The younger adults were not as consistent, with some suggesting the process was insightful and expressing a sense of satisfaction and others making no comments. Adolescents made very few comments about the process.

The goal of the present study was to explore the development of and complex interplay between two aspects of the moral self (moral centrality and internal moral motivation), autobiographical reasoning, and the integration of past socio-moral events into personal narratives. The study was designed so that differences in narrative construction might be observed between conflicting and non-conflicting memories (i.e., did something wrong, but did not feel bad vs. did something wrong and felt bad). Empirical discussions turn first to findings related to age effects, followed by narrative integration, self-relevance and the moral self, and finally to differences between the socio-moral stories.

Effects of age

Narrative integration. It was expected that due to differences in levels of cognitive processing, adolescents' life narratives would be less integrated or coherent,

indicating fewer reconciliatory connections between the events and the self-concept than adults. Empirical evidence partially supported this premise in that both age and internal motivation predicted narrative integration. Neither age or internal motivation however, offered unique predictive effects. According to Pasupathi et al. (2010) narrative integration is more likely to occur for those events in which people make self – event connections. While the adults in the current research were more likely to make self – event connections, they did not show increases in autobiographical reasoning associated with linking the memories to a more cohesive self. Older participants were no more likely to construct a cohesive narrative, showing continuity across the various socio-moral events than were the younger age groups. According to the current results, narrative integration appears to be more attributable to the varying levels of moral identity (as measured by moral motivation) as opposed to age.

Narrative self-relevance. Older adults appear to make more direct self – event connections than younger adults and adolescents. Alternatively, adolescents and young adults were more likely to either reconstruct recollections so that self-relevance was actively dismissed, and/or they made no self – event connections at all. Although no significant differences were found in the self – event connections between adolescents and young adults, a cross-tabulation indicated that young adults made more active dismissals than adolescents. (Because of low frequencies here there is insufficient power for inferential statistical analyses). If these patterns generalize, they could suggest that although young adults appeared to demonstrate more autobiographical reasoning, as per their dismissals, than adolescents, these were in efforts to employ cognitive strategies that led to distancing the event from the sense of self. This partly

supports the findings reported by Proulx et al. (2009) who described young adults as more segmented than teenagers, thus enabling them to externalize bad behaviours. However, findings in our adult sample refutes that this differentiation is a developmental achievement that increases with age. Alternatively, it might be indicative of the development of moral cognitive complexity, whereby the process of integration presupposes differentiation (Labouvie-Vief, 2004). This is somewhat consistent with Frimer et al's (2009) proposal that moral development involves a growing tension between moral agency and communion. According to the authors, disequilibrium is reduced by either yielding to one or the other or by integrating the two opposing values. This process of growing tension followed by either integration or dissociation from one or the other is consistent with the patterns found in the current sample.

The findings that older adults made significantly more self – event connections than did both young adults and adolescents is inconsistent with those reported in previous narrative research in which no effects of age on the frequency of self – event connections were found in self-defining memories (McLean, 2008), or turning point narratives (Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006). However, Pasupathi et al.(2006) did report a negative quadratic effect of age on the frequency of self – event connections in crisis narratives, whereby the percentage of participants who made self – event connections increased up until middle age (approximately 50 years), levelled off, and then dropped slightly. A possible explanation for the disparity in results could be attributed to ceiling effects found in narrative research using turning point narratives and self-defining memories, thus confounding any age differences. Serious consideration should also be given to the possibility that self – event connections in the moral domain might emerge

later in conjunction with possible changes in moral centrality. Consequently, moral narrative identity might show a different developmental path than that of the more general narrative identity measured in the aforementioned research.

Moral self. Results showed somewhat different developmental paths for the two aspects of the moral self. For internal moral motivation, adolescents showed lower levels than young and older adults. There was no significant difference between young and older adults. The current findings suggest that internal moral motivation develops over the course of adolescence and reaches maturity as early as young adulthood. By contrast, moral centrality showed an increase even after young adulthood. These findings could be considered as support for the life course perspective of personality development which proposes that major roles imposed at specific stages of life influence personality development beyond the critical period of adolescence. In their meta-analysis, Roberts, Walton, and Viechtbauer (2006) found evidence of mean-level changes in personality traits in adults after 30 years and in old age. The authors argued that “universal tasks” were influential in determining normative trait development within a given culture. In relation to the current research, given the salience of generative concerns in midlife compared with adolescents and younger adults (Pratt, Norris, Arnold & Filyer 1999) and the association between generativity and moral identity, one might expect to see mean-level changes in moral centrality in response to the associated social demands of this life phase.

Further support linking personality development with the development of moral centrality can be attributed to reports of age increases in agreeableness and conscientiousness and their salience in moral exemplars (McAdams, 2009; Walker,

1999). In his research on characteristics associated with moral exemplars, Walker (1999) found that both Conscientiousness and Agreeableness were the most salient personality traits associated to the moral personality. According to Walker, Agreeableness reflected a communal nature that in the past has been related to aspects of moral functioning (i.e., altruism, caring, and truthfulness), while conscientiousness referred to characteristics that reflected dependability and task related behaviours (e.g., consistent, industrious, organized). Numerous investigations of age differences in the Big Five across the life span have shown mean level increases in both Agreeableness and Conscientiousness in adults. In their cross-sectional sample of participants ranging from 16 years to the mid-80s, Donnellan and Lucas (2008) found that Agreeableness was positively associated with age while Conscientiousness showed a curvilinear pattern such that average levels of conscientiousness were at their highest for middle age participants. The relationship between agreeableness and moral centrality might offer future researchers some insight into the ongoing development of the moral self in adulthood.

The present research suggests that adolescence might be the critical period for the development of internal moral motivation, but that adulthood provides a context within which development of moral centrality ensues. Indeed, researchers would be amiss to draw conclusions on the development of the moral self without considering changes across the entire life span.

Narrative integration, narrative self-relevance and the moral self

It is widely accepted that the internalization of moral values into one's self-conceptualization is indicative of an integrated moral identity (Bergman, 2002; Blasi, 2009; Hardy et al., 2005). Given that McLean et al. (2006) produced evidence

associating more mature identity statuses with higher levels of meaning making than lower levelled statuses, it was expected that participants with high scores of moral centrality and high levels of internal motivation would be more likely to make self – event connections than those with lower scores. This was partly substantiated in the results with internal moral motivation and age predicting narrative self-relevance of events, while moral centrality was not a contributing factor. Thus, it appears that the importance of moral values to the sense of self is not as relevant to one’s narrative moral identity as is the level to which the value is integrated into the self-concept. This corroborates Ryan and Deci’s (2003) argument that “identities vary in the extent to which they are assimilated to the self of the individual and therefore receive the person’s full endorsement and engagement” (p. 256). While most people would agree that moral values are important, not all do so for intrinsic reasons. People with higher levels of internal moral motivation are more likely to find socio-moral memories relevant to the self. Although the direction of this association cannot be predicted based on the current findings, it is highly probable that a bidirectional relationship exists whereby internal moral motivation influences self-relevance while self-relevance helps to internalize moral values. According to McLean, Pasupathi and Pals (2007), the creation of a life story affects the self-concept and future life stories. The more times a story is told exposes the narrator to increased feedback (from both the self and others) on the self-concept, thus providing opportunities for adjustment or confirmation of the current self. In their research of autonomous versus controlled participants, Weinstein et al., (2011) suggested that “autonomous motivation encourages integration, which in turn facilitates continuing autonomy” (p. 540).

While self – event connections indicated the relevance of the recalled event to the self-concept, narrative integration measured cognitive efforts made to integrate the recollections into a cohesive life story that showed some continuity over the various socio-moral contexts. It was expected that a stronger moral identity would predict more narrative integration. Again, results were partly consistent with this expectation. Narrative integration was predicted by levels of internal motivation. It appeared that more internally motivated participants were more inclined to make cognitive efforts to reconcile discrepancies between the various events and the self than were those with lower levels of internal motivation.

In her discussion on the development of cognitive complexity, Labouvie-Vief (2005) defines integration as “an ability to see multiplicity in terms of an over-arching and unifying principle” (p.193) and suggests its achievement depends on regulated emotional activity. Labouvie-Vief (2005) argues that tendencies to use strategies to divert attention from negative information about the self can develop into stable, trait-like patterns of behaviour. This theory of cognitive integration provides a context for the current findings, whereby high levels of self-regulation appear to provide increased tolerance for inconsistencies and disequilibrium, thus accounting for increases in narrative self-relevance and integration.

Although significant, the association between narrative self-relevance and narrative integration was relatively weak ($r = .21$). Consideration should be given to the fact that low levels of moral identity are not mistaken for low levels of general narrative identity. In the current research the stories were disclosed in response to questions posed by interviewers. Unlike turning point, or high and low life point narratives, these events

were not self-defining for those people with lesser levels of moral concerns. This however, does not preclude those individuals from having a need for personal continuity across the various contexts. For example the following narrative belongs to a 23 year-old male who made one self – event connection out of the four stories, and yet his reflection of the various stories and what they tell about him clearly shows the conflict he was experiencing in creating a consistent self.

I try to do the right thing always. My emotions don't... like...what I do doesn't always reflect me... like I am passive but I try not to be but it's there. So like something like not putting a girl's name on a project or telling a girl to leave me alone it doesn't reflect me.

Thus it would appear that individuals with strong moral identities (as measured by internal motivation) are slightly more inclined to look for continuity across different socio-moral contexts than people with less moral concerns. Since identity was only measured in the moral domain, it is difficult to ascertain if the need for continuity across the different socio-moral events can be attributed to the moral self or if it might not reflect a general trend found in stronger narrative identities, not solely within the moral domain.

Differences between socio-moral events

There were no differences in the strength of self-relevance between the consistent (do wrong/feel bad) and inconsistent (do wrong/not feel bad) stories. However, participants who made stronger self – event connections in the inconsistent (wrong/not

feel bad) events showed stronger levels of narrative integration relative to those who made weaker connections. This may be indicative of the similar cognitive processes required to reconcile the inconsistencies between the emotion and the act (at the story level) and the acts alone upon reflection (in the narrative integration task). Both tasks required an ability to integrate opposing self-concepts.

It was expected that people with stronger moral identities would be more likely to make more explicit self – event connections in both the moral and immoral stories compared to those with less regard for moral concerns. This expectation was confirmed as the correlation between self-relevance and internal moral motivation was positive for all four types of events. Overall, narrative self-relevance scores showed no context dependence, i.e., immoral stories were considered no less relevant to individuals' sense of self than moral stories.

In sum, moral centrality and internal moral motivation capture different aspects of the moral self. The current research shows that the narrative construction of socio-moral memories and their integration into one's narrative moral identity is associated with internal motivation as opposed to moral centrality. The level of commitment to moral values is more relevant in the construction of narratives than the perceived level of importance attached to the values. Adolescence appears to be the critical period in which internal moral motivation develops. Increased levels of internal moral motivation are clearly associated with increases in self-relevance and narrative integration. People with stronger moral identities (i.e., those more internally motivated) are less likely to dismiss their previous immoral acts as irrelevant compared to those people with less moral concerns. This willingness to reflect on the self in both moral and immoral acts helps to

develop a sense of the self as a moral agent (Pasupathi et al., 2010), thus strengthening the cycle between the moral self-concept and moral narrative identity.

Limitations and future research

The current research is not without limitations. Firstly, it is unclear how comparable the groups are with regard to SES and educational level. Different recruitment strategies were employed across the three different age groups which may have resulted in systematic sampling biases. Since a measure of educational level was not included, the effects of education could not be analyzed. A second limitation with the current sample is the age range of the adults. With only seven adults over the age of 60 years, investigation of the ongoing development in moral centrality and its impact on narrative construction in senior adulthood was not feasible.

Thirdly, differences reported across age groups must consider the possibility that these might be attributed to cohort effects. McAdams and colleagues (McAdams, Bauer, Sakaeda, Anyidoho, Machado, Magrino-Failla, White & Pals, 2006) reported developmental trends with increased levels of internal motivation and narrative complexity over the course of their three year longitudinal study. Changes in the narratives of adolescents and young adults were compared with cross-sectional differences as between subjects and longitudinal change as repeated measures. Both narrative complexity and internal motivation showed a main effect of time but no significant effect of age. Thus the authors were able to conclude that changes in both aspects of narrative identity could be attributed to development and not cohort effects. This offers some support that the current findings are not likely the result of variations in cohorts.

Another potential limitation lies in the moderate reliability of the narrative coding. Both self-relevance and narrative integration, although adequate, were not very high in intercoder reliability thus indicating limitations in their ability to accurately predict.

Consideration should also be given to the emotional component of the stories and the role affect plays in narrative integration. There is a general understanding that the stress or discomfort associated with the memory of a previous immoral behaviour is likely to increase the need for some sort of emotional or psychological resolution (Heine et al., 2006; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2010; Wilson & Ross, 2003). The current study did not measure or control for the level of emotional involvement in the disclosed stories. Therefore it is unclear if the participants who made no connections (specifically in the wrong/feel bad situation) recalled situations with less emotional involvement than those who made self – event connections.

An area beyond the scope of the current research, but that is worthy of future narrative research is the metacognitive experience of narrative construction. For instance the ease or level of difficulty with which specific experiences are brought to mind is a source of information pertaining to the self-concept. The types of comments made in response to the difficulty experienced in the recollection of the moral stories indicate that there is some sort of theorizing surrounding associated metacognitive processes used in narrative construction. According to Tormala, Falnes, Briñol and Petty (2007), the level of difficulty associated with the generation or recall of cognitions, combined with the ease with which opposing cognitions are recalled, affects the overall confidence in resulting judgments. Lower levels of confidence in content of difficult recollections

might well have influenced the presence of self – event connections in the current research.

According to Pasupathi et al. (2010) moral agency, in the current research, would have been enhanced in participants who made more self – event connections. The authors suggest that the subjective experience of disclosure is in and of itself a source of feedback about the self as a moral agent. The following narrative shows some support for this premise:

I recently graduated from my MBA at Guelph. We had a financial management project and I didn't contribute anything and didn't understand it but I got credit for it. So when the project was presented in class I didn't contribute anything. The prof. knew I didn't contribute but he knew I had a family so he just gave me the marks so I felt like I cheated.

This participant continued to talk about how his MBA lost meaning for him and that he should have confronted the professor. His emotional response (i.e., distress) further informed the self-concept: I feel bad when I am not honest – therefore honesty is important to me.

However, people who, in their disclosures, dismiss the event as relevant or justify their immoral behaviour, thus minimizing the emotional response, are more likely to further distance the self from any sense of moral agency. For example, the following

participant reflected on a situation in which she let her work group down by failing to complete her portion of the school paper. Here she puts blame on her teacher:

If she had been a better instructor and encouraged us more or if she had been a better teacher I would have done more and helped her.

This participant justified her behaviour, even though by her own moral standards, she admits that it is wrong. She thus has no need for further deliberation about the self. The experience of the disclosure informs her self-concept that (in certain circumstances) immoral behaviour is acceptable. Labouvie-Vief (2005) suggests this strategy is a form of temporary degradation in the ability to manage complexity, and can develop into stable patterns that reduce flexible integration. Dismissing the relevance of immoral behaviour removes any sense of “disequilibrium” associated with the act, thus diminishing any moral accountability.

Weinstein et al. (2011) offer some insight into how moral accountability might be improved by providing contexts that enhance autonomy during the process of narrative construction. According to Labouvie-Vief’s (2005) Dynamic Integration Theory, increases in self-regulation enhance people’s ability to manage the increasing complexity of cognitive development, so that the self becomes more tolerant of inconsistencies and diversity as one undergoes efforts toward integration. Trends within the current research, along with findings reported by Proulx et al. (2009), suggest that young adulthood might be the critical period in the development of cognitive complexity, whereby young people are faced with the challenge of differentiation , (“reorganizing” newly developed

cognitive and affective systems) (Labouvie-Vie, 2005). Thus the development of internal regulatory styles might offer young adults the cognitive tools required to successfully manage this stage of development.

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Table 1

Percentage breakdown of themes across story types

Theme feel bad	Consistent		Inconsistent	
	Right/ Wrong/ Feel Good	Wrong/ Feel bad	Right/ Not feel good	Not
Stealing	.8	6.1	2.3	9.9
Cheating	3.1	8.3	1.5	8.4
Lying/Being dishonest	1.5	12.2	6.1	9.9
Standing up for others/own beliefs/truth	6.1	7.6	17.6	3.8
Hurting feelings/being inconsiderate to others' needs	8.4	24.4	10.7	13.7
Physically harming others	.8	6.9	2.3	10.7
Doing something forbidden/ without permission	.8	3.8	1.5	13.7
Using drugs	.8	.8	0	1.5
Risk taking behaviour	0	3.1	0	2.3
Keeping a promise	0	1.5	3.8	1.5
Breaking off relationship	3.1	1.5	4.6	0
Illegitimate relationship	0	2.3	.8	5.3
Returning object/money	7.6	3.1	4.6	3.1
Helping	16	.8	6.1	.8
Fulfilling duties	2.3	2.3	5.3	1.5
Donating	6.1	0	4.6	0

Assisting	33.6	0	11.5	.8
Volunteering	5.3	0	.8	0

Table 2

Correlations between codings of self-relevance strength for different story types

Measure	Wrong/ Not feel bad	Right/ Feel good	Right/ Feel bad
Wrong/Feel bad	.26**	.34**	.30**
Wrong/Not feel bad		.36**	.27**
Right/Feel good			.28**

Note: ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Descriptive statistics for effect of self – event connections across stories

Story	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Right/Feel good	24	1.33	.48
Right/Not feel good	24	1.38	.49
Wrong/Feel bad	24	1.88	.34
Wrong/Not feel bad	24	1.79	.41

Table 4

Spearman's Correlations Between Self-Relevance Strength and Effect across Story Type, Self-Centrality, Moral Motivation, Narrative Integration and Age

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Effect Right/Bad	–	-.25	.17	.21	.21	-.03	.06	-.22	-.02	-.00	.04	-.00	.14	.00
2. Effect Wrong/Good		–	.09	-.18	.04	.38**	.09	.21	.23	-.01	-.08	.04	-.12	.05
3. Effect Right/Good			–	-.13	.19	.04	.41**	-.10	.17	-.21	.07	-.09	-.06	-.01
4. Effect Wrong/Bad				–	-.07	-.13	-.18	.07	-.12	.11	-.06	.04	.14	.05
5. Self-Relevance Right/Bad					–	.26**	.26**	.29**	.66**	.23*	-.05	.07	.35**	.07
6. Self-Relevance Wrong/Good						–	.34**	.27**	.72**	.22*	.02	.11	.26**	.29**
7. Self-Relevance Right/Good							–	.35**	.69**	.32**	-.07	.23*	.37**	.07
8. Self-Relevance Wrong/Bad								–	.68**	.25**	-.08	.26**	.32**	.16
9. Mean Self-Relevance									–	.40**	-.06	.21*	.43**	.21*
10. Internal Motivation										–	.27**	.63**	.38**	.21*
11. External Motivation											–	.14	-.15	-.09
12. Moral Centrality												–	.36**	.17
13. Age													–	.18*
14. Narrative Integration														–

Note: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Figure 1. The moral self-concept (Krettenauer, 2010) and levels of moral personality (McAdams, 2009)

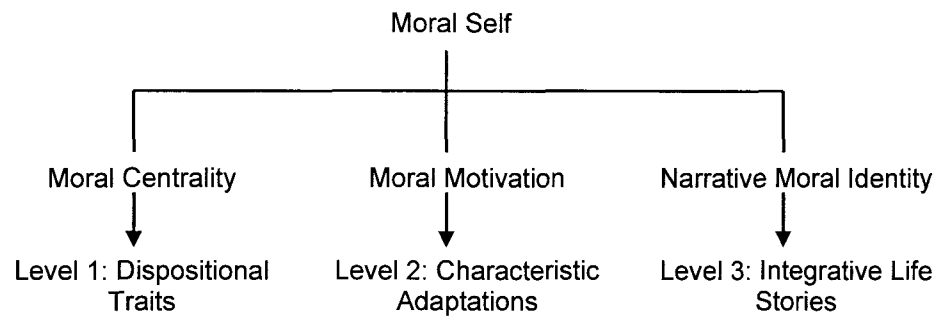


Figure 2. The self-determination continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2003)

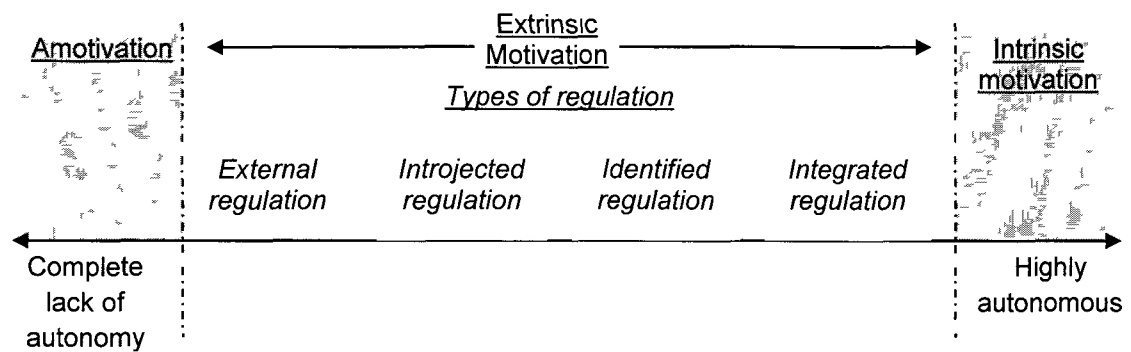


Figure 3. Construction of life narratives

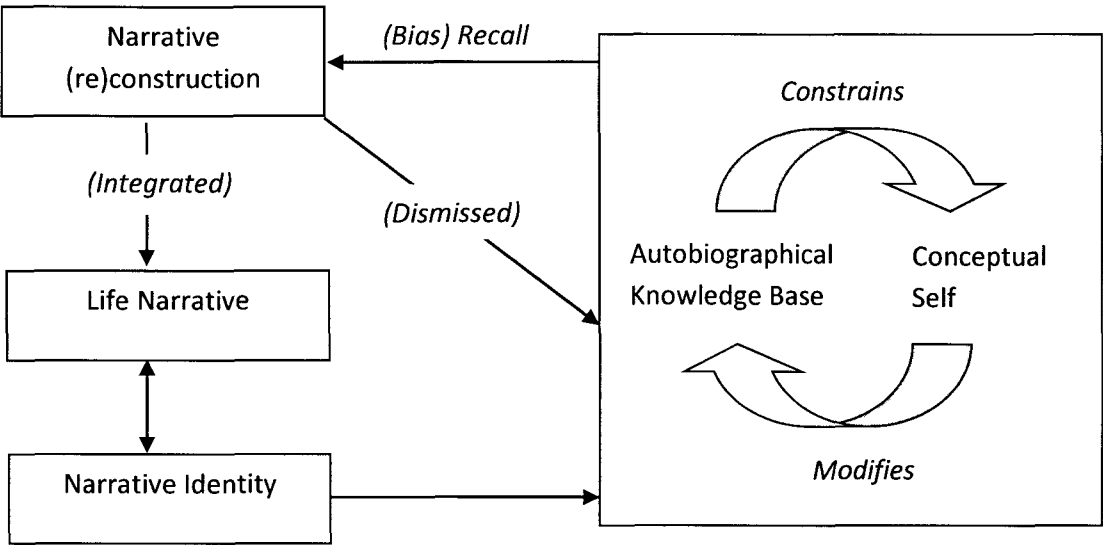


Figure 4. Categories of narrative self-relevance and age group

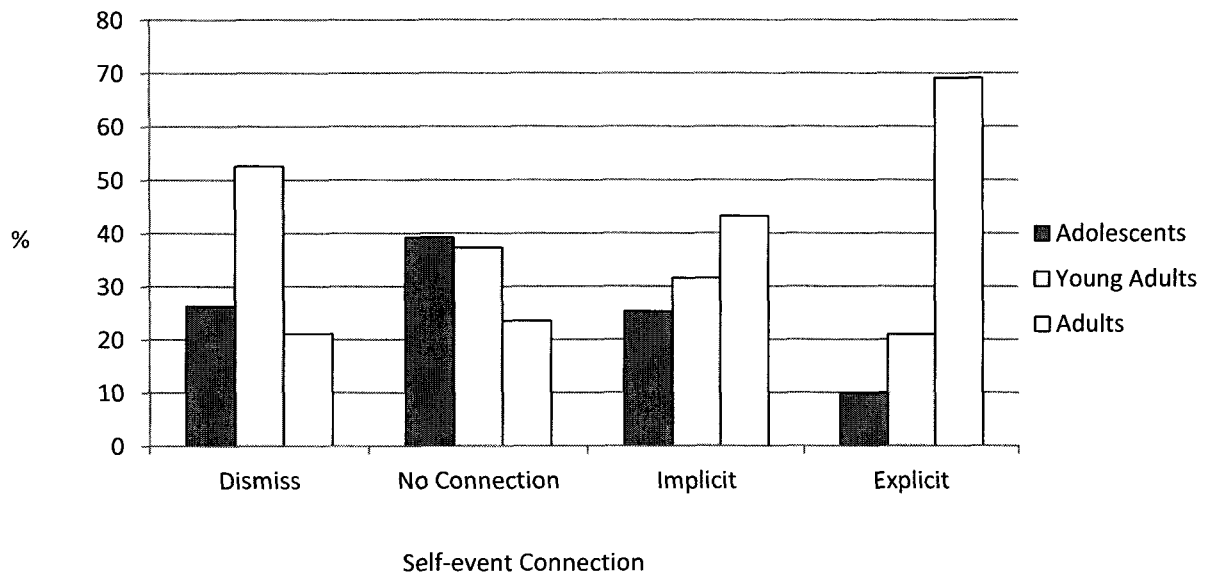


Figure 5. Categories of narrative self-relevance and levels of internal motivation

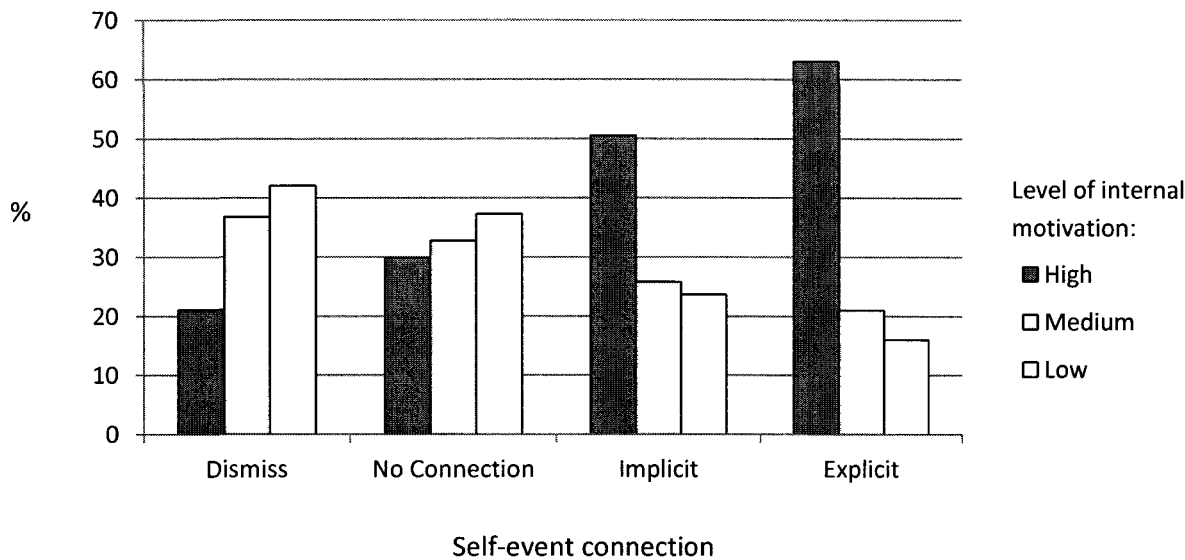


Figure 6. Categories of narrative integration and levels of internal motivation

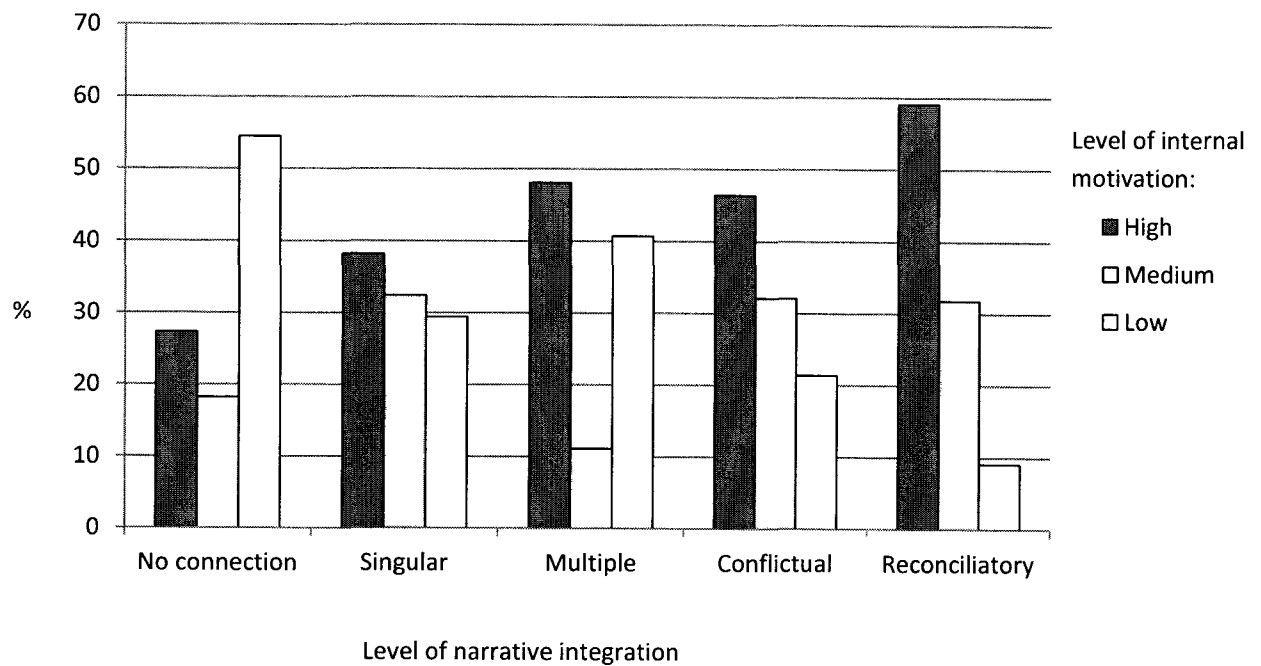
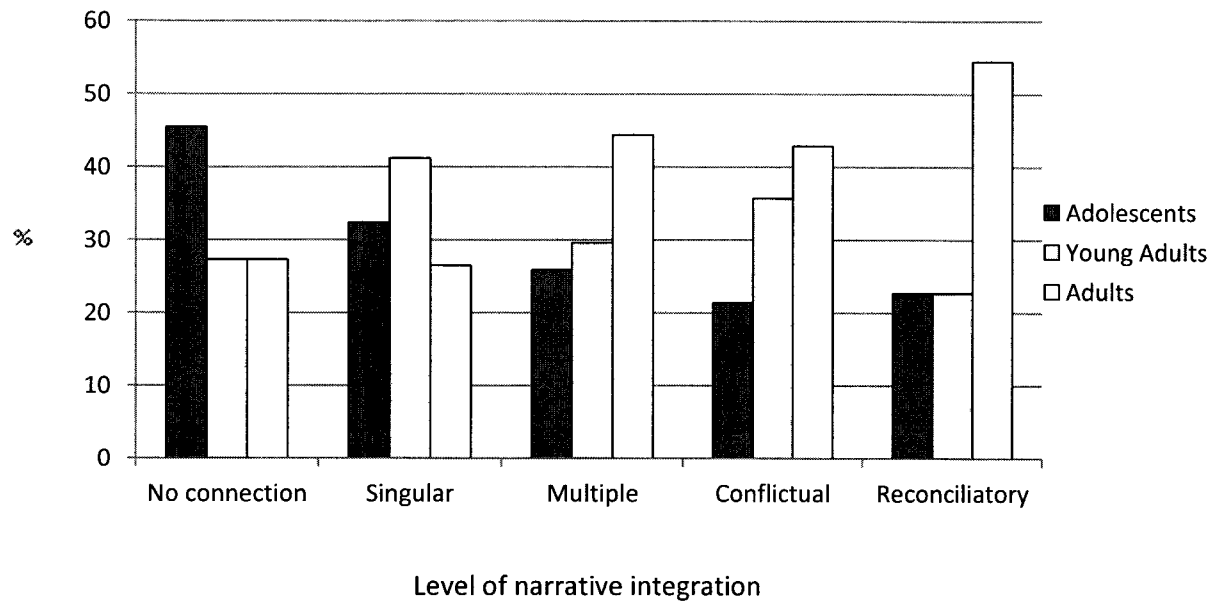


Figure 7. Percentage of narrative integration and age groups



Appendix Coding Manual

Narrative self-relevance

The following self-event connections refer specifically to the moral self that participants include in their personal narratives. A connection is evident when it appears that the event is incorporated into the participant's life story.

This coding category captures the moral self-relevance of each story and codes on 2 dimensions, the strength or level of the connection (how explicit or implicit is the connection) and the relayed effect of the event on the sense of self. All information disclosed by the participant in discussions pertaining to the specific event is used for coding content. Key interview questions include: "why is this event the more important of the two?" and "if you were in the same situation today would you do/feel the same way?" This information must be present for coding, either in response to the questions or offered spontaneously by the participant.

Unscorable: If **both** of the key questions are not asked ("why did you choose this as the more important of the two?" and "if you were in the same situation today would you do/feel the same way?") and the information is not disclosed spontaneously and as a consequence a self connection cannot be made, the content is coded unscorable. If the content is unintelligible or agreement cannot be reached between coders this is also deemed unscorable.

Strength of the connection: This is a four point scale that measures the level or depth of the connection and captures the relevance of the story to the self.

0) Dismiss: the participant explicitly denies the relevance of the event for the current self. There is little to no evidence of the event having any effect on the self. The participant could either downplay the event itself and/or the effect it had on him/her. Examples include:

- “I don’t really care I guess because it only happened once like I have never stolen before it’s not a big deal.” (ID #53)
- “I didn’t really care, like we were laughing about it after and it was like a high five because we got away with it, it’s not like we robbed a bank or something it was just an overpriced 20 dollar movie, so I don’t know, I didn’t really care it was such a little thing and I feel like it would be the same now.” (ID #8)

A deep level of processing might be evident, but the event is still dismissed as either trivial or not relevant to the sense of self. For example:

- “Uhm there was guilt in there somewhere but I think it was overcome by the excitement
uhm definitely not nearly as uhm ---- impactful on my life that I remember the guilt but
I’m sure it was there at some point...uhm --- because I usually do have or feel guilt when I do something wrong, it’s just a matter of whether I push it to the side or not and give into it
Interviewer: If you were in the same situation today how would you feel?
Participant: (laughter) uhm a little childish actually!” (ID # 23)

- 1) No connection: there is no connection between the event and the moral self.

Sometimes the story is not recalled for any morally relevant reason other than it was easier to remember, or was recent. It is evident that the participant has spent little or no time reflecting on this event prior to the interview. For example:

- “Uhm probably feel fine, like I may feel bad about it in the moment, but it’s not something I would hang onto.” (ID #22)

In some cases the participant gives very clear and concise detail about the moral dilemma, but still there is no connection made to the self. For example:

- “I didn’t have any obligations toward him. My loyalty lies with her...she needs to know you can’t do that, it’s not nice, it’s the right thing to do...you don’t want to be the one who has to tell someone something like that...Yeah I felt bad, I felt bad for her because she trusted him so I felt bad that I had to be the one to tell her.

Interviewer: Ok so if you were in the same situation today would you do the same thing?

Participant: hmm yes I think. It would be harder to do it again because he denied it so now she’s not allowed to talk to me because of it.” (ID # 26)

Other types of connections might be made but should not be confused with a moral self connection. For instance, participants might mention that they learned

from the experience however the lesson is of no moral relevance and is not therefore considered a moral self connection. For example:

- “I don’t know, like how much to drink, when and where to drink, when it’s safe to drink.” (ID # 36)
- “I realized a lot about him. Like he doesn’t treat girls really well and I know I couldn’t have a relationship with him...he’s 20 so my mom would flip and he is very emotionally unstable especially when it comes to girls. He’s very needy and I don’t know he’s one of those people who writes everything on his facebook status and I don’t like him as a human being really much” (ID # 46)

The participant might express some emotional involvement but does not make any type of connection between him/herself and the moral dilemma discussed in the story. For example:

- “Probably (feel) the same like I don’t think, like if I still depended on my parents and they didn’t know I left and got away with it I would still feel bad...it wasn’t safe and basically my parents care about my safety.” (ID #15)

- “Yeah I would probably feel more guilty because if I went through it again it would be like the second time I still didn’t do the right thing.

Interviewer: but you’d still do it?

Participant: yeah.” (ID # 26)

2) Implicit: An implicit connection is evident when the participant shows signs that s/he has reflected (or continues to reflect) on the event, but a direct connection between the self and the event has not been made. It might be that the story continues to work its way into the participant's consciousness and/or captures a reoccurring theme/behaviour. Examples include:

- "I would do something more I would make sure I'm 100% confident... it's still on my mind." (ID #3)
- "I don't think initially I felt really bad. I felt worse maybe a few days later and I felt even worse a few years later... I don't know I just felt bad for stealing the kids gum and candy he was upset." (ID #5)
- "uhm more important because like I stole and I still think about it to this day and still feel really bad about it."

In other instances, some learning may have occurred but the lessons are specific to that event and have not been clearly generalized to other life situations. The lesson must have some sort of moral meaning. For example:

- "I think probably number 2 just because it like is more, like I could learn more from it." In response to how she felt the participant responded:
"Angry... and at myself for kind of like not having realized that this would happen. Like I would like to think that I could predict how people are going to behave and I don't know." (ID # 6)

A strong connection to the self might be made but not necessarily linked to any specific learning from the event. In the following example, the participant makes a very clear connection between the event and her self-concept but does not explicitly take from the event itself to reaffirm or change her self view:

- “I think I would have because honestly looking back I’m a person like I follow the rules enough that I am not going to cause problems so I feel like I have the right to go and bend the rules a bit as long as I stay in control but the rules are there for those who go out of control which means some people have to suffer.” (ID # 16)

- 3) Explicit: The participant states that the event had a significant impact. The spoken impact goes beyond the immediate situation and appears to have a lasting effect, it is related to the moral context of the situation and is still very relevant today.

Examples include:

- “As soon as that thought process went through I felt remorse I hugged him I kept holding him and like ill never do that again. Feelings yeah it would be a little self condemnation. I learned a life lesson from this.” (ID # 106)
- “So, yea. I, I felt a relief. I feel like um, the communication has opened, this thing, this

hidden thing now is on the table...And um, the enemy or the devil now has no hold on me.” (ID # 117)

- “Today that situation wouldn’t happen. After going through it as a child I act quickly...seeing how it affected me in my life and seeing how it affected other people and looking back at it now and seeing how severe the consequences can be.” (ID #2)
- “uhm, you know I still felt bad about the situation and the fact that I went and did it but I felt better that in the end we had cleared the air, but still felt bad. I mean, it’s a learning experience and I know that I’ll never make that mistake again.” (ID #4)
- “And that stands by today, I am so scared of police...It’s had that lasting affect.” (ID # 76)
- “I pick that one because I feel like everything I am today um, probably because I made that right decision.”(ID # 98)

Event effect: If the nature of the connection is scored as a 2 (implicit) or 3 (explicit) the content is further coded for the overall effect of the event on the sense of self.

- a) Maintain: The event validated or reinforced the participant’s current self-concept.

Examples include:

- “I guess because that’s me. I’m, I’d be the first one to stop at a...somewhere, and help somebody...That’s me...And um, I don’t know...I just, it’s probably just in me.” (ID #76)
- “Oh totally reinforced like oh I’m a good person.”

b) Change: The event somehow created a change in the participant either directly or by revealing some quality about the self that was not previously evident.

Examples include:

- “guilty and disappointed in myself for not being able to know it” (ID #66)
- “nothing ever happened again. I realized that was not who I was and not who I wanted to be. I don’t like bullies.” (ID #106)
- “uhm and a bit sort of egg-on-the-face just that it’s not that hard and that I messed up and I’ve been making a big deal with my parents saying that you know I can handle things myself and it’s become sort of a foot-in-mouth situation.” (ID #13)

c) Other: The story is either ambiguous or unclear.

Procedural Steps for coding self-in-story events:

Step 1: Determine if content is scorable vs. unscorable;

Step 2: Determine if there is any self – event connection;

Step 3: Decide what type of connection (or non connection) is made;

Step 4: Assign the effect of the connection.

Self – single event connection

This coding category reflects the self-event connection that is made in the story that the participant selects “that tells the most about you.” The content is taken directly from the participant’s response to the aforementioned interview question. There are two coding dimensions, the first categorizes the type of event and the second categorizes the effect of the event on the self.

Type of event: This code categorizes which story/event the participant selects as telling the most about him/her.

- a) Do something wrong and feel bad.
- b) Do something right and feel good.
- c) Do something wrong and not feel bad.
- d) Do something right and not feel good.

Event effect: The content is further coded for the overall effect of the event on the sense of self.

- 0) No connection: Even though respondents are asked to talk about themselves the self is omitted from the discussion and the focus is primarily on others.
- 1) Confirm: The event confirms a particular aspect of the self.
- 2) Cause: The event caused some sort of change in the participant’s life.
- 3) Reveal: The event reveals a hidden or latent aspect of the participant’s self.

Unscorable: If the question was not asked correctly or misunderstood by participant and/or the response is unclear the content is deemed unscorable. If participants select more than one event and provide different explanations for why they picked these situations the entire interview context is still deemed unscorable unless one situation is clearly prioritized over the others.

Narrative integration

This coding category reflects the connections participants make between all of the events recalled and the self. It captures the participants' responses to any perceived inconsistencies in the stories and attempted efforts to reconcile conflicting experiences. Information considered for this coding category is taken specifically from responses to "do you think these stories are related in any way, and if so how?" and "what do these stories tell about you?"

0) No self connection: The various situations are not seen in connection to the self, even when respondents are directly asked, ("what do these situations tell about you?"). The self is not included in any of the discussion. Responses include:

- "I don't know"
- "not really sure"
- "it's odd cause I don't see them relating at all"
- "I think they are all related in each situations has to do with someone else it didn't affect me it affected other people. It never really directly affects me it's just in the ripple"

1) Singular Self: A single self is expressed when participants simplify the reflection so that it only focuses on one story, or they identify a single theme that is present across various stories. Responses include:

- “I’m like looking out for people’s best interests and what other people are doing in most situations like I was helping out the person who was intoxicated, I was helping out the person in the wheel chair and the person with the buggy and was trying to mediate the situation between friends”
- “hmm...uhm... well the 4 things that I felt good about were all about telling the truth...well that I was honest”
- “you can tell I have a strong sense of honesty and accountability, and like in another sense it’s I don’t worry about the small things. I tend to stay positive”
- “they are all most of them are recent actually. That’s about it”

2) Multiplicitous Self: Participants notice, and explain, how the different stories demonstrate different aspects of the self. No effort is made to connect the stories; instead they are seen as an indication of different aspects of the self.

Individuals see that the various situations tell different stories about the self. The self consists of different character traits, beliefs, emotions etc. This multitude is simply described as a matter of fact. There is no mentioning of an inner conflict; respondents don't take an evaluative stance towards the fact that sometimes they act consistent with their beliefs about themselves, sometimes not. Examples include:

- “I think when I was younger uhm I like I know there was a lot of things when I was young that like if I didn’t like someone or something like I didn’t care like I had no feelings for other people do it looks like if I was in elementary school if I did something bad I didn’t FEEL so bad about it but then as I grew up I realized what was wrong and what was right to an certain extent, so I think that as I got older I could see that I got more honest”
- “I was a crazy child. I know that. My parents call me the black sheep so um, I did a lot of silly things when I was a young person but now I’m an older more mature adult.”

3) Conflictual Self: Participants recognize inconsistencies in their stories for which they don’t have an explanation. There is a sense of ambivalence in terms of the self in the stories or the stories themselves. In some instances there is an explicit desire to change. Examples include:

- “I am a fairly strong person not with everything but if it comes down to what’s wrong or right in my eyes I tend to be a lot stronger if it’s a person you know again like a neighbour but I am insecure too at work. Like feeling just to fit in that is ridiculous.”
- “That I can do some good in this world a little bit of good, but I know I have to change there are certain things I have to change and certain ways I have to change. Like there are things I think I can do but I can’t. I try. I cried with some of them with the dog and one being arrested. I try to control my

situations as I can and I haven't been consistent with it. I help other people but this situation I should have gave the money back"

- "I think that I guess just kind of think that a big thing that I take from this is thinking before I do anything. Like I should think before I do things"

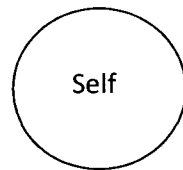
4) Reconciliatory Self: Participants make an effort to explain the perceived inconsistencies, bridging the stories together, so that they can be organized under one self. Lessons might be learned, changes to the self might be made, and self-validation can be discussed. All of these are variations of reconciliatory strategies that are employed to explain the self in the varying stories. Examples include:

- "But I think from all the things you learn and you make mistakes an you're not always going to feel good about decisions and there are always going to be hard choices but you realize what's right and wrong"
- "I think it says that all the bad ones have helped me grow as a person and like I can make the best out of a bad situation where I have done something bad"
- "There is a depth to me there is not just he is nice or he is bad these events have change or created some decisions that will help me in the future for sure. And the experience that I have had really helps"

Unscorable: Responses are unscorable if either of the following questions is not asked: "Do you think these stories are related to each other in any way? And if so,

how?” and “What do these stories tell about you?” and/or the content is not covered spontaneously by the participant OR content is unclear or difficult to comprehend.

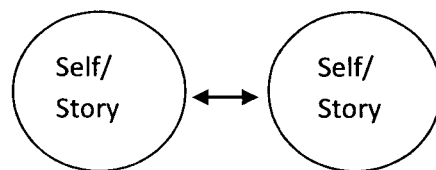
Singular Self:



Multiplicitous Self:



Conflictual Self:



Reconciliatory Self:

