Theory [Invited Paper]

Check for updates

On Stories, Conceptual Space, and Physical Place: Considering the Function and Features of Stories Throughout the Narrative Ecology

William L. Dunlop [1,2] [†], Dulce Wilkinson Westberg [1]

[1] *Department of Psychology, University of California, Riverside, Riverside, CA, USA.* **[2]** *Department of Psychology, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark.*

[†]Author deceased prior to publication of this paper.

Abstract

Life stories, or narrative identities, are psychosocial constructions that work to establish a sense of self-continuity through time and across contexts. These stories, which represent a distinct personality domain and assessment paradigm, both inform and are informed by the stories pertaining to constructs within more distal systems (e.g., dyads, households, states, nations, cultures). To this end, we consider the ways in which study of narrative identity may be enhanced by extending the conceptual bounds of its assessment paradigm, to better account for the varied stories within and across these ecological systems. We argue that: a) like narrative identity, stories throughout the narrative ecology function to build and maintain continuity, and b) there are thematic features of narrative identity that transcend divides between these systems including: agency & communion and redemption & contamination. These premises work to focus study of self, society, and story.

Keywords

narrative identity, ecological systems, cultural continuity, agency, communion, redemption, contamination

---

Relevance Statement

We articulate a framework for interpreting the function and features of stories, irrespective of whether they pertain to one's individual identity, through whole cultural communities. This carries implications for the study of the contributing factors to variability (be it individual, intranationally, or internationally) in narrative identity.

Key Insights

- Narrative identity is considered from the vantage of ecological systems theory.
- Throughout the narrative ecology, stories work to further continuity.
- Throughout the narrative ecology, stories may be interpreted using agency/ communion and redemption/contamination.
- This framework helps guide research on intranational variation in narrative identity.

Stories surround us and stories define us. The current entry summarizes our attempt to offer a common metric for interpreting stories, irrespective of whether they represent the most intimate and individual corners of the self or the guiding principles, values, and meanings of the collective entities to which it is a part. Doing so will be necessary as researchers continue their study of the life story, or narrative identity, including those with hopes of exploring the intranational variability of this vexing construct. At its core, ours is a paper with a small number of premises which, we hope, further an integrative ecological framework useful to researchers working to understand the relations between self, society, and story.

Within the diverse field of personality science, there exists the narrative identity approach, an assessment paradigm focused on a distinct domain of personality, life stories (see Dunlop, 2015; McAdams, 2013; McLean et al., 2020b). Through the construction of a life story, or narrative identity, the author attains and maintains an enduring sense of self through time and across contexts (Chandler et al., 2003; McAdams, 1997). These stories have been noted to exist within distinct and individualized narrative ecologies, ecologies that begin with the person and work out from there to include the social relationships, social contexts, and cultures of which the person is a part (Fivush & Merrill, 2016; McLean, 2015; McLean & Syed, 2015; but see Fish & Syed, 2018).

Our contribution to the innovative theory and research on the narrative ecology may be distilled to two components. First, irrespective of their placement within this ecology, stories may serve the function of building and maintaining a sense of *continuity*, be it with respect to the self, a couple, or even whole cultural communities. Second, certain thematic features within the narrative identity can be used to interpret stories of self, stories of society, and everything in between including: *agency* and *communion*, which serve as motivational landmarks (for review, see Wiggins, 1991), and *redemption* and *contamination*, which capture affective shifts in story (for recent review, see Dunlop, 2021a). In what follows, an overview is provided of narrative identity and what has generally

PsychOpen GOLD

been written about narrative ecologies (Part I). In Parts II and III, we introduce our two central premises (pertaining to continuity and story content) and signal the implications they hold for the study of narrative identity including its potential intranational and international variability. We summarize and conclude our paper in Part IV.

Part I: Narrative Identities and Narrative Ecologies

For as long as there have been philosophers, there have been philosophers interested in the problem of personal identity (see Luckman, 1979). This problem holds a similarly enviable tenure within psychology, going back at least as far as James (1890), who deemed it "the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal" (p. 298). It can be expressed in the following way: Selves rarely if ever stay still for long. They exist within time and, for that reason, are required to adapt to it. The magnitude of these changes is such that if we were somehow able to meet the selves of our year's past, we may require little convincing that we are engaged in an interaction between two numerically distinct people, rather than the same individual at two points in time. Fair enough. A problem emerges, however, when we realize that a sense of sameness in change or, *continuity*, is required for us to remain committed to the promises of yesterday and the hopes of an as-yet unlived tomorrow. It is for this reason that self-continuity is an interpretive achievement rather than something to be assumed by default (Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Chandler et al., 2003).

The narrative identity approach[1] is founded on the notion that, adults construct integrative life stories in which the personal past, present, and presumed future are drawn together within a coherent and compelling plot to attain and maintain a sense of what has been referred to as personal persistence (Chandler et al., 2003) or self-continuity (McAdams, 2013). Narrative and narrative processing is more than qualified to serve this function. It can be used to make sense of personal developments, and explain away inconsistencies and irregularities, by creating connections between the self and experience (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 1985; Pasupathi et al., 2007). More often than not, these connections skew away from verifiable features of our personal past (i.e., facts) and towards inferences less easily authenticated, pertaining to broader meanings and character developments. This property lends itself to the belief that narrative identity is a personal myth or psychosocial construction (Bruner, 1986; McAdams, 1985). It draws

---

1) The assessment paradigm focusing on narrative identity has gone by several names (e.g., the life story model of personal identity; McAdams, 1985). It is also often associated with the related personological paradigm (e.g., Wiggins, 2003). Here, we use the term 'narrative identity approach' due to its cache within contemporary personality psychology.

from the objective occurrence of certain life events, but the meaning made within and across these experiences is and should be focal (Dunlop, 2022).

Assessing Narrative Identity

The narrative identity approach now has in its possession a more-or-less standard technique to both assess aspects of this identity and quantify the thematic and structural features therein (for reviews, see Adler et al., 2017; Dunlop, 2021b). The Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2008) has been particularly germane for the former, offering prompts that allow for the assessment of broad life chapters as well as more specific key scenes, including high points, low points, and turning points. Whether administered within the context of a semi-structured interview or computer-mediated questionnaire (e.g., McCoy & Dunlop, 2016), the resulting narrative material is then typically reliably quantified for any number of thematic and structural features (e.g., Adler et al., 2017; McLean et al. 2020b).

Among these many thematic and structural features, two dualities (four constructs in total) may be signaled out based on their prevalence and conceptual heft (e.g., Adler, 2012; Dunlop et al., 2020b; McAdams et al., 2001; Wiggins, 1991, 2003). The first is agency and communion. The second is redemption and contamination. Agency draws together a collection of more proscribed constructs including but not limited to separation, independence, dominance, power, and achievement. Possessing a similar range and scope, communion captures constructs such as relatedness, community, affiliation, and intimacy (Bakan, 1966; for reviews, see Wiggins, 1991, 2003). Within narrative, agency and communion have been operationalized in different ways, including the presence/absence of certain sub-themes such as achievement/responsibility and status/mastery (representing agency) and love/friendship and unity/togetherness (representing communion; McAdams, 2001).

For a story to be a story, something must happen. Often, this 'something' takes the form of an affective shift from negative to positive or positive to negative (e.g., Dunlop, 2021a; McAdams, 2006; Perlin & Fivush, 2021). The former is the defining feature of redemptive stories while the latter is definitional of contaminated stories. Within narrative identity, redemptive stories often manifest in terms of motifs such as illness to health, suffering to salvation, and rags to riches (see McAdams, 2006). Typically (but not exclusively, see Dunlop et al., 2020b; Perlin & Fivush, 2021), researchers have implemented a dichotomous coding system in which it is determined whether a given life chapter (Dunlop et al., 2018) or key scene (i.e., McAdams et al., 2001) is or is not a redemptive story or contaminated story.

Redemption and contamination represent focal instances of the broader progressive and regressive story types (e.g., Causadias et al., 2018; Gergen & Gergen, 1986). In a progressive story, there is an advancement towards a valued state. This includes not only stories in which a negative beginning is redeemed, but also instances in which

a favorable initial state becomes even better. The inverse of the progressive story is the regressive story, wherein there is a shift away from a valued state. In the case of contamination, this may involve a shift from positive to negative and corrupted. The regressive story also captures instances in which a negative beginning is made worse throughout the story's arc. In the absence of either progression or regression, a story may be considered stable in its underlying structure (see Gergen & Gergen, 1986).

Narrative Identity and Ecology

Phenomenologically, narrative identity may be as intimate as it gets. This story feels like *our* story, being highly personal and infinitely unique. It is. At the same time, this story is a cultural product. In fact, the way we learn to tell stories and ultimately do so could hardly be more cultural in nature (for reviews, see Fivush, 2019; Wang, 2021). Once more, within particular cultural niches, certain types of stories and storytelling are emphasized while others are discouraged (e.g., Hammack, 2008, 2011; McLean & Syed, 2015). To better understand the relations between self, society, and story, several narrative researchers have begun to draw from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory (e.g., Fivush & Merrill, 2016; McLean, 2015). In this theory, the person is centered within several distinct systems (but see Fish & Syed, 2018; Rogers et al., 2021; Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). The microsystem is the one most immediate to the person and houses constructs such as the person's immediate social relationships. Beyond the microsystem is the mesosystem which contains contexts such as the person's neighborhood and work environment as well as the individuals therein. Next, is the exosystem, capturing broader sociopolitical institutions, and the macrosystem, wherein there exists the ideologies and epistemologies of the applicable cultures. These systems are understood to possess a temporal dynamism, a property captured within the chronosystem.

When applied to the topic of story, the ecology becomes the *narrative* ecology. The narrative ecology appropriates these systems but, rather than considering the various persons and structures that may be placed within them, as the name suggests, is constituted by stories. The applicable story at play when we consider the person is an (auto)biography. As we move outward, we have stories pertaining to and told by the person's social contacts (e.g., family members, romantic partners). From there, we have more distal narratives capturing broader tales about, and supported by, one's community and work environments, sociopolitical institutions, and cultures (see Fivush & Merrill, 2016; McLean, 2015).

When narrative is considered from this ecological perspective at least a few things become evident. First, although our stories are highly personal, they are inseparable from the broader ecology, one constituted by stories within more distal systems. Second, narrative is quite versatile, able to shift from the level of analysis with which psychologists are most comfortable (i.e., the person) to other levels (e.g., groups, cultures) with ease and while also escaping the so-called ecological and exception fallacies (see, LeVine,

2001; Na et al., 2010). It makes just as much sense to think about an individual's story as it does a society's (e.g., Kelman, 2001). The same is true for other entities besides nations, such as one's social relationships, family, place of employment, hometown, etc. (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2018, 2020a, 2021; McLean, 2015). As we have written elsewhere (Chandler & Dunlop, 2015), few concepts possess such scope, range, and flexibility. This, we attribute in part to what Sarbin (1986) called the narrative principle, the notion that, "human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (p. 8). Irrespective of whether constructs are the exclusive province of psychology, sociology, or other related disciplines, they may be considered in terms of story (see also, Hammack & Pilecki, 2012; Hammack & Toolis, 2015).

Part II: Transcending the Divide Between Systems Using Story

On the basis of story's plasticity and reach, it can and should be asked whether there are related constructs within the narrative identity literature that possess an ability to traverse with it throughout the narrative ecology. Below, we first consider the relevance of continuity as a common function of stories throughout the narrative ecology.[2] We then identify the thematic and structural features of narrative identity that appear capable of capturing the thematic content of narratives across levels and systems.

Collective Stories for Collective Continuity

Narrative identity affords the author with a sense of self-continuity through time and across contexts (e.g., Dunlop, 2015; McAdams, 2013). We contend that continuity possesses the rare characteristic of being a 'satellite' concept (Chandler & Dunlop, 2015), one that carries relevance for stories throughout the narrative ecology.[3] Just as a definitional property of persons is that they possess an identity that persists through time, so too is it definitional of social relationships through whole cultural communities (e.g., Ashmore et al., 2004; Emery et al., 2021; Usborne & Taylor, 2010; Yampolsky et al., 2021). The stories that exist within the narrative ecology can work in ways which establish continuity (couple continuity, cultural continuity, etc.), and permit a coherent account and shared understanding of the past, present, and future (Chandler et al., 2003; de la Sablonnière et al., 2011; Haraldsson & McLean, 2021).

---

2) Our focus here concerns an understanding of the person and corresponding ecological systems from the perspective of narrative. As such, we do not address the place of narrative intra-personally or within the personality system (for such an overview, see McAdams, 2013) and, instead, assume its central role within this system.

3) Researchers have identified several functions served by autobiographical memory (see Lind et al., 2019). Among them, continuity represents the focus here, given its centrality to narrative identity.

Much of the work exploring continuity beyond the self has considered Indigenous and Inuit youth within North America. Unfortunately, cultural continuity is particularly salient in these groups precisely because of the dramatic injustices they have collectively endured (e.g., Taylor, 2002). One of the many longstanding implications of these actions has been the jeopardization of collective meaning and meaning frameworks. Those looking for indication of such loss will find it in the words of Plenty Coups, one of the great warriors of the Crow Nation (pre-colonization): "I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse-stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. *After this nothing happened*" (as quoted in Lear, 2006, p. 2, italics added). When a culture is robbed of the thread or connective tissue between the collective past, present, and future, few things make sense and the next day simply becomes much like the last (Chandler et al., 2003). Individually, persons work to construct a coherent and compelling personal story and then live into it (e.g., Adler, 2012). From couples through cultures, stories pertaining to the collective can be similarly formative and sustaining (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2018, 2021; Hammack, 2011; McLean & Syed, 2015; Westrate, 2021). In contrast, if, to draw from the words of Plenty Coups, the meaning systems upon which culture is predicated are stopped in their tracks, continuity at both the personal and collective level is likely to be forfeit.

Constituting Continuity

There are several ways that relations between personal and cultural continuity may be conceptualized. At one end of the continuum, there exists the belief that the two are largely if not completely independent of, or orthogonal to, one another. From this 'split' vantage, the overall health or vitality of cultural continuity is irrelevant to the person's more individual ability to construct a self through story. At the other end of the continuum, there exists the more relational belief that, like self and society itself, personal and cultural continuity are more or less the same thing. This vantage suggests that, although personal and cultural continuity may be separated for the purposes of study and/or scholarship, doing so is to prioritize pragmatism over the way things actually are.

Our read of the more traditional ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) falls somewhere between these two possibilities. The person is embedded in a number of increasingly distal systems. This person develops authorship from within a particular sociocultural bedding, one that provides a shared meaning framework. Applied to the topic of narrative and continuity, then, this suggests that cultural continuity represents something of a requisite, or necessary precursor, to self-continuity. In the absence of a shared meaning framework, little is likely to make sense and grasping let alone working to solve the problem of personal identity may simply be out of the question. For there to be a cultural continuity of which to speak, however, it must exist within living souls and warm bodies themselves continuous. This, in turn, signals that personal and cultural

continuity are engaged in a mutually definitional process (see also, Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). One that may involve alignment or misalignment of personal and collective stories (Adler, 2018; Thorne & McLean, 2003). When personal and collective stories (e.g., family, or cultural narratives) do not cohere, identity conflict may contribute to feelings of disconnect and decreased continuity (e.g., McLean et al., 2018; Schachter, 2004). Misalignment may stem partly from variation in the content of personal experiences due to environmental factors, including structural inequalities. For example, racial/ethnic minority group members in the United States (U.S.) are less able to meet the valued cultural standard of attending college due to structural barriers that inhibit their college matriculation (e.g., discrimination, academic tracking; Syed et al., 2011). Variability in the *content* of individuals life experiences may result in intranational variation in narrative identity, as personal continuity, and the stories one tells to achieve it, might differ based on whether one is able to meet valued cultural standards (Wilkinson & Dunlop, 2022). One example of this is that individuals from marginalized groups may tell stories that highlight their connection with other marginalized people as opposed to relating with dominant cultural narratives (Syed & McLean, 2021b). It may be that higher representation of racial/ethnic minorities in particular regions leads to greater alignment of personal and collective stories and, in turn, greater continuity. This implies that environmental factors including racial/ethnic density, may correspond with intranational variation in personal and collective stories. Beyond numerical representation, individuals' *perceptions* of what groups are dominant (hot and cold context; Syed, 2015, p. 36) may also contribute to intranational variability in narrative. Irrespective of whether stories at the personal and cultural level cohere, continuity is central across levels of the narrative ecology.

The Content of Stories, From the Person to the Macrosystem

If the metaphor of "_____ *as story*" carries the range necessary to consider persons through whole cultural communities (e.g., Hammack, 2011; McAdams, 2013), then we may right ask if there are certain dimensions or features of narrative that hold relevance, irrespective of whether we are dealing with stories that exist within the person through the macrosystem. On the basis of both historical precedent (e.g., Hammack, 2011; McClelland, 1965) and conceptual relevance (e.g., Dunlop et al., 2020b; Wiggins, 1991), here we consider four thematic features of narratives, represented by two dualities, that are prime candidates for such systematic and paradigmatic intermingling: agency and communion and redemption and contamination. Due to their utility across various levels of analysis (more on that below), these thematic features provide researchers interested in intranational variability in narrative identity with a common lens to view stories within proximal and distal systems.

PsychOpen GOLD

Agency and Communion

It is impossible to overestimate the relevance agency and communion hold for constructs throughout the ecology and narrative ecology. These meta-constructs have been noted as appropriate conceptual coordinates for an understanding of interpersonal behavior, motives, and affect (e.g., Hopwood et al., 2021; Wiggins, 1991). Such behaviors, motives, and emotions are typically represented within an interpersonal circumplex (see Hopwood et al., 2021), in which agency and communion are placed on the y and x axes, respectively. Treating agency and communion as orthogonal axes within a circumplex allows for precise configuration of how patterns of these personality characteristics vary (Gurtman & Pincus, 2003). As noted earlier, agency and communion also provide some indication of the motivational nature of the story in question. Some stories deal with struggles for personal autonomy, professional success, and the like (agency) whereas others deal with challenges and resolutions to personal relationships and interpersonal connectedness (communion; see Adler, 2012; Frimer et al., 2011; Lind & Dunlop, 2020; McAdams, 2001).

The use of the word 'meta' in the phrase 'meta-constructs' suggests a relevance beyond any one level or system (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2018). In the case of agency and communion, the term is apt. In his authoritative review, Wiggins (1991) noted that this duality has been used successfully to understand a wide swath of entities, from couples through cultures, and even distinct epistemologies and world views (see also, Hogan, 1982). More recently, Fiske (2018) denoted agency and communion as the basic dimensions used to represent individuals as well as groups. Individuals cannot help but view the world around them as if it were a story (Sarbin, 1986) and flavor these stories with themes of agency and communion (e.g., Fiske, 2018; see also, Abele & Wojciszke, 2018). Further underscoring the ubiquity of this duality, some researchers have attempted to assess the agency and communion of collective entities through the analysis of stories. For example, McClelland (1965) determined the achievement motivation (a manifestation of agency; see, for example, Frimer et al., 2011) of whole nations as assessed via the motivational imagery contained within children's books.

In summary, the meta-constructs of agency and communion have proven capable of serving as dimensions relevant to understanding a number of intrapersonal and collective constructs (see Abele & Wojciszke, 2018; Fiske, 2018; Wiggins, 1991). This is so with respect to personal stories as well as other stories throughout the ecology. For this reason, we believe that the duality of human existence possesses the flexibility and scope to be used to speak to the motivational qualities of story across the physical and conceptual spaces the person may inhabit.

Redemption and Contamination

Redemption and contamination have proven similarly capable of capturing the affective arcs of personal and cultural stories, be they shifting from negative to positive

(redemption) or positive to negative (contamination; see Dunlop, 2021a; McAdams, 2006; McAdams et al., 2001). For example, McAdams (2006) framed redemption as *the story Americans live by*. This claim is substantiated by research indicating that Americans demonstrate a preference for redemptive stories and the people who tell them (McLean et al., 2020a). Redemption has also been noted as relevant to the telling of certain historical events in an American cultural context (e.g., Adler & Poulin, 2009; Dunlop et al., 2021). Similarly, in his in-depth examination of Jewish-Israeli and Palestinian youth, Hammack (2008, 2011) observed that the cultural narratives of their respective groups were defined by arcs of redemption and contamination, respectively. That is, redemption and contamination represented archetypes relevant for the identity of persons and whole cultural communities. In summary, then, we contend that redemption and contamination may be used to capture the emotional arcs of stories throughout the narrative ecology and be used to examine differences among individuals, groups, and countries.

Intersections Among Narrative Themes

While these themes are presented independently, it is important to note that they do not necessarily manifest in isolation. Rather, they intersect in meaningful ways across the narrative ecology. Enhanced agency and communion are representative of redemption (McAdams, 1999), whereas declines in these themes are often characteristic of contamination (McAdams, 1998). While redemption and contamination may involve agency and communion, a story cannot be both redemptive and contaminated. Stories can, however, contain themes of both agency and communion, though their prevalence may vary based on cultural context. For example, redemptive stories among Americans often involve enhanced agency ('pulling oneself up by their bootstraps'; McAdams, 2006). This agentic emphasis, however, may vary even within the context of the U.S. Indeed, Americans belonging to marginalized groups have been found to narrate increased belonging (communion) in stories about cultural deviations, which are considered sources of conflict or tension (Syed & McLean, 2021b). In this way, communion may be more important for enabling continuity within narratives that veer from the prototypical. Recent research also demonstrated that redemption & contamination and agency & communion are conceptually related and load onto the same latent construct of "motivational and affective themes" (McLean et al., 2020b, p. 33). These themes were additionally found to be highly predictive of well-being over and above other dimensions of narrative identity. The predictive power of these themes may provide some indication of their probable importance for self-continuity across the narrative ecology. That is, individuals seek to conform to the story approved by their cultural group in order to situate the self across time and contexts. When successful, the story is reinforced at the personal and collective level making positive functioning and self-understanding more likely (Syed & McLean, 2021a).
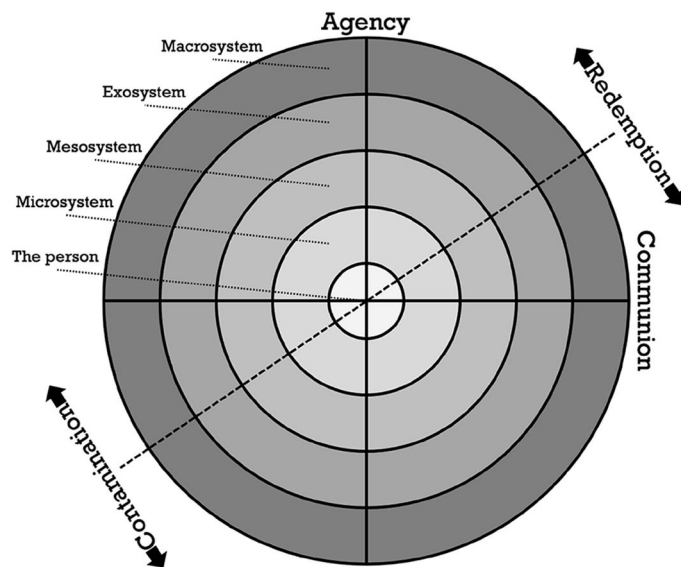
PsychOpen GOLD

A Framework for Stories and Systems

By way of recap, we contend that: 1) narrative identity represents the route by which self-continuity may be gained and maintained (see also, McAdams, 2013), 2) the person and corresponding narrative identity are situated within an individualized narrative ecology, one in which stories pertaining to other entities (e.g., dyads, groups, institutions, and cultures) exist within distinguishable levels (Fivush & Merrill, 2016; McLean, 2015), 3) stories throughout this ecology hold the potential to further the continuity of the corresponding entity (e.g., Chandler et al., 2003; de la Sablonnière et al., 2011), 4) there exists a small number of constructs that, like story and continuity, are able to transcend divides between levels and systems, offering a shared thematic lens from which to view stories: agency and communion provide indication of the motivational coordinates of a given story, while redemption and contamination (the most salient and pertinent exemplars of the broader progression and regression story types; see Gergen & Gergen, 1986) connote its emotional arc.

This framework is represented in Figure 1. The systems reflecting one's narrative ecology may be attributed to the earlier illustration of Fivush and Merrill (2016), whereas the insertion of agency and communion as motivational coordinates for stories within and across levels may be attributed to the interpersonal circumplex prominently featured within Contemporary Integrative Interpersonal Theory (Hopwood et al., 2021). Stories from within these systems may be considered based on their combination of agency and communion. These motivational coordinates, in turn, set the landscape upon which the story's affective arc can play out. As such, the degree of the line representing redemption and contamination can provide indication of the agentic and communal motivational content within the story. This line's extension towards redemption relative to contamination, in contrast, may be used to signal the respective strength of these affective arcs. Of course, many stories are neither redemptive nor contaminated in nature. If so desired, one could interpret stories throughout the narrative ecology in terms of the broader prototypes of progression, regression, and stability. Redemption and contamination are used here, due to their exemplary status with the broader progression and regression prototypes, as well as their established relevance at both the personal and cultural level (Hammack, 2011). Redemption and contamination are also used as they capture emotional variability in experiences and contain affective shifts more predictive of psychological functioning relative to positive or negative affect alone (Adler et al., 2015). Our read of the extant literature examining narrative from more structural vantages (e.g., McLean, 2015; Syed & McLean, 2021a) is that stories within the narrative ecology can be understood in least two qualitatively distinct ways. In the first, they are the stories told by the person about the various concepts and constructs within and across systems (e.g., personal stories about a group or other collective entity; see Ashmore et al., 2004; Westrate, 2021). In the second, they are the stories these various entities create and/or promulgate (see, e.g., Hammack, 2011; Rogers et al., 2021; Syed & McLean,

2021a). As a case in point, a culturally shared narrative surrounding race in the U.S. is colorblindness (i.e., the belief that race does not matter, people are equal, racism only exists in the past). Colorblindness has been found within personal narratives provided by schoolchildren about race as well as in problematic societal "refrains of 'All Lives Matter' in response to 'Black Lives Matter'" (Rogers et al., 2021, p. 4). This demonstrates how a) individual narratives can reflect structural narratives and b) structural narratives are propagated via systems external to the individual (e.g., educational, and political institutions, mainstream media, parents, etc.; Rogers, Niwa, et al., 2021).
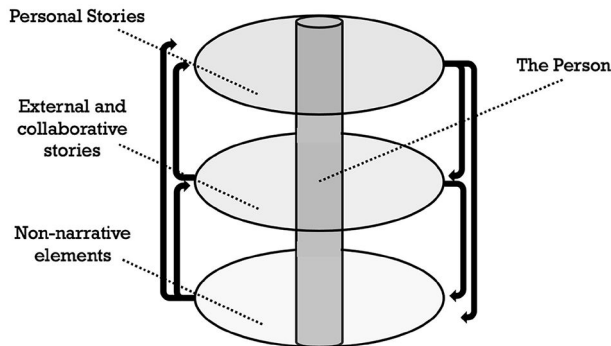
Figure 1

An Organizing Framework for Considering the Motivational Coordinates and Affective Arcs of Stories Throughout the Narrative Ecology

As we begin to offer more concrete suggestions regarding the study of stories within and between systems, it is important to more cleanly separate these two kinds of stories as well as speculate on their associations. With this in mind, we present the layers, or domains, of the narrative ecology in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Narrative (and Non-Narrative) Ecology Partitioned Into Three Constituent and 'Fuzzy' Components

The first domain represents something of a catch-all category, meant to signal the raw materials upon which stories are constructed, including characters and background settings. From there, in the middle domain, we have 'external and collaborative' stories. This domain captures stories permeating through popular culture, media, and literature (e.g., Hammack, 2011) as well as stories about collective entities of which the person is a part. For example, the shared story of a romantic couple (for review, see Bühler & Dunlop, 2019) would be placed in this second domain. In the final domain we have the person's first-hand stories about the entities throughout the narrative ecology. Returning to the example of a romantic couple, this is where we would place the person's individual account of their romantic relationship, as well as personal stories of additional entities, such as work organizations, nations, and cultures.

Before fleshing out the ways in which this framework may inform an agenda of narrative identity research, we wish to raise two caveats. First, the distinctions we have made between the domains in Figure 2 represent more of a pragmatic move rather than a conceptual truth. Indeed, the interconnected nature of the micro-and-macrolevels has led some to call for a change in language that, "intentionally situates the macro in the micro" (i.e., "m(ai)cro"; Rogers et al., 2021, p. 2). Drawing from such relational epistemologies (Causadias et al., 2018; Overton, 2015), we view these distinctions as useful but also arbitrary. Second, in both Figure 1 and Figure 2, the fourth dimension (time) is absent. Though absent from our diagrams, we assure the reader that time is very much at the heart of the framework we have introduced. This is so much so that each of these figures can be understood to represent the narrative ecology at one point in time.

Story itself is necessarily temporal in nature (e.g., Gergen & Gergen, 1986) and the same is true of the narrative ecology (see also earlier discussion regarding the chronosystem).

Part III: An Agenda for Study of Story, Place, and Space

Centering narrative identity within the narrative ecology, while also noting a common metric with which to understand stories throughout this ecology (one based on agency/communion and redemption/contamination) lends itself to a number of novel empirical initiatives. We begin with the domain in the narrative ecology referred to as personal stories, before transitioning to study of external and collective stories and then, finally, this ecology's non-narrative elements (see Figure 2).

Personal Stories

Within the domain of personal stories, there exist the narratives the person has formed about the self (narrative identity), the narratives they have constructed about the collective entities of which they are a part (what Ashmore & colleagues, 2004, p. 83, referred to as 'collective identity stories'), and their representations of particular entities and ideologies ('group stories' to again use the parlance of Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 83). Approaching the study of story from an ecological vantage suggests the need for the creation of interview assessments akin to the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2008), but targeting distinct concepts and constructs, such as one's representation of their cultural group (e.g., Ashmore et al., 2001; de la Sablonnière et al., 2011; Westrate, 2021). As Syed and McLean (2021a) noted, due to their ubiquity, asking participants for direct conceptualizations of such cultural stories may be problematic. It is for this reason that requesting stories of instances in which the narrator felt they had deviated from certain cultural expectations may help compliment more direct assessments to get a sense of the nature of the cultural stories themselves (e.g., McLean et al., 2018; Svensson & Syed, 2019; Wilkinson, 2021). Finally, researchers could continue to explore personal stories pertaining to culturally significant events (e.g., Adler & Poulin, 2009; Dunlop et al., 2018, 2021).

Stories about personal experiences during culturally significant events allow one to examine the narrators' understanding of the events in question and provide indications of their personal and collective ramifications. For example, in our earlier research on the United States' 2016 presidential election (Dunlop et al., 2018, 2021), many of our participants described instances in which an event taking place within a more distal system exhibited a personal and immediate impact upon them. Consider the story provided by Jessica,[4] a Clinton voter from a Northeastern state:

> I went with friends in the evening after work to vote in [state] at a local fire station. We all supported Hillary and was proud to be voting for her, the most qualified candidate and the first female
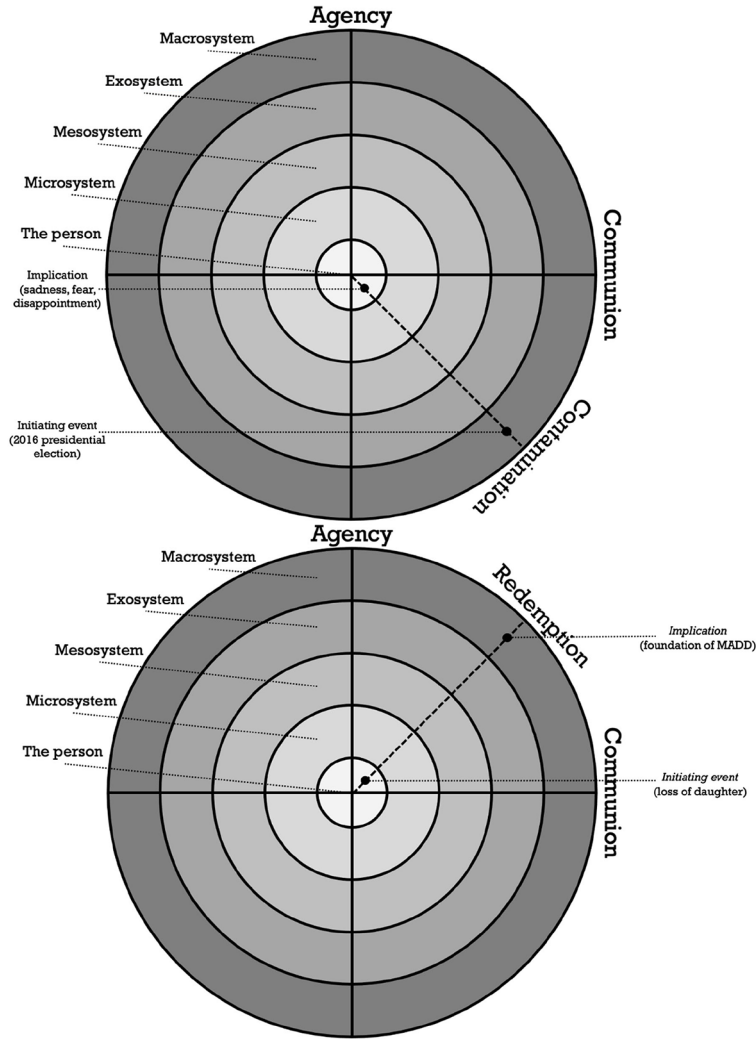
---

4) A pseudonym.

> President or so we thought. We were texting friends in other states as we stood waiting in line to vote. Our mood was energized, upbeat, happy, relaxed, and proud. We bonded with each other and felt that this was a wonderful historic moment that we were proud to be part of. After voting, everyone came back to my home where we were going to watch the election results. The mood was celebratory. We had a party atmosphere with food, music, and drinks served. My family and friends then gathered in front of the TV to watch the reporters discuss the election as we waited for the polls to close. Then the results start coming in and we were jubilant at first. Then the votes got down to the wire and we became worried, then quiet, then disbelief, anger, sadness, fear, and major disappointment crept in. It was a great shock and some of us cried. The room got very quiet, and we were in denial.

Communion abounds in Jessica's story. She describes bonding with friends while watching the results of the 2016 election unfold. This surplus of communion is balanced by a reduction in agency, as she denotes a diminished functioning brought on by a sociopolitical event (largely) out of her control. There is also a contaminated cause and effect in the story's affective arc, and this cause and effect exists within different systems (see Figure 3, top panel). To paraphrase Adler and Poulin (2009), this is very much a case of the politics becoming personal. In contrast to Clinton voters, Trump voters were more likely to evince redemptive narratives about the 2016 political election. This points to the possibility that environmental factors, including cultural discourse about these candidates on media outlets, may have contributed to the opposition present between Clinton and Trump voters' narratives. Individuals are embedded within social systems (e.g., politics, gender, race/ethnicity) that influence their social position and orientation to certain power structures (Velez & Spencer, 2018). This positionality may affect the content of individual's personal experiences and, in turn, their autobiographical narratives (Syed & McLean, 2021a). For example, gender fundamentally influences the storytelling process such that parents typically encourage girls, rather than boys, to engage in more emotional elaboration within stories. Boys, in contrast, are taught to emphasize the setting, action, or logical solutions (Thorne & McLean, 2003). In this way, cultural norms act as mutually constituted frameworks one might use to situate their story of the self (Hong et al., 2000). A narrative ecological framework also allows for interpretation of stories that flow in the opposite direction. As one case-in-point, consider those whose story is defined by a personal tragedy that stimulates a desire for structural change (see also, Dunlop et al., 2015). Take, for example, the story of Candace Lightner, the founder of Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Hers is a story in which the tragic loss of her 13-year-old daughter at the hands of a drunk driver is framed as leading to the author's advocacy and subsequent structural reform efforts is depicted. As she

notes, "I had become a personality and a crusader with a cause...The texture of my days changed enormously" (Lightner & Hathaway, 1991; see Figure 3, lower panel).

Figure 3

Visual Representation of Two Stories Within the 'Personal Story' Domain of the Narrative Ecology

A narrative ecological framework, allowing for the possibility of narrated causes and narrated effects (or at the least, narrated befores and afters) that occupy different systems (Figure 3), dovetails nicely with Perlin and Fivush's (2021) recent work on redemption.

These authors made the innovative suggestion to consider redemptive stories beyond their mere presence and absence, by distinguishing what is challenged and what is resolved. Either may be focused on the self or situation. The current approach, while very much in this spirit, suggests at least two modifications to their model. The first is to consider initiating events and implications among the concepts within and between the systems depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 3. The second is to consider the nature of initiating events and implications using the motivational coordinates of agency and communion (rather than self and situation). For example, in addition to denoting the overall motivational orientation of Candice Lightner's story (high agency, high communion), we could denote the motivational signature of the initiating event (low agency, low communion) and implication (high agency, high communion). Exploring stories within and across systems in this manner also provides the opportunity to document the formulative pieces of narrative relevant to stories beyond redemption.

External and Collaborative Stories

When cleanly separated from the personal and individualized stories above, the study of external and collaborative stories suggests a distinct methodological orientation. Beginning with the person, in this second domain, the emphasis shifts from autobiography to biography — stories other attribute to the person (vicarious stories; see Thomsen & Pillemer, 2017). Narrative identity is a coauthored enterprise, with external stories serving as outlines for the self that one might accept or reject (i.e., assimilate or accommodate; McLean, 2015). For example, family stories influence but exist outside of an individual's narrative identity (Fivush et al., 2011). To best understand the influence of stories told by close others (e.g., peers, family), it will be fruitful to examine the content of these stories and their overlap with narrative identity and psychological functioning (e.g., Harake et al., 2020).

Examining the historical backdrop of collective narratives and differences in personal stories based on generational cohort may also reveal features of the external stories that inform narrative identity (Barsigian et al., 2020). Personal stories about collective aspects of the self are linked with the surrounding context (e.g., how accepted one's collective identity is; Westrate, 2021) and may be used to examine features of cultural narratives (Syed & McLean, 2021a). In this way, the narrative identity approach itself is a tool that may be used to examine stories at the micro- and macrolevels (Westrate, 2021). Beyond this system, this second domain may also be targeted by working to derive cultural stories through existing sources such as historical texts and other cultural products (see also, Syed & McLean, 2021a). This is what was done to distill the cultural narratives considered in Hammack (2011) as well as the work of McAdams (2006). In this latter work, the author consulted several different and varied sources (e.g., *People Magazine*) and, through content analysis, noted the prevalence of redemptive stories within the applicable cultural context (U.S.).

Recent work has also outlined how digital storytelling provides an outlet for individuals to share first-person narratives of their lives through stories, photos, and videos (Fish & Counts, 2020; Fish & Syed, 2021). These cultural products motivate communities to enact structural change. This is another promising avenue for the examination of cultural stories, ones that galvanize social progress. An additional tool with which to examine cultural framing beyond the self is through media representations of cultural groups. Media representations shape how individuals perceive and treat members of particular groups. For example, Besana et al. (2019) found representations of Asian Americans in U.S. films often confirmed harmful stereotypes. This misrepresentation perpetuates inaccurate narratives about Asian Americans and influences the behavior of outgroup members. Examining how representation can be adjusted to alter the cultural narrative, is imperative. Cleanly separating personal stories from the external and collaborative also underscores the utility of collecting non-narrative evaluations of these cultural products (see, for example McLean et al., 2020b).

Beyond Stories

Of course, there is more to life (and the person) than stories. Recognition of the 'non-narrative' domain in Figure 1 is meant to capture the more physical and tangible features of the narrator's ecology that feed into and are influenced by stories. In contemporary personality science, an impressive amount of research has begun to explore such physical spaces in relation to personality traits (e.g., Götz et al., 2020; Jokela et al., 2015; Rentfrow et al., 2008, 2013). Related research has examined how physical space is a cultural product that may influence aspects of the environment, including increased racial inequality (Bonam et al., 2017). For example, perceptions of racialized physical spaces can contribute to the narrative about the space and the groups residing there. The dearth of work exploring narrative identity and physical place stands in contrast to this promising focus within personality trait and social psychological literature. Indeed, in our review, we failed to identify a single research project exploring narrative identity while drawing from the innovative methods used to explore geographic variation in personality traits. Obviously, there is much work that needs to be done.

The ecological framework summarized here may be a helpful guideline in this work. Viewing the narrator as the center of a distinct and individualized narrative ecology broadens the range of stories that may be considered and contrasted intranationally. For example, not only could and should researchers begin to consider the ways in which personal stories differ across physical areas (e.g., neighborhoods, states, broader regions; e.g., Jokela et al., 2015; Rentfrow et al., 2008, 2013), they may also incorporate into their studies consideration of 'collective identity stories' and 'group stories' (Ashmore et al., 2004). Considering the study of intranational variation in personality via story also unlocks new and exciting research avenues from which to consider questions pertaining to the existence and nature of specific cultures delineated on the basis of their geography

(e.g., Oishi et al., 2015; Rentfrow et al., 2008) as well as the viability of regional stereo-types (e.g., the culture of honor; see Nisbett & Cohen, 1996).

In addition to the relative ubiquity story has exhibited in study of self and society, a comparison of the features of salient autobiographical stories from one region to the next appears to sidestep the potential dangers of the reference-group effect (see Heine et al., 2002). The same is true of recent research exploring variability in relations between traits and certain constructs (e.g., life satisfaction) between regions (e.g., Jokela et al., 2015). As story and narrative identity are examined in relation to geographic variability, both the mean-level of narrative features as well as their correlates should be considered. This research may also wish to plumb the extant literature on traits and places for discussion of the mechanisms that may explain geographic variability in not only traits but also stories (e.g., Götz et al., 2020; Rentfrow et al., 2008).

As a final point, we wish to signal the cold fact of life that not everyone is afforded the same capitol to craft their stories (Syed & McLean, 2021a). Be it external or a feature of the person themselves, much in the non-narrative domain works to constrain and limit what is narrated and how continuity is attained and maintained. The narrative ecologies of those who occupy marginalized identities (see McLean et al., 2018) will differ drastically from those who do not. The framework introduced in the pages of this manuscript may prove useful as it suggests a common metric from which to consider the stories of both marginalized and non-marginalized identities and cultures.

Part IV: Conclusions on Continuity and Story Content Within and Across Systems

Narrative processing in general, and the authoring of narrative identity in particular, represents the route by which individuals build and maintain a sense of self-continuity. As the earlier words of Plenty Coup make clear, however, we are not the sole proprietors of this purpose and momentum. Each of us exists within a complex ecology comprised of stories and spanning systems from the immediate to the distal. The richness and unity we experience through the construction of our own story is predicated and dependent upon a similar felt continuity among the ideological and cultural practices that exist in more distal systems. In the absence of such a bedding, nothing (else) will happen.

The current entry is one based on a few novel premises. The first of these, already no-ted in the above paragraph, is that like narrative, continuity possesses a functional utility throughout the narrative ecology and the stories contained within it. The second is that, within the narrative identity literature, there exists a select few features that appear similarly flexible across and within systems: agency and communion and redemption and contamination. We maintain that these motivational and affective features possess the scope sufficient to interpret stories across the board. One of the advantages of so doing is an enhanced ability to compare stories within and between narrative ecologies. This is

not to say that other dimensions of narrative identity do not possess this ability. Future work should gather empirical evidence for how these and other dimensions of narrative (e.g., affective tone) speak to stories across the narrative ecology. Distilling the themes most relevant across various levels of the ecology will help to discern the dimensions along which intranational variation in narrative identity can be best understood.

Our hope in doing all of this was to be generative to the study of narrative identity. For good reason, many research programs have considered the personal stories generated by participants to be the product of sole authorship. Others have approached the study of narrative identity from a more cultural or structural perspective. Alone, neither approach adequately recognizes the many features and factors that work to cause one individual to construct a different narrative than the next. For example, noting that redemption is relevant within American cultural contexts does not provide a complete explanation as to why some Americans are more or less redemptive than others. At present, a complete equation and/or theory to account for individual differences in the redemptive content of participants' stories does not exist. The ecological framework described here may aid researchers as they work to further derive this equation.

Competing Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author Contributions: *William L. Dunlop*—Idea, conceptualization | Design planning | Visualization (data presentation, figures, etc.) | Writing | Supervision, mentoring. *Dulce Wilkinson Westberg*—Idea, conceptualization | Design planning | Visualization (data presentation, figures, etc.) | Writing | Feedback, revisions.

Supplementary Materials

For this article, open peer-reviews are available (for access see Index of Supplementary Materials below).

Index of Supplementary Materials

Personality Science. (Ed.). (2022). *Supplementary materials to "On stories, conceptual space, and physical place: Considering the function and features of stories throughout the narrative ecology"* [Open peer-review]. PsychOpen GOLD. https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.6673

PsychOpen GOLD

References

Abele, A. E., & Wojciszke, B. (2018). *Agency and communion in social psychology.* London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Adler, J. M. (2012). Living into the story: Agency and coherence in a longitudinal study of narrative identity development and mental health over the course of psychotherapy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 102*, 367–389. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025289

Adler, J. M. (2018). Bringing the (disabled) body to personality psychology: A case study of Samantha. *Journal of Personality, 86*, 803–824. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12364

Adler, J. M., Dunlop, W. L., Fivush, R., Lilgendahl, J. P., Lodi-Smith, J., McAdams, D. P., McLean, K. C., Pasupathi, M., & Syed, M. (2017). Research methods for studying narrative identity: A primer. *Social and Personality Psychological Science, 8*, 519–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617698202

Adler, J. M., & Poulin, M. (2009). The political is personal: Narrating 9/11 and psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality, 77*, 903–932. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00569.x

Adler, J. M., Turner, A. F., Brookshier, K. M., Monahan, C., Walder-Biesanz, I., Harmeling, L. H., Albaugh, M., McAdams, D. P., & Oltmanns, T. F. (2015). Variation in narrative identity is associated with trajectories of mental health over several years. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 108*, 476–496. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038601

Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality. *Psychological Bulletin, 130*, 80–114. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.1.80

Ashmore, R. D., Jussim, L., Wilder, D., & Heppen, J. (2001). Toward a social identity framework for intergroup conflict. In R. D. Ashmore, L. Jussim, & D. Wilder (Eds.), *Social identity, intergroup conflict, and conflict reduction* (pp. 213–249). New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

Bakan, D. (1966). *The duality of human existence: An essay on psychology and religion.* Chicago, IL, USA: Rand McNally.

Barsigian, L. L., Hammack, P. L., Morrow, Q. J., Wilson, B. D., & Russell, S. T. (2020). Narratives of gender, sexuality, and community in three generations of genderqueer sexual minorities. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 7*, 276–292. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000384

Besana, T., Katsiaficas, D., & Loyd, A. B. (2019). Asian American media representation: A film analysis and implications for identity development. *Research in Human Development, 16*, 201–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427609.2020.1711680

Bonam, C. M., Taylor, V. J., & Yantis, C. (2017). Racialized physical space as cultural product. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 11*, Article e12340. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12340

Bruner, J. S. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds.* Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.

Bühler, J., & Dunlop, W. L. (2019). The narrative identity approach and romantic relationships. *Social and Personality Psychological Compass, 13*(4), Article e12447. https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12447

PsychOpen GOLD

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.

Causadias, J. M., Updegraff, K. A., & Overton, W. F. (2018). Moral meta-narratives, marginalization, and youth development. *The American Psychologist, 73*, 827–839. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000252

Chandler, M. J., & Dunlop, W. L. (2015). Personal and cultural identities: Development and persistence. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science* (7th ed., pp. 452–483). Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley.

Chandler, M. J., Lalonde, C. E., Sokol, B. W., & Hallett, D. (2003). Personal persistence, identity development, and suicide: A study of Native and Non-Native North American adolescents. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, 68*, vii–130.

de la Sablonnière, R., Pinard St-Pierre, F., Taylor, D. M., & Annahatak, J. (2011). Cultural narratives and clarity of cultural identity: Understanding the well-being of Inuit youth. *Pimatziwin, 9*, 301–322.

Dunlop, W. L. (2015). Contextualized personality, beyond traits. *European Journal of Personality, 29*, 310–325. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.1995

Dunlop, W. L. (2021a). Everything you wanted to know about redemptive stories* (*but were afraid to ask). *Journal of Research in Personality, 92*, Article 104078. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2021.104078

Dunlop, W. L. (2021b). Narrative identity's nomological network: Expanding and organizing assessment of the storied self. *Personality Science, 2*, Article e6469. https://doi.org/10.5964/ps.6469

Dunlop, W. L. (2022). The cycle of life and story: Redemptive autobiographical narratives and prosocial behaviors. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 43*, 213–218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.07.019

Dunlop, W. L., Bühler, J., Maghsoodi, A., Harake, N., Wilkinson, D., & McAdams, D. P. (2020a). The stories couples live by. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520969900

Dunlop, W. L., Harake, N., & Wilkinson, D. (2018). The cultural psychology of Clinton and Trump supporters: A narrative approach. *Social Psychological & Personality Science, 9*, 193–204. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617732611

Dunlop, W. L., Walker, L. J., & Wiens, T. K. (2015). The redemptive story: A requisite for sustaining prosocial behavioral patterns following traumatic experiences. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 28*, 228–242.

Dunlop, W. L., Wilkinson, D. E., & Harake, N. (2021). Episodic master narratives through time: Exploring the temporal dynamism of 2016 election night stories. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 51*, 820–832. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2790

Dunlop, W. L., Wilkinson, D., Harake, N., Graham, L. E., & Lee, D. (2020b). The redemption and contamination research form: Exploring relations with narrative identity, personality traits, and life satisfaction. *Memory, 28*, 1219–1230. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2020.1828926

Emery, L. F., Gardner, W. L., Carswell, K. L., & Finkle, E. J. (2021). Who are "we"? Couple identity clarity and romantic relationship commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 47*, 146–160. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167220921717

Fish, J., & Counts, P. K. (2020). "Justice for native people, justice for native me": Using digital storytelling methodologies to change the master narrative of Native American peoples. In K. C. McLean (Ed.), *Cultural methodologies in psychology: Describing and transforming cultures* (pp. 237–272). New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

Fish, J., & Syed, M. (2018). Native Americans in higher education: An ecological systems perspective. *Journal of College Student Development, 59*, 387–403. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2018.0038

Fish, J., & Syed, M. (2021). Digital storytelling methodologies: Recommendations for a participatory approach to engaging underrepresented communities in counseling psychology research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 68*, 271–285. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000532

Fiske, S. T. (2018). Stereotype content: Warmth and competence endure. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 27*, 67–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417738825

Fivush, R. (2019). Sociocultural developmental approaches to autobiographical memory. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 33*, 489–497.

Fivush, R., Bohanek, J. G., & Zaman, W. (2011). Personal and intergenerational narratives in relation to adolescents' well-being. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 2011*, 45–57. https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.288

Fivush, R., & Merrill, N. (2016). An ecological systems approach to family narratives. *Memory Studies, 9*, 305–314. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016645264

Frimer, J. A., Walker, L. J., Dunlop, W. L., Lee, B. H., & Riches, A. (2011). The integration of agency and communion in moral personality: Evidence of enlightened self-interest. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101*, 149–163. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023780

Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. M. (1986). Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 22–44). New York, NY, USA: Praeger.

Götz, F. M., Stieger, S., Gosling, S. D., Potter, J., & Rentfrow, P. J. (2020). Physical topography is associated with human personality. *Nature Human Behaviour, 4*, 1135–1144. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0930-x

Gurtman, M. B., & Pincus, A. L. (2003). The circumplex model: Methods and research applications. In J. Schinka & W. Velicer (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology: Research methods in psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 407–428). Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley.

Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting a life: The development of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin, 126*, 748–769. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.126.5.748

Hammack, P. L. (2008). Narrative and the cultural psychology of identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 12*, 222–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868308316892

Hammack, P. L. (2011). *Narrative and the politics of identity: The cultural psychology of Israeli and Palestinian youth.* New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

PsychOpen GOLD

Hammack, P. L., & Pilecki, A. (2012). Narrative as a root metaphor for political psychology. *Political Psychology, 33*, 75–103. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00859.x

Hammack, P. L., & Toolis, E. E. (2015). Putting the social into personal identity: The master narrative as root metaphor for psychological and developmental science. *Human Development, 58*, 350–364. https://doi.org/10.1159/000446054

Harake, N. R., Sweeny, K., Wilkinson, D., & Dunlop, W. L. (2020). Narrating the nadir: Examining personal and vicarious stories of cancer-related low points among survivors and romantic partners. *Psychology & Health, 35*, 1268–1292. https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2020.1743838

Haraldsson, K. G., & McLean, K. C. (2021). "My story is not my own": A qualitative analysis of personal and collective continuity. *Qualitative Psychology.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000197

Heine, S. J., Lehman, D. R., Peng, K., & Greenholtz, J. (2002). What's wrong with cross-cultural comparisons of subjective Likert scales? The reference-group effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 903–918. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.6.903

Hogan, R. (1982). A socioanalytic theory of personality. In M. M. Page (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Vol. 29. Personality: Current theory and research* (pp. 55–89). Lincoln, NE, USA: University of Nebraska Press.

Hong, Y. Y., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C. Y., & Benet-Martinez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: A dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *The American Psychologist, 55*, 709–720. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.7.709

Hopwood, C. J., Pincus, A. L., & Wright, A. G. C. (2021). Six assumptions of contemporary integrative interpersonal theory of personality and psychopathology. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 41*, 65–70. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.03.007

James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology.* New York, NY, USA: Henry Holt and Company.

Jokela, M., Rentfrow, P. J., Bleidorn, W., Lamb, M. E., & Gosling, S. D. (2015). Geographically varying associations between personality and life satisfaction in the London metropolitan area. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 112*, 725–730. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1415800112

Kelman, H. C. (2001). The role of national identity in conflict reduction: Experiences from Israeli-Palestinian problem-solving workshops. In R. D. Ashmore, L. Jussim, & D. Wilder (Eds.), *Social identity, intergroup conflict, and conflict reduction* (pp. 187–213). New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

Lear, J. (2006). *Radical hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation.* Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press.

LeVine, R. A. (2001). Culture and personality studies, 1918–1960: Myth and history. *Journal of Personality, 69*, 803–818. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6494.696165

Lightner, C., & Hathaway, N. (1991). *Giving sorrow words: How to cope with grief & get on with your life.* New York, NY, USA: Grand English Publishing.

PsychOpen GOLD

Lind, M., Demiray, B., & Bluck, S. (2019). Identifying distinct sets of predictors of specific functions of autobiographical memory. *Memory, 27*, 1313–1318. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2019.1639759

Lind, M., & Dunlop, W. L. (2020). *Surplus and Thwarted Agency and Communion (STAC) coding manual.* Gainesville, FL, USA: University of Florida.

Luckman, T. (1979). Personal identity as an evolutionary and historical problem. In M. V. Cranach (Ed.), *Human Ethology* (pp. 357–382). Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

McAdams, D. P. (1985). *Power intimacy and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity.* New York, NY, USA: Guilford Press.

McAdams, D. P. (1997). The case for unity in the (post)modern self: A modest proposal. In R. D. Ashmore & L. J. Jussim (Eds.), *Self and identity: Fundamental issues* (pp. 46–78). New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, D. P. (1998). *Contamination sequence coding guidelines* [Unpublished manuscript]. Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA.

McAdams, D. P. (1999). *Coding narrative accounts of autobiographical scenes for redemption sequences* (4th rev.) [Unpublished manuscript]. Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA.

McAdams, D. P. (2001). *Coding autobiographical episodes for themes of agency and communion.* [Unpublished manuscript]. Foley Center for the Study of Lives, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA.

McAdams, D. P. (2006). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by.* New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, D. P. (2008). *The life story interview* [Unpublished manuscript]. The Foley Center for the Study of Lives, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA.

McAdams, D. P. (2013). The psychological self as actor, agent, and author. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 8*, 272–295. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612464657

McAdams, D. P., Reynolds, J., Lewis, M., Patten, A., & Bowman, P. J. (2001). When bad things turn good and good things turn bad: Sequences of redemption and contamination in life narrative, and their relation to psychosocial adaptation in midlife adults and in students. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 474–485. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167201274008

McClelland, D. C. (1965). Toward a theory of motive acquisition. *American Psychologist, 20*, 321–333.

McCoy, T. P., & Dunlop, W. L. (2016). Contextualizing narrative identity: A consideration of assessment settings. *Journal of Research in Personality, 65*, 16–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2016.08.006

McLean, K. C. (2015). *The co-authored self: Family stories and the construction of personal identity.* New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

McLean, K. C., Delker, B. C., Dunlop, W. L., Salton, R., & Syed, M. (2020a). Redemptive stories and those who tell them are preferred in the U.S. *Collabra: Psychology, 6*, Article 39. https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.369

PsychOpen GOLD

McLean, K. C., Lilgendahl, J. P., Fordham, C., Alpert, E., Marsden, E., Szymanowski, K., & McAdams, D. P. (2018). Identity development in cultural context: The role of deviating from master narratives. *Journal of Personality, 86*, 631–651. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12341

McLean, K. C., & Syed, M. (2015). Personal, master, and alternative narratives: An integrative framework for understanding identity development in context. *Human Development, 58*, 318–349. https://doi.org/10.1159/000445817

McLean, K. C., Syed, M., Pasupathi, M., Adler, J., Dunlop, W., Drustrup, D., Fivush, R., Graci, M., Lilgendahl, J. L., Lodi-Smith, J., McAdams, D. P., & McCoy, T. (2020b). The empirical structure of narrative identity: The initial Big Three. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 119*, 920–944. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000247

Na, J., Grossmann, I., Varnum, E. W., Kitayama, S., Gonzalez, R., & Nisbett, R. E. (2010). Cultural differences are not always reducible to individual differences. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 107*, 6192–6197. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1001911107

Nisbett, R. E., & Cohen, D. (1996). *Culture of honor: The psychology of violence in the South.* New York, NY, USA: Routledge.

Oishi, S., Talhelm, T., & Lee, M. (2015). Personality and geography: Introverts prefer mountains. *Journal of Research in Personality, 58*, 55–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2015.07.001

Overton, W. F. (2015). Processes, relations and relational-developmental-systems. In W. F. Overton & P. C. M. Molenaar (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science: Vol. 1. Theory and method* (7th ed., pp. 9–62). Hoboken, NJ, USA: Wiley.

Pasupathi, M., Mansour, E., & Brubaker, J. R. (2007). Developing a life story: Constructing relations between self and experience in autobiographical narratives. *Human Development, 50*, 85–110. https://doi.org/10.1159/000100939

Perlin, J. D., & Fivush, R. (2021). Revisiting redemption: A life span developmental account of the functions of narrative redemption. *Human Development, 65*, 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1159/000514357

Rentfrow, P. J., Gosling, S. D., Jokela, M., Stillwell, D. J., Kosinski, M., & Porter, J. (2013). Divided we stand: Three psychological regions of the United States and their political, economic, social, and health correlates. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 105*, 996–1012. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034434

Rentfrow, P. J., Gosling, S. D., & Potter, J. (2008). A theory of the emergence, persistence, and expression of geographic variation in psychological characteristics. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3*, 339–369. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00084.x

Rogers, L. O., Niwa, E. Y., Chung, K., Yip, T., & Chae, D. (2021). M (ai) cro: Centering the macrosystem in human development. *Human Development, 65*, 270–292. https://doi.org/10.1159/000519630

Sarbin, T. R. (1986). The narrative as a root metaphor for psychology. In T. R. Sarbin (Ed.), *Narrative psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* (pp. 3–21). New York, NY, USA: Praeger.

Schachter, E. P. (2004). Identity configurations: A new perspective on identity formation in contemporary society. *Journal of Personality, 72*, 167–200. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00260.x

Svensson, Y., & Syed, M. (2019). Linking self and society: Identity and the immigrant experience in two macro-contexts. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 64*, Article 101056. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2019.101056

Syed, M. (2015). Theoretical and methodological contributions of narrative psychology to ethnic identity research. In C. Santos & A. J. Umaña-Taylor (Eds.), *Studying ethnic identity: Methodological advances and considerations for future research* (pp. 27–54). Washington, DC, USA: American Psychological Association.

Syed, M., Azmitia, M., & Cooper, C. R. (2011). Identity and academic success among underrepresented ethnic minorities: An interdisciplinary review and integration. *The Journal of Social Issues, 67*, 442–468. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2011.01709.x

Syed, M., & McLean, K. C. (2021a). Master narrative methodology: A primer for conducting structural-psychological research. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000470

Syed, M., & McLean, K. C. (2021b). *Who gets to live the good life? Master narratives, identity, and well-being within a marginalizing society.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/4pjuf

Taylor, D. M. (2002). *The quest for identity: From ethnic minorities to Generation X.* New York, NY, USA: Praeger.

Thorne, A., & McLean, K. C. (2003). Telling traumatic events in adolescence: A study of master narrative positioning. In R. Fivush & C. A. Haden (Eds.), *Connecting culture and memory: The development of an autobiographical self* (pp. 169–185). New York, NY, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Thomsen, D. K., & Pillemer, D. (2017). I know my story and I know your story: Developing a conceptual framework for vicarious life stories. *Journal of Personality, 85*, 464–480. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12253

Usborne, E., & Taylor, D. M. (2010). The role of cultural identity clarity for self-concept clarity, self-esteem, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 36*, 883–897. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167210372215

Vélez-Agosto, N. M., Soto-Crespo, J. G., Vizcarrondo-Oppenheimer, M., Vega-Molina, S., & García Coll, C. (2017). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory revision: Moving culture from the macro into the micro. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*, 900–910. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617704397

Velez, G., & Spencer, M. B. (2018). Phenomenology and intersectionality: Using PVEST as a frame for adolescent identity formation amid intersecting ecological systems of inequality. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 2018*, 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1002/cad.20247

Wang, Q. (2021). The cultural foundation of human memory. *Annual Review of Psychology, 72*, 151–179. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-070920-023638

PsychOpen GOLD

Westrate, N. M. (2021). Using life story methods to illuminate cultural-historical dimensions of LGBTQ+ identity development across generations. In K.C. McLean (Ed.), *Cultural methods in psychology: Describing and transforming cultures* (pp. 3–34). New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press.

Wiggins, J. S. (1991). Agency and communion as conceptual coordinates for the understanding and measurement of interpersonal behavior. In D. Cicchetti & W. M. Grove (Eds.), *Thinking clearly about psychology: Essays in honor of Paul E. Meehl, Vol. 1. Matters of public interest; Vol. 2. Personality and psychopathology* (pp. 89–113). Minneapolis, MN, USA: University of Minnesota Press.

Wiggins, J. S. (2003). *Paradigms of personality assessment.* New York, NY, USA: Guilford Press.

Wilkinson, D. E. (2021). *Stories off the beaten path: Exploring the content and correlates of cultural deviation narratives.* Manuscript submitted for publication.

Wilkinson, D. E., & Dunlop, W. L. (2022). Ethnic-racial life scripts: Relations with ethnic-racial identity and psychological health. *Emerging Adulthood, 10*, 402–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696820968691

Yampolsky, M. A., West, A. L., Zhou, B., Muise, A., & Lalonde, R. N. (2021). Divided together: How marginalization of intercultural relationships is associated with identity integration and relationship quality. *Social Psychological & Personality Science, 12*, 887–897. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620962653