CULTURE, SELVES, AND TIME: THEORIES OF PERSONAL PERSISTENCE IN NATIVE AND NON-NATIVE YOUTH

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Before it finishes, this chapter will end up as a short summary of a rather long research undertaking aimed at detailing the different procedural means exploited by culturally mainstream and Aboriginal (or "First Nations"[1]) youth in their efforts to understand their own and others', personal persistence or "self-continuity" in the face of those wholesale personal changes that time and development inevitably hold in store. What was it, we wanted to know from each of them, that, "in the contemplation of their lives, links the parts to the whole" (Dilthey, 1962, p. 201)? Before coming to an account of their diverse answers to such questions, however, it is important to first attempt to get clear about what we, as well as a whole graveyard full of intellectual ancestors, have intended by the notion personal persistence, and why understanding oneself and others as somehow continuous in time has so regularly been held out as both a constitutive condition for selfhood and as a prerequisite to the maintenance of any sort of moral order.

The tightly pleated arguments to be unfolded here will be laid out in three steps. The first of these rehearses the reasons why the notion of personal persistence is so widely (and, we will argue, appropriately) understood to be foundational to what self- or personhood could reasonably be taken to be. Step two—Part II—details our reasons for maintaining that the ready-to-hand reasons capable of adequately sustaining such necessary claims about the continuity of the self effectively boil down to just two: self-continuity warranting strategies that we will label here as either "Essentialist" or "Narrativist" in character. Finally, in Part III, we mean to report out on evidence intended to demonstrate—and this is our main point—that the choice between these alternative approaches to the problem of self-continuity is strongly determined by one's culture of origin. We will do this by describing data collected as part of a close and ongoing comparison between the claims about self-continuity offered up by

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[1] In keeping with common practice in Canada, the term "aboriginal" is used here to refer to indigenous persons in general, whereas "Aboriginal" refers to several specific groups within Canada: Inuit, First Nations, and Métis. The Inuit were formerly referred to as "Eskimo", and First Nations were once termed "Indian." The Métis have their origins in intermarriages between the First Nations and European settlers.

several samples of Aboriginal and culturally mainstream Canadian youth.

Part I: The Paradox of Sameness and Change

Before going on in Part II to take up what might conceivably count as solutions to the problem of self-continuity, a clear case first needs to be set out as to why experiencing oneself as personally persistent is, first of all, problematic, and, second, why solving this problem is as important as we and others go on to allege.

What renders the maintenance of self-continuity a problem, and what qualifies its solution as an identity preserving achievement, is, we will argue, that properly owning one's past and future requires finding answers (often a whole train of age-graded answers) to the paradox of sameness within change—a paradox that turns on the fact that we must, on pain of otherwise ceasing to be an instance of what selves are standardly taken to be, understand our own self to somehow embody both permanence and change simultaneously (Fraisse, 1963).

Considered separately, claims for both personal change and personal sameness seem unavoidably true. Few, for example, require being convinced that each of us is, more often than not, relentlessly—even tediously—the same. The old and powerful idea that leopards do not change their spots is not only consonant with much of ordinary experience, but key to the fundamental logic of identity—a logic which requires that persons be, in some sense, sufficiently self-same to allow for their regular identification and re-identification as one and the same continuous person through time (Strawson, 1999). In short, we all regularly and happily subscribe to the idea of personal sameness because we have no choice—because of the patent absurdity of the consequences to which the rejection of this idea would lead.

All that has just been said about sameness is, of course, only the first shoe. Here is the second of what is arguably a matched pair. Life is a breakneck and, in the old phrase of Aristophenes, "whirl is king" (Schlesinger, 1977, p. 279). That is, because things are in a perpetual state of flux, selves are naturally and inevitably works in progress, forced by the temporally vectored nature of their public and private existence to constantly change or die (Gallagher, 1998). Clearly, our bodies change, our beliefs and desires change (along with our projects, our commitments and our interpersonal relationships), often seemingly beyond all recognition. If this were not so, tradition would defeat novelty, and we could neither make sense of the experience of innovation in the lives of individuals, nor of change in the history of the species (Unger, 1975).

There, in a nutshell, is the classical paradox of sameness and change, and a large part of the reason that selves lead the treacherous existence that they do. Change is inevitable, sameness is unavoidable, and working out some way of understanding ourselves as personally persistent that does not trivialize, or turn a blind eye to, either of these contradictory but necessary obligations is no easy nut to crack. Failing to do so is simply not a live option, all for the reason that any putative self that did not somehow negotiate a way of achieving sameness within change would simply fail to qualify as a recognizable instance of what selves are standardly taken to be (Cassirer, 1923). Although, as *we* take it, this conclusion is not really negotiable, coming to some better understanding why this is so is less than obvious, and requires some effort devoted to sorting out just what sort of claim actual claims of personal persistence are ordinarily intended to be.

What self-continuity is *not* is some elective "feature" (Taylor, 1991), or contingently true fact about selves that can be imagined to stand, or fall, depending on one's personal or cultural predilections. Rather, as we shall argue, qualifying as importantly self-same across the multiple changes and multiple phases of one's temporal existence, is no sort of disputable empirical fact at all, but an exceptionless generic, design feature or systems imperative; a normative-forensic obligation or constitutive condition of selfhood (Flanagan, 1996). In short, being understandably self-same across the

multiple phases of our temporal existence is centrally and significantly what most, and perhaps all, societies think persons *ought* to be (Wilkes, 1988, p. 128).

Why this is so widely alleged to be so (e.g., Hallowell, 1955; Harré, 1979) is that every society—every moral order—requires, as a foundational condition for its continuing existence, some degree of social responsibility, which, in turn, presupposes the availability of mechanisms for both counting its members responsible for their own past actions, and for insuring some degree of commitment to an as yet unrealized but common future. In the absence of such presumptions of personal persistence it would not be possible, for example, to apply praise and blame appropriately, or to take one another's hopes or intentions for the future with any degree of seriousness. How, for example, could there be a heaven and a hell, where the good and bad are meant to languish, if people's past actions and future intentions could not be reliably counted as their own? How, for that matter, could St. Peter do a proper accounting job if persons flitted in and out of existence, and if the number of souls in the world was not reliably the same as the number of individuals originally brought into existence? If some workable measure of sameness was not to be had, that is, if there was not some proper way of reliably vouchsafing personal persistence, then the whole fabric of civic life would quickly unravel. Duties and liabilities would be un-assignable, contracts and promises would be meaningless, and hopes and dreams a mystery. Consequently, self-continuity, as Wilkes (1988, p. 158) puts it, is what makes the notion of purposive behavior intelligible, and social life possible. For all of these reasons personal persistence is widely argued, even among otherwise committed cultural relativists (e.g., Geertz, 1973; Geertz & Geertz, 1975; Hallowell, 1955; Shweder & Bourne, 1982) to be "universal in the human experience" (Levine & White, 1986, p. 38), and so "ubiquitous to all of humankind" (Harré, 1979, p. 397).

None of the foregoing claims regarding the "universal" or "ubiquitous" character of presumptive personal persistence should, of course, be seen as in any way impugning the well-documented fact that, in different times and different places, various cultural groups can and have subscribed to often wildly disparate beliefs and values concerning self- or personhood (Lillard, 1998). Selves are a good deal more than the generic design features that they necessarily hold in common, and at other less top-lofty levels of analysis (Dennett, 1987; Marr, 1982; Overton, 1991), different societies obviously can and do differ dramatically in what they take to be the hardware requirements of selves, and the procedural ways in which these are instrumented (Chandler, Lalonde, & Sokol, 2000). Nor is the putative requirement that selves must necessarily persist in any way intended to legislate against the possibility that, normative expectations or not, some of the time some of the people evidently do drop the thread of their own continuous existence, or at least imagine that they have done so. Amnesias and fugue states, and conversion experiences of varying sorts presumably do happen, and in the fullness of time, many do regularly change—or believe themselves to have changed—seemingly beyond all recognition. Whether rare or commonplace, those who "suffer" such apparent lapses in persistence necessarily do so at the risk of their legitimate claims to personhood. That is, those who fail to present a winnable case for their own persistence are quickly drummed out of the corps of bona fide persons, are written off as laboring under some serious misapprehension, or, worse still, are seen as delusional (Hacking, 1999). What evidently seems required, then, if the claims about personal persistence laid out here are seen to have merit, is that all such oddities—such candidate cases of putative discontinuity— need to be understood as exceptions to a general rule, or normative backcloth of presumed sameness, that shows the rest of us to be intelligible only in view of our own past behavior and experience, and in light of our short-term and long-term goals (Wilkes, 1988). Anything less would be to abandon the "principle of charity" that allows

the rest of us to proceed as if our worlds make some followable and temporally vectored sense. That, in short, is the problem that claims of self-continuity are meant to address. What, we now need to know, is the solution?

As we will argue below, in Part II, the paradox of sameness and change, and its resolution through some followable argument for personal persistence, appears to admit to only one or the other of two broad solution strategies. One of these, which we will go on to mark as "Essentialist" or entity-based, works to resolve the problem by actually embracing change, but only awkwardly and in some diminished or carefully hedged way that allows certain special identity conferring bits and pieces of the self—some indelible stain—to hide out from the ravages of time. On such accounts, what are dismissed as only superficial parts of oneself are seen to be as free and fickle and will-o'-the-wisp as they like, so long as other more central, more subterranean, more essential features of the self, often thought to lie at the very core of one's being, are understood to somehow stand outside of, and otherwise defeat, time (Shalom, 1985).

Alternatively, one can happily "give up the ghost" on any imagined "essential" part of the self thought to constitute some unchanging innermost core of one's being, and, instead, stake all claims for personal persistence on the connective tissue—the relational forms—that link together the various time-slices that together make up the archipelago of one's temporally vectored existence. On such accounts—which we have variously labeled as "Relational" or "Narrative"—nothing about the self need be understood to stand apart from time, or be wholly immune to change. Rather, self-continuity or personal "survival" (Parfit, 1971), is thought to be guaranteed by the fact that some connective thread can be found and taken up that is capable of linking earlier and later manifestations of the self into some meaningful whole.

The open question to which we now mean to turn has to do with just how these contrastive ways of thinking about sameness within change differently play themselves out in history, and in the historical lives of given individuals of different ages and cultures.

Part II: Essentialist vs. Narrative Self-Continuity Warrants

The broad claim that we mean to defend in what follows is that whenever and wherever there is talk about wholeness or personal persistence, then only one or the other of just two vernaculars is likely being spoken. *One* of these, which we have just characterized as Essentialist or Entity-based, works to marginalize change, and standardly seeks to "ground" our understanding of self-continuity by imagining some perhaps hidden, but always enduring personal *essence* that necessarily stands apart from the ravages of time, while relegating everything that is fickle and changeable to the status of a kind of ephemeral shadow of the machine.

According to what we will mark out as a *second* and fundamentally different way of reasoning through the paradox of sameness within change (a way labeled here as Relational or Narratively-based), defensible claims of personal continuity are never rooted in the persistence of some fictive, a-temporal part, no matter how supposedly essential or deeply tucked away in the core of one's being. Rather, on this view, personal persistence in the face of change can only be redeemed to the degree that meaningful relations—interstitial connections, if you will— can be established between the earlier and succeeding time-slices of our life. Each of these distinctive self-continuity warranting strategies is briefly hinted at below (for a more detailed accounting see: Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003).

Essentialist Readings of the Self

Although what has been hinted at so far in alluding to a class of Narrativist claims for personal persistence strikes many as somehow dangerously continental or otherwise suspiciously *avant-garde*, Essentialism is likely to seem as familiar as an old shoe. The reason for this, of course, is that Essentialism has reputedly been the default strategy in Euro-

American culture for at least three centuries. According to what has become the received view on this topic (e.g., Taylor, 1975, 1989, 1991; Sass, 1988), Western thought, at least since the Renaissance, can be read as a "journey into the interior" (Sass, 1988, p. 552) marked by an inward turn, away from still earlier medieval views according to which persons are imagined to have traditionally found their place in some larger meaning structure by looking outside themselves and to an all-encompassing cosmic or religious order—some Aristotelian or God-given "great chain of being" (Lovejoy, 1942) in which individual persons play some predestined but secure part. On such pre-Enlightenment accounts, order, harmony, value, and meaning were not to be found within one's self, but in things larger than life situated in the surrounding cosmos.

All that, of course, was then—way back then. With the Enlightenment—with the dawning of Galilean and Newtonian science—this earlier and more orderly world of fixed external meaning is widely thought to have effectively collapsed into a matrix of contingent correlations and mechanistic laws of atomic causation. In the face of this "disenchantment" or "dissipation of our sense of the cosmos as a meaningful order" (Taylor, 1989, p. 17), looking outward for sources of meaning is said to have no longer made sense. Rather, inheritors of these new insights were forced instead to turn inward to a more private realm of meaning; some "theater of the mind," where nothing was judged more reliable than our own changeable human experience or interpretations. On this now familiar account, the most famous example of which is Cartesian philosophy, the inner realms of persons, however difficult to access, came to be viewed as more trustworthy and more meaning laden than was the contingent chaos of the ambient universe. Whatever its other costs and benefits, the hallmark change of this new modern inwardness was, it is said, a heightened sense of ourselves as beings with inner depth (Taylor, 1989, p. x).

According to Taylor (1975), subsequent incarnations of this Enlightenment theme all amounted to one or another variation upon this same inward turn. One of these, which Taylor has labeled an "Autonomous" view, held that it was not only practically necessary, but morally incumbent on each of us, if we are to be free and self-determining, to build a bulwark against the mechanistic determinism of the natural world, and to freely chose our fate as individual agents—a Kantian-like understanding that still pervades much of Western thought. A second of these equally Essentialistic views, which Taylor terms "Expressivist," and which partially coincides with Romanticism, understands each of us to possess "an inborn and inner essence that initially exists *in potentia*, and, as it were, yearns to realize itself through a natural process of self-unfolding" (Sass, 1988, p. 563). Fulfillment, on this Expressivist account, meant each person's discovery and expression of her or his own special way of being human (Taylor, 1975, p. 23). Much of the valorization of self-exploration and self-expression, again common to Western culture, obviously has its roots in this romantic counter-Enlightenment movement.

Despite their evident differences, both the "Autonomous" and "Expressivist" positions outlined by Taylor are, fundamentally, more similar than different: both maintain that the true expression of selves arises in opposition to the material and social forces that surround them, and both continue to promote an inward turn that champions individualism, self-awareness, and self-actualization against the social and material constraints of the natural world. From this now predominantly Anglo-American perspective, any reasonable account of the temporal persistence of the self necessarily begins and ends with the invention of a deeply interiorized essence, and anything else less substantive risks dissolving into what Foucault (1970) called "a dream of self-dispersal."

None of this Essentialist talk of immunity to time, however cleverly engineered to finesse the problem of sameness within change, comes without well-documented and oft-mentioned

costs. By accenting inwardness, both Autonomous and Expressivist variations on essentialism foster isolation from outer nature, and an estrangement and separation from the social world. By failing to locate a source of meaning outside the self, both promote a brand of narcissism that collapses morality into a crude form of self-interest, and undermine the worth of anything more grand than simple self-promotion. This is the *Malaise of Modernity* (1991) and the *Ethics of Authenticity* (1992) against which Taylor and others (e.g., Bruner, 1986; Cassirer, 1923; Dilthey, 1962; Habermas, 1985; Harré, 1979) have written so forcefully, and against which existential-phenomenological thinkers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre worked in their efforts to promote a more outer-directed conception of human existence grounded in a larger, encompassing external world.

Personal Persistence in a Narrativist Voice

Despite the fact that, after more than 2000 years of uninterrupted use, Essentialism has come to so dominate Euro-American thought that it more or less amounts to our contemporary version of common sense, it would, nevertheless, be a mistake to suppose that it represents the whole of our (or anyone else's) folk psychology about personal persistence. That is, not withstanding the broadly agreed upon fact that Western societies are very much steeped in an essentialist tradition, there is, just as certainly, a second, if contrapuntal framework of understanding that works to ground identity in the possibility of self-continuity without essence (Putnam, 1988). According to such narrative-like or relational accounts, nothing definitive about selves actually does survive time, or is sufficiently enduring to reliably vouchsafe their persistence. Rather, survival is seen to be owed to whatever relations are responsible for linking our earlier and later ways of being into some coherent pattern, or narrative structure—a connection that, as Dilthey (1962, p. 202) put it, "can only be understood through meaning."

Selfhood, in these anti-metaphysical terms, is not to be understood as rooted in some enduring substance or transcendental essence, but as something closer to what Dennett (1992) calls a "narrative center of gravity," built of the stories we fashion in an effort to integrate our past, present, and anticipated future. We are, by such lights, best seen as leaning more heavily on the foot of change than the foot of sameness; more schematic than taxonomic (Mandler, 1984); more discursive and historical than declarative and prepositional (Bruner, 1986); more dialogical than monological (Hermans, 1996); more local and indigenous than universal or transcendental (Habermas, 1985); and altogether as something more closely akin to the narrative embodiment of lives as told (Spence, 1982). When obliged to justify why selves need and deserve to be counted only once, practitioners of this more Narrativist trade do not, as would their more Essentialist counterparts, begin by banking on the continued existence of some—call it now "illusory"—kernel of sameness (e.g., one's fingerprints, ego, personality, soul) that is imagined "to stand behind the passing states of consciousness and our always shifting ways of being" (James, 1891, p. 196). Rather, they begin instead by putting their money on the web of diachronic patterned relations that are understood to link up the different time slices of their own lives—linkages that are held out to be sufficient in and of themselves, to ground the possibility of self-continuity without essence (Putnam, 1988).

Like the Essentialist views that narratologists so peevishly stand on their heads, relational accounts too have their critics. Some (e.g., Car, 1986; Ricoeur, 1985; Zagorin, 1999), anxious that selfhood not be seen to dissolve into some species of literature, argue that, because lives are not amenable to just any telling, something else less story-like must stand behind and distinguish the telling from the told (Mishler, 1995). Others, still less charitably, are quick to write off proponents of such Narrative views as practitioners of "mere" rhetoric (Ring, 1987), or converts to some *en passant* French fad (Callinicos, 1989), who risk, as Zagorin (1999, p. 23) puts it, becoming "lost in the tropics of discourse."

It is not our intention here to attempt to somehow choose up sides, or arbitrate between these competing Essentialist and Narrativist views. Rather, we mean only to list them out as a way of lining up some of the culturally available resources that history provides as procedural alternatives for differently thinking about the problem of one's own and others' personal persistence through time.

Part III: On assessing the thoughts of Native and non-Native youth

Adventitiously dabbling, as we have just done, in the recent course of Western intellectual history has served, we hope, to make two points. One of these is that, at least since the Enlightenment, what Polkinghorne (1988) termed a broadly shared "metaphysics of substance," coupled with an acquired sense of "inwardness," has conspired to privilege Essentialist solutions to the problem of personal persistence, or at least it is said to have done so for those reared up in contemporary Euro-American culture. The second is that, set against this all too familiar default strategy is another at least potentially available, but countervailing intellectual tradition that privileges becoming over being by partaking in what Polkinghorne (1988) has alternatively called a "metaphysics of potentiality and actuality"—a framework of understanding that potentially favors Narrativist, as opposed to Essentialist, solutions to the paradox of sameness within change.

However representative of the general case, what these and other such Panglossian claims about whole cultures and whole epochs fail to make clear is how, precisely, the balance between such Essentialist and Narrativist thoughts actually plays itself out in real time and in the actual lives of actual individuals, or even whole communities of individuals. Our program of cross-cultural research is meant to be a beginning way of addressing such person- and community-level questions. In attempting to take up these more individuated and, consequently, more bona fide psychological matters, two procedural questions immediately arise: First, exactly *whose* thoughts should be inquired into? And second, just *how* might such an inquiry be best carried out? Fair questions, we think, in a volume meant to be all about alternate conceptions of self and mind.

Part of an answer to the first of these—the *who* question—follows rather directly from the arguments of the preceding section. If, as we have alleged, Essentialism is actually bred in the bone by Western culture, and if thoughts about personal persistence are, as claimed, alive in the minds of everyone, and not just professional philosophers, then it ought to follow that almost any run-of-the-mill Euro-American will, if pricked, fairly bleed Essentialism. That much, at least, no one would find surprising. Rather, the real challenge posed by the "who" question is not how to find live instances of Essentialist thought, but rather how best to locate a potential contrast group that might showcase the Narrativist alternative.

Our own candidate group of choice was Canada's Aboriginal, or First Nations peoples. Other, equally suitable, groups no doubt exist, but there are good reasons, other than convenience (if that is what you call it), for having chosen as we did. One such reason, or more precisely, a background condition that allows all other reasons to count, is the natural fact that First Nations are decidedly *not* Euro-American. Despite several centuries' worth of sustained attempts to forcibly assimilate them, First Nations peoples remain a set of identifiably distinct nations within Canadian society. Although individual First Nations were differentially savaged by a succession of government sponsored forced assimilation programs, all have succeeded, to varying degrees, in retaining and rebuilding much of their cultures. While, in and of itself, "failure" or refusal to assimilate does not, of course, guarantee that Narrativist strategies would find a comfortable home in First Nations cultures, such evidence does come from other quarters. By available accounts, and in contrast to the dominant culture, Native communities, including those in western Canada, do reportedly hold a more distributed conception of knowledge and personhood (Battiste, 2002), and

their claims about personal identity are widely understood to grow out of community and clan relationships in ways that are less evidently true of persons whose cultural roots grow most directly out of a Euro-American intellectual tradition (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). While none of this is enough to prove a point, it was enough, we judged, to warrant our own decision to search among First Nations youth for possible evidence of a default strategy that favors Narrativist, as opposed to Essentialist, self-continuity warranting practices.

Methods and Procedures

In answer to our second question—the one having to do with *how* thoughts about personal persistence might best be gathered up for examination—we will report very briefly on our own decade-long efforts to create and refine a method of getting young persons to seriously consider and speak to the paradox of sameness and change. The unabridged version of this story is long—even Byzantine—but, conveniently, is already reported elsewhere (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003). Minimally, the short version comes in two parts. The first of these includes the fact that the methodology to which we eventually came consists of a semi-structured interview that requires our research participants to describe themselves, both in the present and then some years in the past, all before going on to provide reasons meant to justify why (the inevitable differences that divide their two accounts not withstanding) they still continue to regard themselves as one and the same continuous person. Part Two follows a more or less identical path, but this time counterpart questions are asked, not about participants' own lives, but about the lives of various fictional story characters—where "fictional" and "various" refer to the lives of heroes and heroines of classical stories of character development (*bildungsromane*) familiar in Western and Aboriginal cultures. These stories about, for example, the lives of Jean Valjean, Ebenezer Scrooge, or "The Bear Woman," were presented either in "Classic Comic Book" form, or as short film trailers.

Importantly, this assessment approach, in contrast to more standard issue measurement strategies which presuppose that respondents harbor some declarative knowledge about this or that denotative dimension of the self, is more procedural (Wildgen, 1994), or practice based (Kitayama, 2002), and works simply by requiring participants to actively go about the business of warranting their own and others' personal persistence in the face of demonstrated change.

Scoring

Having carefully set down whatever the young participants in our several studies actually had to say on the subject of their own and others' personal persistence, we subsequently struggled to categorize their remarks in each of two ways. First, and without making a procrustean bed of the enterprise, we worked to designate each response as an instance of Narrativist or Essentialist thought, or (which effectively never came up) as something else entirely. Having settled the question of general response "Type," (i.e., having typecast each participant's account of personal persistence in, first their own lives and then the lives of at least two story characters, as three instances of either Essentialist or Narrativist problem solving strategies) we then went on to code all such responses as reflective of what has proven to be one or the other of five ordered "Levels" of complexity.

Assuming that we are already clear enough about what is loosely intended by broad talk of responses of the Narrativist and Essentialist "Type," what remains in special need of careful explication is what, in this case, is meant by "Level." As proved to be the case, there was, apparent in our data, strong evidence for the existence of what amount to "canonical," if slightly homespun, versions of both Essentialist and Narrativist self-continuity warranting strategies—responses that, while falling importantly short of what might be reasonably expected from a legitimate card-carrying philosopher of mind, easily qualified as recognizable caricatures of such better polished, professionalized explanations. In the case of

responses of the Essentialist "Type," for example, some small, but sizeable, number of our late adolescent respondents argued that, while many of the evident changes in their own lives and the lives of various story characters were real enough, all of these could still be understood as superficial, or merely phenotypic, variations upon another deeper lying and more essential genotypic core of sameness capable of productively paraphrasing itself in endless surface variations—an "essence" the unchanging existence of which served to justify their strongly held convictions about personal persistence. By contrast, other participants, whose general approach to the problem of sameness within change was fundamentally narrative-like in character, responded in no less canonical ways, but did so by reporting that they had identified a clear plot line running through their own autobiography that successfully laced together the various time slices of their own storied lives.

In the classification scheme eventually applied to all of our data, responses that took either of these canonical forms were coded as being at our so-called "Level 4" (i.e., all but perfect) on what proved to be a 5 level coding scheme. The occasional and especially sophisticated participant who ended up actually being coded at Level 5 did so by successfully bracketing such canonical Essentialist or Narrativist forms of reasoning, suggesting instead that their claims about underlying essences or plotlines running through their lives were, in fact, lightly held and best understood as either provisional "theories" they were entertaining, or rough drafts they were still in the midst of sketching about the chronology of their own and others' lives. Naturally enough, responses coded at these 4th and 5th levels were the exception rather than the rule among the Native and non-Native youth on report here. This is understandably the case because young people are not ordinarily born into the world with anything like such fully-fledged ways of trying to make sense of their own and others' self-continuity in time. Instead, the large bulk of these adolescents responded in ways that amounted to stripped-down and more child-like versions of typically later-arriving canonical or provisionalized forms of Essentialist and Narrativist reasoning.

Reduced to its lowest possible common denominator, entry level Essentialist reasoning (Level I in our accounting scheme), for example, proceeds as though selves are made up out of a simple assemblage of atomic parts (e.g., one's name, or fingerprints, or strawberry birthmark), the persistence of any of which is deemed sufficient to make you still you after all of these years. Only marginally more complex is a class of Level II or "Topological" accounts that aim to succeed by insisting that all apparent change is merely presentational, with various fixed and immutable aspects of the self simply orbiting in and out of view. Positing the existence of something like a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other is a familiar tactic of respondents who invoke this low level Essentialist strategy. Still others, scored at Essentialist Level III, successfully factor a truncated notion of time into the equation by postulating a maturational model that allows for the possibility of latent attributes of the self—attributes that, while always present in some nascent form, have their own moments of ascendancy, each popping out (like one's beard or second set of teeth) according to some preordained epigenetic time clock.

Narrativist accounts, too, appear in a variety of scaled-down versions, the earliest Level I instance of which amounts to no more than a simple chronology. A life, seen by such lights, amounts to no more than one damned thing after another. Level II and III Narrativist responses are only marginally more complex, either lining out the various time-slices of a life like so many beads on a common Picaresque string, or treating biographies as though they amounted to no more than a deterministic chain of causes and effects.

Given that each of the commentaries offered up by the participants in our research was scored for both "Type" (Essentialist or Narrativist) and "Level" (I-V), and that all participants were typically asked to comment on possible continuities, not only in their own life but the

lives of two fictional story characters, particular individuals or groups of individuals could display, at least in theory, any one of a wide range of response patterns. Some of these are worth listing out in advance. It could have turned out, for example, that, despite our determined efforts to elicit their best thoughts on the matter, some or all of our respondents might simply have had nothing to say that could be counted as evidence of their having seriously understood or engaged the problem we set before them. As it was, this rarely, if ever happened, with most interview protocols running to several typed pages. Alternatively, some or all of the participants in our several studies might have had *something* to say on the subject of personal persistence, but nothing that represented a natural fit with what was, at least initially, a theoretically derived scoring typology. This too, largely failed to come up, with less than five percent of the protocols collected ending up as "un-scorable." No less disruptive to our hopes for some better understanding of the problem of personal persistence would have been a pattern of pattern-less results, suggesting that, whatever young people might think about the argumentative grounds for self continuity, they simply thought about these matters differently on different occasions.

In considering this last possibility it is necessary to view the notion of "multiple occasions" in each of two ways. First, and in the usual manner of calculating test-retest reliability, "occasions" could be read as referring to different testing sessions separated in time. Alternatively, the notion of "multiple occasions" could also be taken to refer to the *content* of different test items rather than the timing of their administration. Here, we could count questions about persistence in the life of a story character as one item or 'testing occasion' and questions about persistence in the respondent's own life as another, and look for evidence of inter-item consistency across these different measurement opportunities.

Similar concerns about the stability of responses could focus, not on the choice

between Narrative and Essentialist problem-solving strategies, but on the level of complexity of such responses. We might even predict that measurement occasions separated by sufficient time would reveal something like a developmental progression, with responses becoming more complex with the passage of real time. Differences in the complexity of responses that appeared across different item contents, however, would prove (at least in our own case) theoretically troubling.

Concentrating for the moment on the *form* or "Type" of such arguments, the possibilities for stability would seem to line themselves out along a continuum that runs from absolute stability through utter randomness. That is, it might have been the case that, regardless of when and how the topic is presented, individual young persons could show themselves to be consistent in employing either Essentialist or Narrativist warranting strategies on all occasions. A less stringent form of stability—one that allowed both strategies to co-exist within the same person—would see 'consistently' replaced by 'usually.' If we remain attentive to the distinction drawn above between the timing and the content of the measurement occasion, it could be that persons are consistent *within* a testing session, but inconsistent *across* sessions. Such a finding would, then, suggest that choosing a warranting strategy, like changing one's socks, might have nothing whatsoever to do with matters of culture. Further still, respondents, might, for example, reliably exhibit an Essentialist strategy whenever they are asked about their own persistence and use a Narrativist approach to the persistence of others (or vice versa). At the far end of this continuum we would reach a point where we could find no rhyme or reason behind the use of these strategies by individual participants.

Within this set of possibilities, our own theoretically driven expectations with regard to the question of stability were as follows: (1) that both strategies would be available to many or most of the young persons tested—that is, participants would show some understanding of

both forms of reasoning; (2) that many or most of the participants would strongly favor one strategy over the other—that is, each young person would have what might be called a 'default' strategy; (3) that across testing sessions and across test content, all or most individuals would cling to the same default strategy; (4) that the complexity (not the form) of the response would be relatively stable *within* testing sessions (i.e., complexity would not vary widely whether questions were being posed about the continuity of self and others); (5) that complexity would be observed to increase "longitudinally" *across* reasonably long stretches of developmental time; and, finally, (6) that the 'default' strategy in evidence would be shown to differ between the cultural groups.

Participants

Finding samples of young persons best suited to the testing of these half dozen predictions required special attention to matters of culture and demography. Our first challenge, having decided to pursue the possibility of cultural differences between First Nations and non-Native youth in British Columbia, was to find some way of taking "representative" samples from within these cultural groups. Here, history and geography conspire against success. British Columbia, where our research was conducted, occupies more than 10% of Canada's large land mass and is home to nearly 200 distinct First Nations communities comprising dozens of diverse languages and cultural traditions. In the face of these logistical barriers, we elected to narrow our focus to just two Native communities: one urban and one rural. The task of locating a 'comparison' sample of non-Native young people within British Columbia (i.e., representative of Euro-American culture and otherwise comparable to First Nations youth) is equally complicated given the multicultural mosaic of BC's urban centers and the fact that the history of First Nations people renders the usual set of socio-economic matching variables inappropriate. In the end, solving this 'control group' problem involved selecting youth from within a school system that catered primarily to the third-generation descendents of a white European immigrant group.

Although data collection in all of these settings is still ongoing, the sample to be reported on here consisted of a total of 220 young persons between the ages of 12 and 20, of which 91 were drawn from an urban Native community, 92 from a rural Native community, and 37 non-Native participants. These groups did not differ significantly from one another with respect to their composition by gender or age.

Finally, with these participants in place, we also felt it necessary to put in place a set of additional control procedures. For example, it was judged important, given the fact that our cap was set on identifying possible cultural differences, to employ procedures for establishing that our participants were indeed committed to, or felt themselves to be fully-fledged members of, their respective cultural communities. To this end, we employed several questionnaire measures meant to variously assess 'ethnic identity,' 'ethnic orientation,' and levels of 'acculturation.' Similarly, to ward off the possibility that differences between the groups might result from contrasting linguistic styles or abilities rather than more deeply rooted differences in ideas about personal persistence, we subjected the transcripts of our interviews to a series of text analyses meant to estimate linguistic and conceptual complexity.

Results

Responses for each participant from each of the three scorable sections of our interview protocol (self and two stories) were categorized according to Type (Essentialist versus Narrative), and assigned to one of the five Levels of complexity just outlined. By way of reminder, we made six predictions about the results of these classification efforts. First, we anticipated that the Type designation of "Essentialist" or "Narrativist" would not prove to be a person-sorting exercise. That is, we assumed that it was not only possible, but even likely that individual participants might have both of these problem solving strategies in their repertory. We also anticipated that, across

variations in test content, and across testing sessions, most young people would strongly favor (i.e., employ as a default option) one of these strategies at the expense of the other. The available data clearly support these predictions: 75% of the participants employed the same Type of argument throughout their interview, while only a quarter were observed to use both Essentialist and Narrativist warrants. When re-interviewed after an interval of 18-24 months, 70% of a small longitudinal subsample (n = 23) of our Native participants consistently used the same warranting strategy that they had employed during the initial interview. We take these findings to mean that, although "access" to both sorts of warranting strategies is frequently demonstrated, most participants do have a default strategy that is regularly exercised across occasions and across time.

We also laid out a set of expectations regarding the complexity, or "Level" of the responses. One of these concerned performance at any given point in time. Here we predicted that during an interview, complexity would not vary importantly as a function of whose personal persistence (self or other) was being inquired into. Again, our findings lend support to these expectations. Better than half (58%) of our participants showed no variability in Level assignments across the three available scoring opportunities, and for a further quarter of the sample all of their responses fell in at least adjacent Levels. While not perfect, this degree of consistency indicates that, ordinarily, most of our participants employed not only the same Type of reasoning across content, but also did so at the same Level of complexity.

Although we predicted that each participant's Type of reasoning would remain relatively constant over time, we also anticipated that the Level of complexity would increase during the course of development. Analysis of our longitudinal data reveals that, after removing those participants who were already at ceiling on the measure (i.e., at Level 5), fully two-thirds of participants were observed to employ higher Levels of reasoning at the second interview than they had at the first.

The remainder of our participants who failed to show this developmental pattern were evenly split between those who showed a measurable but trivial decline over time, and a small group of our youngest participants who remained at Level 1 on both testing occasions. In short, for most of these young persons, an interval of 18-24 months between interviews appears sufficient to reveal measurable increases in the complexity of their reasoning.

All of the preceding was meant to lay the groundwork for a discussion of the real point of our assessment efforts—the search for possible cross-cultural differences. We not only anticipated that our participants would give voice to some form of commitment to the proposition that persons in general, and they in particular, *ought* to be seen as persisting through time and despite change, but we also expected them to do so in ways that were largely consistent with what we envisioned to be the main and contrasting currents within their respective cultures of origin. We did find such a difference, and will, in short order have more to say about its size and shape, but it is important to first stress that finding a reportable difference between groups drawn from different cultures is not at all the same thing as finding a difference that is attributable to culture. Before leaping to any such conclusion it is important to be especially confident of two things. First, we needed strong assurances that our respondents accept and value the cultural designations that we used to recruit them—that is, that they recognize themselves as members of their respective cultural group and take that membership as a cornerstone of their identity. With this in hand, we would then need solid evidence that any observed difference was not the result of some systematic, but coincidental set of noisy background variables that work to divide the groups, but only in culturally and theoretically uninteresting ways.

Here, most importantly, is what we found: 76% of non-Native participants employed Essentialist warranting strategies; and 87% of Native participants employed Narrativist strategies. The Urban and Rural Native

communities, as it turned out, did not differ from one another in the frequency of Narrative or Essentialist ratings, nor was the Type of strategy used associated with age or gender: culture was, then, the only grouping variable that showed a statistical association with Type of reasoning.

As noted above, the first test of our faith in these results turns on the always suspect designations 'Native' and 'non-Native.' As such, we were more interested in what individual participants took themselves to be, and whether they especially valorized their ethnic identity, rather than how they were classified for census purposes. While available measures of ethnic identity are not without certain inherent shortcomings, we deemed it important to make some effort to assess whether or not our First Nations participants—and most particularly, those First Nations youth who appeared to employ "counter-cultural" Essentialist warranting practices—expressed any strong affiliation with their culture of origin. That is, our having picked out our contrast groups by focusing on their Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal status, while clearly of interest, might well have proven a matter of little personal relevance to our young participants. As a way of examining this prospect, a subset of our Native participants were given a 130-item ethnic identification scale composed of items drawn from several established measures that had been developed or adapted for use with First Nations youth. Items included ratings of levels of participation in traditional activities and practices as well as endorsement of Native and non-Native cultural values and customs. Any doubts that we might have had about the depth of commitment to Native ways on the part of our First Nations participants were dispelled by the extremity of their responses: in our sample, all things Native were uniformly judged to be of value and "highly true of me." This was equally true of the minority of Native youth who employed Essentialist warrants as it was for the majority, who responded in more Narrativist ways. Whatever else might divide these contrasting groups, it is not to be found in the depth of their attachment to Native culture.

Though all of our Native participants reported that they were comfortably identified within their First Nations culture, it might still have been the case that responsibility for the observed relation between Narrativist practices on the part of Aboriginal youth and the Essentialist practices of non-Aboriginal participants lies not, as we imagined, in the contrasting views of personal persistence held by members of these different cultural groups, but rather in some more mundane difference in the ways in which these young persons use language, particularly the language they use to describe their self-concept. Perhaps, one might imagine, Essentialist talk is simply more conceptually complex or somehow argumentatively 'better' than Narrativist talk. Perhaps what we are calling Narrativist responses are simply Essentialist answers offered by those without a special talent for abstraction, or, alternatively, that Essentialist responses are simply Narrativist answers put forward by those without an ear for plot. Or perhaps First Nations youth, living as they do in what some might mistakenly see as a 'collectivist' enclave within an 'individualist' nation, are simply marked by a heightened concern for interdependence and community that somehow colors all talk of 'self' in collectivist hues. Narrativist and Essentialist self-continuity warranting strategies would, on such a reductive account, simply amount to a new set of labels for the tired individualism-collectivism dichotomy that has, of late, come under increasing suspicion (Fiske, 2002; Kitayama, 2002; Miller, 2002; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Turiel, 2002).

The business of ruling out these various reductive interpretations for the finding that Native and non-Native youth regularly employ different default strategies in reasoning about their own and others' personal persistence involved several alternate assessment procedures and analyses. First, to test the reductive prospect that what passes for Essentialist and Narrativist responses strategies are, when unmasked, really only differences in linguistic complexity, we subjected the transcripts from our interviews to a set of text

analyses that estimate the linguistic sophistication of the participant. No reliable differences emerged between the Native and non-Native youth, nor between Essentialists and Narrativists on any of 10 different markers of linguistic competence (Pennebaker & King, 1999). Complexity was (as anyone might predict) positively correlated with age, but even with age partialled out, complexity, it turned out, was best predicted by our Level of reasoning assignments. That is, more sophisticated language ability was most strongly associated, not with the Type of reasoning used, but with higher Levels of reasoning.

Even if, as proved to be the case, linguistic skill is distributed evenly across the cultural groups, it might still have been the case that Native and non-Native youth simply differ in the ways that they use language to describe the self. That is, our terms Essentialist and Narrativist could simply refer, not to differing ways of warranting personal persistence, but to more incidental differences in the attention devoted to self and others in talk about persons. For example, Essentialists might exhibit an 'idiocentric' focus upon their own personal qualities, attitudes, beliefs and traits, while the talk of Narrativists might have proven more 'allocentric' in its focus upon interdependence and responsiveness to others. Testing this reductive prospect was accomplished by asking a subset of our participants to complete Kuhn and McPartland's (1954) famous *Twenty Statements Test* (also known as the "Who Am I?" Test) in which respondents are asked to complete twenty sentence stems that begin "I am…" The resulting responses were then scored for the presence of idiocentric and allocentric statements. No reliable differences in the proportions of these statement types were found between the cultural groups or between Essentialists and Narrativists. In other words, neither group showed a tendency to disproportionately concentrate their attention, either on subjective psychological traits or other-oriented characteristics.

Further evidence in support of this same conclusion comes from our participants'

performance on Singelis' (1994) measure of independent and interdependent self-construals. Again our cultural groups and our assigned groupings of Essentialist and Narrativist did not differ in their ratings of statements that stress the importance of internal states, feelings, and traits (independent self-construal) or the external or public dimensions of self in roles and relationships (interdependent self-construal).

Where the groups did differ—and where we had good reason to suspect that they might—was in their implicit theories of personality and in particular in the ways in which those theories make room for the possibility of personality change. Responses to Dweck's (2000) *Implicit Theories of Personality Scale*, reveal that Essentialists endorse a static or entity view of personality in which enduring traits effectively withstand change. Narrativists, by comparison, hold a more 'process'-oriented view in which personality is understood to be malleable. These positive findings are perhaps best seen, not as some additional control measure, but as the results of a multi-method approach aimed at triangulating upon what was originally intended by our designation of some protocols as narrative-like, and others as more essentialistic.

In summary then, it appears that, like their elders and a whole raft of their intellectual ancestors, young persons are not only committed to the necessary conviction that personal persistence is a critical requirement of personhood, but also make serious attempts to resolve the paradox of sameness and change in their own and others' lives in ways that shadow the Essentialist and Narrativist traditions evident in the broader course of intellectual history. Most First Nations youth employ Narrativist strategies. Most culturally mainstream youth employ Essentialist strategies. These default strategies are neither wholly dictated by culture (some 15-25% of youth employ the problem solving approach common to the 'other' culture), nor are persons reliably marked by having access to just one strategy (25% show the ability to use both strategies even if one is

preferred). These cultural differences are not the result of background differences in linguistic sophistication or conceptual complexity, or ethnic identification, nor do they reduce to differences between the ways 'individualists' versus 'collectivists' are prone to talk about matters of selfhood. Essentialists and Narrativists do not differ in the extent to which they endorse idiocentric and allocentric statements, or "independent" and "interdependent" conceptions of identity. They do show a tendency to differ, however, and in just the way one would predict, in their implicit theories of selfhood, with Narrativists championing personality change and Essentialists favoring enduring immutable traits. The clear conclusion supported by all of these analyses is that culture is very strongly associated with (but does not fully determine) whether one adopts a Narrative or Essentialist strategy for resolving the paradox of personal persistence and change. We take these distinctions between Native and non-Native ways of warranting personal persistence to be reflective of the fact that constructing such arguments is neither a completely private and personal affair, not wholly dictated by social environments or cultural practices.

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