

Personal Persistence and Personal Projects: A way of evaluating the intersection of personal and cultural continuity

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The overall goal of our contribution to this volume—our own personal project—will be to showcase the ways in which Personal Projects analysis can be used to explore variation in the construction and understanding of the meaning of self. More than that, we mean to use personal projects analysis as a vehicle for examining this variation across both individuals and whole cultures. We realize, of course, that studies of ‘self’ and ‘culture’ are contentious within the social sciences. We recognize too, that announcing our plan to link the personal and the cultural in the pages that follow amounts to uttering what some would consider fighting words. But the kernel idea that we intend to offer up as a way of avoiding fisticuffs, is this: professional and cultural differences aside, in our everyday experience, both selves and cultures are commonly understood to both change and yet remain the same. That is, whatever else divides us, we routinely experience ourselves and others as temporally stable or continuous, yet we also expect people to change—and often strive to bring about change in ourselves and others. In much the same fashion, we understand that cultures must change and yet, if they are to survive pressures of assimilation, or colonization, or conquest, must somehow remain ‘the same.’ Some hope for resolving this apparent paradox of sameness and change—and of bridging the gulf between studies of individual persons and of

entire cultures—can be found, we will argue, in notions of personal and cultural continuity that are capable of preserving identity (personal identity and cultural identity) across time and through change.

The obvious first step in our personal project, then, if we are to convince you that an accounting of our own attempts to resolve this “paradox” is worthy of your sustained attention, is to provide some working definition of just what we mean by “personal persistence” or “cultural continuity”—and to demonstrate why, against tradition, we seem intent on casually collapsing all those usual levels of analysis that routinely separate studies of persons from studies of the cultures they inhabit. Getting all of this straight will occupy Part One of the chapter and will, after some meandering through the philosophical literature, bring us to Part Two, in which we present reasons for believing that such notions actually apply to real instances of both persons and cultures. Part Three concerns the fact that failures in continuity hold real and dire consequences that can be measured in elevated suicide risk for individuals and in the suicide rates of entire cultural communities. In Part Four, we mean to come to the real heart of the matter by introducing new evidence in support of the view that personal projects analysis offers a novel way to understand how the everyday plans and routine personal strivings of young adults can function to maintain and modify

more deep-seated and culture-bound conceptions of self and personhood. In the closing section of the chapter, we outline our future research plans and discuss the feasibility of adding a new dimension to personal projects analysis that quantifies the extent to which personal projects intersect with communal and cultural experience to define (and redefine) the meaning of self within different cultural contexts.

All of that seems a tall order—and of course it is—so let's begin by asking a seemingly simple question: How is it that you are still the same person you used to be? Think about it. What connects the person that you once were to the person you take yourself to be today or the person you are en route to becoming? What argumentative strategy would you adopt to warrant the claim that, despite having changed in perhaps dramatic fashion over the years, you are still importantly the same person? Before summarizing what some 600 young persons have told us about their own sense of self-continuity and before presenting our scheme for categorizing these attempts to resolve the paradox of personal persistence, we begin as promised with a brief discussion of what the philosophers have had to say on the topic.

I. Self continuity and the paradox of personal persistence

Our ordinary understanding of the concept of "person" or "self" includes, it is said, two seemingly contradictory features: selves are commonly taken to "embody both change and permanence simultaneously" (Fraisse, 1963, p. 10). On the one hand, we appreciate that persons change—often dramatically so—over the course of their development. Yet, on the other, persons must somehow persist as continuous or numerically identical individuals, and remain, as Locke (1694/1956) famously put it, "as the same thinking thing in different times and places" (p. 335). If persons were not understood to persist from one moment to the next, and to somehow own their own pasts, then no one could be held accountable for their actions and our concepts of moral responsibility would be emptied of meaning (Rorty, 1973), just as planning for an anticipated future would be fundamentally nonsensical. Our everyday meaning of self, then, creates a paradox: How can persons both change and yet remain the same? How is it, for example, that you are still 'the same' person that you were 10- or 20- or 30 years ago? If pondering this question is new to you, and if answers fail to come readily to mind, then all is as we had hoped. But take heart, not only have whole generations of philosophers puzzled over the problem of numerical

identity, but so too (as we intend to show in a later section) does every new generation of young persons.

References to this paradox of change and stability can be found in the writings of Aristotle (who held that "animals differ from what is not naturally constituted in that each of these [living] things has within it a principle of change and of staying unchanged" cited in Wiggins, 1980, p. 88-89) and Locke (1694/1956) and William James (1910), and on into the modern era. Cassirer (1923), for example, speaks of "temporal unity"; Chisholm (1971) of "intact persistence"; and Strawson (1999) of "diachronic singleness." Solutions to the problem are not, however, quite so common.

The most frequent solution offered by philosophers concerns not connections to a previously experienced past, but rather to an anticipated and not yet realized future. Selves, in MacIntyre's words (1984) are on a perpetual "quest." Persons are made, according to Bakhtin, not only out of "remnants of the past, but also from rudiments and tendencies of the future" (1986, p. 26)—rudiments that give "a sense to one's life as having a direction towards what one not yet is" (Taylor, 1988, p. 48). What holds our past, present, and future together in time is, as Flanagan (1996) puts it, the fact that: "As beings in time, we are navigators. We care how our lives go" (p. 67).

Psychologists have taken up this same forward-looking notion in various guises—most notably in Markus' work on 'possible selves' (e.g., Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Ruvolo, 1989). For Markus and Nurius (1986), possible selves are the mechanisms of change for the self-concept. While traditional instruments assessing the 'now-self' provide ratings that are highly stable across periods as long as 35 years, possible selves—representing the "context of possibility that surrounds and embeds these self-views—may have undergone substantial changes during this period" (p. 965). Whether hoped for or feared, possible selves, like Cantor's (1990) life tasks and Markus' (1983) self-schemas, "focus more globally on what individuals hope to accomplish with their lives and what kind of people they would like to become as the significant elements of motivation" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 956-957).

Few would argue that people ordinarily fail to see themselves and others as temporally continuous, or indeed, that we fail to care how our lives go. That we hold selves to be continuous or persistent is not really at issue—it is a definitional part of the term "person." What the philosophical literature does not, and

perhaps cannot, tell us, however, is whether people routinely feel the need to resolve this paradox within the confines of their own lives, and, if they do, how is it accomplished? The answer to this last question can only be found by asking people how it is that they are still ‘the same’ person despite the obvious ways in which they seem to have changed over time. The following section will be devoted to summarizing the results of a series of studies designed to put this question to persons of various ages and cultural backgrounds. Our purpose in rehearsing these empirical findings—the details of which can be found in other publications—is to show that questions of personal persistence are matters of real concern to real young persons, and that the solution strategies they entertain are not only shaped by their own developmental station, but also by their cultural environment.

II. Accessing and assessing thoughts about personal persistence

Getting young people of differing ages and cultural groups to offer up their best thoughts about the paradox of sameness and change turns out to be more difficult than simply asking them how it is that they manage to both change and yet remain the same. At least this was our experience. In hindsight, the blank stares that attended this first-off, dead-simple assessment technique are perfectly understandable since: (1) no one is born with clear thoughts about how it is that selves persist across time and there must be some developmental process that lies behind whatever grown-up mode of thinking might eventually emerge; and (2) there is no reason to assume (and every reason to doubt) that even the most articulate and self-aware among us would have a ready answer to this rather odd question—especially when it is lobbed in cold from somewhere out in left field. Some more round-about way was needed, we soon discovered, of warming young people to the prospect of discussing this rather heady matter of their own persistence through time. The assessment strategy that we eventually adopted involved introducing the topic more gradually and by way of example by presenting fictional case histories of personal change over time and then soliciting comments on the continuity of the person in question before more gently turning attention to the participant’s thoughts about continuity in their own life.

The procedure as it has come to be standardized in our studies involves presenting participants with a condensed comic-book version of the life story of a character (e.g., Victor Hugo’s Jean Valjean in *Les*

Miserables) who is said to undergo radical personal change over the course of the narrative. A set of probe questions are then used to elicit the participant’s best thoughts as to why the protagonist as described at the outset should still be considered ‘the same person’ at the end of the story. Following a pair of such stories, participants are then asked to describe themselves both as they perceive themselves in the present moment and at some point in their own distant past. Similar probe questions are then used to draw out the participants’ views on the issue of their own self-continuity. This semi-structured interview procedure has been employed, in various forms, to study reasoning about personal persistence in childhood (Chandler, Boyes, Ball, & Hala, 1987), adolescence (Chandler & Ball, 1990; Ferris, 2001), and adulthood (Brandstätter & Lalonde, 2003), as well as in different cultural contexts (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol & Hallett, 2003). A more detailed accounting of the procedural means of conducting this interview can be found in these other sources, but for the moment, the point to be made is that there are practical ways in which to query persons of different ages about what have previously been seen as matters of interest only to professional philosophers. More importantly, here is what these studies have found.

First, on the basis of interviews conducted with more than 600 young persons to date, there appears to be a natural developmental progression to thoughts about personal persistence. Children, in their middle-school years, claim that persistence is found in any and all things that remain constant across time: pointing to one’s name, favored activities, or physical appearance is seen to be sufficient. Change, if it is acknowledged at all, is seen as peripheral: “I am still the same because I still play soccer.” In time, children begin to offer more substantial reasons that become increasingly abstract with advancing age. The hidden forces of unchanging personality traits often come to form the focus of arguments offered by pre-teens: “I’m still the same because I’m still aggressive: I used to get in fights at school, now I’m only aggressive on the soccer field where it’s OK to be like that.” For adolescents, the reasons lie deeper still: “I am the ship that sails through the troubled waters of my life.” Making sense of these arguments is sometimes difficult, but a clear age-graded pattern in terms of increasing conceptual sophistication has been documented (Chandler et al., 2003).

The second general finding from these earlier studies is that these arguments in favor of continuity can be effectively sorted into one of two general kinds. One way of winning the argument that you are

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still the same person is to claim that you haven't really changed at all, and to work to discount or trivialize anything that looks like evidence of change while clinging to all of those things about you that have managed to somehow withstand the ravages of time. Claiming, for example, that the basic structure of your personality has remained the same despite the differing ways in which it might be expressed over time, is just such a change-defeating, or "Essentialist" argument. A second, and quite different, "Narrative" strategy involves first granting that real change has, in fact, occurred and then placing all hope of persistence on the existence of some narrative or plot-like way of seeing all of the different ways one has been in the past as connected through a series of storied and coherent cause-and-effect chains to the person you currently take yourself to be. Brief descriptions and examples of these alternative "Essentialist" and "Narrative" self-continuity warranting strategies and the 5-level sequence of reasoning types are presented in Table 1 below.

As might be expected, the list of variables associated with individual differences in performance on this 5-point scale includes the usual suspects of chronological age and level of cognitive development—a finding that is now supported by both cross-sectional and longitudinal data (Chandler et al., 2003). Explaining why it is that individual young people appear to prefer one of these solution strategies over the other, as they evidently do according to our data, and typically cling through thick and thin to that style of argumentation across this developmental progression is another matter.¹ But our data show just this sort of calculated loyalty: though most can appreciate and even offer up arguments that belong to the 'other' camp, their usual 'default strategy' is unambiguously either Essentialist or Narrative. A partial answer to this question seems to reside in the cultural background of our interviewees. Among the "culturally mainstream" Canadian youth we have interviewed to date, more than 80% have employed Essentialist strategies, while more than 70% of the Canadian Aboriginal (or First Nations) youth in our studies make use of

Narrative strategies. It is through these cross-cultural studies that personal and cultural continuity begin to connect.

¹ Readers interested in possible relations between our Essentialist/Narrativist distinction and the work of Dweck (2000) may be interested to know that her "Implicit Theories of Personality Scale" was included in an earlier study in our research program. In a sample of Aboriginal youth who completed both our interview procedure and Dweck's (2000) 6-item inventory, Essentialists were more likely to endorse an Entity view of personality, while their Narrativist peers took an altogether more Process view.

Table 1: Summary of Personal Persistence Warranting Strategies

Essentialist Strategies	Narrative Strategies
<p><i>Level 1: Simple Inclusion Arguments</i></p> <p>The self is understood to be a simple assemblage of parts without internal structure. Continuity is maintained by finding any aspect of the self, no matter how trivial, that has managed to remain intact: one remains the same because, for example, their fingerprints or hair color has not changed.</p> <p><i>Level 2: Topological Arguments</i></p> <p>Anything seemingly novel is argued to have already been present from the beginning, although perhaps temporarily obscured (e.g. “It looks to you like I’ve changed, but that’s just because you’ve never seen this side of me before”). Change is discounted as a matter of mere appearance.</p> <p><i>Level 3: Epigenetic Arguments</i></p> <p>Change is seen as the result of an unfolding epigenetic plan that includes anticipated periods of immaturity that can create an illusion of discontinuity in those lacking an understanding of how life normally unfolds (e.g. “I know I seem different, but I always had it in me to be just the way I am right now”).</p> <p><i>Level 4: Entity Arguments</i></p> <p>Change can be written off as mere phenotypic variations, while, beneath this changing surface structure, there remains a core of essential sameness capable of paraphrasing itself in endless superficial variations (e.g., “I have always been competitive—as a child I wanted to win races, now I want to get the best grades”).</p> <p><i>Level 5: Theory Based Arguments</i></p> <p>While self is still a kind of “entity”, permanence and change are now seen to exist simultaneously, forming a dynamic equilibrium. Accounts of self are provisional, or theory-like, and seen as being in need of active and continual revision.</p>	<p><i>Level 1: Episodic Arguments</i></p> <p>What passes for permanence here is a simple chronological listing out of events without providing any true plot structure. The mere contingency of events in time is thought to vouchsafe personal persistence across changes of any and all sorts.</p> <p><i>Level 2: Picaresque Arguments</i></p> <p>Respondents at this level construct somewhat more complex narratives according to which what passes for a plot is simply a listing out of episodes in which the hero acts in ways that confirm their true character. Within such stories, circumstances change, but persons do not.</p> <p><i>Level 3: Foundational Arguments</i></p> <p>Past and present lives are seen as cause and effect—the “person” one has become is the inevitable consequence of antecedent events which have set their life on an unwavering and fatalistic course. The plot of such narratives concerns the sequence and impact of these cause and effect chains.</p> <p><i>Level 4: Embodiment Arguments</i></p> <p>Selves are embodied agents” who share responsibility for the eventual shape of their own biography. Arguments of this sort are true <i>bildungsroman</i>, or stories of character development governed by a real discoverable plot that is seen to reveal the precise reasons that things turned out as they did.</p> <p><i>Level 5: Interpretive Arguments</i></p> <p>The current narrative is seen to be only the latest in a perhaps endless series of attempts to interpretively re-read the past in light of the present. Continuity arises only out of the abstract pattern of one’s efforts to make ongoing sense of oneself.</p>

The intuition behind these cross-cultural comparisons was that young persons construct a sense of self—an identity—from materials made available to them by their cultural surroundings and that cultural groups differ in the kinds of materials that are ready to hand. For “mainstream” Canadian youth, growing up as they do within a Euro-American intellectual tradition that places special value on what Polkinghorne (1988) has called a “metaphysics of substance” according to which truth and beauty and virtue are always to be found at depth beneath a shifting surface layer of mere appearance, essentialism is all but bred in the bone. By contrast, indigenous groups are said to promote a “metaphysics of potentiality and actuality” (Polkinghorne, 1988) that is consistent with their interpretive and oral traditions and their more

thorough-going “ecocentric” approach to matters of knowledge and identity (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000) and so favors a narrative stance. By these lights, the sharp differences that are apparent in the ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth reason about personal persistence are entirely consistent with the cultural traditions within which they develop.

All of the foregoing was intended to make four key points. First, that the issue of self-continuity or personal persistence is nothing new under the sun—philosophers and psychologists and others have long wrestled with the paradox of sameness and change. Second, when the topic is presented in a suitable manner—as it is in our interview procedure—even middle-school children can be counted on to

carefully consider the problem and are able to offer up reasons in favor of their own persistence in time. Third, there is a developmental progression in the sophistication of the reasoning used: across the period of their teens years, the typical participant in our studies can be expected to pass from level 1 to level 5 of our coding scheme. Fourth and finally, there are clear differences in the argumentative strategies that young persons from different cultural backgrounds adopt. Aboriginal youth generally admit that real and transformative change has occurred in their lives, but work to construct a coherent narrative that weaves together the separate time slices of their experience. Non-Aboriginal youth, by contrast, typically labor to trivialize or deny change in favor of a hidden and unchanging essence that endures despite changes to the visible surface structure of the self.

All of that, we hope, has proven interesting enough, but wait (as they say), there's more. The 'more' concerns not the normative process of development, but rather the effect of certain kinds of failures or challenges faced in moving along this developmental sequence. As noted above, the consequences of such failures are found in elevated suicide risk for individual persons and whole communities.

III. On the personal and cultural consequences of failures of continuity

The theoretically driven nature of our work on identity formation led us to suppose that the step-wise function of increasing sophistication in reasoning about continuity we had observed would also leave room for a certain class of structural failures that attend any putative developmental sequence. In this particular case, we wondered about the consequences of transitional failures—of failing to step smoothly from one phase or stage in this normative sequence to the next. What would it mean, for example, if you were midway in your journey up this developmental staircase and found yourself suddenly off-balance by having abandoned your previous working notion of personal persistence as childish or naïve all before having any more fully formed or adequate alternative firmly in place? What if you fully lost—even for a brief developmental moment—that otherwise concrete sense of continuity in time that effectively binds together your own past, present, and future? Caught in that awkward transitional moment, with both feet temporarily off the ground and bereft of your usual and certain commitment to your own future, what would keep you from acting on those fleeting self-

destructive impulses that occasionally haunt us all? And what if, in the usual course of events, we wondered, you were expected to ascend the full flight of this precarious set of stairs in your tumultuous teen years?

If failures to maintain a sense of personal persistence were as dangerous as we supposed, then young persons who are known to be actively suicidal, we reasoned, should also be marked by an inability to resolve the paradox of sameness and change as presented in our interview procedure. Studies of young people housed in psychiatric settings (Ball & Chandler, 1989; Ferris, 2001) have confirmed this suspicion. Unlike all of their non-hospitalized peers, and unlike their ward-mates who are hospitalized for reasons other than suicidality, over 80% of those known to be suicidal at the time of their interview were also unable to mount any kind of argument whatsoever as to why they themselves, or any story characters we presented, should be understood to persist through time. Of course, even controlling as we did for obvious third-variable candidates such as depression, we could still be reading the causal relation in the wrong direction: perhaps being suicidal robs you of your sense of self-continuity. Perhaps, but that would still leave us all to wonder why suicide is most often attempted and committed by the young, and why it is that once past early adulthood, one's risk for suicide diminishes rather than grows.

If failures of personal persistence are associated with individual acts of suicide and if such failures are most likely to occur in the teen years when the pace of change is at its height, then perhaps we have the beginnings of an explanation for the sudden and dramatic spiking in suicidal behavior that occurs during adolescence and early adulthood. This at least has been the guiding assumption behind our continued work in this area.

If the usual forces of development work to regularly put young persons in harm's way during their adolescent years, then why are suicide rates so much higher still among Aboriginal youth? Available evidence suggests that Aboriginal youth in Canada are 3 to 5 times more likely to die by their own hand than non-Aboriginal youth (Lalonde, 2001). Indeed, the Aboriginal population of Canada is said to suffer the highest suicide rate of any culturally identifiable group in the world (Kirmayer, 1994). Usual explanations for this dramatic difference in suicide rates invoke demographic differences in poverty, transience, or point toward higher rates of mental illness in the Aboriginal

population. By focusing as they do on population-level variables, such explanations gloss over the diversity that exists within Aboriginal groups and promote the mistaken notion that there is an “epidemic” of suicide sweeping through “the” Aboriginal population. In fact, while it is true that suicide rates are extremely high in some Aboriginal communities, our research has shown that in British Columbia, in over half of all First Nations communities no suicides were recorded in a 14 year period from 1987-2001 (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Lalonde, 2001). Apparently, some communities have effectively “solved” the suicide problem. Within the remaining communities, rates range from well below the provincial average to 50 times higher. This is a rather selective “epidemic.”

The question that immediately leaps to mind, of course, is just what separates the high suicide communities from those in which suicide is remarkably rare or entirely absent? The answer—or at least some part of an answer—is to be found in mechanisms that work to maintain continuity, not of individual persons but of cultural communities. Just as conceptions of self-continuity work on the individual level to extend the self both forward and backward in time by keeping us committed to an anticipated future and responsible for our own past and so provide a hedge against suicide risk, so too do conceptions of cultural continuity—but this time on a much larger scale. Communities that have been especially successful in protecting their youth from suicide risk, at least according to our research, are also marked by efforts to preserve and promote their cultural heritage, to assert direct local control over key aspects of civic life, and to reacquire and maintain access to their traditional territories. That is, those communities that have enjoyed success in maintaining their cultural traditions and in securing greater degrees of political self-determination—communities that effectively own their own past and control their own future—also enjoy the lowest suicide rates (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Lalonde, 2001).

Once again, however, we could be reading this epidemiological relation in the wrong direction. It could be that individual acts of suicide rob a community of a sense of cultural continuity. Perhaps, and while no one would doubt that a suicide—particularly the suicide of a young person—can have a devastating effect within a small community, that would again leave us to wonder why the presence of these same factors is associated with higher rates of school completion and lower

rates of unintentional injuries. Cultural continuity appears to be associated with many measures of healthy youth development. Our own more hopeful reading of this growing dataset is that youth who develop within communities that actively promote their cultural heritage and have been successful in achieving a measure of self government tend to care about their own personal and cultural future.

IV. Personal persistence and personal projects

But what, you might wonder, does all this talk of suicide have to do with personal projects? It graphically illustrates the importance and utility of personal self constructions and the key role that the cultural environment can play to support or undercut such constructions. What all of the research reported thus far cannot tell us, however, is *how* these Essentialist or Narrative views are formed or maintained or reconstructed over time. What actions or activities—personal or cultural—function to prop up particular conceptions of the self? What impels young people to abandon one way of thinking in favor of another? In other words, how are differing conceptions of the self expressed in everyday life? Some large measure of our own hopes for answering just these sorts of questions has come to rest on personal projects analysis. Our reasons are as follows.

If our personal projects are predictive of general well-being (Little, 1985, 1988, 1989, 1998, 2000), and if failures in personal persistence are associated with acts of suicide, then we might predict a relation between the two measures at least at the extremes. That is, the personal projects of suicidal persons ought to be markedly different than those of more rank and file young persons. Indeed, evidence from personal project research involving students seeking psychological counseling (Salmela-Aro, 1992) as well as clinically depressed populations (Röhrle, Hedke, & Leibold, 1994) supports this hypothesis. But beyond these extraordinary or tragic cases, there are other reasons to suppose that personal projects hold the potential to tell us something of value about the self-conceptions of their authors. First, personal projects are more than an arbitrary assemblage of mundane tasks or running ‘to-do’ lists. Instead, our personal tasks and goals represent a personal project system—an organized and focused set of plans that orient us toward an anticipated and valued future. As such, they can be seen to embody the person we take ourselves to be en route to becoming. If that is so, if personal projects are an expression of our ability to envision our own future and to work toward bringing it about, then an analysis of such project

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systems should provide a window onto conceptions of the self. Viewed in the opposite direction, it ought to be the case that conceptions of selfhood play an important role in the inception, construction, and execution of personal projects.

Personal projects represent concrete efforts to manipulate the environment and to engineer our own experience in ways that create the future we envision for ourselves. Our beliefs about the ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ self—the self that endures despite the changes that our own efforts are designed to bring about—is the yardstick against which the success of personal projects is measured. If Flanagan (1996) is right, that is, if “we are navigators” and really do “care how our lives go,” then combining the study of self-continuity with the conceptualization of personal projects as “conative units of analysis” pertaining to motivation (Little, 1999) and self (Little, 1993) may help us better understand how and why we plot the particular life course that we work to follow. In short, then, here are the twin working hypotheses that prompted this research: Personal projects propel our ongoing construction and reconstruction of self, while conceptions of personal persistence provide a rudder and a compass.

The sea swell of contemporary interest in studying the “meaning” of selfhood is sustained by the availability of tools (e.g., personal projects analysis and the personal persistence interview) that claim to capture both idiographic and nomothetic dimensions of the self. Moving between these levels of analysis is, of course, an inherently risky business. But the real target of our work is not simply the private thoughts of individuals about the routine business of managing their lives (their personal projects), nor even about their deeply held notions of personhood (self-continuity). The quarry is the conjunction of these two—how the ways in which we understand and navigate our own lives work to create the self. By applying both tools to the problem at hand, we would seem to have a better chance of capturing Bruner’s ‘self in use’ or McAdams’ (1996a) ‘selfing’ or the elusive connection between self and culture:

The Self, then, like any other aspect of human nature, stands both as guardian of permanence and as a barometer responding to the local cultural weather. The culture, as well, provides us with guides and stratagems for finding a niche between stability and change: it exhorts, forbids, lures, denies, rewards the commitments that the Self undertakes. And the Self, using its capacities for reflection and for envisaging

alternatives, escapes or embraces or reevaluates and reformulates what the culture has on offer. (Bruner, 1990, p. 110)

The joint assessment of personal projects and conceptions of personal persistence would, we reasoned, tell us something of value about the public and private ways in which our participants attempt to influence the course of their own development by identifying the ways in which they quite literally preserve, alter, enhance, and re-create themselves as they navigate through time. To this end, we collected personal projects questionnaires from close to 400 undergraduate students, and interviewed a subsample of 75 participants to collect their thoughts about their own and others’ continuity in time. Among the many questions that we sought to answer with this large and rich data set, two would seem especially relevant to the present purpose. First, because of our particular interest in ‘selves in time’, we wanted to know whether personal projects were targeted at the temporal aspects of the self. That is, do projects differently address one’s past, present, and anticipated future? Second, we wanted to examine the personal projects of Essentialists and Narrativists as classified in our self-continuity interview. Do the groups differ in terms of the *kinds* of personal projects they pursue? Do they differ in terms of the *functions* that these projects are understood to serve with reference to their conceptions of self?

Do Personal Projects target temporal aspects of the self?

The modular nature of personal projects analysis made it possible to add a total of twelve ad hoc dimensions that, among other things, address the temporal aspects of the self to the 17 ‘core’ dimensions established by Little (1998). The standard set was complemented by two previously tested dimensions, *Distractionability* and *Commitment* (Brandstätter & Baumann, 2003) as well as ten ad hoc dimensions developed for the present study (see Table 2). Nine of these ad hoc dimensions were added to capture specific ways in which projects might function in relation to the maintenance and change of a person’s self-conceptions. Participants were asked how *central* each project is to their sense of self, and how each project might serve to *express*, *explore*, *extend*, and *improve* aspects of the self, and the extent to which a project allowed for *re-establishment* of a sense of self and for self *enhancement*, *experimentation*, or *preservation*. These dimensions were intended to capture the extent to which each project is judged relevant to

certain temporal aspects of the experienced self. *Experimentation*, for example, was described as “to what extent this personal project reflects trying new ways of being”. *Preservation* is defined by “to what extent this project prevents changes to existing aspects of the self by taking actions that strengthen the current self”. (For a complete listing and description of the additional dimensions, see Table 3.) These self-related dimensions were hypothesized to align according to their temporal orientation to

past self, present self, and future self (see Figure 1). Finally, a *Community/Culture* dimension was added to capture the relatedness to one’s community or cultural group that might be gained by involvement in a project. (For a comparison of the ‘traditional’ factor structure with the derived factors from this expanded set, see Table 4.)

Table 2: Traditional and self-related personal project dimensions grouped by conceptual factors

Type	Conceptual Factor	Dimension
Traditional or Core Dimensions/Factors		
	Meaning	Importance Enjoyment Self-identity Value-congruency Absorption
	Structure	Control Initiation Negative impact
	Community	Visibility Others' view of importance Support
	Efficacy	Outcome Progress Project Stage
	Stress	Difficulty Stress Challenge
Proposed Dimensions/Factors		
	Not assigned	Distractibility Commitment Community/Culture
	Present Self	Centrality Expression
	Past Self	Preservation Re-establishment
	Future Self	Enhancement Improvement Experimentation Extension Exploration

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 INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

 INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The hypothesized structure of these self-related dimensions appears in Figure 1. As can be seen in

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this figure, our nine self-related dimensions were hypothesized to reflect the manner in which personal projects are used to express central aspects of the current self (*Present*: Centrality, Expression, Exploration), to bring about changes to the self (*Future*: Experimentation, Extension, Improvement, Enhancement), and to preserve or regain valued aspects of self (*Past*: Preservation, Re-establishment). An evaluation of this hypothesis using exploratory factor analyses, however, revealed that all of the self-related dimensions are highly intercorrelated, resulting in a one-factor solution. This suggests that projects that are generally experienced as ‘closer to home’ relate fairly consistently to all of these factors. In other words, while some projects may be not relevant to any of these self-functions, others simultaneously serve present, past, and future self-functions. Interestingly, however, eliciting 2, 3, and 4-factor solutions yielded support for the more finely grained structure of our hypothesized temporal alignment with two noteworthy exceptions.

First, *exploration*, which we had imagined would constitute a function of the Present self, relates instead with the future oriented factors. Our working definition of exploration included processes of reflecting on one’s personality or self—a sort of stock-taking exercise—while our participants clearly conceived it as an activity closer to experimentation: it seems to have been understood as more external than internal and as having to do with where they imagine themselves going rather than where they have been. Secondly, our hypothesized future-related dimensions generated two factors rather than one: *improvement* and *enhancement* turn out to be all about attempts to (as the old song goes) “accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative”—or, in short, about ‘becoming a *better* self’ (i.e., Future-Better), while *experimentation*, *extension*, and *exploration* build a separate factor capturing self functions that are more oriented towards ‘becoming a *different* self’ (i.e., Future-Other). These obtained relationships are illustrated in Figure 2 below.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The high intercorrelations between self-functions indicate that both projects and project systems typically serve all four of the self-functions—though usually with differing degrees of emphasis on any one function. That is, at the micro-level (project level analyses), a project may emphasize the Future-Better self function, while at

the same time maintaining some minimal threshold level of focus on the other self functions. Similarly, at the macro-level (project system level analyses), the project system of a given person also comprises all four self functions and aims to achieve a balance among them. Hence, people seem to achieve coherence both within and across their projects, rather than dedicating part of their project system towards change and other parts towards sameness. Sameness and change, it seems, are relentlessly on the agenda for everybody, in every project, and within the whole project system at any given point in time.

Do the Personal Projects of Essentialists and Narrativists Differ?

Among the 75 participants who completed both the personal projects analysis and the self-continuity interview, 48 were classified as Essentialist and 27 as Narrativist (see Table 5 for the distribution of these participants across levels and tracks). The groups did not differ in the level of reasoning used (a measure of argumentative sophistication), nor on other demographic variables that might be of interest (e.g., age, gender). More centrally, however, and in ways that we initially found discouraging, the groups also did not differ with regard to their overall personal project ratings on the rating dimensions and higher level project factors (as shown in Table 4, the factors derived through exploratory factor analysis were: Stress, Efficacious Involvement, Identity/Culture, Community, and Structure, as well as the self related factors Future-Other Self, Present Self, Future-Better Self, and Past Self). At first blush, then, there seemed little to choose between them—for Essentialists and Narrativists alike, personal projects are, just as Little intended, used to manage the minutiae of everyday life.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

On reflection, however, this absence of overall or global differences should have come as no surprise. There are no good reasons to imagine, for example, that Essentialists should rate their projects as any more or less important or central than Narrativists, nor to think that one group would necessarily experience higher levels of stress or lower levels of structure. Differences did appear, however, when we probed more deeply and examined the kinds of projects that Essentialists and Narrativists were engaged in, and the ways in which they negotiated the “meaning-manageability tradeoff” (Little, 1998) in the service of overarching

needs for self expression, preservation, enhancement, and extension. As we argue below, these differences are reflective of their divergent conceptions of selfhood.

Projects were categorized in the usual manner into one of six content categories: Academic/Occupational, Health/Appearance, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal/Value Concerns, Leisure, and Administrative/Maintenance. A series of group differences emerged with respect to certain kinds of projects. Narrativists were reliably more likely to report Interpersonal projects, and reported a higher number of such projects. Though they listed fewer Interpersonal projects, Essentialists reported that their Interpersonal projects were closer to completion (higher Project Stage). Essentialists reported that their Health projects are more relevant to Future-Other self functions. Administrative projects are more stressful and more central for Narrativists. And the list goes on. For the sake of brevity, however, the results of the long series of analyses we carried out on these project content categories can be summarized in just two claims about overall differences between Essentialists and Narrativists. Both claims are consistent with the self-continuity strategies of these groups: (1) it appears that Narrativists have a more distributed sense of self (distributed across both people and projects) and tend to engage in projects that emphasize meaning over manageability; and, (2) Essentialists appear to be change-resistant and tend to engage in projects that are more manageable rather than meaningful.

Distributed Self and Meaning

The claim that Narrativists have a more distributed sense of self is evident in both the greater frequency with which they engage in Interpersonal projects (more distributed across people) and in the fact that they show higher ratings of Self-identity for Administrative tasks. These higher levels of Self-identity associated with Administrative projects—with the nitty-gritty of our lives—seem to indicate that Narrativists invest a substantial amount of ‘self’ even into seemingly mundane tasks such as searching for an apartment, filling out job applications, or cleaning the house. Perhaps because these projects are extensions of the self, they are also stressful: Narrativists deem their Administrative projects only slightly less stressful than their Academic ones, while Essentialists experience much lower Stress in conjunction with their Administrative projects than with Academic ones. For Narrativists, Administrative projects are more relevant to their sense of self than their Academic or

their Health projects. For Essentialists, on the other hand, these other project categories are more reflective of their true self than Administrative undertakings.

Change Resistance and Manageability

The claim that Essentialists are change-resistant arises mainly from our analysis of their Intrapersonal and Health projects. Intrapersonal projects are particularly theoretically interesting, since they reflect “an individual’s own motivation, personal characteristics, and sense of identity” (Little, 1993, p. 173). In the context of our study, they were expected to be particularly revealing with regard to possible differences between Essentialists and Narrativists. Indeed, when we conducted discriminant function analyses using the combination of the 29 project rating dimensions averaged across Intrapersonal projects, Essentialists and Narrativists could be reliably distinguished on the basis of their Intrapersonal project ratings alone. Essentialists’ Intrapersonal projects were more visible, value-congruent, self-exploratory, and self-extending, but lower in Initiation than Narrativists’. But Intrapersonal projects also tend to be stressful and onerous (Little, 1993; Salmela-Aro, 1992), and Essentialists seem to avoid such projects whenever possible. When they do engage in these projects, they are likely to be initiated (or co-initiated) by other people. It is interesting to note that although Essentialists are less likely to initiate Intrapersonal projects, they do not report fewer of these projects. Furthermore, Essentialists tend to use their Intrapersonal projects to a larger extent to achieve Future-Other self functions (Exploration and Extension). A similar tendency is observed for Health related projects—suggesting that when Essentialists experience personal change it is either a result of projects that were pressed upon them by others or else occurs incidentally through projects that are undertaken for reasons other than personal change.

Embodiment and Health Projects

Essentialists also use Health projects differently. Health projects for Essentialists are relatively higher on Self-identity, Preservation, Past self and Future-Other. Essentialists rate their Health projects as more important compared to their Leisure projects, while for Narrativists the difference is smaller and reversed. Health projects appear to have a particularly important role in achieving self-continuity for Essentialists. In being highly relevant to both their preservation needs (Preservation, Past self) and their need for change (Future-Other:

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Exploration, Extension, Experimentation), Health projects may just be a main vehicle of self-continuity for Essentialists—extending from the Past via the Present to the Future. In effect, this may represent the Embodiment idea that is the ‘essence’ in ‘Essentialist’—defining their body as a core aspect of what they count as self over time, or what they use to achieve an enduring sense of self (i.e. self-continuity)—a body that needs to be taken care of, exercised, fed well, and given a hair cut now and then.

Personal Narratives and Interpersonal Projects

For Narrativists, Intrapersonal projects are the more likely candidates to fulfill such Self-preservation or self-continuity functions, as expressed in higher Preservation ratings (and as a trend in higher Past self factor ratings) of projects in this category as compared to Health projects. Unlike Health projects that target physical aspects of the self, Intrapersonal projects are aimed at bringing about psychological change. As such, our findings suggest that Narrativists—in accord with our conceptualization of their self-continuity reasoning strategy—are looking for stability or continuity not in essences, but in psychological constructs, and in the construction and re-construction of personal narratives as suggested by McAdams (1995, 1996b; 1996c), Sarbin (1997), and other life story theorists (e.g., Bruner, 2001, Ezzy, 1998). In summary, Intrapersonal projects are highly relevant to the two Future-related self functions and Present self for both groups, and for Past self foremost for Narrativists.

Meaning and Manageability

The meaning-manageability tradeoff—the need to “jointly optimize the manageability and the meaningfulness of projects” (Little, 1989, p. 21)—is essentially a question of project ‘phrasing level.’ Little (1988) suggests that the level at which a project is phrased can be determined “simply by reference to its abstraction level, its syntactical or linguistic complexity, and the scope and span of activities entailed” (p. 44). In Little’s example, the meaning-manageability tradeoff consists in the need to choose between or balance molecular level projects such as “return the ladder to my neighbour” and highly molar level superordinate activities such as “challenge the rise of Australian realist philosophy” (Little, 1989, p. 21). Our own claim that Essentialists favor more manageable projects, while Narrativists emphasize meaning is supported not only by the fact that Essentialists report fewer

Interpersonal projects (just over half of Essentialists—54.2%—report such projects, compared with 85.2% of Narrativists), but these projects appear to be more concrete and more ‘doable’. This is reflected in the project stage ratings—Essentialists deem their Interpersonal projects as being closer to completion and, therefore, as possibly having more defined and concrete beginnings and endings rather than as representative of more extended and overarching personal strivings.

Essentialists not only rate their Interpersonal projects as further progressed than Narrativists rate theirs, they also rate them as more progressed compared to their own Academic and Leisure projects, while Narrativists rate projects in each of these categories to be at similar stages. This indicates that, if Essentialists do construe their Interpersonal projects at lower phrasing levels (Little, 1988, 1989; Emmons, 1992), then this is a content specific phenomenon, which does not generalize to the categories of Academic and Leisure projects. If Project stage does, in fact, signify a proxy measure of project phrasing level, then Essentialists seem to tip the balance towards more manageable while Narrativists may tend to choose the meaningful.

Personal Persistence and Subjective Well-being

Essentialists and Narrativists also differed in terms of their subjective well-being. For Essentialists, positive affect is particularly—and only—associated with Past self aspects, indicating that they experience positive affect when personal projects provide self preservation and reestablishment, rather than any of the other self-functions. For Narrativists, positive affect relationships are more evenly distributed across the self functions. Among Narrativists, the extent to which projects reflected a sense of personal identity as well as a sense of belonging to their community or culture, was strongly reflected in their affective experience. Higher Identity/Culture ratings were associated with high positive and low negative affect. For Essentialists, these relationships are completely absent. For this group, it is the more tangible aspects of community, such as Support and Others’ View of Importance, that are more relevant to the experience of positive affect as well as affect balance.

This latter result is particularly interesting in view of the inverse relationship between cultural

continuity and suicide rates in Aboriginal communities. The finding that the extent to which personal projects reflect both a personal sense of agency and a sense of belonging to one's community plays an important role in the well-being of individuals preferring a Narrative approach to self-continuity, while having little effect for Essentialists, combined with the fact that Aboriginal youth prefer Narrativist strategies by a margin of 4 to 1, provides (indirect) evidence of the differential importance that cultural connectedness can have for different cultural groups. Cultural continuity may be particularly important to communities (such as Aboriginal communities) in which a Narrativist approach to self-continuity is the preferred or predominant strategy.

Conclusion

The goal of our work has been to connect two very different theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of selfhood. One approach involves studies of self-continuity—of the ways in which young persons come to grapple with the same problems of personal persistence that have vexed generations of philosophers. These studies have revealed both developmental and cultural variation in the contrasting ways in which persons of different ages and different cultural backgrounds come to resolve the paradox of sameness and change. The other approach involves studies of the ways in which the seemingly mundane goals and plans of everyday life can reveal the structure of the self. Research in this tradition has uncovered a remarkable complexity in the ordinary magic of what McAdams has called 'selfing' (1996a).

The procedural means we selected for connecting these two approaches was admittedly simple: we just wandered out and applied both sets of measures to the same sample of willing undergraduate participants. Our reasons for doing so, or more precisely, our reasons to expect some coherent set of results to obtain, were guided by a theoretical commitment to the notion that self conceptions are neither entirely private, nor completely public. That is, who we are, the persons we take ourselves to be, the persons we hope to become or fondly recall having been, are neither fully determined by our cultural surround nor wholly matters of personal invention. Our work is predicated on the notion that we construct and reconstruct and invent and reinvent ourselves in ways that bear the marks of both social and personal construction. The aim of the new research outlined here was to empirically demonstrate that this process

of 'selfing' connects our deep-seated, enduring, and implicit conceptions of self with the more routine, changeable, and explicit actions we undertake in our workaday personal and social worlds.

By necessity, we have painted the research in very broad strokes, leaving out great swaths of detail concerning our procedures and statistical analyses, but hope to have persuaded you that there is general merit in this approach and, more specifically, that Narrativists and Essentialists use personal projects in ways that are consistent with their conceptions of personal change. Narrativists emphasize the relational and interpersonal aspects of change while Essentialists, though less likely to actively seek change, maintain continuity by structuring their project systems in ways that shore up their own more embodied view of self. For Essentialists and Narrativists alike, personal projects can, and evidently do, work to propel the self through time by providing the necessary connective tissue that binds past, present, and future aspects of the self.

V. Future Directions: Boosting our own "Future-Better" ratings

The success of this initial effort to connect self-continuity and personal projects—and so to connect the personal and the cultural—rested on the effectiveness of the new dimensions we introduced to the personal projects procedure. Our intent was to focus the attention of our respondents on two previously under-explored aspects of personal project systems. First, we wanted them to comment on the temporal aspects of their projects—on the ways that projects might specifically target their own past, present, and future. We did this by creating a set of self-related dimensions that eventuated in our Past self, Present self, Future-Other, and Future-Better factors.

Second, we asked our respondents about the extent to which each project "conveys or reflects a sense of connection to your community or culture." This Community/Culture dimension did not load on the traditional Community factor, but instead helped create a new factor (Identity/Culture) constructed out of the core dimensions of the traditional Meaning factor (Value-congruency, Self-identity, Enjoyment). This new factor appears to capture those aspects of the personal project system that operate to connect personal identity and meaning with a sense of communal identity and cultural belonging.

Interestingly, the Identity/Culture factor is the only one that related to all four of the self factors

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(Past self, Present self, Future-Other, and Future-Better) indicating that participants who rate their projects as high on Identity/Culture, have projects that also serve all self functions, be they past-, present-, or future-self related. The relationship between Identity/Culture and Future-Other (with the dimensions Experimentation, Exploration, and Extension), is in many ways the most informative from a theoretical point of view. How can something that is not yet realized be invested with such a heavy load of personal and cultural meaning? We believe this points to the importance of potential—of a sense of identity that is projected through a realm of possibilities and possible selves. These are the projects that involve the highest degrees of uncertainty and risk. Future-Better (Enhancement, Improvement) are incremental and seek to polish-up the current self. Future-Other projects involve stepping away from the roots of the current and past self into new and unknown territory. The association with Identity/Culture shows that such tasks are only undertaken when they are close to the heart and offer the possibility of strengthening a sense of cultural belonging.

And here we arrive at our last point. To borrow Flanagan's language again, if both persons and whole cultures can be understood as "beings in time" and "navigators" that care how their lives go, then understanding how personal and cultural activities work to preserve continuity in the face of change, and ultimately, how such activities or projects operate to bring about a better future—personal future, collective future—should be high on our list of research priorities. Within the Aboriginal communities that have collaborated in our work on youth suicide, finding ways to preserve culture and to promote a strong sense of cultural belonging among youth consistently tops the list of community goals. Our research suggests that these efforts to strengthen cultural continuity are likely to pay particularly large dividends in terms of lowering suicide rates given the preponderance of the Narrative strategy among Aboriginal youth. This is so because, relative to Essentialists, whose sense of self-continuity is largely self-contained, for youth who adopt a Narrative strategy that derives its strength from the interleaving of shared personal histories, the effect on a sense of personal persistence of threats to culture or of positive community actions will be magnified. When your own sense of personal persistence is dependent on the persistence of your culture, the need for

strategies that maintain self- and cultural continuity is more vital.

Aboriginal communities do not, of course, need to be told—especially by ivory tower academics—that maintaining their culture is important or that threats to their culture bring dangers that are disproportionately visited upon their youth. But community leaders are open to new methods of assessing the impact that their own efforts to promote self-determination can have on youth development, and we believe that a suitably refined version of the self-continuity/personal projects methodology we employed could be especially valuable in supporting these efforts. The usual methods of program evaluation—those that focus on changes in the attitudes or behaviors of persons exposed to this or that particular form of intervention—are particularly ill-suited to the task of evaluating the effect of multi-level community-based efforts to promote culture. Consider, for example, the fact that Aboriginal communities in British Columbia that have succeeded in gaining control over local police and fire services have lower rates of suicide than communities without control. Any evaluation strategy that focused on youth attitudes toward the acquisition of fire-fighting equipment or a local constabulary would clearly miss the point. What we really want to know is why youth who come of age in communities that acquire such services are so much better off. What we want, then, is a means of connecting personal identity with a sense of cultural identity. And this is just the promise offered by our methodology.

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Table 1
 Summary of Personal Persistence Warranting Strategies

Essentialist Strategies	Narrative Strategies
<p><i>Level 1: Simple Inclusion Arguments</i></p> <p>The self is understood to be a simple assemblage of parts without internal structure. Continuity is maintained by finding any aspect of the self, no matter how trivial, that has managed to remain intact: one remains the same because, for example, their fingerprints or hair color has not changed.</p> <p><i>Level 2: Topological Arguments</i></p> <p>Anything seemingly novel is argued to have already been present from the beginning, although perhaps temporarily obscured (e.g. “It looks to you like I’ve changed, but that’s just because you’ve never seen this side of me before”). Change is discounted as a matter of mere appearance.</p> <p><i>Level 3: Epigenetic Arguments</i></p> <p>Change is seen as the result of an unfolding epigenetic plan that includes anticipated periods of immaturity that can create an illusion of discontinuity in those lacking an understanding of how life normally unfolds (e.g. “I know I seem different, but I always had it in me to be just the way I am right now”).</p> <p><i>Level 4: Entity Arguments</i></p> <p>Change can be written off as mere phenotypic variations, while, beneath this changing surface structure, there remains a core of essential sameness capable of paraphrasing itself in endless superficial variations (e.g., “I have always been competitive—as a child I wanted to win races, now I want to get the best grades”).</p> <p><i>Level 5: Theory Based Arguments</i></p> <p>While self is still a kind of “entity”, permanence and change are now seen to exist simultaneously, forming a dynamic equilibrium. Accounts of self are provisional, or theory-like, and seen as being in need of active and continual revision.</p>	<p><i>Level 1: Episodic Arguments</i></p> <p>What passes for permanence here is a simple chronological listing out of events without providing any true plot structure. The mere contingency of events in time is thought to vouchsafe personal persistence across changes of any and all sorts.</p> <p><i>Level 2: Picaresque Arguments</i></p> <p>Respondents at this level construct somewhat more complex narratives according to which what passes for a plot is simply a listing out of episodes in which the hero acts in ways that confirm their true character. Within such stories, circumstances change, but persons do not.</p> <p><i>Level 3: Foundational Arguments</i></p> <p>Past and present lives are seen as cause and effect— the “person” one has become is the inevitable consequence of antecedent events which have set their life on an unwavering and fatalistic course. The plot of such narratives concerns the sequence and impact of these cause and effect chains.</p> <p><i>Level 4: Embodiment Arguments</i></p> <p>Selves are embodied agents” who share responsibility for the eventual shape of their own biography. Arguments of this sort are true <i>bildungsroman</i>, or stories of character development governed by a real discoverable plot that is seen to reveal the precise reasons that things turned out as they did.</p> <p><i>Level 5: Interpretive Arguments</i></p> <p>The current narrative is seen to be only the latest in a perhaps endless series of attempts to interpretively re-read the past in light of the present. Continuity arises only out of the abstract pattern of one’s efforts to make ongoing sense of oneself.</p>

Table 2: Traditional and self-related personal project dimensions grouped by conceptual factors

Type	Conceptual Factor	Dimension
Traditional or Core Dimensions/Factors		
	Meaning	Importance Enjoyment

	Self-identity
	Value-congruency
	Absorption
Structure	Control
	Initiation
	Negative impact
Community	Visibility
	Others' view of importance
	Support
Efficacy	Outcome
	Progress
	Project Stage
Stress	Difficulty
	Stress
	Challenge

Proposed Dimensions/Factors

Not assigned	Distractibility
	Commitment
	Community/Culture
Present Self	Centrality
	Expression
Past Self	Preservation
	Re-establishment
Future Self	Enhancement
	Improvement
	Experimentation
	Extension
	Exploration

Table 3
Dimensions added to Personal Project Analysis

Dimension	Description
Community/Culture:	how much this personal project conveys or reflects a sense of connection to your community or culture
<i>Self-related dimensions</i>	
Centrality:	how central this personal project is to your sense of self
Expression:	to what extent this personal project highlights or showcases an aspect of the self that already exists—a part of you that has not reached the surface but already exists
Enhancement:	to what extent this personal project aims at improving upon an existing positive aspect of the self.
Experimentation:	to what extent this personal project reflects trying new ways of being
Exploration:	to what extent this project examines aspects of the self
Extension:	to what extent this project reflects an existing part of the self that is pushed or applied to new settings or displayed in a new manner
Preservation:	to what extent this project prevents changes to existing aspects of the self by taking actions that strengthen the current self
Improvement:	to what extent this personal project serves the improvement of an existing (negative) aspect of the self
Re-establishment:	to what extent this personal project serves to reconnect to or regain an earlier aspect of the self

Personal Persistence and Personal Projects
Table 4
Traditional and Derived Factor Structure

<i>Traditional Factor</i>	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Derived Factor</i>
Meaning	Community/Culture*	Identity/Culture
	Value congruency	
	Self-identity	
	Enjoyment	
	Importance	
Efficacy	Absorption	Efficacious Involvement
	Distractibility*	
	Commitment*	
	Project Stage	
Structure	Progress	Structure
	Outcome	
	Control	
Stress	Initiation	Stress
	Negative impact	
	Stress	
Community	Difficulty	Community
	Challenge	
	Support	
	Other's view of import.	
	Visibility	

Dimension

Table 5

Number of participants by track and level of self-continuity strategy

Track	Level					Total
	I	II	III	IV	V	
Essentialist	1	11	18	14	4	48
Narrative	2	1	6	14	4	27
Total	3	12	24	28	8	75

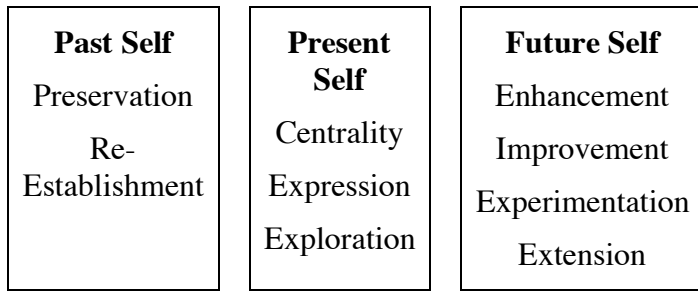


Figure 1. Hypothesized structure of self-related dimensions

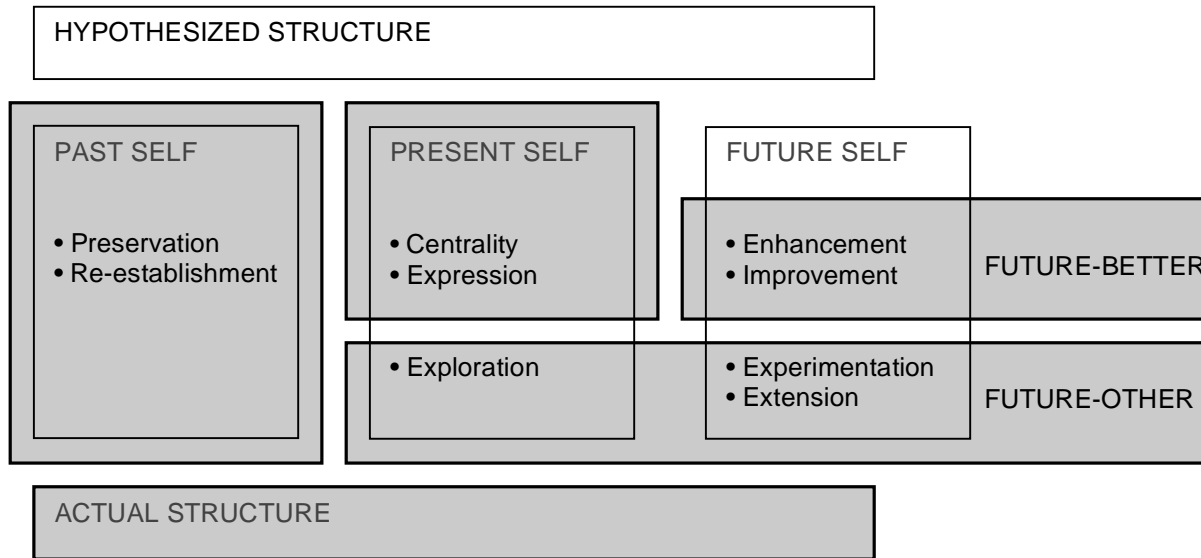


Figure 2. Hypothesized and actual structure of self-related dimensions. The hypothesized structure is overlapped by the actual structure (grey boxes).