Healthy ways of relating to past, present, and future self: Narrated growth and self-compassion with well-being and future orientation

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This project addressed two aspects of personality linked adjustment and the good life: self-compassion and narrative growth. Using a college sample of 288 young adults (*M* age = 18.4 years; 68.6 % women), we collected a set of self-defining life stories and rated life stories for personal growth. We also collected endorsements of self-compassion, well-being, and future orientation. We found that growth and self-compassion were positively linked and had positive, incremental associations with well-being and future orientation. Further, people relatively higher in self-compassion and relatively lower in growth endorsed the highest well-being and future orientation at one-month follow-up. Evidence suggests that nuanced considerations across multiple measures of personality help provide more thorough views of adjustment and fulfillment in people's lives.

1. Introduction

Personality shapes how people navigate past experiences, how they are equipped for functioning in the moment, and how they can look toward the future in a constructive and adaptive way. This project addresses two factors that reflect different "aspects" of personality (McAdams & Pals, 2006) and have been linked as important for people's adjustment and flourishing: self-compassion and narrative growth (Mansfield, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2015). Narrative growth reflects the ways people integrate and reason about their past experiences, and the ways people continue to recognize new strengths, values, and goals given their experiences (Pals, 2006; Bauer, Graham, Lauber, & Lynch, 2019). Self-compassion involves constructive ways people can navigate challenges and setbacks in life by maintaining mindfulness, self-kindness, and connectivity with others (Neff, 2003a). Both of these forms of personality—growth at the level of *narrative identity* and self-compassion at the level of *character*—have been linked to forms of fulfillment and flourishing in daily life (i.e., Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Booker & Dunsmore, 2019; Claréus, Lundberg, & Daukantaité, 2021; Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007b). Still, there is room to expand work in this area, considering how expressions of growth and endorsements of self-compassion are related to each and to different areas of psychological functioning, particularly across areas of adjustment reflecting a good and fulfilling life. Here, we consider the ways expressions of growth in important and emotionally rich life stories and endorsements

of self-compassion could be related to each other and could inform reports of well-being and future orientation among a college sample of young adults. This project was an opportunity to replicate and extend insights for both of these forms of personality reflecting adaptive ways of relating to the self and one's experiences in the world.

1.1. Narrative identity

Humans are natural storytellers. We use stories, moment-to-moment, to make sense of experiences as they are encountered, and we use stories to reflect on and make sense of the earlier chapters of our lives (McAdams, 2001). We often present information in story formats and share purposeful stories to share insights, lessons, values, and important aspects of history with people around us (i.e., Bohanek et al., 2009; Jennings, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2014; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). We organize and make connections between the stories of our lives to understand our pasts, make sense of our lives in the present, and anticipate opportunities in the future (McAdams, 2001, 2013). Narrative identity involves the process of constructing or "authoring" a dynamic, complex, and integrated life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In personality science, narrative identity is often captured using nomothetic and manual-based ratings of life stories across multiple dimensions. These dimensions reflect aspects of *structuring and organizing* life stories, framing stories with *affect and reasoning*, and incorporating autobiographical *reasoning and integration* from lived experiences (Fivush et al., 2017; McLean et al.,

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2020). Many of the themes within these dimensions are relevant for aspects of well-being and functioning (Bauer et al., 2008, 2019; Booker et al., 2021ac, 2022c; Graci, Watts, & Fivush, 2018; McLean et al., 2020). This project focuses on one theme that involves forms of constructive life reasoning and integration—that of personal growth.

1.2. Growth in narrative identity

Narrative expressions of personal growth involve forms of autobiographical re-construction and reasoning that lead to self-discovery and maturation (see Bauer, 2021; Pals & McAdams, 2004). Growth is important as one of the major tools for *integrating* different chapters of one's life story—recognizing the aspects of change and maturation progressing across major developmental periods and event following relatively recent events that challenge and provoke new ways of thinking about oneself and one's standing in the world ("I personally grew as this was going on. I became more self-sufficient. And became more of a grown up"). For these reasons, growth can reflect key ways people are making connections between who they were in the past, who they are in the present, and who they have the potential to become in the future. Within the narrative psychology literature, there are multiple approaches for capturing expressions of growth: tallying mentioned connections between past event aspects and areas of personal growth; rating expressions of different types of growth themes (i.e., intrinsic, integrative, agentic, communal); and rating the overall story as representing more or less growth (i.e., Bauer & McAdams, 2004b, 2010; Mansfield, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2015; Pals, 2006). Across these different methods, research broadly reinforces that growth is salient across many types of life stories. People can identify areas of progress and constructive self-transformation from personal setbacks and conflicts with others, as well as broad successes like graduations, marriages, career progress, and childbirths (i.e., Arnold & Clark, 2016; Bauer and McAdams, 2004a; Booker, 2019; Booker et al., 2021; Mansfield, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2015). When people incorporate more constructive forms of growth, recognizing positive self-transformation to date and continuing to identify areas for advancement and promise, they should be better adjusted and should have a more positive outlook for future steps.

1.3. Growth and Well-Being

This project focused on the ways important expressions of personality, like narrative growth, inform two broad measures relevant for the good life. The first set of measures involves well-being—how people feel satisfied with their lives and find fulfillment and purpose regarding across fundamental human needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Here, we considered how people appraise their lives as having value, satisfaction, and purpose. We focused on measures that span hedonic and eudaimonic endorsements of well-being, including experiences with happiness, reports of relationship fulfillment, and reports of competence (see Ryan & Deci, 2001). There is consensus that narrative growth, like other important dimensions of narrative identity (e.g., Graci et al., 2018; McLean et al., 2020), is positively associated with such measures of well-being, including subjective evaluations of positive affect and emotions, endorsements of life satisfaction, endorsements of basic need fulfillment, and endorsements of purpose, self-acceptance, and control over one's environment (i.e., Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008; Bauer & Park, 2010; Booker et al., 2021ac, 2022ac; Claréus et al., 2021). We expected expressions of broad narrative growth to be positively related to endorsements of well-being in this project, in line with this literature.

1.4. Growth and future orientation

The second set of measures this project addressed involve future orientation. Future orientation involves beliefs and appraisals that life

will continue to get better, even in (or especially in) the face of difficult and challenging situations (see Hirsch et al., 2007). We used indices of hope and generativity to approach future orientation in this project. These items each center around expectations that personal initiative or future involvement with others will lead to promotive outcomes in the future. Hope involves positive emotional experiences in anticipation of possible goal attainment and cognitive appraisals of one's ability to attain possible future goals (see Lazarus, 1999; Snyder et al., 1991). Generativity involves motivations to make a lasting impact by uplifting following generations (McAdams, 1992). While developmentally generativity is expected to be more central to the motivation of midlife and older adults (e.g., Grossbaum & Bates, 2002), goals for supporting others (i.e., using personal insights to support others; engaging in community or voluntary service) are also relevant for young, college-going adults (Ackerman et al., 2000). There are fewer narrative studies addressing ties between growth and measures relative to future orientation, but existing work is promising. Booker, Brakke, and Pierre (2022a) recently showed ways narrative expressions of growth are positively linked to reports of hope among a group of young, Black, college-going women. Arnold and Clark (2016) found positive ties between expressions of narrative growth and dimensions of generativity (i.e., social orientation) among midlife adults. We expected narrative growth to be positively associated with measures of future orientation.

In addition to expressions of personality and constructive forms of relating to oneself and one's experiences at the level of *narrative identity*, we were interested in endorsements of personality addressing relating to the self at the level of *character*—ways people tend to interact with the surrounding environment that are related to, but more specific than, broader personality traits (e.g., agreeableness). We focused on individual differences in self-compassion.

1.5. Self-compassion

Self-compassion reflects adaptive ways of relating to the self in the face of setbacks, conflicts, and failures (Neff, 2003a). A widespread conceptualization of self-compassion involves three major components for how people tend to respond to setback or loss in life: by showing oneself kindness and understanding rather than harshness and criticism; by maintaining connections and understanding with others (i.e., recognizing setbacks are a common part of the broader human experience) rather than feeling isolated in one's setback or failure; and by maintaining a balanced and mindful understanding of the issue at hand rather than ignoring or over-identifying with setback (Neff, 2003a). Growing research has shown self-compassion to be an important individual difference positively related to other adaptive ways people view and evaluate their lives (i.e., self-esteem, [lower] self-criticism; Neff, 2003b; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007a), ways people endorse other aspects of character and personality (i.e., gratitude, optimism; (Booker & Perlin, 2021; Neff et al., 2007b), ways people endorse different strategies for interacting with others (i.e., care toward partners, relationship satisfaction; Neff & Beretvas, 2013; Yarnell & Neff, 2013).

1.6. Self-compassion and narrative growth

Conceptually, both narrative growth and self-compassion involve individual differences in how people can respond to lived experiences in a constructive and healthy manner. While these constructs capture different ways of relating to oneself, they are should be complementary to each other. Indeed, existing research supports the ways that young adults' expressions of narrative growth—more in response to challenging life experiences (i.e., conflicts with others)—are positively correlated with endorsements of self-compassion (Mansfield, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2015). We expected expressions of narrative growth and endorsements of self-compassion to be positively associated in this project.

1.7. Self-compassion and well-being

We also expected self-compassion to be positively associated with measures of well-being (see Zessin, Dickhäuser, & Garbade, 2015). There is consensus that measures of self-compassion are linked to multiple measures of well-being, including reports of positive affect and happiness (Booker & Dunsmore, 2019; Neff et al., 2007b), positive self-evaluations (Neff & McGehee, 2010), and reports of fulfillment and purpose (Neff, 2003b). We expected that participants endorsing higher self-compassion in this study would also endorse greater well-being, in line with existing work.

1.8. Self-compassion and future orientation

There has been relatively less research considering ties between self-compassion and future orientation. Still, existing evidence supports links between these measures. Self-compassion has been positively associated with reports of hope (Booker & Perlin, 2021; Yang, Zhang, & Kou, 2016) and scales specifically centered on future orientation (Chang et al., 2019). We expected current work to replicate these associations and for self-compassion to be positively associated with indices of future orientation.

1.9. The importance of considering growth and self-compassion among emerging adults

This project focuses on traditional college-age adults or individuals who represent the developmental transitions and demands of *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2000, 2014). Being able to relate to oneself and one's experiences in a constructive, healthy fashion is important across adulthood (Allen, Goldwasser, & Leary, 2012; Bauer & McAdams, 2004b; Chang et al., 2019; Homan, 2016), but also has specific benefits and applications for young, college-going adults as they navigate academic and professional challenges, goals for building and maintaining intimate relationships and continue moving toward important life milestones (i.e., Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Booker et al., 2021a, 2022ac; McAdams et al., 2006). Hence, studies on both growth and self-compassion focused on traditional age college adults are relevant and timely. Further, there remains room to address the insights distinct and complementary aspects of personality bring to informing measures of well-being and future orientation during this developmental period.

1.10. The current study

This study focused on displays of narrative growth and reports of self- as two complementary forms of personality (Mansfield, Pasupathi, & McLean, 2015; McAdams & Pals, 2006) and measures about constructively relating to the self (Bauer & McAdams, 2004ab, 2010; Booker et al., 2021c, 2022c; Pals, 2006). We were interested in replicating findings that growth and self-compassion are related to each other and relevant for measures of well-being and future orientation. Further, we were interested in the possibility that self-compassion and growth may show interactions for reports of well-being and future orientation. We addressed this work using data collected across two monthly periods with college adults. We collected baseline narratives about self-defining memories—experiences involving strong (positive or negative) emotions and important life events—from college adults and rated these stories broad expressions of narrative growth. We also collected baseline endorsements of self-compassion. We used these measures to test associations with endorsements of well-being (collected at baseline and a one-month follow-up) and future orientation (collected only at one-month follow-up). Hypotheses were as follows:

(1) Narrated growth and self-compassion would be positively associated.

(2) Narrated growth and self-compassion and would have positive associations with measures of well-being (i.e., happiness, flourishing, thriving) and future orientation (i.e., hope, generativity).
(3) When considered simultaneously, both narrated growth and self-compassion would account for unique or incremental variance with measures of well-being and future orientation.
(4) An "amplified" interaction effect would be supported between narrated growth and self-compassion—participants higher in both measures would endorse the highest levels of well-being and future orientation.

This set of research questions was not pre-registered. Datasets with de-identified quantitative data for this manuscript can be found at https://osf.io/zbh4m/?view_only = e5a414e244014473b3c27c792982318d.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited as part of a larger project on young adults' narrative identity and psychosocial adjustment. Participants were 288 college adults recruited from a public university in the central US (*M* age 18.4 years, SD = 0.88; 68.6 % women). Most students identified as White (80.6 %), with many remaining students identifying as either Black (9.0 %), Multiracial (4.9 %), southeast Asian or Pacific Islander (1.7 %), or Latino or Latina (1.4 %). Students were recruited from an Introductory Psychology course, but a vast majority of students (~93 %) represented majors outside of psychology (i.e., accounting, animal science, biology, business, chemistry, education, engineering, health sciences, journalism, sports management). Students were recruited from a semester before the major impacts of COVID-19.

2.2. Procedures

Participants were recruited through the psychology department's online research recruitment system, as part of a course requirement to either complete a set number of research participation hours or complete alternative activities for comparable time and effort. Students were asked to complete computerized questionnaires at two phases, spaced approximately one month apart. Time 1 activities included response to the self-defining memory and multiple questionnaires. Time 2 activities included additional questionnaires (see below). Students received course credit for their time.

2.3. Materials

2.3.1. Self-Defining memory task

Participants responded to the self-defining memory task (Blagov & Singer, 2004; Singer, Blagov, Berry, & Oost, 2013). This is an autobiographical narrative prompt that asks participants to recollect an enduring and emotionally salient lived experience—one that could provide a meaningful snapshot as to who they are as a person. The self-defining memory task is expected to draw upon life experiences that are salient for sense of purpose and opportunities to establish self-continuity for individuals (see Singer et al., 2013). Hence, these autobiographical narratives were expected to be promising for considering ratings of growth. Part of the prompt for this task is below:

> To understand best what a self-defining memory is, imagine you have just met someone you like very much and are going for a walk together. Each of you is very committed to helping the other get to know the "Real You". You are not trying to play a role or to strike a pose. While, inevitably, we say things that present a picture of ourselves that might not be completely accurate, imagine that you are making every effort to be honest. In the course of the conversation, you describe a memory that you feel conveys powerfully how you

have come to be the person you currently are. It is precisely this memory, which you tell the other person and simultaneously repeat to yourself, that constitutes a self-defining memory.

Two example narratives are provided below from respondents Rose and Zain (pseudonyms). These responses are representative of the kinds of story content and typical length of responses in this sample:

> My uncle came over and was downstairs with my dad and I remember going down and seeing them both crying. This was right before they told us that my two-year-old cousin had been diagnosed with leukemia. It made me think about how life can be so short and unfair and you need to live every day like it's your last and be positive.

- *Self-defining memory from Rose, an 18-year-old woman*

> When I was young, around 4 years old, my dad took me to a park to catch a baseball. I was having a lot of fun most especially due to my love of baseball at the time. While in the middle of playing catch I missed the ball and it hit my face giving me a black eye and leaving me crying on the ground. My dad quickly ran over to me, hugged me, and comforted me. When I think back to that moment I find that what my dad did for me, giving me a loving embrace and truly caring, is someone I want to become.

- *Self-defining memory from Zain, an 18-year-old man*

There were no time or word limits for participants. These narrative responses were rated for the integration of personal or autobiographical growth, described below.

In a set of follow-up items, participants were asked to rate the emotions elicited by their recollected self-defining memories, on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Items also addressed the number of years since the event (retention interval; open response) and reported imported importance (1-to-7 scale) and vividness (1-to-7 scale). Shared events occurred on average four years prior to study participation ($M = 4.23$ years, SD = 3.67). Participants rated emotion experiences for happiness ($M = 4.03$, SD = 2.28), sadness ($M = 4.00$, SD = 2.15), anger ($M = 2.85$, SD = 2.05), fear ($M = 2.57$, SD = 1.98), surprise ($M = 2.55$, SD = 1.84), shame ($M = 2.04$, SD = 1.66), disgust ($M = 2.11$, SD = 1.74), guilt ($M = 2.08$, SD = 1.69), interest ($M = 3.18$, SD = 1.99), embarrassment ($M = 1.97$, SD = 1.65), contempt ($M = 2.55$, SD = 1.89), and pride ($M = 3.97$, SD = 2.46). On average, participants shared events that ultimately elicited more positive emotions (i.e., happiness, pride) rather than events that ultimately elicited more negative emotions (i.e., sadness, anger, guilt). On average, and in line with the narrative prompt, participants reported events as being more important ($M = 5.98$, SD = 1.30) and more vividly remembered ($M = 5.82$, SD = 1.33).

2.3.2. Narrated growth

Participants' narratives were rated for displays of narrated growth from the lived event, based on a manual rating scheme by Mansfield and colleagues (2015). This rating scheme addresses the ways individuals frame lived events and the ways they are connecting insights about past events to their current/future selves, using a 5-point rating scale. Lower scores (1 or 2) indicate forms of enmeshment in the event, struggles to move forward from events, and greater emphasis on the ways the event has lingering negative impacts on the person, their values and goals, and/or the world around them. Higher scores (4 or 5) indicate forms of growth and positive self-transformation from the event (i.e., new ideals or values recognized; appreciation for greater strength and resolve having gone through the event), mentions of ongoing personal change and progress, and recognized positive impacts on the person, their

values and their goals, and/or the world around them. Stories with little mention on personal change, or stories where individuals mentioned very similar levels and struggles between growth and enmeshment were rated as a midpoint score of 3. A two-person coding team was trained in this rating scheme. After familiarizing with the scheme, the team jointly reviewed and rated the first ten narratives, using discussions to form growth ratings. The team then completed multiple rounds of reliability building, by rating sets of narratives independently and then meeting together in consensus-building meetings to discuss and resolve any differences between original scores, forming final values for jointly discussed narratives. An additional 90 narratives were reviewed and coded using this approach, and the team developed inter-rater reliability of ICC = 0.74 through this approach. A single member of the coding team then rated the remaining narratives independently. Example narratives, representing lower and higher ratings of growth, are presented in the Appendix.

2.3.3. Self-compassion

At Time 1, participants completed the Self-Compassion Scale—Short Form (Raes, Pommier, Neff, & Gucht, 2011). This scale addresses the major dimensions of self-compassion in response to personal failures and setbacks, as proposed by Neff (2013). This scale includes subscales addressing self-kindness versus self-judgment, a sense of connectivity with others versus a sense of isolation, and mindful connectedness with the challenge at hand versus being overwhelmed by or neglecting the problem at hand. Items were completed on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Almost never*; 5 = *Almost always*; sample item, "I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like"). Because each subscale has fewer items included, the composite measure is recommended for use. This composite was used in the project, and this scale showed acceptable internal consistency ($\omega = 0.78$).

2.3.3.1. Measures of well-being. At Times 1 and 2, participants completed measures of subjective happiness, flourishing, and thriving as indices of well-being.

2.3.3.2. Subjective happiness. Participants completed the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1997). This 4-item scale addresses evaluations of one's level of happiness and satisfaction, including in comparison to others. Items are completed on a 7-point Likert scale (sample item, "Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself"; 1 = *Less happy*; 7 = *More happy*). Internal consistency was strong for this scale at each time point (ωs = 0.81-0.84).

2.3.3.3. Flourishing. Participants completed the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010). This 8-item measure addresses the ways individuals feel satisfaction and fulfillment across multiple domains of life. This scale was completed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*; sample item = "I lead a purposeful and meaningful life"). Internal consistency was excellent for this scale at each time point (ωs = 0.91-0.99).

2.3.3.4. Thriving. Participants completed the Brief Inventory of Thriving (Su, Tay, & Diener, 2014). This 10-item measure address a holistic view of psychological well-being. Items were completed on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 5 = *Strongly agree*; sample item, "I am optimistic about my future"). Internal consistency was excellent for this scale at each time point (ωs = 0.91–0.92).

2.3.4. Measures of future orientation

At Time 2, participants completed hope and generative as indices of future orientation.

2.3.4.1. Hope. Participants completed the Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). This is a 12-item measure (including four distractor items)

regarding the ways people evaluate themselves as capable of accomplishing important goals (i.e., agency) and the ways people view possible goal opportunities and paths for themselves (i.e., pathways). Items were completed on an 8-point Likert scale (1 = *Definitely false*; 8 = *Definitely true*; sample item, "My past experiences have prepared me well for my future"). This composite score was used for this scale, and it showed strong internal consistency ($\omega = 0.88$).

2.3.4.2. Generativity. Participants completed the Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). This 20-item scale addressed the ways participants embraced opportunities to make positive change on behalf of others. Items were completed on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *Never*; 4 = *Very often*; sample item, "I have important skills that I try to teach others"). The internal consistency of this scale was strong ($\omega = 0.85$).

2.4. Power analyses

Our sample was based on a planned recruitment aim of 300 participants, which was considered sufficiently large for addressing anticipated analyses at the time (i.e., correlation analysis, regression analysis). Attrition at Time 2 was steeper than anticipated given previous multiphase projects. Still, models for Time 2 had 130 available participants (see below). Post-hoc power analyses suggested that this sample size would be sufficient for two-tailed correlation tests with medium effect sizes ($r = 0.30$) and for regression models with four independent variables and medium effect sizes ($f = 0.15$) to be well-powered at $1 - \beta = 0.95$ (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

2.5. Analytical plan

Summary statistics are presented in Table 1. Preliminary analyses included bivariate correlations and *t*-tests. Independent-samples *t*-tests to determine whether Time 1 measures differed given later study attrition. Paired *t*-tests were used to determine whether measures of well-being, captured at each point, differed over time. These scores were not expected to change within participants as there was no focused intervention or manipulation in this project. Correlations were used as a set of descriptive tests addressing ties between expressions of growth and narrator ratings of their self-defining memories. As a data reduction approach, components of Time 1 well-being, Time 2 well-being, and Time 2 future orientation were formed for hypothesis tests.

Hypothesis tests addressed the correlations between growth and self-compassion (H1) and the correlations among growth, self-compassion, and components of well-being and future orientation (H2). Regressions addressed the simultaneous associations of growth and self-compassion with components of well-being and future orientation (H3) and support for interactions between growth and self-compassion for components of well-being and future orientation (H4).

2.6. Preliminary analyses

Table 2 shows the results of independent samples *t*-tests between participants who returned to complete the second time point ($n = 130$) and those who did not return for the second time point ($n = 158$). There were no significant differences of gender, narrated growth, self-compassion, or self-reports at Time 1.

We used paired *t*-tests to determine whether reports of well-being, which were collected at both study time points, showed significant change across time points. There was no purposeful intervention in this project, and systematic changes were not expected. For reports of subjective happiness ($t(129) = -1.30$, $d = -0.11$, $p = .196$), flourishing ($t(129) = -0.37$, $d = -0.03$, $p = .715$), and thriving ($t(129) = -1.52$, $d = -0.13$, $p = .131$), there was not support for within-person differences at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level.

We used correlation analyses to determine whether independent ratings of personal growth were associated participant ratings of the emotions elicited by their self-defining memory, retention interval, event importance, and/or event vividness. Growth was significantly and positively correlated with endorsements of experienced pride ($r = 0.27$, $p < .001$) and happiness ($r = 0.22$, $p < .001$). In contrast, expressions of growth were significantly and negatively correlated with endorsements of experienced embarrassment ($r = -0.21$, $p < .001$), guilt ($r = -0.18$, $p = .004$), disgust ($r = -0.19$, $p < .001$), shame ($r = -0.18$, $p = .003$), anger ($r = -0.16$, $p = .010$), and sadness ($r = -0.23$, $p < .001$). A final set of correlations addressed remaining "follow-up" items about self-defining memories: 1) retention interval; 2) the importance of the narrated event; and the vividness of the narrated event. Displays of growth were not significantly correlated with the event retention interval ($p = .104$), event importance ($p = .450$), or event vividness ($p = .179$).

Given the focus on self-compassion as another important aspect of personality in this project, we extended these descriptive analyses to address ties between endorsements of self-compassion and narrator ratings of their self-defining memories. Endorsements of self-compassion

Table 2
Independent-Samples T-tests given Time 2 Availability.

Variable	Non-Returners ($n = 158$)		Returners ($n = 130$)		t (286)	d	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Gender	1.68	0.47	1.69	0.46	−0.20	−0.02	0.845
Self-Compassion	2.94	0.60	2.91	0.55	0.46	0.05	0.649
Narrated Growth	3.42	0.96	3.38	0.88	0.36	0.04	0.738
T1 Subjective Happiness	4.91	1.09	4.88	1.06	0.15	0.02	0.868
T1 Flourishing	5.70	0.83	5.79	0.78	−0.86	−0.10	0.391
T1 Thriving	4.00	0.56	4.00	0.57	−0.11	−0.01	0.914

Note. For Gender, women received the higher value.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations.

		Descriptive Statistics				Correlations								
		M	SD	Min	Max	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1.	Narrated Growth	3.40	0.92	1.00	5.00	**0.18**	**0.19**	0.14	0.12	**0.19**	**0.22**	0.13	**0.18**	0.05
2.	Self-Compassion	2.92	0.58	1.36	4.55	–	**0.50**	**0.41**	**0.31**	**0.26**	**0.39**	**0.35**	**0.34**	**0.25**
3.	T1 Happiness	4.90	1.08	1.50	7.00		–	**0.83**	**0.65**	**0.63**	**0.70**	**0.72**	**0.59**	**0.48**
4.	T2 Happiness	4.96	1.05	1.00	7.00			–	**0.58**	**0.69**	**0.68**	**0.75**	**0.68**	**0.55**
5.	T1 Flourishing	5.74	0.81	2.75	7.00				–	**0.70**	**0.78**	**0.74**	**0.68**	**0.57**
6.	T2 Flourishing	5.80	0.77	3.13	7.00					–	**0.68**	**0.83**	**0.74**	**0.63**
7.	T1 Thriving	3.99	0.56	2.10	5.00						–	**0.82**	**0.68**	**0.56**
8.	T2 Thriving	4.01	0.57	2.40	5.00							–	**0.74**	**0.61**
9.	T2 Hope	6.24	0.86	3.75	8.00								–	**0.65**
10.	T2 Generativity	1.77	0.43	0.75	2.85									–

Note. Bolded values are significant at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level. T1 $n = 288$; T2 $n = 130$.

were positively correlated with reports of event pride ($r = 0.21$, $p < .001$), contempt ($r = 0.12$, $p = .037$), interest ($r = 0.15$, $p = .011$), surprise ($r = 0.12$, $p = .041$), and happiness ($r = 0.23$, $p < .001$). Further, self-compassion was negatively associated with endorsements of embarrassment ($r = 0.18$, $p = .002$), guilt ($r = -0.22$, $p < .001$), disgust ($r = -0.22$, $p < .001$), shame ($r = -0.22$, $p < .001$), anger ($r = -0.22$, $p < .001$), and sadness ($r = -0.24$, $p < .001$). Like growth, self-compassion was not significantly associated with endorsements of retention interval ($r = 0.104$, $p = .078$), event importance ($r = 0.04$, $p = .552$), or event vividness ($r = -0.01$, $p = .938$).

2.7. Data preparation and reduction

We formed principal component scores for sets of items representing Time 1 well-being (i.e., happiness, flourishing, and thriving; 80.8 % variance explained), Time 2 well-being (83.8 % variance explained), and Time 2 future orientation (i.e., hopefulness, generativity; 82.3 % variance explained). Standardized component scores were used for hypotheses tests. Correlation tests addressed whether gender was correlated with any of these composite scores. Gender was not significantly correlated with the T1 well-being ($r = -0.07$, $p = .273$), T2 well-being ($r = -0.08$, $p = .398$), or T2 future orientation ($r = -0.03$, $p = .705$) scores. Gender was not included as a covariate for hypothesis tests.

2.8. Hypotheses tests

We tested 1) whether growth and self-compassion are related to each other, 2) whether growth and self-compassion are correlated with composites of well-being and future orientation, 3) whether growth and self-compassion account for unique variation in well-being and future orientation when considered simultaneously, and 4) whether interaction effects are supported between growth and self-compassion for well-being and future orientation.

With bivariate correlation, growth and self-compassion were significantly and positively correlated ($r = 0.18$, $p = .003$). Further, using partial correlation to control for all endorsements of elicited emotions from the self-defining memories—emotion ratings that were correlated with both growth and self-compassion (see above)—a significant and positive correlation was maintained ($r = 0.14$, $p = .035$).

Growth was significantly and positively correlated with Time 1 well-being ($r = 0.20$, $p = .001$), and had a trending, positive association with Time 2 well-being ($r = 0.17$, $p = .065$). Growth was not significantly associated with Time 2 future orientation ($r = 0.13$, $p = .151$) composites. Self-compassion was significantly and positively correlated with Time 1 well-being ($r = 0.45$, $p < .001$), Time 2 well-being ($r = 0.37$, $p < .001$), and Time 2 future orientation ($r = 0.32$, $p < .001$).

In linear regression analyses, growth and self-compassion were entered as simultaneous sources informing measures of Time 1 well-being, Time 2 well-being, and Time 2 future orientation. Because there was not evidence of within-person change in original measures of well-being between Time 1 and Time 2 (see above), steps were not taken to control Time 1 well-being measures for Time 2 well-being. That is, we tested whether these baseline measures continued to inform Time 2

well-being, rather than whether they explained within-person variation between Time 1 and Time 2. Table 3 presents the regression estimates for these models. For Time 1 well-being, the model omnibus was significant ($F(2, 269) = 41.4$, $R^2 = 0.24$, $p < .001$). Both growth and self-compassion accounted for significant variance for this composite and each measure was positively associated with composite scores. For the Time 2 well-being composite, the model omnibus was significant ($F(2, 123) = 11.1$, $R^2 = 0.15$, $p > .001$). Self-compassion maintained a significant and positive association with well-being. Growth did not have a significant association with well-being. For the Time 2 future orientation composite, the model omnibus was significant ($F(2, 123) = 8.1$, $R^2 = 0.12$, $p > .001$). Self-compassion maintained a significant and positive association with future orientation. Growth did not have a significant association with future orientation.

Regression analyses were used to test a two-way interaction of self-compassion and growth for each composite score. For Time 1 well-being, the interaction term was significant (estimate = -0.21, SE = 0.09, $\beta = -0.11$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$, $p = .024$). The simple slopes were significant both when growth was higher (t-value = 2.27, $p = .024$) and when growth was lower (t-value = 8.79, $p < .001$). When self-compassion was higher, students reported similarly high levels of well-being across scores of growth. When self-compassion was lower *and* growth was lower, students reported notably low well-being. Fig. 1 presents the estimated marginal means for this interaction. For Time 2 well-being, the interaction term was significant (estimate = -0.34, SE = 0.14, $\beta = -0.16$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p = .019$). The simple slope with higher scores of growth was not significant (t-value = 0.95, $p = .345$). In contrast, the simple slope with lower scores of growth was significant (t-value = 4.89, $p < .001$). Scores of well-being were highest when self-compassion was higher and when growth was lower. Fig. 2 presents the estimated marginal means for this interaction. For Time 2 future orientation, the interaction term was significant (estimate = -0.34, SE = 0.14, $\beta = -0.17$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.04$, $p = .015$). The the simple slope with higher scores of growth was not significant (t-value = 0.83, $p = .411$). In contrast, the simple slope with lower scores of growth was significant (t-value = 4.37, $p < .001$). Scores of future orientation were highest when self-compassion was higher and when growth was lower. Fig. 3 presents the estimated marginal means for this interaction.

In summary, we found that growth and self-compassion were positive associated (H1); growth showed some positive ties with well-being and self-compassion was positively tied to each measure of interest (H2); associations of growth and self-compassion previously supported in correlations were maintained when these scores were considered simultaneously in regressions (H3); and interaction effects between growth and self-compassion were supported with each composite measure, though the patterns of the interactions were different than expected (H4).

3. Discussion

We focused on the ties between constructive ways people relate to themselves and measures of well-being and future orientation. We expected two personality measures—the narrative identity measure of growth and the character measure of self-compassion—to be positively

Table 3
Linear Regression Estimates of Composite Scores on Reported Self-Compassion and Narrated Growth.

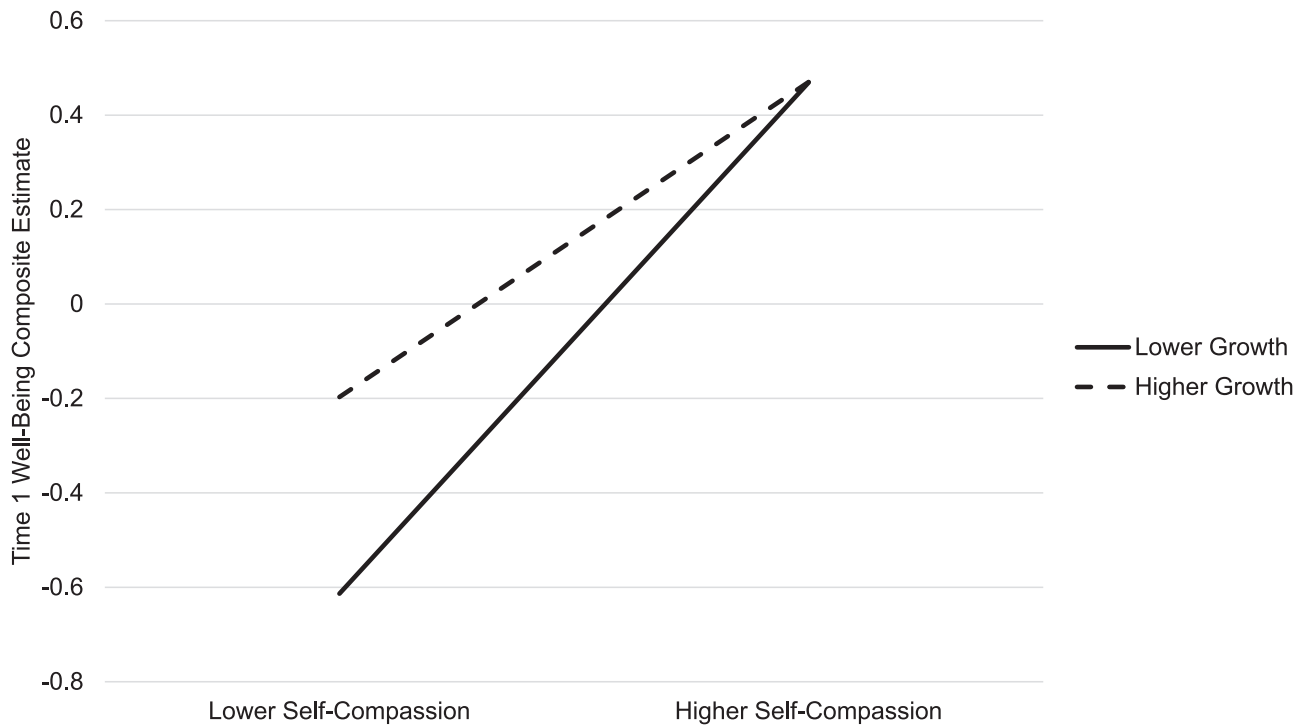|	Time 1 Well-Being				Time 2 Well-Being				Time 2 Future Orientation			
	Est	SE	β	p	Est	SE	β	p	Est	SE	β	p
Growth	0.13	0.06	0.12	0.030	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.291	0.07	0.10	0.06	0.476
Self-Compassion	0.80	0.10	0.45	0.000	0.67	0.16	0.36	0.000	0.59	0.19	0.32	0.000
Model R^2	0.24				0.15				0.12			
$F(2, 269)$	41.4											
$F(2, 123)$					11.1				8.1			
Model Sig.	0.000				0.000				0.000			

Fig. 1. *Estimated Marginal Means of Time 1 Well-Being Scores given Time 1 Self-Compassion and Growth. Note.* Scores for growth and self-compassion were set at −1 SD and + 1 SD from the mean.
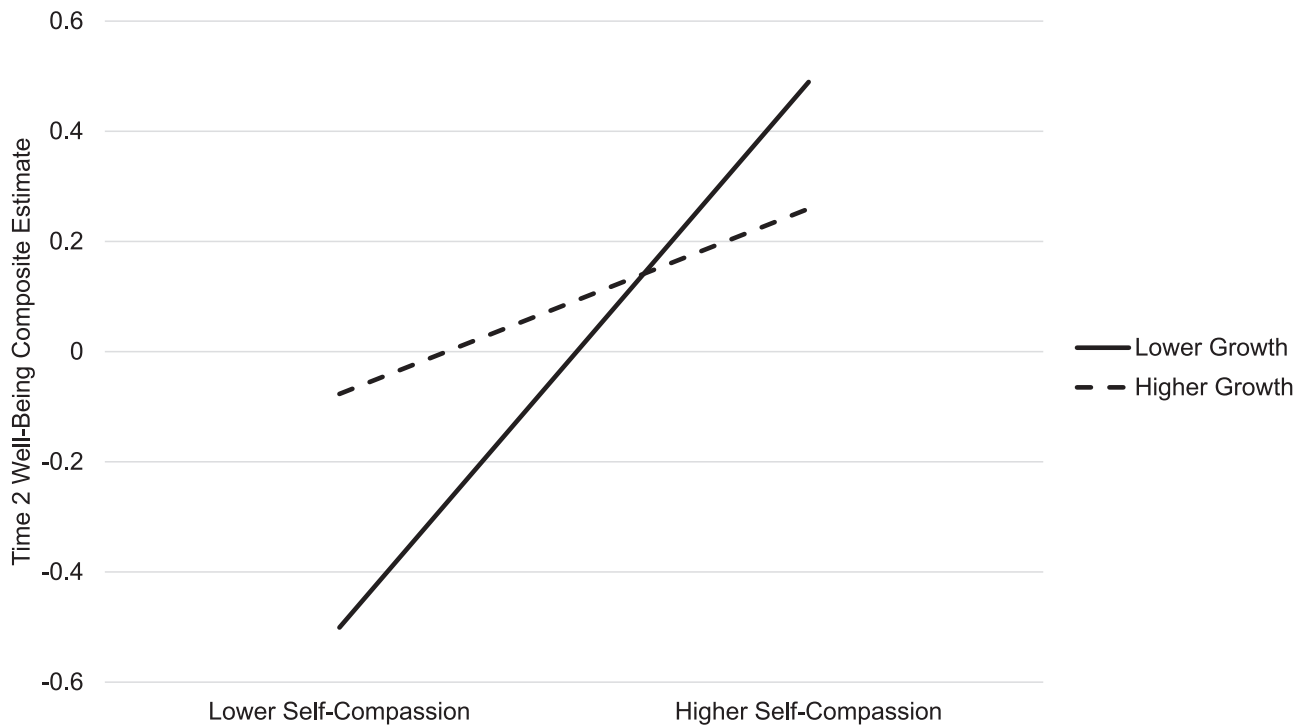

Fig. 2. *Estimated Marginal Means of Time 2 Well-Being Scores given Time 1 Self-Compassion and Growth. Note.* Scores for growth and self-compassion were set at −1 SD and +1 SD from the mean.

associated with each other, to be positively associated with measures of well-being and future orientation, to explain unique variance in these measures when considered simultaneously, and to show an amplified interaction for these measures. We found some support for expectations, as well as areas of nuance or surprise that we address below.

3.1. Are narrative growth and self-compassion positively related with each other?

We had clear reason to expect that people who express more narra-tive growth and positive self-transformation would also endorse more self-compassion. In line with previous work (Mansfield, Pasupathi, &
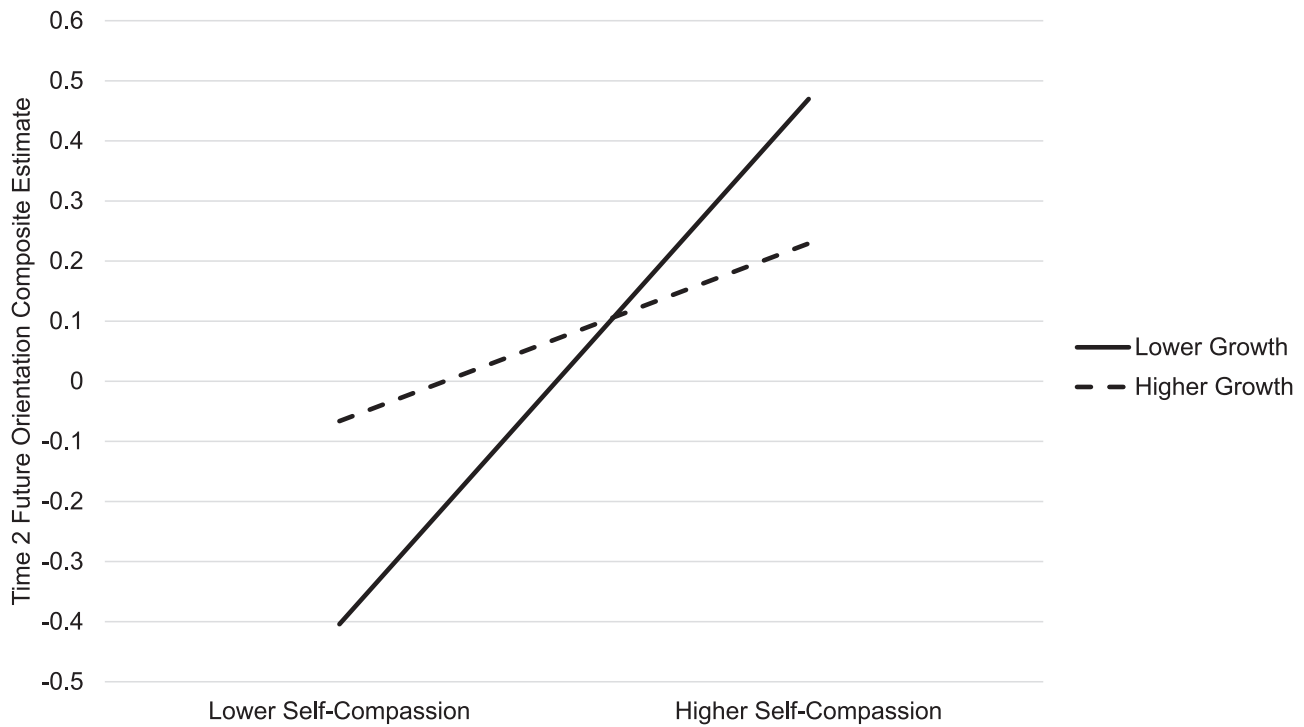
Fig. 3. *Estimated Marginal Means of Time 2 Future Orientation Scores given Time 1 Self-Compassion and Growth. Note.* Scores for growth and self-compassion were set at −1 SD and +1 SD from the mean.

McLean, 2015), we found that people who incorporated more expressions of growth and constructive self-transformation in important, vivid, self-defining memories also endorsed higher levels of self-compassion and reports of self-understanding and mindful awareness. This was helpful to see as our narrative prompt allowed for both positive and negative valence events to be shared, and students' recollections spanned different contexts and affective tones (e.g., "When my uncle got into a fatal accident my family and I had to try to move on from the grief together"; "I won a state championship as a captain of the team. It showed me that I am strong and a great leader"). Indeed, among participants who expressed higher growth and who endorsed higher self-compassion, there were at times spontaneous mentions from their growth-focused stories that also highlighted some concepts of self-compassion. See an example from Reef (pseudonym), who had high scores in both growth and self-compassion:

> One day my close friend and I were having a conversation in his car. This friend is one that I consider my brother. Back when I was still home we used to always have talks about religion. I was born into Christianity and he is a Muslim. To give some context I was not religious by any means, but I wasn't atheist. […] Like I said we would have talks/debates about religion. It would never be hostile it was mostly me asking him questions and him telling me what he believed was true as well as his reasoning why. He would tell me some things and a lot of times I would immediately disregard it as being false. […] But one day for some reason that one conversation we had made everything click. things started to make sense to me. I started to see the work God, Allah, was doing in my life. I see it as my heart opening up. things truly started making sense to me and my life seemed to have a purpose. The little things I would think are co-incidences all connected. the reason why I felt a certain way made sense to me. Obviously, this conversation was a long and emotional one. I actually ended up breaking down in tears for thinking that I knew more than I actually did. I felt like my life before that moment was a life full of ignorance. I am still very ignorant now. I believe everyone is. But I feel like I'm more knowledgeable in my purpose in

life. I'm still very ignorant in the religion and have to learn more about it but I still think about it every day. Islam has made me act less selfishly and I feel has overall made me into a better happier person. I'm not saying I was a bad guy before but now I do think more about my actions and the effect it has on others. There is much more to this but basically finding Islam was a huge part of my life and still [a]ffects me today and will continue to for the rest of my life.

Reef's focus across this narrative spans his personal journey in faith and the ways his life, and there are multiple points when he reflects on past flaws without overidentifying with them and his focus shifts intentionally beyond himself, thinking of the relevance of faith and action in connection with others—themes that could complement self-kindness and a sense of common humanity (see Neff, 2003a). While not explicitly measured with our rating scheme, Reef's life story messages also touch on more specific ways of conceptualizing growth, such as themes on moral and spiritual growth and growth centered on self-actualization (Bauer & McAdams, 2004b, 2010).

3.2. Are narrative growth and self-compassion positively related with measures of well-being and future orientation?

Across a growing literature, individual differences in growth and self-compassion have each been linked to multiple areas of psychological functioning and health. Much of this work has been centered on well-being—how do people feel about the direction of their lives, the ways fundamental needs are being met, and the ways they feel life has purpose, meaning, and fulfillment (i.e., Bauer et al., 2019; Booker & Dunsmore, 2019; Neff et al., 2007a,b). In this project, we expected ties to measures of well-being reflecting the ways people identify happiness in their lives and recognized broad areas of fulfillment and purpose in their lives—measures relevant for a good life. Growth (Time 1 only) and self-compassion (both Time 1 and Time 2) showed positive associations with a composite measure of well-being, reinforcing that these individual differences are salient for the good life. Accordingly, expressing less growth and endorsing less self-compassion coincided with poorer well-

being. A narrative example from Ferrah (pseudonym), who expressed less growth and endorsed less self-compassion, underscores this relevance with well-being:

> I was at my mom's side visiting when she and I got into a fight. I had made plans because she told me I didn't have to take my little brother to my dad's house. Later on she said I had to take him after I had confirmed I could go out that night. When I asked her why she said her boyfriend was tired and wanted to go home. This made no sense to me […] So I told my mom I wasn't taking him because I had plans with my friends, she had already given me permission to go, and there was no reason she couldn't take my little brother. She said okay and let it go, at least I thought she had. However, she had just gone to talk to her boyfriend who proceeded to tell me I was disrespectful and ungrateful. After a long fight he threatened to kick not only me out again but also my mom and little brother. That night I moved in with my dad and began to realize the emotional abuse my mom had indirectly put me through by staying with a man who always caused problems for me […] I will always be ungrateful and disrespectful to him.

We were also interested in testing the ways growth and self-compassion could be associated with items proximal to future orientation, or expectations that future events and opportunities will improve—that things will get better in life (Hirsch et al., 2007). We used ratings of hopefulness and generativity to capture indices of future orientation. We expected that both growth, reflecting positive change from the past, and self-compassion, involving adaptive ways of moving beyond past challenges, would both be positively linked with this measure of looking ahead to future opportunities in a positive and constructive fashion. Existing work with adolescents and young adults suggests that narrative expressions of growth are tied to indices of hope (Booker et al., 2022a) and generativity (Arnold & Clark, 2016), in line with measures used in this work. Similarly, research has linked reports of future orientation with reports of self-compassion (i.e., Chang et al., 2019; Huang, Lin, Fan, Qiao, & Wang, 2021).

While narrated growth was positively correlated with a specific measure of hope, there was not a significant tie with later reports of generativity or the broader composite of future orientation. This was surprising, and it is unclear whether this weak finding is due to the different modes of data (i.e., self-report vs. independent rating; see Panattoni & McLean, 2018), the particular nomothetic rating strategy in this project (i.e., capturing global ratings as opposed to specific instances or categories of growth), or possibly the breadth of affective tones represented by sample self-defining memories (i.e., uplifting events of growing closer in a relationship, discovering a new career path, growing in one's faith or broader values; challenging events like the loss of a loved one, relationship dissolution, missing out on a major opportunity or competition)—whether growth operated differently given the affective tone or topic at hand. Given the weaker association between baseline growth and follow-up well-being, it is also possible that earlier expressions of narrated growth are not relevant for psychological functioning over time. However, other recent work challenges this last explanation. Work by Bauer and McAdams (2010) shows that earlier expressions of growth-centered goals inform longitudinal change in college adults' ego development and well-being out to three-year follow-up. Further, research addressing narratives about the impacts of COVID-related college shutdowns in Spring 2020 showed that expressions of narrative growth were informative for multiple measures of well-being and mental health concurrently and that these ties were maintained to a one-year follow-up (Booker, Ell, Fivush, Greenhoot, McLean, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2022c).

In contrast to growth, endorsements of self-compassion were significantly and positively associated with our component score for future orientation. This finding fits with the growing evidence supporting self-compassion and its approaches for relating healthily to one's past self may also serve for taking positive views of future self and future

opportunities (i.e., Chang et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2016). Notably, other researchers have argued that self-compassion's contributions to relating to oneself *and* managing healthy attitudes and strategies toward others—maintaining connectivity with others—may be particularly beneficial for future orientation and for ways people see potential for themselves and for important relationships (see Chang et al., 2019). This would also fit with the developmentally salient challenges of maintaining close, dependable relationships across emerging adulthood, as young people are navigating work, school, dating, new communities, and beyond (Arnett, 2000, 2014; Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Booker, Hernandez, Talley, & Dunsmore, 2022b; Dunlop, Hanley, & McCoy, 2019). In fact, many of the self-defining memories provided by sample students centered on important interactions and relationships with others—events made possible given the support of close others; worries about others' health; changes in attitude after an important shared experience with someone else, etc. A segment of Ebonie's narrative highlights this central importance of being connected with others and ways such connectedness emerged across many stories:

> The first time I was individually called out to help the teachers with her made me realize that I love working with people with disabilities and how they challenge me to come up with creative ways to problem solve, and I also realized how special [this friend] is to me. This was a defining moment that I still hold close to me today because it allowed [my friend] and I to grow closer and without that friendship, I would not be the same person I am today and I may not have the same career goals that I do now.

3.3. Do narrative growth and self-compassion account for incremental variance for well-being and future orientation?

We were interested in the direct ties of growth and self-compassion with well-being and future orientation, as well as the ways both growth and self-compassion can account for distinct or incremental variance for these measures. This question was aimed at reinforcing the value in considering multiple personality factors simultaneously (i.e., McAdams & Pals, 2006) and the benefits of capturing a richer view of the ways people constructively relate to themselves. Given the earlier correlation findings, this question was most relevant for baseline reports of well-being, where both measures had significant associations with well-being. However, it remained important to consider whether the ties of self-compassion with follow-up measures remained above and beyond important forms of growth-based life reasoning. We did find that for baseline well-being, both growth and self-compassion maintained robust associations, and self-compassion maintained robust associations with follow-up measures. Further, self-compassion maintained positive associations with well-being and future orientation at follow-up, beyond the influence of narrative growth. In line with other studies addressing personality across the levels of narrative identity, character, and traits, these two measures offer distinct and complementary forms of information for other areas of psychological adjustment (i.e., (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016; Booker et al., 2022a; Syed, 2021).

3.4. Do well-being and future orientation differ across levels of both narrative growth and self-compassion?

Our last question addressed the possibility of interactions between expressed narrative growth and endorsed self-compassion for measures of well-being and future orientation—whether having different scores across these two adaptive ways of relating to the self could be linked to different measures. We expected a synergistic and amplified interaction—that people high in *both* growth and self-compassion would have especially high endorsements of well-being and future orientation. Interaction effects were supported, but they pointed to different patterns of findings across scores of growth and self-compassion. For each measure of interest, being low in both growth and self-compassion was tied

to especially poor adjustment. This isn't surprising and fits with the broad ways that each measure is correlated with adjustment. A narrative example from Kelis, who expressed lower growth and endorsed lower self-compassion, reinforces some of the ways reasoning expressed in her life story could extend to other areas of life and be relevant for these measures:

> A self-defining memory is the day my parents got divorced. I was in the 6th grade and my whole world was shaken. I remember missing a day of school because I had to go sit in the courtroom and listen to my parents argue over what schedule my sister and I would be put on until we were both 18. I remember the judge stating that everyday, my sister and I would switch houses, ultimately disrupting anytime of "flow" we could have during a week. I remember walking out of the courthouse with my mom because if was now 'her day' and not getting to say "I love you" to my dad. Now it affects me because I no longer believe in love and that marriage is worth nothing.

Her ongoing framing from this experience shows a recognized enmeshment in this event across of development and ongoing difficulty moving beyond this experience, including a "takeaway" rejection of values on intimacy and care with others. These separate values are also relevant for adjustment in college settings and emerging adulthood more broadly (Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Booker et al., 2022b; Dunlop et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Paired with limited values and approaches of self-compassion—responding to the different life challenges and ordeals with self-criticism, a sense of isolation, and possible over-identification—it is not surprising that Kelis and others with similar displays of both growth and self-compassion could stand out as endorsing poorer adjustment in the short-term. Overall, participants who expressed higher growth and who endorsed higher self-compassion did have relatively high endorsements both at baseline and follow-up (e.g., "Now that I have been granted a fresh start in a new atmosphere, I am able to be myself completely and be unashamed by it. Due to finally being my most authentic self I have never been happier").

Notably, participants *higher* in self-compassion and relatively *lower* in growth had highest endorsements of Time 2 well-being and future orientation. These could be participants who were focused more on the current moment and still adhering to constructive and balanced ways of relating to themselves and others (maintaining a healthy balance of connectedness, etc.; Chang et al., 2019; Neff, 2003a). A brief example of someone with a relatively lower growth score and higher report of self-compassion comes from Omer's, whose narrative is below:

> A few years ago, I was walking across the street when someone on a bike ran into me. Although I was unaffected, he fell down and dropped all of his belongings. I took the time to help him up and pick up all of the things he dropped. This is an important memory because it shows that I am a helpful person.

Results fit the above findings that self-compassion was more strongly associated with these measures than expressions of narrative growth. This could be due to the endorsements of self-compassion being more broadly applicable across areas of psychological functioning, relevant for multiple areas of greater personal adjustment, lower personal adversity, and successes in relationships (see Zessin, Dickhäuser, & Garbade, 2015). These and the above findings could also be signs that expressions of narrative growth operate differently given the valence of the narrated event—that identifying and integrating growth from uplifting and promotive life stories operates for the self differently than growth from upsetting or threatening life stories. There are arguments that narrative reasoning about challenging and threatening experiences could provide unique opportunities for re-organizing and recovering one's threatened sense of self, in ways that are not matched in reasoning about uplifting and non-threatening events (see (Habermas & Köber, 2015)). There is some evidence that growth might have different implications for psychological adjustment across more positive valence and more negative valence narratives, and that growth in "low point

events" may better explain psychological adjustment over time better than "high point event" growth, when considered simultaneously (Booker, Fivush, & Graci, 2021c). As this project involved narratives spanning positive and negative affective tones, there may be additional nuances that were not captured in the current work. Such prospects reinforce the importance of additional narrative identity dimensions such as redemption and contamination (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001; Perlin & Fivush, 2021). Framing challenging events with redemption and positive resolutions has implications for psychological adjustment and functioning (i.e., Booker & Perlin, 2021; McLean et al., 2020). This would be important, as growth and redemption are related but provide distinct information for psychological adjustment (Bauer et al., 2019).

In contrast, participants lower in self-compassion and higher in growth had moderate adjustment in each measure. This group could reflect approaches of recognizing areas of constructive change, but that change may not reflect a balanced approach of relating to the self or maintaining balanced connectedness with others (i.e., Yarnell & Neff, 2013). Two narratives from students fitting this pattern of scores are below: one from Lexie; and another from Nisha. Both events happen to address painful topics of self-harm, which impacted these students in profound ways:

> When I was in the seventh grade, I had a friend named [friend's name]. I discovered my life's purpose through her. She had a bad family life. […] I have always been the supportive friend. There were multiple occasions that she called me so upset that I went to go check on her. One time, she called me and told me she was tired of being alive and she knew how she was going to do it. I didn't even have to ask what "it" was. My mom drove me to her house, and I ran inside to her counting a bottle of pills. I managed to calm her down and she says I saved her life. That is how I discovered helping people with their mental health is what I am meant to do. - *Narrative from Lexie*
> My junior year of high school I lost someone close to me to suicide. It was the first real death I had ever experienced and my first time grappling with a situation like that. Feelings of guilt and grief were so strong that it took so long to not feel that pain every day. I think it made me stronger and completely changed my perspective on life. I learned to have a more complex understanding of the [e]ffects of depression and anxiety, especially with the way they distort ones brain. Grieving with other and alone were both hard and I had to find ways to cope. These stick with me and help me in my life still. - *Narrative from Nisha*

Both participants point to clear areas of personal self-transformation and the recognition of new life directions, new passions and interests, and new strategies for moving forward in life—the kinds of adaptive ways of functioning that could complement well-being and future orientation. Yet, Lexie's narrative especially centers on growth in the service of others. This is undoubtably a good realization and motive going forward but is not the same as stopping to also take care of the self and show oneself compassion in times of distress. There could be ways that individuals such as this are continuing to thrive as they operate around others, but they *may not have as much ease showing themselves the same care and understanding they lend to others* (Neff, 2003a; Neff & Beretvas, 2013). This view would also fit with the ways self-compassion is found to be positively tied to a better balancing of partner and personal needs (Yarnell & Neff, 2013). Importantly, while narrative growth is complementary to other narrative identity dimensions like communion and agency (Booker, Brakke, Sales, & Fivush, 2021a; McLean et al., 2020)—the motivational drives for getting along with others and getting ahead with personal goals—and expressions of growth can be specific to important motivational themes and other ego development (i.e., integrative) and fundamental need (i.e., intrinsic) topics (Bauer & McAdams, 2004b, 2010), our measure of growth was broader and did not isolate these important dimensions. Relatedly, Nisha's narrative seems to point to areas where she might struggle with responding to losses and

setbacks, possibly extending to difficulties with some areas of self-kindness or maintaining connections with others in the face of distress. Still, her overall outlook on perseverance remains clear and could be in the service of well-being and particularly future orientation—expectations for future opportunities to continue to improve, despite current or recent difficulties (Hirsch et al., 2007, 2015). Another possibility remains that many of these impactful events could share overlap in involving drastic threats threatening the self and close others, which could be impacting ongoing self-compassion even as people are able to, in other ways, constructively reason and grow the event. An example lies in another narrative response from Austen, who had a higher score of growth and lower report of self-compassion, sharing that "my grandfather suffered a stroke and was rushed to the hospital. In that moment I recall thinking about how I will never take anyone's life for granted again […] I learned to live like I was going to die." Living as if they were always hoping to take full advantage of the moment could complement some ways of functioning well and looking toward next steps with confidence, but if these steps do not provide space for patience and self-kindness, adults could be limited in some areas of healthy responding and functioning.

These findings highlight the importance of taking more nuanced views within narrative identity and across different measures of personality in addressing how people are functioning and thriving in the moment and their outlook for continuing to thrive over time. Yet, these and other promising interaction terms will need to be replicated and extended toward additional populations of young adults outside of college settings (i.e., Booker et al., 2021c) and individuals representing the broader lifespan (i.e., Bauer & Park, 2010).

3.5. Limitations, strengths, and future directions

This study used a convenience sample of predominantly White and predominantly female college adults to address the current research questions at hand. The supported findings fit broadly with other empirical work addressing personality at the levels of personality and character considering other predominantly White college populations (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Booker et al., 2021a), as well as Black college populations (Booker et al., 2022a), community-based young adults (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2004a; Booker et al., 2021c), and relatively older US adult populations (Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005; Bauer & Park, 2010). Yet, there remains a clear need to study questions about growth and connections to finding the good in life using samples that represent additional diversity in race, ethnicity, age, gender, and geography. The current study was limited in not being able to consider stability, lability, and directionality among most measures of interest. Despite a two-wave study design, most measures were only captured at one time point and a one-month difference between study waves is not ideal for capturing larger within-person variability for most measures where intervention/manipulation is not involved. Attrition in this project was surprising, and though we had no evidence of major study measures being associated with later attrition, it is possible that a meaningful confound could have limited ongoing participant interest in study participation. Further, missing data impacted power for some analyses extending to Time 2.

Although there was marked attrition between Time 1 and Time 2 in this study, the study benefited from a multi-phase approach that considered ties between growth and endorsements of character with concurrent reports of adjustment and follow-up reports of adjustment and future orientation.

Future studies will benefit from taking explicit steps to improve representation with narrative-focused projects, both in representing more populations (i.e., age groups, racial and ethnic groups, participants from more educational and financial backgrounds) and in better addressing the role of culture in how narrative identity is made normative and in addressing possible barriers to the integration of narrative identity for marginalized populations (see also Sanders, Rose,

Booker, & King, 2021; Syed, 2021; Syed & McLean, 2021). Future studies should also work to incorporate more multi-phase and longitudinal designs to address the ways earlier narrative identity and reasoning in growth could inform trajectories of outlook and to address possible mechanisms of change between growth and indicators of the good life. There is consensus dimensions of expressed narrative identity are distinctly informative and complementary to other self-reports and observations of behavior (e.g., Adler et al., 2016) and that many themes of narrative identity can help inform adjustment and functioning (e.g., McLean et al., 2020), but there remains a need and ample space to consider the longitudinal roles of earlier individual differences in narrative identity and both the extent narrative identity (systematically) with distance from lived experiences (see Fivush, Booker, & Graci, 2017; Van Boven, Kane, McGraw, & Dale, 2010) and the implications of such changes for individuals (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Booker et al., 2020, 2022c).

4. Conclusion

The project addressed the ways two personality measures involving healthy ways of relating to the self—narrated growth and endorsed self-compassion—were associated with each other and with measures of well-being and future orientation. Using a college sample of young adults, we collected a set of self-defining life stories and rated life stories for global expressions of personal growth. We also collected endorsements of self-compassion, well-being, and future orientation. We found support that growth and self-compassion were positively linked and had positive, incremental associations with well-being and future orientation. Further, interactions were supported between growth and self-compassion, such that people relatively higher in self-compassion and relatively lower in growth endorsed the highest well-being and future orientation at one-month follow-up. Findings reinforce the importance of both the constructive forms of self-transformation and appreciation for new values and strengths in one's life story as well as the balanced ways people endorse self-kindness, ongoing connectedness with others, and healthy regard for pressing issues in their lives. Further, evidence suggests that nuanced considerations across multiple measures of personality help provide more thorough views of adjustment and fulfillment in people's lives.

5. Author note

The author led research question formation, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix

Examples of Self-Defining Memory Narratives Representing Different Growth Ratings.

Lower Growth Examples.

Example 1. *In my life I have had few boyfriends and best friends. Of those few people I have held close to me, all of them have either cheated on me or left me with no explanation. Because of this I no longer let myself get close to people. These experiences have turned me into a much colder person that*

trusts no one. It has changed me as a person in many ways.

Example 2. *A self-defining memory is the day my parents got divorced. I was in the 6th grade and my whole world was shaken. I remember missing a day of school because I had to go sit in the courtroom and listen to my parents argue over what schedule my sister and I would be put on until we were both 18. I remember the judge stating that every day, my sister and I would switch houses, ultimately disrupting anytime of "flow" we could have during a week. I remember walking out of the courthouse with my mom because if was now 'her day' and not getting to say "I love you" to my dad. Now it affects me because I no longer believe in love and that marriage is worth nothing.*

Example 3. *One memory that has stuck with me for years and years is the time that my mom gave me her long red maxi skirt to wear to school and a bunch of girls made fun of me for it. I was so embarrassed. Up to that point my mom had been my best friend and since then I haven't really respected her like I used to.*

Higher growth Examples

Example 4. *One of my self-defining memories happened with the zoo. I was a volunteer with the zoo for three years and I did things like work with the education department and was a camp counselor. My favorite thing that I have ever done was work with the endangered species, the American Burying Beetle, in the insectarium. For three years, I helped prepare them for their release by helping regrow the population and make sure they were in top shape with their health and hygiene. My mentor and boss, [name], asked me one day if I could go on the trip with the insectarium to help release them. I was ecstatic, I had always wanted to do that and it was my dream to watch the beetles go to their home after all of the hard work they went through. I went on the trip with them and it was absolutely life changing. I got to help dig holes to prepare the sites for the beetles. I got to put dead quails in the holes for the beetles to bury into. I got to release pairs of males and females into the holes to start their lives together and make their homes in the prairies. It was absolutely life changing. For the rest of the summer, I went around and told people that I released an endangered species. It was one of my proudest moments and something that I will hold onto forever because it made me truly realize that each organism has such an impact on the world and I want to spend the rest of my life helping the environment and those organisms in some way.*

Example 5. *My freshman year of high school I went to get my hair cut and I accidentally got it all shaved off. I had to learn how to get comfortable with it and grow thick skin. From then on I would say that I have been able to take criticism much better and have also been a lot more confident.*

Example 6. *My twin brother, while going through the first few years of high school used to be every abusive to my mom and I. It became a very toxic home, one where many nights I would spend at my friends' houses. I was able to grow past it, and let it help build me up instead of being me down. I became a stronger person because of it.*

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