

Seeing One's Self: Locating Narrative Memory in a Framework of Personality

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ABSTRACT Individuals confront the continuing challenge of attending to the competing demands of internal and external stimuli. The emerging I-Self applies three principles of evaluation, categorization, and subsidiation to organize these informational demands. These principles guide the development of the five systems of personality—cognition, affect, motivation, behavior, and psychophysiology. These systems interact to create various Me-Selves that comprise the different roles and contexts of the personality. Each Me-Self contains evaluations (valenced responses to self and others), categories (self- and other representations), and sequences in time (the self and others in past, present, and future). Narrative is the perceptual expression of a particular Me-Self in consciousness. Narrative memory allows for meaningful analysis by consciousness of specific Me-Selves and the cognitions, affects, and goals associated with those selves. Applications of this position to research and psychotherapy are discussed.

The contributors to this special issue were asked to contemplate new perspectives on personality theory. My goal for this article is to address the topic that has preoccupied me for the last 15 years, the role of autobiographical narrative memory in emotion and personality, and reconsider it in light of advances in personality theory. The critical question I hope to answer is where to locate narrative memories in a framework of personality that includes overarching self-representations and interacting subsystems of cognition, affect, motivation, behavior, and psychophysiology. Besides defining the level at which narrative

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memories operate within this framework, I also hope to make clear the function they serve within the personality.

My framework begins with an assumption that individuals struggle to negotiate the competing information of an interior and external world. To direct attention and focus conscious thought, the developing self applies three hierarchical principles of organization to these competing stimuli. These principles in turn guide the development of the major three systems of the "private" personality (J. L. Singer & Bonanno, 1990)—cognition, affect, and motivation. As individuals accumulate life experiences, these systems combine to generate and organize narratives; these narratives provide an internal "perceptual" reality to the various self-representations that make up one's "Me-Selves." Of the various narratives, narrative memories, especially "self-defining ones" (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; J. A. Singer & Moffitt, 1991–92; J. A. Singer & Salovey, 1993), which are repetitively contemplated over a lifetime, offer a continuity with past experience, a commentary on current concerns, and a template for the possibility and prospects of future action.

In presenting my understanding of narrative memory's role in personality, it is helpful to think about a perceptual analogy. Narrative memories are percepts differentiated from the various internal stimuli of thoughts, imagery, fantasy, and immediate proprioceptive sensation. When a person retrieves and contemplates a narrative memory, he or she is focusing on a specific figure amidst these competing internal stimuli, not to mention the simultaneous external demands on attention (e.g., the task at hand and sensory cues). As the narrative memory is recalled, a coordination of thought, feeling, goal-oriented activity, and bodily responses is achieved and the mind fixes upon a distinguishable pattern in consciousness. How the pattern offered by the narrative memory is created and the functions it may serve for the person will be at heart of the argument I present.

In order to discuss narrative memory's contribution to personality, it is necessary to describe a working framework of personality. The particular framework I will describe owes many debts to other models, including Cantor and Kihlstrom's (1987) social intelligence, McAdams's (1985) life story model of identity, Markus's self-schemas (Markus & Nurius, 1986), Pervin's goal theory (1983), J. L. Singer's private personality (J. L. Singer, 1988; J. L. Singer & Bonanno, 1990), Tomkins's (1979, 1987, 1991) script theory, and Westen's (1992) self-representations. I offer this framework with no pretenses that it is a comprehensive model or that it is superior to alternate conceptions of

the person. Its advantage for my purposes is that it makes straightforward assumptions and is easily translated to empirical tests. Many of its tenets have already been explored and at least partially supported by experimental evidence. My ultimate goal is not a veridical description of the "real person," but a conceptualization that enables fruitful dialogue and experimentation that will move researchers closer to a practical and more satisfying vision of the role of autobiographical memory in personality.

A Framework of Personality

A fundamental task for us as human beings is the negotiation of stimulation presented by the physical world of which we are a part. From birth on, we experience external and internal demands—the piercing brightness of sunlight, the ache of hunger, the chill of a bitter wind, the discomfort of our own inconsolable cries. In animals with less complex brains or a less developed cerebral cortex, reflexive behaviors and simple motoric plans achieve the appropriate congress with the demanding world. Human beings, for better or worse, learn to rely upon the intercession of conscious thought to handle the negotiation of internal and physical stimuli. As James once wrote, "The first fact for us, then, as psychologists, is that thinking of some sort goes on" (James, 1890, p. 224).

One result of the fact of thinking is that human beings do not have only one attentional field—the physical world outside the body; we also attend to our own thoughts independent of that world. The work of J. L. Singer and colleagues (Antrobus, Singer, & Greenberg, 1966; Pope & Singer, 1976; D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer, 1990) over many decades has elegantly demonstrated how task-relevant thought in tasks such as signal detection may be affected by preoccupying stimulus-independent thought (e.g., daydreams and fantasy). J. L. Singer and Bonanno (1990) write,

We propose that for human beings (as far as we can tell), our stimuli derive either from the "objective" world, the consensually measurable physical and social stimuli in our milieu, or from the "subjective" or private world of our memories and ongoing mental processes. . . . At any given moment the human being must assign a priority to responding to those stimuli that come from exodermic sources (sounds, light patterns, smells, touches, or tastes) or to those that appear to be "internal" (the recollections, associations, images,

interior monologues, wishful fantasies, or ruminative worries that characterize consciousness). Bodily sensations or signals of pain or malfunction from our organ systems represent a kind of intermediary source of stimulation, although we propose that such experiences often appear to have an “objective” quality, despite their inherent embeddedness within our physical selves. (p. 421)

Once attention is focused, whether externally or internally, we are able to perceive patterns in the particular stimulus to which we attend. As we develop, much of this pattern recognition (and certainly the pattern recognition that ultimately holds the most meaning) is culturally inherited and taught. We learn to organize the external world into stable physical objects; we learn the meaning of symbol systems, first signs, and then with great complexity, language. We quickly learn to detect interpersonal patterns regarding caretakers, siblings, relatives, and peers. Internally, we must learn to connect physical experience to a sense of our whole personhood (see Damon & Hart, 1988; Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979). (I remember a moment when my daughter, who was a little over 2 at the time, looked in the mirror and pointed to the two lines above her eyes and asked what they were. When I replied, “eyebrows,” I felt present at a unique moment of discovery in the voyage to the self.) We must also learn to understand our internal stimuli in a temporal sequence; images of previous events that return to our attention and consciousness need to be understood as memories—events of the past.

The Three Hierarchical Principles of the I-Self

The development of a capacity for pattern recognition spatially and temporally, internally as well as externally, allows for the emergence of a rudimentary self. Although the self as object (me) is a product of these developments in thought (Lewis & Brooks-Gunn, 1979; Stern, 1985; Westen, 1992), I am first concerned with the self as subject or knower (I) (James, 1890). The developing I-Self avails itself of three critical hierarchical principles of organization that allow it to make greater and greater distinctions in its world of internal and external demands. These three organizing principles correspond to a philosophical and psychological tradition of dividing the psychological world of the private personality into faculties of “feeling,” “thinking,” and “conation” or “will.” This tripartite division can be found in 18th-century German philosophy and

took definitive expression in Kant's introduction to *Critique of Judgment* (1790; cited in Gardiner, Metcalf, & Beebe-Center, 1937).

I call these three principles (a) evaluation (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Fiske, 1982); (b) categorization (Gibson, 1979; Rosch, 1978), and (c) subsidiation (Murray, 1938). Evaluation may be linked to the faculties of feeling or what Kant called "judgement"; categorization corresponds to Kant's "pure reason," and subsidiation to conation or what Kant called "practical reason." Each of these principles functions by hierarchically organizing information. By hierarchy, I mean a "body of entities arranged in a graded series" (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 621). The body of entities in this case is whatever the object of consciousness may be (whether external sensory cues or internal images or thoughts). What distinguishes among the three hierarchical principles is the means by which the stimuli are graded to form the arranged series. For the evaluation principle, the graded series is arranged on the basis of valued preference; what is valued more is ranked higher. For the categorization principle, what is more abstract or encompassing is higher in the arranged series. For the subsidiation principle, what is more terminal in a sequence of actions or thoughts is graded higher in the series.

The evaluative hierarchy is based on the value or importance attributed to any stimulus at a given time. For example, a person may place great value on satisfying his or her appetite, but in moments of acute danger or anxiety, give little attention to hunger and turn instead to thoughts of physical safety. People may evaluate the goal of fame with favor, but this goal pales beside the responsibility they may feel for their families. It should be emphasized that this evaluative ordering goes beyond mere affective responses. A person may feel great surges of passion, but evaluate them as less important in light of pressing moral obligations. As these examples imply, evaluative hierarchies are not fixed and will shift with situational cues; however, at any given point in time, individuals assign an order of preference and importance to the stimuli they encounter.

The categorical hierarchy has been well-studied in perception (Gibson, 1979), concept formation (Rosch, 1978), and memory (Neisser, 1986, 1988). People tend to organize information according to increasing levels of abstraction or generality. At the lowest level is the specific event or detail. At higher levels of abstraction, events may be identified as belonging to a category or "class" of events, of which some may be more exemplary or prototypical than others, but no one event can

be said to be the category itself. As we learn the category of "eating dinner," for example, we can begin to include a whole assortment of different types of meals in this category (e.g., spaghetti, chicken, rice and beans, etc.).

The subsidiation hierarchy refers to the instrumental dependence of informational units upon each other. The following definition of subsidiation by Murray (1938) refers to needs within a motivational system, but it can be equally applied to any aspects of human thought or action:

When one or more needs are activated in the service of another need, we may speak of the former as being *subsidiary* . . . and the latter as being *determinant*. The determinant need regulates the action from the beginning, but may not itself become overt until the terminal phase of the total event. (p. 86)

Murray provides the example of a surgeon who at any given moment in an operation is engaged in a series of subsidiary actions (clamping, making an incision, working upon the damaged organ, closing up the incision, etc.) that are meaningful steps toward a terminal goal (the health of the patient). In most cases, subsidiation implies a temporal ordering insofar as one component precedes another in a linear sequence.

These three hierarchies operate independently of each other, though they may often be correlated in their ordering of a set of stimuli. For example, people in general tend to value the end point of a sequence of thoughts or actions more than subsidiary ones, but if this were always the case, all psychological or behavioral tasks initiated would be carried through to their conclusion. As Mischel's (1966) work on the delay of gratification illustrates, people often succumb to the immediate stimulus, despite their knowledge that restraint would lead to an ostensibly more valued goal. As another example, a higher level of categorization does not always imply a higher degree of subsidiation. In the cognitive system, a set of events stored in the memory category "visiting grandma each summer" are located there due to temporal and spatial contiguity, but are not required to share any instrumental relationship to each other.

I do not make any assumption about a hierarchical relationship among the three principles. Though some biological models have depicted an evolutionary sequence of motivation, affect, and cognition (the so-called "Triune Brain," see MacLean, 1980), I see them each as indispensable, but of equal weight within the individual.

The I-Self, then, can be defined as the psychological entity that ap-

plies these three hierarchical principles to the competing demands of internal and external stimuli. This I-Self categorizes, prefers, and prioritizes (thinks, feels, and orders stimuli in terms of terminal purposes). As a child develops, the application of these principles to the intensifying stimulation from the external and internal world offers attention a means of focus and direction. Internal or external stimuli as they are processed by this I-Self can be evaluated for the degree of pleasure or pain they produce, can be grouped according to developing categories of abstraction, and can be understood as comprising cause and effect sequences that lead to particular intended outcomes. The specific evaluations, categorizations, and purposes that become each individual's more or less stable identifying characteristics can be considered the emerging Me-Selves, the products of the I-Self's ongoing efforts at organization and classification.

The Five Systems of the Personality

One difficulty for this emerging I-Self is that its use of three hierarchical principles can become confusing. The three principles are recursive—as human beings we can think about our thoughts, feel about our emotions, prioritize our priorities. At the same time, we can feel about thoughts, choose among emotions, and think about our priorities.

For order to emerge among the competing demands of these three principles of psychological organization, the personality divides into three separate functional systems: the cognitive system, which draws upon categorization, the affective system, which offers evaluations of the pleasure, pain, and intensity of stimuli, and the motivational system, which assigns subsidiary and determinant status to intentional actions (for a theory of how these three systems interact to create a nosology of personality types, see Miller, 1991). In addition to these three systems, there are the two systems that directly involve the interface of the physical world with the psychological (behavioral and psychophysiological). With any motoric movements (whether speech or action), we are acting upon the physical space of a world outside our bodies. In recognizing the physical cues and physiological cues of our bodies, we are responding to the fact that our psychological reality is always based within an internal physical reality as well as an external reality outside our bodies. Though the three purely psychological systems (cognition, affect, and motivation) are each focused on a particular function, they continue to benefit from the organizational activity of all three prin-

ciples (evaluation, categorization, and subsidiation). Within each of the five subsystems of the personality, the I-Self's three organizing principles continue to be at work.

Before describing each of the five subsystems, let me say a few words about the term "system." These systems are not meant to be reified physical entities with anatomical sites, but rather conceptual structures and processes that are dedicated to specific purposes within the personality. A system may be defined as a coherent assembly of interrelated and dependent parts (Schwartz, 1990; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Each system contains a hierarchical structure that organizes its levels from most simple to most complex; complex functioning of the system depends upon the satisfactory functioning of each successive level of the system. Systems exist for functional purposes; a system has at least one dedicated goal toward which its effective functioning will carry it. The definition of what constitutes a discrete system and distinguishes it from a related system is ultimately rather arbitrary and depends upon factors such as historical circumstance, level of analysis, and ease of separation for empirical investigation. For example, I might define the heating system as a distinct system among others (plumbing, electrical) in my home. Of course, if my home is heated electrically, the boundaries among systems become less clear. As an example in psychology, Izard (1991) has suggested six subsystems of the personality (homeostatic, drive, emotional, perceptual, cognitive, and motoric), yet the boundaries between cognitive and perceptual functions are increasingly difficult to define (Gibson, 1979) and the "drive" concept as distinct from mechanisms of homeostatic regulation is currently much out of favor.

Cognitive System

Through perception, learning, memory, thought, and language, the cognitive system enables each of us to make sense of, organize, and respond to various external and internal stimulus demands. By detecting, retaining, and applying patterns of information, we are able to take planful action upon the world. Given my particular interest in narrative memory, I will discuss the autobiographical memory subsystem as a representative of organization within the cognitive system. Autobiographical memory allows individuals to retain information about past events that they have directly experienced and lets them retrieve that information to inform their current responses to stimuli.

In agreement with Tulving's (1972) work on semantic and episode memory, autobiographical memory researchers have found that autobiographical experiences are recalled through categorical or abstracted structures; recalled autobiographical events are filtered through existing schemas. One of these important structures appears to be a narrative or story organization (Mandler & Johnson, 1977). Neisser (1988) writes,

Story structure, which exists objectively in every culture and transcends the details of any particular story or myth, is apparently something that people remember. What is more, remembering this rather abstract entity serves an important function: It helps one to recall specific and particular stories as they are encountered. (p. 358)

One of the means individuals use to store memories is to organize the encoded events according to narrative conventions and story types that are familiar within their particular culture. This is a clear example of the categorization hierarchy at work.

Paralleling the work of cognitive psychologists on autobiographical memory, cognitive scientists have wrestled with similar issues of hierarchical structure in their attempts to model human text understanding through computer analogues (Black, 1984; Galambos, Abelson, & Black, 1986; Kolodner, 1984; Schank, 1982, 1990; Schank & Abelson, 1977). A key overlapping concept that developed from this work is that human beings store information in knowledge structures (Galambos et al., 1986), which are abstract categories that label and organize more specific events. These knowledge structures build in hierarchical fashion.

At the more basic level are categories organized around common temporal sequences of events or what Schank and Abelson have called scripts (the sequence of events involved in going to the store or eating at a restaurant). At the higher level of knowledge organization are theme-based knowledge structures that link temporally and physically distinct circumstances through a common theme or conflict (Schank, 1982). By studying participants' search process and the type of memories retrieved, Reiser (1983; Reiser, Black, & Abelson, 1985; Reiser, Black, & Kalamarides, 1986) was able to demonstrate the hierarchical indexing participants used to store memories. Recollection of a particular memory takes place by summoning a particular context and then making inferences to find the specific experience one seeks to recall. Experiences are retrieved by finding the appropriate knowledge structure, then using the general information within that structure to guide

the search process to the specific event in question. Reiser also found that the most common knowledge structure for everyday recall was an "activity" similar to Schank and Abelson's (1977) "script" (going to work or socializing with friends), which consisted of information about participants, locations, time periods, and motivating goals.

Both cognitive psychology and cognitive science's investigations of autobiographical memory have converged on the concept of a hierarchically organized memory system that uses categories of differing abstraction as its defining units. Neisser (1988) summarizes,

The structure of autobiographical memory, then is basically hierarchical. It is not a strict hierarchy in the mathematical sense, but it is rich enough in overlapping and nested relations to make that term appropriate. We use our memories in ways that reflect this hierarchical organization. Directed recall usually moves either downward from context or upward from particulars. (p. 364)

Reiser (1983) linked the evaluative and subsidiation hierarchy principles to autobiographical memory in the following way. He suggested that the importance (evaluation principle) and retrievability of a given memory were a function of a hierarchical ordering of activities and goals within the memories. Events linked to higher level goals will be more salient and available to recall. Events linked to higher level goals will also be connected to more paths in memory, since all lower level goals will be motivated by the highest level within a given context (subsidiation principle). This implies easier and more frequent access. Since attention is limited, events linked to higher level goals will be given more prominence in the original encoding of the memory (evaluation principle). This preferential encoding makes practical sense, since one may more easily infer lower events from higher level ones.

Within the autobiographical memory subsystem of cognition, hierarchical principles are operating at encoding through retrieval to organize information within existing knowledge structures; this organization is aided by the detection of instrumental relationships and the assignment of evaluative importance to the information under consideration.

Affective System

Both Tomkins (1962, 1963) and Izard (1991) have detailed elaborate theories of the affective system in the personality. Izard (1991) has defined an emotion as a "complex process with neural, neuromuscular/expressive, and experiential aspects" (p. 42). At the neural level, emo-

tions draw upon both the somatic and autonomic nervous systems. At the neuromuscular level, emotion draws primarily on facial muscular patterning, as well as bodily gestures and vocalizations. At the experiential level, emotion is felt in consciousness with a positive or negative valence that encourages or discourages interactions with others or with objects in the environment. Izard asserts, "The experiencing of emotion can constitute a process in consciousness completely independent of cognition" (p. 42). This independence, of course, has been the object of extensive debate (Lazarus, 1982; Zajonc, 1984).

Emotions serve three major functions—a biological function to redirect the flow of energy resources in the body in response to acute stimuli (the quickening of heart rate in a fearful situation); a motivational function to focus and guide thought and behavior; and an expressive or social function to communicate preferences and internal states to others in the social environment (Izard, 1991, p. 51). Tomkins (1962, 1963) states that people seek to express and control affect, as well as to maximize positive and minimize negative affect (Tomkins, 1979).

The affective system also relies upon evaluation, categorization, and subsidiation. Drawing upon Darwin's original study of emotion, Izard and Tomkins both assert that there are a set of fundamental emotions, which developed through evolutionary-biological processes. From these fundamental emotions (e.g., sadness, anger, fear, enjoyment), more complex emotions have developed as blends and combinations (e.g., jealousy is a blend of anger, sadness, and fear, or romantic attraction is a blend of enjoyment, interest, and perhaps fear). These more complex emotions, such as depression, disappointment, and pride, may be considered higher order categories in which aspects of the fundamental emotions may be located.

Evaluatively, some emotions may generally take precedence over others in terms of importance; surprise or startle will generally overwhelm any other existing feeling. However, a key to personality may indeed be the evaluative preferences individuals show for different affective states. An individual who accords fear great weight may take few risks, while an individual who prizes excitement may show diminished attention to the affective signals of fear (Zuckerman, 1979). Social situations and the expectations and conventions they impose may help to define the given importance of an affect to an individual. Although sexual fantasies may yield enjoyment, if they are experienced at a funeral, they may yield to competing and more powerful feelings of guilt and shame.

Regarding subsidiation, individuals often organize their affective ex-

perience in instrumental terms. To achieve the higher order affect of pride, I may acknowledge the necessity of hard work and forbearance, which leads to a certain degree of distress and frustration. In other situations in which I have behaved wrongly, I may welcome distress as a means of atoning for the guilt I am now experiencing. It is a common psychotherapy dictum that when a client displays anger, hurt is behind it.

Joining the thoughts, images, and remembered events of the cognitive system are the physiological, muscular, and experiential messages from the affective system.

Motivational System

Through the motivational system, cognitions, affects, and physiological cues are combined to create short-range and long-range goals, which give direction to thought and action. Emmons (1989) offers a helpful review of what differentiates the motivational system from other functional systems within the personality. He cites Gordon Allport's (1953) definition of a motivational perspective:

“When we set out to study a person's motives we are seeking to find out what the person is trying to do in this life, including what he is trying to avoid, and what he is trying to be.” (Allport, 1953, p. 112, cited in Emmons, 1989, p. 92)

Emmons (1989) goes on to suggest that, in addition to characterizations based on affective and cognitive input, a person can be portrayed by a “unique set of . . . ‘trying to do’ tendencies” (p. 92) or “personal strivings.” He proposes personal strivings exist at one level in a hierarchical model of motivation. At the highest level of motivation are the most abstract and widest categories—the motive dispositions of need for achievement, power, or intimacy. At the next level are personal strivings that define motives into more specific categories of action, yet remain relatively abstract and flexible (“make a success of my life,” “create loving relationships,” “seek amusement whenever I can”). The third level consists of more time-bound and context-based goals—Klinger's (1989) current concerns, Little's (1983) personal projects, and Cantor's (1987) life tasks. At the lowest level are specific action units that resemble the script-like activities discussed by Schank and Abelson or Reiser—looking for a job, cooking dinner, calling a friend. There are several other hierarchies of motivation that Emmons acknowledges,

dating back to Murray's (1938) original formulation of subsidiation (actones or specific actions growing from needs which are in turn driven by complexes) and carrying through more contemporary models. All of the models described by Emmons postulate an instrumental relationship among levels of motivation. Since motivational concepts are by definition instrumental, there is no meaningful difference between a categorization and subsidiation hierarchy in this system; motivational concepts at higher levels of abstraction exist to drive intention and action at more specific levels.

The question of the assignment of value to different motives, strivings, life tasks, and actions is an intriguing one. Although one would normally accord motives the greatest importance in one's life, the problem of compulsions demonstrates the complexity of evaluative ordering. Though an individual desperately desires success at work, the relatively irrelevant act of washing one's hands (subsidiary to a minor striving for cleanliness) may take on an evaluative importance that preoccupies the individual, causing tardiness and frequent disruptions in the workplace. Alternatively, an individual may begin with the personal striving of success at work in the service of contributing to the world, but end up absorbed with the details of a career, giving little thought to the originally valued social contribution. Later in this article when I turn to a discussion of the various Me-Selves, it will become clear how two different motives may come into conflict due to the simultaneous activation of divergent self-representations.

Once again, components of the motivational system are intertwined with the affective and cognitive systems. The status of goal attainment or nonattainment will evoke affective responses, and rumination about goals will be manifest in recollections of previous attempts at these goals and fantasies about future goal success or failure.

Behavioral System

Through the behavioral system, as human beings we take action in the world in response to external demands presented by both our physical environment and other people. By taking physical action, which may range from vocalization to operating a machine to using a weapon, we are acting upon and reacting to the world around us. As behaviorism has clearly articulated, behaviors evoke consequences—rewards and punishments—that define our goals and future actions.

Behaviors are by their nature sequences of motoric acts and range in

simplicity from the winking of an eye to the complexity of a gymnastic routine or recitation of a Beckett monologue. Any complex behavior always relies upon the overlearning of motoric subroutines, which then allows attention to be directed to more voluntary and complicated behavioral choices. Subsidiation is a clear property of behaviors as thus described. I peel the orange for the fruit inside. From an evaluative standpoint, people elect in their leisure time the behaviors they prefer, and for the more privileged, in their work time as well. Interestingly, the choice of one behavior over another indicates one criterion of preference, but people are often aware of doing something that they would prefer not to do due to multiple motives (e.g., to earn money, to please others, to maintain social conventions, etc.).

In a recent theory of personality, Buss and Craik (1983) have proposed a categorization hierarchy of behavioral acts to distinguish individuals. They have demonstrated that certain acts are particularly prototypical of traditional traits, such as introversion (e.g., reading alone, staying home on a weekend night). Other acts that bear similarity to these prototypical acts are linked within the same cluster. Individuals can be objectively measured for the number of times they perform the specific related acts that define a category within the personality.

Some critics of this perspective have suggested that clusters of acts without attention to meaning may be misleading (Block, 1989). Additionally, complex behavior is usually overdetermined; it draws upon many tributaries of desire, motive, and purpose. It is here where interpretation of the intentionality of these acts through the motivational, affective, and cognitive systems is crucial (Wakefield, 1989).

Psychophysiological System

Through the psychophysiological system, we receive cues from our bodies that alert us to threat, assure us of pleasant circumstances, and help us to regulate our own homeostatic functioning. Once again, the I-Self evaluates, categorizes, and perceives the instrumental relations of physical and physiological cues from the body. We constantly make evaluations of physical pain signals the body presents to consciousness. The choice to seek help for pain is sometimes a function of how much importance individuals assign to physical comfort in their lives. (I am embarrassed to say that I waited until my first sabbatical to have an irritating callus removed from my foot that had been there for the previous 5 years, even though the procedure to remove it took approximately 15

minutes.) In terms of categorization, people often find ways of organizing the physical cues of their bodies into categories or classes that allow them to interpret the information these cues provide. For example, certain kinds of physical cues (headaches, stomach pains, rapid heart beat) have become associated with stress symptoms and are perceived as a category of responses to increased tension or pressure in one's life.

When we were children, we constantly experienced a subsidiation organization of the physical cues from our bodies. Beginning with the connection of reflexive activity to the satisfaction of drives (sucking or crying to be comforted), we move on to mastering toilet training based upon a knowledge of what certain physiological cues signal will happen. We also inherit knowledge (some of it mythical) from our parents about the instrumental nature of our bodies. We must drink our milk if we want to grow up big and strong. We need to get outside to get some color in our cheeks. If we sit around in wet clothes, we will become sick. As adults, there is a continued pressure to respond to physical and physiological cues in terms of subsidiation. What we eat, how much we exercise, what kind of stress we endure are all linked instrumentally to health outcomes. For example, the inhibition of anger by restraining vocal and bodily expression is thought to increase heart rate and diastolic blood pressure (Hokanson & Burgess, 1962), which in turn means less resting time and more demand upon the heart, which leads to greater fatigue and risk for the cardiovascular system.

Emergence of Me-Selves

The I-Self applies these overarching principles of evaluation, categorization, and subsidiation to yield three psychological systems of affect, cognition, and motivation. However, due once again to the recursive properties of these principles, the I-Self turns its thoughts, feelings, and priorities upon itself as the object of analysis. The I-Self's observation of itself is always context-based and therefore contains multiple perspectives. Accordingly, we do not possess just one unchanging image of self with clearly defined content. We see ourselves as multiple Me-Selves, each Me-Self differing depending upon the context and role dictated by that context. Each Me-Self contains cognitive, affective, and motivational information relevant to its particular context.

The cognitive system first allows individuals to make differentiations of the self from others (Damon & Hart, 1982) on basic differences of age and gender. As children interact with more people outside

their family and experience a greater range of social situations, these categorizations become more complicated and extend to what James (1890) originally called "social selves," and what contemporary social cognition researchers call self-schemas (Markus & Cross, 1990) or self-representations (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Westen, 1992). The categorized self may be described in Westen's (1992) words as

an organized knowledge structure that aids processing of information about a given domain. The self in this view is a schema or set of schemas which include abstract semantic knowledge as well as specific episodic memories and may have hierarchical organization like other schemas or concepts (such as "bird," which has nested within it many subtypes; similarly the self has many subcategories). (p. 3)

The overarching personality then comprises many Me-Selves that organize the various social roles individuals acquire as they develop in their particular society and culture. We begin to form categories of the "self as son or daughter," the "self as sibling," the "self as student," and the self as "friend." We may also form more global categories based on an attribute or outcome ("self as friendly," see Markus & Cross, 1990, p. 594, or "self as tragic hero," see Westen, 1992, p. 2). Additionally, these Me-Selves may be categorized by how individuals come to see themselves with others. Westen again comments on this aspect of self-categories:

Importantly, self-representations are often embedded in *relationship schemas* or *self with other* representations at various levels of generality. (Westen, 1992, p. 8)

Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987) described these various subselves as a "family of selves" (p. 132) and suggested that certain of these subselves will be more central to the person's self-definition, thereby engaging more self-reflection and generating more links to other subselves. This greater processing attention will mean easier and more frequent access to these particular representations.

As the cognitive system defines different sectors of the Me-Self, the affective system assigns value to these various Me-Selves. In its most rudimentary form, this evaluation can be thought of as self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), a means of grading each Me-Self for its comparative worth to the individual. Aspects of the Me-Self can also be seen as good or bad, worthy of pride or shame.

Each of the Me-Selves draws upon the five systems of the person.

For example, if a woman has the Me-Self category of “self as mother,” she has the potential to access affective cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and psychophysiological information related to that self. She may draw upon joy and pride from her affective system, the role categories of food provider, listener, and teacher from her cognitive system, the goals of teaching self-respect, avoiding harm, and conveying love from her motivational system, the motor routines of picking up around the house, dropping the children at day care, and making lunches at the end of the day from her behavioral system, and the psychophysiological cue of a “warm glow” spreading over her as she watches her children sleep at night. Since these categories of the self may be simple or complex (in the sense that there may be multiple and even conflicting perspectives contained within a particular Me-Self), frustration and anger could be added to the affect system, referee and peacemaker to the cognitive system, the goals of getting through this phase and not losing her temper to the motivational system, mopping up the overturned food bowls to the behavioral, and deadening fatigue to the psychophysiological.

The motivation system relies upon the principle of subsidiarity to organize the Me-Self across a temporal dimension. By applying subsidiarity to particular Me-Selves, we emerge with a sense that our lives are following a trajectory. Our experience of our past self has led to and helped determine who we are at present. What we have done before and do now will help to predict what future selves are possible for us. Similarly, Me-Selves at periods of our lives are seen in the service of other, perhaps more central, Me-Selves. For example, for some individuals, the “self as student” may be subsidiary to the “self as employee”; the academic aspects of the self were considered only in terms of their instrumental value for a terminal goal of a “good job.” For other individuals, “self as student” may have served the more central self category of “self as dutiful child.” Once the obligation of schooling was over, the investment in this Me-Self dissipated rapidly. By placing Me-Selves in temporal and instrumental sequence, we can define discrete domains of a past, present, and future (possible or to-be-avoided) Me-Self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This location of the self over time is a major aspect of identity—the experience of the self as continuous and unified in purpose over time (Baumeister, 1986; McAdams, 1985).

With the emergence of Me-Selves as units coordinating cognitive, affective, and motivational information, it is important to ask what happens to the I-Self, the self as knower. Is there one overarching consciousness that responds to the content of the various Me-Selves? I

would propose that each Me-Self has the capacity to occupy consciousness and activate the functions of thinking, feeling, and prioritizing, but no one Me-Self maintains a metalevel of awareness or analysis over any other. To use a computer metaphor, the Me-Selves are like icons on a Mackintosh or Windows desktop. When the mouse clicks on to a particular Me-Self icon, there is an activation of that Me-Self with its accompanying subroutines of cognition, affect, and motivation. As long as that Me-Self is active, it controls thoughts, feelings, and goals regarding the interior and external world. An activated Me-Self applies its I-Self principles (categorization, evaluation, subsidiation) to the world. Within an activated Me-Self, there is a dominating i-self that acts upon the world, but there is no conscious active I-Self outside the Me-Selves. As I shall discuss a little later on, the existence of ambivalence is an indication that more than one Me-Self can be activated at the same time.

Keeping with my metaphor, one might then ask, who clicks the mouse, or why is one or another Me-Self activated? I will address this question more substantially at the conclusion of this article, but for the moment, I will say that the demands of culture are very strong upon us and ever increasing as we mature and live adult lives. In many situations of our day-to-day lives, we are influenced more by social constraints and expectations than we might ever realize. To anticipate the next section on narrative, cultural tales wag the mouse rather than the other way around. Yet if we are prey to the clicks of culture and situational demands, what stops us from experiencing the self as fragmented and dissociated; why are we not multiple personalities? Just as there is an inactive screen upon which the desktop icons sit, so too is there an underlying unconscious environment to the many Me-Selves. We can gain no direct access to it, since our conscious thought depends upon the activation of a Me-Self that then activates its own particular i-self to do the looking. Yet its existence allows us to feel a unity of selves within our physical body and to experience a temporal stability. It may be the remnant of the original I-Self that led to the development of the multiple Me-Selves through the application of categorization, evaluation, and subsidiation. It is possible, as Freud suggested, that we are made aware of this vestigial I-Self through dream content and other nonconscious events that somehow reach awareness. It may be that for individuals suffering from dissociative disorder, barriers or blockages induced by trauma have disrupted this holding environment.

Narrative and the Self

Having now reviewed the major components of my framework of personality (the three hierarchical principles of the I-Self, the five systems that emerge from these principles, and the Me-Selves that link and coordinate these systems), I return to the problem of attention directed toward competing internal and external stimuli. Given our continual engagement in evaluating, categorizing, and ordering the various stimuli we encounter, how do we ever “fix” a percept in consciousness? How do we learn to “see” internally the endless number of images, events, thoughts, psychophysiological cues, and social roles that compete for attention? Once we have managed to focus in on an internal image or thought, how do we come to assign it value and how do we locate it temporally in the larger structure of our identity (past-present-future Me-Selves)?

My answer to these questions is that we rely upon narrative as our perceptual aid, our means of internal sight. Yet narrative does not enter *deus ex machina* to save the day. Narrative is the emergent product of the three hierarchical principles of the I-Self. Borrowing Gergen and Gergen’s (1988, p. 19) criteria for intelligible narratives in our culture, we can see the relationship of narratives to evaluation, categorization, and subsidiation.

1. “The establishment of a *valued* end point” (emphasis mine)—in other words, a destination that is desirable or undesirable for the protagonist of the narrative (evaluation and subsidiation).
2. “Selection of events relevant to the goal state”—events within the narrative are narrowed down to those most relevant to attainment or nonattainment of the goal in question (categorization and subsidiation).
3. “Ordering of events”—in this case, a linear temporal sequence seems to be the most common convention (subsidiation).
4. “Establishing causal linkages.” Gergen and Gergen write, “[T]he specific articulation of one event or series of events is said to require the occurrence of a subsequent event” (p. 22) (subsidiation).
5. “Demarcation signs”—narratives are marked by phrases and signals that separate and define them as different from other narratives and internal stimuli (categorization).

Also contained within these elements of narrative are the critical aspects of the cognitive, affective, and motivational systems. Narratives focus on a specific subset of events in our life, link them to a desired goal, and inform us about the feelings (both kind and intensity)

associated with attainment or nonattainment of the goal in question. Narratives also identify a protagonist and that protagonist is most often one of the Me-Selves. Though we most often associate narratives of the self with memories, we should recognize that we engage in the narration of our experience in the present (today I am organizing my experience and internal stimuli by fashioning an ongoing narrative of myself as “professor at work”) and in the possible future (as anyone who has ever identified with Walter Mitty knows, we build elaborate narratives of what we might be in another time, world, or situation). Once a narrative is fixed and “perceived” by consciousness, we now have a coherent way of experiencing a particular Me-Self or set of Me-Selves and the associated cognitions, affects, goals, behavioral routines, and psychophysiological cues. I do not believe that the phenomenological self that is known by individuals through their own conscious experience is the self of self-representations or self-guides (Higgins, 1987). We come to see ourselves through the narratives that gain distinctiveness and repetitive prominence over time in our consciousness. Once we click a particular desktop icon, we no longer see the icon, but instead the subroutines and features contained within it.

Tomkins’s (1979) script theory of personality articulated this position clearly. Nuclear scenes and the abstracted scripts that emerge from them are narrative patterns that fix highly valued affective sequences in our consciousness. They provide organized categories of particular characters, settings, plot sequences, and goals that allow us to make sense of new social interactions and of previous encounters re-remembered. Just as we rely upon reliable and discrete patterns of color, motion, shape, and dimension to distinguish figures from backgrounds, narratives organize the systems of personality into distinguishable patterns that allow us to recognize who we are and what we think, feel, and do in a particular situation and time period in our life. This is why Tomkins saw his script theory as a grand integrative theory of psychology—the scripts generated by personality are our means of connecting the diverse electrochemical and biochemical systems of our bodies into identifiable patterns to the observing mind. Through narrative, scripts offer us a patterned structure to distinguish the outline of the self amidst the competing stimuli inside and outside the body. In fact, Demorest and Alexander (1991) have demonstrated that individuals may project these narrative sequences from their own life histories onto fictional stories they are asked to create.

Narrative Memories

In my own research, I have focused on one specific aspect of narrative—what I have called “self-defining memories” (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; J. A. Singer & Moffitt, 1991–92; J. A. Singer & Salovey, 1993). These memories are narratives of past Me-Selves recalled by ongoing consciousness. Self-defining memories are autobiographical memories that are particularly vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to other similar memories, and related to important unresolved themes or enduring concerns in individuals’ lives (J. A. Singer & Salovey, 1993). Through a series of studies, my colleagues and I have been able to demonstrate that the affective intensity of self-defining memories may be predicted from their relevance to the attainment or non-attainment of individuals’ most important current life goals (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; J. A. Singer, 1990). We have also demonstrated that self-defining memories are linked to one’s personal values and sense of racial/ethnic identity (Sadler, 1994) and that individuals will rate their self-defining memories as more important than other types of autobiographical memories (J. A. Singer & Moffitt, 1991–92). Through repetitive and vivid reviews in conscious thought, self-defining memories become easier and easier to see within the internal visual world. By their importance and esteemed value within a particular Me-Self, they focus and sustain the attention of consciousness (evaluative principle). Their linkage to similar memories both locates them in categories of particular Me-Selves and demarcates them from others (categorization). Their relevance to enduring and/or unresolved goals accords them an instrumental value in consciousness (subsidiation).

In a related line of research, my colleagues and I (J. A. Singer & Moffitt, 1991–92; Moffitt, Singer, Nelligan, Carlson, & Vyse, 1994) and others before us (Williams & Broadbent, 1986) have also demonstrated that individuals organize their memory narratives according to differing degrees of specificity and generality. Individuals’ use of single event memory narratives (linked to specific events traceable to a particular time and date) and summary memory narratives (amalgams of many events blended into a generic recollection) can be linked to affective influences (Moffitt et al., 1994; Williams & Broadbent, 1986), as well as to defensive strategies of repression (J. A. Singer & Salovey, 1993). Individuals can use the principle of categorization to sharpen or alter conscious focus on affectively important aspects of their lives.

If narrative memories crystallize in consciousness the particular cog-

nitive, affective, and motivational significance of particular Me-Selves, one must again consider their relationship to any concept of unified and ongoing identity. McAdams (1985) has proposed that the accumulated narratives or "nuclear episodes," along with other elements of narrative (characters, settings, and plot endings), comprise the "identity" as experienced by the individual. In accordance with my earlier discussion of the lack of an active overseeing I-Self, I would suggest that there may exist a "Me-Self as Life Reviewer"; this Me-Self may function to look for unity and connections across various Me-Narratives. It may also serve as the commentator and critic on these narratives, but it does not hold a privileged narrative position among other Me-Selves. It is also important to observe that this Me-Self as Life Reviewer is not necessarily present in all individuals in our culture and may not even be present in many other cultures of the world (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). If one considers a continuum within our own culture, at one end there would be individuals whose lack of this particular Me-Self may lead to acts of impulsivity and addictive behavior and, at the other end, there would be individuals whose extreme investment in this Me-Self would invoke narcissistic self-preoccupation and an emotional detachment from the world.

Ongoing Studies of Narrative Memory and Applications in Psychotherapy

The framework of personality in this article grew out of empirical work and is meant to encourage further research. As Westen (1992) describes, he, along with other researchers, has begun the careful investigation of individuals' self-representations through narrative episodes from their lives. My colleagues and I have also begun a research program to work with participants collaboratively in an exploration of how they understand themselves through the medium of self-defining memory narratives. In these studies, we provide participants with general domains of their lives (holidays with families, time in high school, after-school activities, etc.) and ask them to generate a series of self-defining memories. They then rate these memories for their affective responses to them. We then ask participants to consider the particular self-roles they see as active in each memory, as well as the major life goals they were seeking and the goal status (attained or not). As participants accumulate a large set of memories from these domains (they return for several sessions over the course of a semester), we ask them to

evaluate the memories in terms of affective importance (which memory means the most to you). We also ask them to categorize the memories, using their own uniquely developed and labeled categories. Finally, we ask them to extract an overarching narrative sequence from subsets of the memories that they experience as linked by a common theme. At the end of this ongoing work, we will know the narrative memories, Me-Selves, goals, and narrative sequences that matter most to the individual. I believe this knowledge will provide the richest possible description of the conscious personality, a worthy companion to projective testing that seeks to portray the unconscious dimensions.

This emphasis on narrative as an organizing structure of personality has also become a widely discussed theme in contemporary psychotherapy (Bruhn, 1990; Schafer, 1992; Spence, 1982, 1990). Bruhn (1990) has demonstrated how the collection of early memories in psychotherapy can provide great insight into repetitive issues that emerge in individuals' lives and their therapies. Elsewhere, I have provided case illustrations of how self-defining memories raised in psychotherapy can be used to explore crucial issues of transference that develop between the therapist and client (J. A. Singer & J. L. Singer, 1992; J. A. Singer & Salovey, 1993; J. A. Singer & Salovey, 1995). Although I do not discount the importance of unconscious themes within therapy, I have found that clients can identify the driving memories of their lives and then perceive the repetitive resurfacing of these memories' themes in the central conflicts of their interpersonal relationships.

CONCLUSION

In highlighting the role of narratives in assisting individuals to organize and register the important details of their internal worlds, one must ask the question how do narratives develop and in particular how do certain narratives become self-defining. The answer to this question is one that may trouble personality psychologists who put a premium on individual agency or who proclaim the individual as the unique author of a personal narrative. Returning to Gergen and Gergen's (1988) work on self-narratives, I am inclined to say that our particular Western culture dictates a finite number of patterns that are transferred to the individual through the various human transmitters of culture (first and foremost primary caregivers, relatives of those caregivers, teachers, peers, clergy, therapists, etc.) and the nonhuman ones (bedtime stories, television, videos, cinema, magazines, art, myths, and songs).

Human beings begin with the raw capacity to assign affective value, categorize information, and order that information sequentially. This "I-Self" has the skills to narrate, but it awaits the socializing forces of family and culture to begin its story construction and telling. As consciousness of the self in the world develops, knowledge of Me in a variety of roles and contexts evolves. This knowledge is based in narratives transmitted by the representatives of the culture in which we are embedded. These narratives are necessarily selective based on the country, the class, the race, the religion, the gender to which we belong. Because development is a function of genetically inherited characteristics and the unique historical events of people's lives, each individual emerges with a different set of narratives and unique twists within similar narratives, but overall patterns can be discerned. Various theorists of personality such as Jung, Campbell, Bettelheim, Berne, Tomkins, and McAdams have suggested that individual themes of personality are connected to overarching cultural symbols, archetypes, and dialectics. When I began my research on self-defining memories, my own tendency was toward a more constructivist, individually focused psychology. After collecting and analyzing thousands of self-defining memories from college students, I have been overwhelmed by the narrative similarities they bring to the important events of their lives. Their emphasis on the twin themes of achievement and relationship says as much about the design of our culture as it does about their individuality.

McAdams (1985) has suggested that these two cultural themes shape each individual's unique life story—communion (the movement outward toward others) and agency (the assertion of independence from others). J. L. Singer (1988) argues that the tension of these two is simply a more complex manifestation of the same attentional struggle between the competing demands of the interior and exterior world. Yet, though this dimension is a reasonable starting point for a framework of the person, I would interject a note of caution, which I am well aware threatens to deconstruct the theoretical edifice I have fashioned.

I have suggested that human personality draws upon a collection of Me-Selves that define individuals in a variety of roles and contexts. I then suggested that narrative is the medium by which these Me-Selves are viewed in consciousness. Though these Me-Selves have differing affective intensities and motivational rankings depending upon varying contexts, there is no dominant or privileged single Me-Self and thus there is no dominant narrative. In the great film, *Citizen Kane*, a reporter seeks to answer the question "Who was Charles Foster Kane?"

by speaking to those who knew him well. After watching the various narratives of his life, the viewer comes to realize along with the frustrated reporter that there is no one Kane, but many men contained in one. This conception of the multiplicity of the self or "selves" is congruent with current debates about the multiplicity of narratives in all forms of human knowledge. Multicultural and feminist critiques call into question the possibility that there is one dominant narrative that will account for human personality.

With regard to the framework presented in this article, I have taken as a starting premise that human beings function as individual units negotiating the demands of internal and external stimuli. This is one among many other possible narrative starting points for the story of human personality. The basic hierarchical principles I have elaborated—the allocation of value (evaluation), the rationing of experience into discrete units (categorization), and the ordering of experience to encourage delay with a greater emphasis on a terminal end than the process itself (subsidiation)—are these not familiar themes of our particular socio-economic culture? As psychologists, we are caught in a recursive loop, the truth that we seek through measurement is filtered through our eyes, which are also the eyes of the culture looking through us (Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 1985; Howard, 1991). How we address this loop—enter it blindly, dance around it, allow it to strangle us—will be a crucial issue of personality theory and research in the decades to come.

Given that I have assigned a central role to narrative in personality, it is appropriate that I conclude with a reference to literature. At the end of his extraordinary poem, "Among School Children," W. B. Yeats asks, "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (Yeats, 1933/1974, p. 214). These words speak to the heart of the relationship of narrative to the private psychological world of the person. As we struggle to make sense of the competing stimuli of memories, images, thoughts, and wishes, we locate these stimuli in particular roles and contexts (Me-Selves). Narratives associated with these Me-Selves allow us to find meaningful patterns of affect, cognition, and motivation that are available to conscious review. As a choreographer coordinates music, movement, and shape in unison and sequence, so as human beings we seek to coordinate feelings, thoughts, and goals into narratives. Yet who is the principal choreographer, the individual or the culture? As we recall and "see" and live these stories of our selves, are we the storytellers or are the stories told through us? Are we the dancers or the dance?

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