

Going Forward by Drawing From the Past: Personal Strivings, Personally Meaningful Memories, and Personality Traits

Angelina R. Sutin and Richard W. Robins

University of California, Davis

ABSTRACT The present research explored the idea that what people strive for in their daily lives is meaningfully linked to their autobiographical memories and stable personality characteristics. Study 1 showed that (a) personal strivings (both self-reported and content coded) are related to the emotional and motivational content of self-defining memories, (b) personal strivings are related to self-esteem and narcissism, and (c) the relation between personal strivings and personality is partially mediated by memory content. Study 2 extended these findings to a longitudinal context and showed that personal strivings and memory content reciprocally influence each other over time. Together, the findings suggest that when people consider how to move forward in their lives, they draw on their past experiences to establish goals for the future and that the way this process plays out is shaped by people's stable personality characteristics.

According to Adler (1931), autobiographical memories are the key to understanding personality because they reflect an individual's most pressing concerns and strivings. He argued that memories represent a person's "'Story of My Life': a story he repeats to himself to warn him or comfort him, to keep him concentrated on his goal, to prepare him, by means of past experiences, to meet the future with an already tested style of action" (pp. 73–74).

Thus, Adler believed memories should serve as the primary unit of analysis in the study of personality because memories both reflect and shape an individual's current goals and underlying personality dispositions. For example, in the deepest moments of despair while

Correspondence regarding this article may be addressed to Angelina R. Sutin, Department of Psychology, University of California, Davis, CA 95616-8686. E-mail: arsutin@ucdavis.edu.

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studying for a final, a college student may recall a time when her hard work and perseverance resulted in an A on a particularly challenging exam. This memory may motivate and encourage her to study and strive for an A. In contrast, if her salient memories of hard work end in frustration and failure, she may give up because perseverance never led to success in the past. Aspects of this individual's personality, such as her level of self-esteem, may also influence the accessibility of these memories and thus the type of goals she will pursue. Below, we review previous research on the links between memories, goals, and stable personality characteristics.

Self-Defining Memories Are Linked to Personal Strivings

Singer and Salovey (1993) define self-defining memories as autobiographical memories that are emotional, vivid, repeatedly retrieved, and linked to other, similar memories. Self-defining memories anchor an individual's identity; these are the memories retrieved in times of uncertainty or life transition to remind the individual of his/her core identity (Blagov & Singer, 2004). The content of self-defining memories reflects the dominant themes in an individual's life, particularly unresolved conflicts or enduring concerns. These memories are more important and accessible to the individual than general autobiographical memories, which do not tap themes of self-understanding and self-discovery.

Self-defining memories may maintain their affective intensity through their connection with an individual's personal strivings. Emmons (1989) described personal strivings as "idiographically coherent patterns of goal strivings [that] represent what the individual is typically trying to do. . . . Each individual can be characterized by these 'trying to do' tendencies" (p. 92). Personal strivings are particularly valuable to the study of memories and personality because these measures integrate nomothetic and idiographic research strategies. By asking participants to generate their own personal strivings and then appraise them on dimensions such as commitment or importance, personal strivings "are individually tailored to the respondent, yet the ratings scales used for appraising the goals yield quantitative comparisons between different persons independent of idiosyncratic goal content" (Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998, p. 398). Both striving content and appraisals have important

implications for well-being (Emmons, 1992; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001), achievement (Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007), and romantic relationships (Elliot & Reis, 2003). Personal strivings are just one of several midlevel motivational units; other units, such as life tasks (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987), current concerns (Klinger, 1977), personal goals (Karoly, 1999), and personal projects (Little, 1983), may share similar relations with personally meaningful memories.

Previous research has documented a number of connections between the affective quality of self-defining memories and the thematic content and appraisals of everyday strivings. For example, individuals who express positive affect in their most meaningful memories are more committed to their goals and perceive them to be more attainable, whereas individuals who express negative affect in their memories tend to be less optimistic about the attainability of their goals (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; Singer, 1990). Moreover, memories relevant to the attainment of specific strivings are more vivid and affectively intense than other autobiographical memories (Singer & Salovey, 1993). Individuals who typically strive for avoidance goals (e.g., to avoid looking foolish) rather than approach goals (e.g., to appear intelligent) have memories with less positive and more negative emotional content (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; Singer, 1990). Such individuals tend to retrieve salient memories of when they failed to attain these goals, perhaps as a reminder of the consequences of goal non-attainment (Moffitt & Singer, 1994; Singer, 1990).

In addition to their affective quality, the motivational content of self-defining memories may also be linked to personal strivings. Although no previous research has directly examined this question, Thorne and Klohnen (1993) found that the motivational content of an individual's constellation of memories contributes to enduring patterns of behavior by setting up expectancies of how self and others should act. Thus, the motives expressed across an individual's memories are likely to be related to how the individual construes his/her personal strivings. Given that achievement motivation is generally linked with adaptive motivational strategies and power motivation with negative ones (Smith, Atkinson, McClelland, & Veroff, 1992), memories saturated with achievement and power should be related to, respectively, adaptive and maladaptive striving content and appraisals.

Self-Defining Memories and Personal Strivings Are Reciprocally Related Over Time

If memories help “meet the future with an already tested style of action,” as Adler suggests, then the influence of memories on this “style of action” should be apparent over time. Adler’s argument implies that memories not only inform the individual about his/her goals at a single point in time, they also serve as a motivating force to maintain striving and goal engagement over time. Longitudinal research addressing this question, however, is scarce. Although one longitudinal study found that memories influence current expectations and help maintain consistency of the self over time (Thorne & Klohnen, 1993), no research has examined the reciprocal relation between memory content and personal strivings over time.

The assumption that goals and memories reciprocally influence each other over time is implicit in current models of self and memory. These models (Conway, 2005; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004; Singer & Salovey, 1993) suggest that our memories keep us motivated and engaged in our goals as we strive to attain them; this is the reason that memories are so important and remain vivid years after the event occurred. Likewise, these models posit that our goal strivings are created and constrained by our memories. According to Conway (2005; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000), for example, autobiographical memories constrain the “working self” (i.e., the hierarchy of an individual’s active goals at any given time) and this working self likewise modulates access to autobiographical memories. The working self, autobiographical memories, and their interaction are assumed to be dynamic; that is, construction of current goals and autobiographical memories fluctuate over time, depending on the current state of the individual (Conway, 2005).

Blagov and Singer (2004) also recognize the reciprocal relation between memories and goals and imply that this relation plays out over time. They suggest that “not only do life goals influence the construction of autobiographical memory, but linking memories to abstract self knowledge. . . creates a positive feedback loop that gives additional cognitive, affective, and motivational value to the memory and powerfully reinforces relevant goals” (p. 486). Despite much theorizing about the relation between memory and strivings over time, no research has addressed how memories and goals at one

point in time influence memories and goals at a subsequent point in time.

Stable Personality Characteristics Are Linked to Personal Strivings and Self-Defining Memories

The consistency of self-defining memory content over time and across domains (e.g., achievement and relationship) may be due, in part, to an individual's underlying personality (Sutin & Robins, 2005). That is, stable dispositional tendencies, such as self-esteem and narcissism, influence the emotional and motivational content of self-defining memories. High self-esteem individuals and narcissists, for example, have memories with similar emotional content but divergent motivational content: Both high self-esteem individuals and narcissists report memories saturated with positive emotional content, but narcissists' memories feature power-related content, whereas the memories of individuals with high self-esteem include achievement-related content (Sutin & Robins, 2005). Thus, memory content is partly an expression of affective and motivational processes associated with self-esteem and narcissism.

The influence of self-esteem and narcissism is not limited to memory content but extends to personal strivings as well. For example, narcissists' goal strivings are saturated with power motivation (Emmons & McAdams, 1991), which is consistent with the idea that narcissists are concerned with exerting power over others as a way of maintaining their grandiose self (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). In contrast, individuals with genuinely high self-esteem tend to hold approach-oriented achievement goals (Heimpel, Elliot, & Wood, 2006), which is consistent with the idea that efficacy and competence are defining features of high self-esteem.

Although personality dispositions have been examined separately in the context of self-defining memories (e.g., Sutin & Robins, 2005) and personal goals (e.g., Emmons & McAdams, 1991; Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992), previous research has not systematically examined the interrelations among these three critical domains. We propose a model in which memory content mediates the relation between personality and personal strivings. That is, individuals' stable personality dispositions shape the affective and motivational content of their most accessible memories, which subsequently shape appraisals of their most important goals. For example, narcissists are

known to be interested in power, and their memories are laden with power-related content (Sutin & Robins, 2005). Power, however, may be related to perceiving conflict among strivings because the desire for power often pits two competing goals against each other; for example, the desire to control others is incongruous with the desire to be get along with others. In the context of narcissism, this may be a conflict between strivings such as “make people like me” and “be superior to others.” Narcissists may have conflict among their strivings in part because they are motivated to have power and control over others, which is salient to them through their self-defining memories. Therefore, self-defining memories may be one mechanism through which personality dispositions influence goal strivings.

The Present Research

The overarching goal of the present research is to better understand the concurrent and longitudinal relations among self-defining memories, personal strivings, and stable personality characteristics. We report two studies that examine (a) the relation between self-defining memories and personal strivings, (b) the relation between stable personality characteristics and personal strivings, and (c) the role of self-defining memories in mediating the relation between personality and personal strivings. Study 1 examines these associations concurrently, and Study 2 examines them in the context of a short-term longitudinal study. In Study 1, participants wrote about three salient experiences and rated their emotions and motives during each experience. Participants also described 10 personal strivings and rated each striving on a set of dimensions; the strivings were then independently coded by a team of raters. In Study 2, participants provided information about their memories and strivings at two points in time: at the beginning and end of an academic term. In both studies, we test whether memory content mediates the effect of narcissism and self-esteem on personal strivings.

We extend previous research in several ways. First, contributing to the literature on memory content and strivings, we examine how the motivational, in addition to the affective, content of self-defining memories, relates to an individual's personal strivings. Second, building on our previous research showing that individuals' underlying personality shapes the emotional and motivational content of their memories, and that this content in turn is associated with per-

sonality change (Sutin & Robins, 2005), we test memory content as one mechanism through which stable individual differences (self-esteem and narcissism) influence personal strivings. That is, are personal strivings evaluated, in part, by the accessibility of memories specific to particular personality dispositions? Third, we move beyond concurrent relations to examine how the relations between memories and strivings play out over time. We address the dynamics of these constructs by first measuring the stability of memory content and personal strivings appraisals over a 10-week period. Then, we test whether memory content predicts change in personal strivings and whether personal strivings predict change in memory content over time.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

Two hundred undergraduate students (75% women) participated in the study in exchange for course credit. Participants were, on average, 20.8 years old ($SD = 2.3$, range = 18 to 22), and in their 3rd year of college (range = 1st to 6th year).¹

Participants completed measures of self-defining memories, personal strivings, and personality (described below). The personality measures were always completed first. The order of recent memories, earliest childhood memory, and personal strivings was counterbalanced across participants. Only one of the variables examined in the present study (Conflict among personal strivings) showed any form of order effect, so all subsequent analyses are reported without consideration of order effects. This absence of order effects implies that completing the memory measure before the striving measure (or vice versa) did not change the meaning of these constructs for participants, thus alleviating concerns of conscious (and nonconscious) influence of the assessment of one variable on the other.²

1. Data from this sample have been used in analyses published elsewhere (Sutin & Robins, 2005), but none of the analyses reported here reproduces analyses reported in our previous publication.

2. We also collected data on dispositional shame, guilt, and pride. Although these variables showed consistent patterns with both the self-reported and content coded strivings, space limitations prohibit us from reporting these findings. Similarly,

Self-Defining Memories

Instructions. Participants were asked to write about three self-defining memories—a positive and negative academic memory and their earliest childhood memory. We focus on academic memories because this domain should be particularly important to our undergraduate sample and thus very relevant to their goal strivings. We asked participants to write about both positive and negative memories because we wanted to examine the influence of valence on the relation between strivings and the content of self-defining memories. Finally, we include an early childhood memory because it provides a useful contrast between recent and remote memories and is unconstrained by either domain or valence.

We adapted the self-defining memory instructions from Singer and Moffitt (1991–1992) retaining their emphasis on the importance and centrality of these memories to the participant's identity:

Please describe a memory that is personally meaningful to you and that relates to a *positive [negative]* experience you have had in the academic environment. The memory should be relevant to your identity as a college student and reveal something about how you feel about yourself in the academic domain. It may be a memory about any kind of *positive [negative]* experience, but it should be something you have thought about many times.

The instructions for the earliest childhood memory stated, “Please describe your earliest childhood memory. Describe what happened and when, whom you were with, and how each of you felt and reacted. What was your role and what was the outcome of your behavior?” Participants were given an entire page to write about each memory, and most participants used the majority of the page.

Affect ratings. After describing each memory, participants were asked to rate their emotions during the memory. Specifically, participants were asked to “think about how you felt at the time of this memory. Use the following words to describe how you felt during the time the memory happened.” Participants rated six positive emotions (proud, inspired, excited, strong, determined, enthusiastic) and six negative emotions (upset, scared, ashamed, hostile, guilty, distressed), which were taken from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). All ratings were made on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1

several additional content coded striving dimensions that had consistent relations with both memory content and personality were omitted for the same reason.

(*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). The individual emotion ratings were composited into Positive Affect (PA) and Negative Affect (NA) scales for each memory.³ Alpha reliabilities for the PA scale ranged from .74 for PA in the negative academic memory to .87 for PA in both the positive academic and earliest childhood memories; alpha reliabilities for the NA scale ranged from .66 for NA in the negative academic memory to .82 for NA in the earliest childhood memory. For some analyses, the memory-specific PA and NA scales were composited across the three memories to form overall PA and NA scores (the composited PA and NA scales correlated $-.05$, *ns*). Means and standard deviations for these variables are shown in Table 1.

Self-reported motives. Participants were also asked to “rate the extent to which you had each of the following motives or goals during the experience described in your memory.” Participants rated the following three motives: Achievement (“to do something well or to excel at something”); Power (“to exert power or control over others”); and Intimacy (“to feel close or intimate with others”). All ratings were made on the same 5-point scale as the affect ratings. Although the self-reported motives were assessed by only one item, previous research suggests that single-item measures can have adequate reliability and validity (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). For some analyses, a composite score for each of the three motives was computed across the three memories (the composite Power and Achievement scores correlated $.18$, $p < .05$, Power and Intimacy correlated $.30$, $p < .05$, and Achievement and Intimacy correlated $.33$, $p < .05$). Means and standard deviations for these variables are shown in Table 1.

Personal Strivings

Participants generated a list of their personal strivings, defined as “what one typically or characteristically strives for in everyday life.” Participants were given a page with a list of 10 sentence stems starting, “I typically try to...” All participants generated 10 strivings.

Self-ratings. Participants rated each striving on 10 dimensions taken from Emmons (1999). All ratings were made on a 6-point scale, ranging

3. Due to time and space constraints, the PANAS scales were abbreviated from 10 items to 6 items. In an independent sample ($N = 2,238$), the full-length trait PA and NA scales both correlated $.96$ with their respective abbreviated scales, suggesting that our assessment of PA and NA was not compromised by the abbreviation of the PANAS scales.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Memory Content (Study 1 and Study 2)

	Study 1	Study 2	
		Time 1	Time 2
<i>Positive affect</i>			
Mean across memories	2.5 (.6)	2.5 (.5)	2.4 (.6)
Positive academic	3.9 (.9)	3.8 (.9)	3.6 (.8)
Negative academic	1.5 (.6)	1.3 (.4)	1.3 (.4)
Earliest	2.0 (1.0)	2.2 (1.0)	2.2 (1.0)
General	—	2.6 (1.3)	2.6 (1.2)
<i>Negative affect</i>			
Mean across memories	2.2 (.5)	2.1 (.5)	2.0 (.4)
Positive academic	1.3 (.5)	1.2 (.5)	1.2 (.4)
Negative academic	3.3 (.8)	3.1 (.8)	3.0 (.8)
Earliest	2.0 (1.0)	1.8 (.9)	1.7 (.8)
General	—	2.2 (1.0)	2.1 (.9)
<i>Power motivation</i>			
Mean across memories	1.6 (.8)	1.7 (.7)	1.6 (.8)
Positive academic	1.7 (1.0)	1.9 (1.2)	1.8 (1.1)
Negative academic	1.6 (1.1)	1.4 (1.0)	1.5 (1.0)
Earliest	1.7 (1.1)	1.6 (1.0)	1.5 (1.0)
General	—	1.7 (1.2)	1.7 (1.1)
<i>Achievement motivation</i>			
Mean across memories	3.3 (.9)	3.0 (.9)	2.9 (1.0)
Positive academic	4.3 (1.0)	4.1 (1.2)	4.0 (1.3)
Negative academic	3.2 (1.5)	2.9 (1.5)	2.7 (1.5)
Earliest	2.5 (1.5)	2.3 (1.5)	2.1 (1.3)
General	—	3.0 (1.7)	2.9 (1.6)
<i>Intimacy motivation</i>			
Mean across memories	2.4 (1.1)	2.4 (.9)	2.3 (.9)
Positive academic	2.1 (1.3)	2.1 (1.2)	2.0 (1.2)
Negative academic	1.9 (1.4)	1.7 (1.1)	1.7 (1.1)
Earliest	3.1 (1.6)	3.0 (1.4)	2.8 (1.4)
General	—	3.0 (1.5)	2.8 (1.4)

Note: $N = 200$ for Study 1 and $N = 300$ for Study 2. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses. All ratings were made on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*).

from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). To reduce the number of variables, we first computed the average rating across the 10 strivings, separately for each dimension (median alpha = .80, range = .73 to .91 across the 10 dimensions). High intercorrelations among some of the dimensions (e.g., “commitment to this striving” and “happiness upon attaining this striving” correlated .62) indicated the possibility of a higher-order factor structure. Therefore, to further reduce the number of variables, we subjected the means to a principal components analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation and extracted and rotated two to five factors. The three-factor solution provided the most conceptually meaningful solution and accounted for 61% of the variance.

A parallel analysis (Horn, 1965; Zwick & Velicer, 1986) also suggested a three-factor solution. In a parallel analysis, the eigenvalues obtained from the PCA are compared to the average eigenvalues obtained from a large number of randomly generated datasets, based on the number of variables and sample size of the data subjected to the PCA. If the eigenvalues in the actual dataset exceed the averaged eigenvalues for the simulated random data, the factors are retained. In the current data, the eigenvalues for the first three factors, but not the fourth, were larger than the average eigenvalues from the simulated data, supporting a three-factor solution.

The first factor, *Commitment*, consisted of “commitment to this striving,” “effort expended toward this striving,” “happiness upon attaining this striving,” “striving for this because of intrinsic reasons,” and “desirability of this striving.” The second factor, *Progress*, consisted of “satisfaction with progress made toward this striving,” “likelihood of success in reaching this striving,” and “degree to which life circumstances hinder progress toward this striving” (negatively loaded). Finally, the third factor, *Conflict*, consisted of “how much this striving conflicts with other strivings” and “striving for this because somebody else wants you to.” These factors are similar to the three dimensions Moffitt and Singer (1994) derived from a principal components analysis of a somewhat different set of striving dimensions, and they correspond to single-item measures commonly used in research on personal strivings (e.g., Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004; Simons & Carey, 2003). The Commitment factor had a mean of 4.6 ($SD = .5$), Progress had a mean of 3.9 ($SD = .5$), and Conflict had a mean of 2.5 ($SD = .9$). Alpha reliabilities, computed across the individual strivings for all dimensions relevant to each factor, were .90 for Commitment, .85 for Progress, and .92 for Conflict.

Content coding. In addition to the self-ratings, three raters independently coded each striving on two dichotomous dimensions (Emmons, 1999): (a)

approach (striving for something positive) versus *avoidance* (striving to avoid something negative; $\alpha = .96$) and (b) presence/absence of *self-defeating tendencies* (strivings that reflected a lack of growth, such as striving to do as little as possible; $\alpha = .72$). The mean coder ratings were summed across the 10 strivings, yielding a score for each dimension that could range from 0 to 10.

Personality Measures

Self-esteem. Participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965). The 10-item RSE scale assesses global self-esteem and was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In the present sample, the RSE had a mean of 38.4 ($SD = 7.1$) and an alpha reliability of .87.

Narcissism. Participants completed the 40-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988), a widely used measure of sub-clinical levels of narcissism. The NPI uses a forced-choice response format in which participants select one of two statements they agree with more (e.g., “The thought of ruling the world frightens the hell out of me” vs. “If I ruled the world, it would be a much better place”). In the present sample, the NPI had a mean of 14.4 ($SD = 6.2$) and an alpha reliability of .81.

Results and Discussion

Memory Content and Personal Strivings

The emotional content of the memories was significantly correlated with both self-reported and content-coded strivings (see Table 2). In general, participants who reported higher levels of PA across their memories were more committed to their strivings and perceived themselves as making more progress toward attaining them. Further, higher levels of NA in the appropriate context (e.g., in a memory about academic failure) was positively related to both the Commitment and Conflict dimensions, suggesting that feeling negative emotions about one's academic failures is associated with more commitment to the attainment of one's strivings, but also more perceived conflict among one's current goals and aspirations.

Turning to the content-coded striving dimensions, individuals who experienced more positive emotions across their memories reported higher levels of Approach strivings and lower levels of Self-defeating strivings (see Table 2). Although these correlations were

Table 2
Correlations of Affect in Memories with Self-Reported and Content-Coded Strivings (Study 1)

Striving Dimension	Memory			Mean Across Memories
	Pos. Acad.	Neg. Acad.	Earliest	
<i>Positive affect</i>				
Self-reported				
Commitment	.32*	.02	.23*	.33*
Progress	.14*	-.02	.15*	.18*
Conflict	.10	.08	.06	.07
Content-coded				
Approach	.14*	.02	.13	.14*
Self-defeating	-.15*	-.02	-.02	-.10
<i>Negative affect</i>				
Self-reported				
Commitment	.08	.17*	.01	.12
Progress	-.09	-.01	-.13	-.14*
Conflict	.08	.14*	.12	.20*
Content-coded				
Approach	-.09	-.05	-.12	-.14*
Self-defeating	.07	-.01	.07	.07

Note: $N = 200$. Pos. Acad. = positive academic memory; Neg. Acad. = negative academic memory.

* $p < .05$.

weak and varied in magnitude across memories, they were consistently in the same direction (i.e., always positive with Approach and always negative with self-defeating). These results suggest that PA is generally associated with adaptive personal strivings. NA across the three memories was related to fewer approach-related strivings, although this finding was not significant in any of the individual memories.

The motivational content of the memories was significantly correlated with both self-reported and content-coded personal strivings (see Table 3). Participants who reported higher levels of Power motivation across their memories tended to perceive greater conflict among their personal strivings and to have more Self-defeating strivings. In contrast to Power, Achievement motivation reported across

Table 3
Correlations of Motives in Memories with Self-Reported and Content-Coded Strivings (Study 1)

Striving Dimension	Memory			Mean Across Memories
	Pos. Acad.	Neg. Acad.	Earliest	
<i>Power motive</i>				
Self-reported				
Commitment	.15*	.04	.01	.08
Progress	-.05	-.12	.02	-.06
Conflict	.23*	.19*	.16*	.25*
Content-coded				
Approach	.04	-.02	-.08	-.03
Self-defeating	.10	.14*	.02	.12
<i>Achievement motive</i>				
Self-reported				
Commitment	.16*	.06	.19*	.19*
Progress	.10	-.15*	-.03	-.06
Conflict	-.09	.01	.20*	.06
Content-coded				
Approach	.02	.00	-.02	-.01
Self-defeating	-.23*	-.07	-.10	-.17*
<i>Intimacy motive</i>				
Self-reported				
Commitment	.24*	.24*	.24*	.32*
Progress	.03	-.02	.04	.02
Conflict	.17*	.06	.15*	.16*
Content-coded				
Approach	.04	.00	.06	.05
Self-defeating	.04	-.08	-.13	-.09

Note. $N = 200$. Pos. Acad. = positive academic memory; Neg. Acad. = negative academic memory.

* $p < .05$.

memories had more adaptive correlates; it was positively associated with the Commitment dimension and negatively associated with Self-defeating strivings. Like Achievement, Intimacy motivation reported across memories was associated with the Commitment dimension. However, Intimacy was also associated with self-reported Conflict among strivings, indicating both an adaptive and a maladaptive pattern.

Table 4
Correlations of Personality Variables With Self-Reported and Content-Coded Strivings (Study 1)

Striving Dimension	Self-Esteem	Narcissism	<i>t</i> -value ^a
Self-reported			
Commitment	.09	.27*	- 2.11*
Progress	.36*	.07	3.49*
Conflict	- .15*	.21*	- 4.26*
Content-coded			
Approach	.18*	.21*	- .35
Self-defeating	- .16*	- .04	1.37

Note: *N* = 200.

^a*t*-test for the difference between dependent correlations.

**p* < .05.

Personality Correlates of Personal Strivings

Each personality dimension had significant correlations with both the self-reported and content-coded strivings (see Table 4). Individuals with high self-esteem perceived themselves as making progress toward achieving their strivings, experienced less Conflict among their strivings, and had more Approach-oriented and fewer Self-defeating strivings. The pattern of findings was quite different for narcissism. Narcissistic individuals experienced a great deal of conflict among their strivings, but were more committed to their strivings, and had strivings characterized by higher levels of Approach. Testing for the difference between dependent correlations, the correlations between self-esteem and the self-reported striving dimensions were significantly different ($p < .05$) than the correlations between narcissism and these dimensions.

These findings provide important insights into the intrapsychic processes that distinguish narcissism and self-esteem—two conceptually related but distinct personality characteristics (Tracy & Robins, 2003). Although both narcissists and participants with high self-esteem reported approach strivings, their appraisals of these strivings differed significantly from each other. Specifically, high self-esteem participants showed a more adaptive pattern of striving appraisals than did narcissistic participants: Whereas narcissists were highly committed to their conflicting

Table 5
Mediators of the Relation Between Personality and Personal Strivings
(Studies 1 & 2)

Mediator Effect	Study 1	Study 2
	$\Delta\beta$ (Sobel Test)	$\Delta\beta$ (Sobel Test)
Narcissism		
NPI → Mean PA → Commitment	.07 (2.54*)	.05 (2.66*)
NPI → Pos. Acad. PA → Commitment	.06 (2.53*)	.06 (2.93*)
NPI → Pos. Acad. PA → Progress	.03 (1.55)	.06 (3.07*)
NPI → Mean PA → Progress	.07 (1.47)	.04 (2.37*)
NPI → Mean Power → Conflict	.11 (2.90*)	.08 (3.68*)
NPI → Pos. Acad. Power → Conflict	.05 (2.20*)	.08 (3.31*)
NPI → Earliest Power → Conflict	.18 (1.54)	.02 (2.11*)
Self-esteem		
RSE → Pos. Acad. PA → Commitment	.14 (3.31*)	.03 (2.26*)
RSE → Neg. Acad. NA → Commitment	.02 (−.61)	.02 (−2.15*)
RSE → Pos. Acad. PA → Progress	.02 (.25)	.03 (2.26*)
RSE → Pos. Acad. NA → Conflict	.02 (−.77)	.04 (−2.28*)
RSE → Mean NA → Conflict	.05 (−1.84)	.05 (−2.79*)

Note: $N = 200$ for Study 1 and $N = 300$ for Study 2. NPI = Narcissistic Personality Inventory; RSE = Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale; PA = Positive Affect; NA = Negative Affect; Pos. Acad. = positive academic memory; Neg. Acad. = negative academic memory; Earliest = Earliest childhood memory.

* $p < .05$.

strivings, high self-esteem participants perceived their strivings to be coherent and perceived progress toward the attainment of these strivings.

Memory Content as a Mediator of the Association Between Personality and Strivings

We conducted a series of tests to determine whether the emotional and motivational content of self-defining memories mediated the relations between personality and the striving dimensions. Here we assume that stable personality traits shape the experiences a person has and the way in which those experiences are both encoded in memory and interpreted at retrieval, and that these memories in turn shape the everyday goals individuals pursue in their lives.

Memory content mediated several of the narcissism-striving relations (see Table 5). Mediator analyses indicated that narcissists were

more committed to their strivings because they experienced more PA across their recent memories, particularly their positive academic memory. In addition, narcissists perceived more conflict between their current strivings because their memories were higher in power-related content; this mediator relation held across their memories and in their positive academic memory. Neither the affective nor motivational content of the memories mediated the relation between self-esteem and the striving dimensions.

In summary, the findings from Study 1 show that the emotions and motives that characterize an individual's most meaningful memories have important implications for their goal pursuit. Moreover, stable personality dispositions are linked to these goal strivings, and these links are mediated, in part, by the affective and motivational content of self-defining memories. In Study 2, we further explore these relations using a short-term longitudinal design.

STUDY 2

Concurrent relations, although informative, only indicate how two variables are related to each other at one snapshot in time. Most models of self and memory assume that goals and memories are dynamic constructs that mutually influence and reinforce each other (Conway, 2005; Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). It is unlikely that these processes only occur concurrently. Self-defining memories may have a lasting influence on the construction and appraisal of an individual's most important goals. Likewise, goal strivings may influence the retrieval of autobiographical memories, perhaps emphasizing the retrieval of certain aspects of the memory (e.g., positive emotion) over others.

In Study 2, we move beyond concurrent relations to ask, how do memories and strivings mutually influence each other over time? Although existing models of self and memory argue for their reciprocal influence over time, no empirical research has actually tested for longitudinal and reciprocal relations. Study 2 replicates and extends the finding from Study 1 by assessing memories and personal strivings twice, at the beginning and the end of an academic term. We first examine the concurrent relations between the striving dimensions and the emotional and motivational content of memories

(replication of Study 1), and then extend the findings of Study 1 by examining reciprocal relations between memories and strivings over time. We also expand the scope of our investigations by examining a fourth type of autobiographical memory—a general self-defining memory—in addition to the academic and earliest memories. Assessing general memories provides several additional benefits over the academic and earliest memories assessed in Study 1. First, general memories are the most commonly assessed type of self-defining memory, allowing us to directly link our findings to this literature (e.g., Singer & Salovey, 1993). Second, with a general memory we can systematically compare memories that vary in valence, domain specificity, and recency. For example, when comparing recent and remote memories, the general memory provides a better contrast with the earliest childhood memory than the academic memories, because both the general and earliest childhood memories are unconstrained by domain and valence. More generally, the replication of findings across such a diverse set of memories provides strong evidence for the robustness of our effects.

Participants and Procedure

Three hundred undergraduate students (75% women) participated in exchange for course credit. Participants were, on average, 19.5 years old ($SD = 2.7$, range = 18 to 46), in their 2nd year of college (range = 1st to 6th year), and primarily Caucasian (54%) or Asian American (25%; the remaining 21% were Latino, 5%, African American, 1%, and other/mix, 15%). Participants completed measures of self-defining memories and personal strivings (described below) at two points in time, approximately 2 months apart. Participants also completed personality measures in a separate session a few weeks prior to the Time 1 assessment.

Self-Defining Memories

Instructions. Participants wrote about four self-defining memories: a positive and a negative academic memory, a general self-defining memory, and their earliest childhood memory. The instructions for the academic memories and the earliest childhood memory were identical to Study 1. The instructions for the general memory stated:

Please describe a memory that is personally meaningful to you. It can be either positive or negative, but it should convey the most important experience you have had that helps you to understand who you are and how you arrived at your current identity. It may be a memory about any kind of experience, but it should be something you have thought about many times and is still important to you, even as you are recalling it now. Please describe the memory in detail: what happened and when, whom you were with (if anyone), and how you felt or reacted.

Affect ratings. For each memory, participants rated eight positive emotions (proud, excited, strong, determined, inspired, enthusiastic, superior, joyful) and eight negative emotions (upset, scared, ashamed, hostile, distressed, guilty, jealous, angry) on the same rating scale as in Study 1. In the Time 1 assessment, alpha reliabilities for the PA scale ranged from .69 in the negative academic memory to .92 in the general memory; alpha reliabilities for the NA scale ranged from .74 in the negative academic memory to .87 for NA in the general memory. In the Time 2 assessment, alpha reliabilities for the PA scale ranged from .74 in the negative academic memory to .93 in the general memory; alpha reliabilities for the NA scale ranged from .79 in the positive academic memory to .89 in the general memory. The composited PA and NA scales correlated .01 at Time 1 and .05 at Time 2 (both *ns*). Means and standard deviations for these variables are shown in Table 1.

Motive ratings. Participants made the same motive ratings as in Study 1. In the Time 1 assessment, Power and Achievement correlated .45, $p < .05$, Power and Intimacy correlated .28, $p < .05$, and Achievement and Intimacy correlated .38, $p < .05$. In the Time 2 assessment, Power and Achievement correlated .43, $p < .05$, Power and Intimacy correlated .36, $p < .05$, and Achievement and Intimacy correlated .43, $p < .05$. Means and standard deviations for these variables are shown in Table 1.

Personal Strivings

Participants completed the same measure of personal strivings as in Study 1. In the current sample, Commitment had a mean of 4.3 ($SD = .6$) and an alpha of .91 at Time 1 and a mean of 4.3 ($SD = .6$) and an alpha of .92 at Time 2, Progress had a mean of 4.1 ($SD = .6$) and

an alpha of .87 at Time 1 and a mean of 4.0 ($SD = .6$) and an alpha of .87 at Time 2, and Conflict had a mean of 2.3 ($SD = .8$) and an alpha of .89 at Time 1 and a mean of 2.4 ($SD = .9$) and an alpha of .92 at Time 2.

Personality Measures

Several weeks prior to the Time 1 assessment, participants completed the same measures of self-esteem and narcissism as in Study 1. The RSE had a mean of 40.7 ($SD = 7.8$) and an alpha reliability of .91; the NPI had a mean of 15.8 ($SD = 6.6$) and an alpha reliability of .84.

Statistical Overview

To examine the relations between the memory content and personal strivings over time, we conducted a series of cross-lagged analyses (Ferrer & McArdle, 2003; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1979). In these models, the observed score of each variable at each time point is a function of the latent true score and measurement error. To examine the longitudinal relation between memory characteristics and striving dimensions, the model specifies each latent variable at Time 2 as a function of three components: (1) an autoregression (β), representing the effect of the same variable at Time 1; (2) a cross-lagged regression (γ), representing the effect of the other variable at Time 1; and (3) a residual (d), which is constrained to be equal across Time 1 and Time 2 and allowed to correlate with the residual for the other variable at the concurrent time point.

To determine how well a model fits the data, investigators typically rely on multiple measures of goodness of fit. The traditional χ^2 test is very sensitive to sample size; thus, for models with large samples, the p -value is likely to be significant, even if the model does have a close fit to the data (e.g., Widaman & Thompson, 2003). Consequently, researchers often rely on other measures of fit such as the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Normed Fit Index (NFI). An RMSEA below .05 indicates a very good fit and an RMSEA between .05 and .08 indicates an acceptable fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). A CFI or NFI above .95 indicates a very good fit and a CFI or NFI between .90 and .95 indicates an acceptable fit (Bollen & Long, 1993).

Results and Discussion

The results are divided into two sections: (1) the concurrent relations between memory content and the striving dimensions (replication of Study 1) and (2) the cross-lagged (i.e., longitudinal) relations between the emotional and motivational content of the memories and the striving dimensions.

Concurrent Relations Between Memory Content and Personal Strivings

Overall, the results at Time 1 generally replicated the Study 1 findings (see Table 6). Results for both the emotional and motivational memory content were generally in the same direction and of similar magnitude as in Study 1. For example, participants who reported more PA across their memories were more committed to their strivings and perceived making more progress toward striving attainment; in contrast, participants who reported more NA experienced greater conflict among their strivings and perceived less progress toward attaining them.

The pattern of findings for the motives was also similar to Study 1: Power-motivated participants reported more conflict among their strivings, achievement-motivated participants reported more commitment to their personal strivings, and intimacy-motivated participants reported both more commitment to and conflict among their strivings.

Similar to Study 1, the content of the individual memories had slightly different patterns of correlations with the personal strivings dimensions. PA and Power reported in both the positive academic memory and the general memory had similar correlations with the strivings dimensions, but NA, Achievement, and Intimacy in these memories had divergent correlations. In addition, the content of the general and earliest memories—the two memories unconstrained by domain and valence—generally had similar correlates, with the general memory showing stronger correlations with the striving dimensions than the earliest childhood memory. As in Study 1, affective and motivational content aggregated across the memories had stronger relations with the striving dimensions than content reported in the individual memories.

The memory content found to mediate narcissism and the striving dimensions in Study 1 replicated in Study 2 (see Table 5). In addition, PA mediated the relation between narcissism and the Progress dimension, such that narcissists reported making progress toward

Table 6
Correlations of Affect and Motives in Memories With Self-Reported Striving Dimensions (Study 2)

Striving Dimension	Recent Memories			Earliest Memory	Mean Across Memories
	Pos. Acad.	Neg. Acad.	General		
<i>Positive affect</i>					
Commitment	.27*	.09	.30*	.08	.39*
Progress	.23*	.09	.20*	.06	.32*
Conflict	.05	.06	.09	.12*	.18*
<i>Negative affect</i>					
Commitment	-.09	.20*	-.10	.06	.04
Progress	-.15*	-.01	-.07	-.05	-.16*
Conflict	.22*	.21*	.01	.10	.22*
<i>Power motive</i>					
Commitment	.09	.11	.16*	.11	.19*
Progress	.04	.00	.07	.02	.05
Conflict	.32*	.10	.20*	.16*	.31*
<i>Achievement motive</i>					
Commitment	.16*	.16*	.23*	.12*	.26*
Progress	.09	.10	.09	.10	.13*
Conflict	-.01	-.02	.12*	.14*	.11
<i>Intimacy motive</i>					
Commitment	.14*	.10	.01	.14*	.15*
Progress	.05	-.02	.04	.10	.06
Conflict	.11	.11	.11	.00	.12*

Note: $N = 300$. Pos. Acad. = positive academic memory; Neg. Acad. = negative academic memory.

* $p < .05$.

their strivings because they have more PA in their memories and narcissists reported conflict among their strivings because their earliest childhood memory was more saturated with power motivation.

Although memory content did not mediate the relation between self-esteem and the striving dimensions in Study 1, memory content did mediate some of these relations in Study 2 (see Table 5). Specifically, high self-esteem individuals reported more commitment to their strivings and more progress in attaining them because they experienced a higher level of PA in their positive academic memory. In contrast, low self-esteem individuals reported more conflict among

their strivings because they reported a higher level of NA across their four memories, although this effect only held in their positive academic memory. Finally, low self-esteem individuals were less committed to their strivings because their negative academic memory was saturated with NA. Although these findings were not significant in Study 1, the magnitude of these effects in both studies was similar (see Table 5), and it is likely that the larger sample size in Study 2 provided the additional power needed to render the same effect size statistically significant. We now turn to how memory and strivings influence each other over time.

Cross-Lagged Relations Between Memory Content and Striving Dimensions

In this section, we examine bidirectional lagged effects between memory content and the striving dimensions. A lagged effect between, for example, PA and a striving dimension would indicate that PA at Time 1 predicted the striving dimension at Time 2, controlling for both the prior level of the striving dimension (i.e., its stability over time) and the concurrent effect of PA at Time 2. One interpretation of lagged effects is that they provide a stringent test of whether a particular variable assessed at Time 1 predicts change in another variable from Time 1 to Time 2. We first discuss the stability of memory content and the striving dimensions over time before turning to the bidirectional cross-lagged effects of memory content and personal strivings.

Stability of memory content and strivings. The stability correlations for the emotional content of the memories were generally comparable, although slightly lower, than what one finds for the stability of general (i.e., non-memory-specific) affect over a comparable time period (Vaidya, Gray, Haig, & Watson, 2002). Table 7 shows the test-retest correlations for the emotional and motivational content of the four memories and the mean across the four memories. The stability correlations for positive affect ranged from .47 (negative academic memory) to .78 (earliest childhood memory), and the stability correlations for negative affect ranged from .54 (positive academic memory) to .76 (negative academic memory). The motivational content of the memories had somewhat lower stabilities over time. The stability correlations ranged from .45 (general memory) to .55 (earliest childhood memory) for Power motivation, from .28 (positive academic and general memories) to .50 (earliest childhood

Table 7
 Test-Retest Correlations for Affective and Motivational Memory Content (Study 2)

	Affect		Motive		
	Positive	Negative	Power	Achievement	Intimacy
Mean across memories	.70*	.68*	.65*	.48*	.60*
Positive Academic	.57*	.54*	.51*	.28*	.51*
Negative Academic	.47*	.76*	.49*	.36*	.45*
General	.54*	.56*	.45*	.28*	.36*
Earliest	.78*	.74*	.55*	.50*	.49*

Note: $N = 300$.

* $p < .05$.

memory) for Achievement motivation, and from .36 (general memory) to .51 (positive academic memory) for Intimacy motivation.

The striving dimensions had somewhat higher test-retest correlations than memory content: the Commitment dimension had a stability correlation of .66, the Progress dimension had a stability correlation of .71, and the Conflict dimension had a stability correlation of .70. Both memory content and the striving dimensions had stability correlations in the moderate range. Moderate stability indicates that although the constructs were relatively stable over the 10-week period, there was still sufficient variability for other constructs to exert their influence and predict changes over time. To that end, we turn to the cross-lagged effects of memory content on the strivings dimensions and the strivings dimensions on memory content.

Emotional content of memories. Commitment had positive lagged effects on both PA and NA. Specifically, participants committed to their personal strivings at Time 1 tended to report more PA in their positive academic memory ($\beta = .17, p < .05; \chi^2 = 3.53, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .051, CFI = .995, NFI = .988$), more NA across their four memories ($\beta = .10, p < .05; \chi^2 = .002, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.00, NFI = 1.00$), and more NA in their general memory ($\beta = .20, p < .05; \chi^2 = 2.06, df = 2, RMSEA = .010, CFI = 1.00, NFI = .999$) at Time 2. In other words, Commitment is associated with subsequent increases in both PA and NA, suggesting that individuals were more ego involved in their strivings. None of

the complementary lagged relations were significant; that is, PA and NA did not predict changes in Commitment over time.

Turning to the Conflict dimension, lagged effects, both from affective content to Conflict and from Conflict to affective content, emerged over time. Participants who reported NA in their negative academic memories ($\beta = .18, p < .05; \chi^2 = 4.7, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .073, CFI = .992, NFI = .987$) and general memories ($\beta = .09, p < .05; \chi^2 = 4.2, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .060, CFI = .991, NFI = .983$) perceived progressively more conflict among their strivings over time. In addition, participants who perceived conflict among their strivings at Time 1 tended to report more NA in their positive academic memory ($\beta = .05, p < .05; \chi^2 = 6.7, df = 2, p < .05, RMSEA = .089, CFI = .983, NFI = .977$) at Time 2. Finally, there were no lagged relations in either direction between the Progress dimension and the affective content of the memories.

Motivational content of memories. The Commitment dimension had a positive lagged effect on Achievement motivation, reported across the four memories ($\beta = .18, p < .05; \chi^2 = 3.7, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .053, CFI = .993, NFI = .986$) and specifically in the positive academic memory ($\beta = .29, p < .05; \chi^2 = 10.2, df = 2, p < .05, RMSEA = .117, CFI = .952, NFI = .943$): Participants committed to their personal strivings at Time 1 reported more Achievement motivation in their memories, particularly in their positive academic memory, at Time 2.

None of the complementary lagged relations were significant; that is, none of the three motives predicted changes in Commitment over time. However, we did find lagged relations in this direction for the Conflict dimension. Specifically, participants who reported more Power motivation in their negative academic memory ($\beta = .07, p < .05; \chi^2 = 3.4, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .049, CFI = .995, NFI = .987$) and more Intimacy motivation in their positive academic memory ($\beta = .06, p < .05; \chi^2 = 3.9, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .057, CFI = .991, NFI = .983$) perceived progressively more conflict among their strivings over time. In addition, participants who perceived more conflict among their strivings tended to report more Power motivation in their positive academic ($\beta = .20, p < .05; \chi^2 = 10.4, df = 2, p < .05, RMSEA = .119, CFI = .972, NFI = .967$) and earliest childhood memories ($\beta = .14, p < .05; \chi^2 = .2, df = 2, ns, RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.00, NFI = .999$) at Time 2. Finally, there were no lagged effects in either direction between the Progress dimension and the motivational content of the memories.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present research examined the interrelations among self-defining memories, personal strivings, and stable personality characteristics. In two studies we showed that (a) personal strivings were related to the affective and motivational content of self-defining memories, both concurrently (Study 1) and over time (Study 2); (b) personal strivings were related in theoretically meaningful ways to stable personality dispositions; and (c) memory content mediated many of these effects. Below we discuss the implications of each of these findings.

Self-Defining Memories and Personal Strivings

Research and theory suggest that individuals draw from their past experiences to develop goals for the future. It is this link between past and future that intimately binds together memories and personal strivings. In fact, self-defining memories may maintain their affective intensity and importance to the self through their connection with current goals and strivings (Singer & Salovey, 1993). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Moffitt & Singer, 1994), we found that when individuals feel positively about their memories, they are more committed to their strivings and perceive making more progress toward striving attainment. In contrast, when individuals feel negatively about their memories, they experience more conflict among their strivings and perceive less progress toward their striving attainment.

The present research is the first to demonstrate that personal strivings are linked to the motivational content, not just affective content, of self-defining memories. Each motive had unique relations with the striving dimensions. The motivation for power or control over others was consistently related to perceiving conflict among strivings and reporting a greater number of self-defeating strivings, suggesting a maladaptive pattern. Achievement motivation, in contrast, had more adaptive correlates; it was primarily related to striving commitment and fewer self-defeating strivings. Interestingly, intimacy motivation fell in between power and achievement—intimacy-motivated participants were committed to their strivings but perceived conflict among them. This apparent contradiction may be due to the nature of the memories assessed. Intimacy motivation reported in achievement memories may indicate that these

individuals are struggling to reconcile communal motives within autonomous experiences. Thus, their strivings may include intrapersonal and interpersonal goals that naturally conflict with one another. Motivation, often overlooked when assessing memory content, adds another important dimension to the understanding of the connection between self-defining memories and goal strivings.

Some of the relations between memory content and the strivings dimensions were memory specific and others generalized across memories. For example, positive affect in the positive, but not the negative, academic memory was related to both the Commitment and Progress dimensions. People who feel good about their successes may use memories of these experiences as a touchstone when evaluating and working toward future goals. A memory of how good it feels to succeed may motivate an individual to try to succeed again. One way to do that is to be committed and make progress toward goal attainment. In contrast, there is no reason to expect that feeling good about a negative experience should have the same motivating force. Power motivation in nearly every memory, on the other hand, was related to perceiving conflict among strivings. Power-motivated individuals may seek to exert power and control over others, regardless of the situation. To satisfy this motive, however, may require different tactics in different situations; thus, power-related goals may naturally conflict with one another.

Moving beyond concurrent relations, we showed that memory content and personal strivings are longitudinally and reciprocally related to each other. Current models of self and memory implicitly assume a bidirectional relation between memories and goals over time (Conway, 2005; Conway et al., 2004) but lack empirical evidence of this association. The significant cross-lagged effects found in the present study provide initial evidence for the mutual influence of memory content and personal strivings on each other over time: the commitment and conflict dimensions had longitudinal effects on the affective and motivational content of the memories, whereas memory content only influenced the conflict dimension. Surprisingly, the progress dimension and memory content were unrelated over time. We might have expected individuals who perceive making progress toward their goals to accumulate more positive and achievement-themed memories. However, cross-lagged effects are very difficult to find because they tend to be small and unreliable

(Lorenz, Conger, Simons, & Whitbeck, 1995; Stoolmiller & Bank, 1995), so further research is needed before concluding that such effects do not exist.

Personal Strivings and Personality Dispositions

When considering how to move forward with their lives, stable personality characteristics may influence how individuals construe their goals and aspirations for the future (Little et al., 1992). Important goal strivings are created and evaluated in ways consistent with underlying personality dispositions. And indeed, the present findings suggest that the motivational processes associated with self-esteem and narcissism are manifested in both the content and appraisals of personal strivings, whether self-reported or content coded by independent judges.

Personal strivings may help distinguish between these conceptually similar, yet theoretically distinct, personality dispositions. Specifically, self-esteem and narcissism shared some correlates but also had divergent relations with the strivings dimensions. Both narcissists and high self-esteem individuals reported positive, approach-oriented strivings. Their appraisals of these strivings, however, were very different. High self-esteem individuals perceive progress toward their aspirations, whereas narcissists are committed to striving attainment but also experience conflict among those strivings.

Memory Content Mediates Personality and Personal Strivings

We proposed and tested a simple mediational model of personality, memory and personal strivings. Specifically, we suggest that self-esteem and narcissism shape the affective and motivational content of personally meaningful memories (Sutin & Robins, 2005) and that this heightened accessibility to specific memory content subsequently shapes the appraisal of personal strivings. For example, efficacy and competence are defining characteristics of high self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem encode and retrieve experiences consistent with these features, and this heightened accessibility to positive memories of achievement-related events should be salient to them as they construct and evaluate their strivings. Likewise, individuals with low self-esteem should have greater access to memories with negative affective content, which could lead to increased conflict among strivings. Both studies provided support for our mediational

model: Memory content mediated many of the links between self-esteem and narcissism and personal striving appraisals.

Care should be taken, however, when interpreting these mediator effects because there is a question about the direction of causality. Although we assumed that personality influences everyday strivings via memory content, it is possible that pursuing certain goals will have a cumulative effect on personality characteristics, and these changes in personality might be mediated by memory-related content and processes. For example, an individual with approach and achievement-related strivings may develop self-defining memories saturated with achievement motivation, which, in turn, gradually increase the individual's self-esteem. Further longitudinal research is needed to tease apart these various possibilities.

Limitations

This research has several limitations. First, we did not systematically sample memories from all important life domains. We focused primarily on achievement memories because these memories should be most important to undergraduate students' current strivings. Other domains, such as love, family, or sports, may also be important to the construction and evaluation of personal strivings. It is encouraging, however, that we replicated the same general pattern of results using slightly different constellations of memories, including ones unconstrained by domain or valence (i.e., general and earliest childhood memories), in two independent samples. Indeed, our findings highlight the importance of sampling domain-specific memories in addition to the general memories typically assessed in autobiographical memory research.

Second, we assessed both self-defining memories and personal strivings in the same session, raising the possibility that the self-defining memory task may have influenced responses on the personal strivings task, and vice versa (Singer, 1990). Although we found virtually no order effects from counterbalancing the memory and striving measures, it is possible that these constructs influenced each other in similar ways regardless of order. Future research should test whether these findings replicate when the key variables are assessed on separate occasions.

Third, to examine the relations between memory content and strivings over time, we used a short-term longitudinal study with

only two waves of assessments. Memory content and strivings might have long-term reciprocal effects that were not captured in our 10-week interval. It is important to note, however, that this period is not random but rather a highly meaningful unit in the lives of undergraduate students, marking the beginning and the end of an academic term. The academic and interpersonal challenges that occur over the course of a term constitute a microcosm for the processes that normally play out over a longer time scale in an adult's life.

Fourth, we assessed memories and personal strivings on only two occasions and personality on only one occasion. Three or more assessments are needed to assess the shape of the trajectory of change (e.g., to distinguish between linear and quadratic change). A longitudinal study over a longer period of time, including multiple assessments, would be useful to test the long-term, reciprocal relations among memory content, personal strivings, and personality.

Finally, although cross-lagged effects help test for certain alternative causal hypotheses (e.g., the possibility that the temporal sequence is reversed or the possibility of reciprocal influence), they cannot rule out the possibility that a third variable influences both variables and creates a spurious correlation. Moreover, some of the concurrent relations did not replicate in the cross-lagged analyses, leaving open the question of causal direction for those particular effects.

Despite these limitations, the current findings establish important links between self-defining memories, personal strivings, and personality. Following Adler (1931), we believe that "past experiences" help individuals "meet the future with an already tested style of action." We add to this the possibility that it is not just the types of past experiences characterizing people's lives but the way in which they retrieve and evaluate them that influences how they approach their future. In short, we move forward by drawing on our past, but the past is not an objective storehouse of experiences but rather a dynamic and ambiguous warehouse from which different emotional and motivational themes are selected, depending on our stable personality traits.

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