Narrative Review

A reading self

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Abstract

This essay begins with a presentation of the narrative self from the perspectives of Personality Psychologists Arnold Ludwig, Jerome Bruner, and Dan McAdams. These personality theorists hold different but overlapping views of personality, particularly regarding the concept of the self. Ludvig's view of the self begins this essay with his focus on how biography shapes and defines a self. Within a narrative structure similar to Ludvig, McAdams's and Bruner's views of the self are presented. These theorists agree that selves are different from persons. This overview prepares the reader to think about and apply the concept of a reading self. The second part of this essay draws on Ludvig's, Bruner's, and McAdam's perspectives on a biographical or narratively composed self. Their understanding of selves is a jumping-off place for the formulation of a reading self. McAdam's framing of action, agency, and author provides a scaffold for the construction of a reading self. Drawing on the author's own experiences as both a learner and a teacher offers a possible way to explore the concept of a reading self. Trial and error, research, and conversations with colleagues and students provide the tools for learning within an ongoing struggle in personal learning, aiding students to become better thinkers and readers. Reflexivity is central. Through reflexive practices, one's beliefs, experiences, and identity are developed through reading and storytelling. This essay emphasizes that reading is not a passive activity but rather a dialogical one – readers engage in a conversation with books, and books respond to the reader, allowing them to participate in an internal dialogue. Using Turkle's concept of evocative objects, we view books as tools for constructing a bricolage of a reading self.

Keywords: actor, agent, author, Bruner, Mc Adams, Ludvig, evocative objects, bricolage, reflexivity, autobiographical self, biographical self, reading self

Introduction

This essay grew from several experiences as I reflected on my intellectual history as a writer and teacher. Not surprisingly, the influences came from three sources: teachers, writers, and students, who initially provided me with a connection to writers, but increasingly, it was writers connecting me to other writers that I discovered via citations, footnotes, book prefaces, and acknowledgments coupled with conversations that fueled interest in the idea of a reading-self.

As I began constructing a list of people I might converse with, a teacher of American Intellectual History came to mind[1]. He impacted my ways of learning and teaching. I looked him up to see if he might be available for a Zoom conversation. Unfortunately, he had passed away. This failed connection led me to begin the construction of a personal intellectual life by tracing my reading of texts considered personally significant is now an on-going project. These activities, which on the surface may seem unconnected, led to this exploration of a reading-self.

In the process, I discovered that a significant part of my intellectual development was teaching at a small Midwestern college cum university. The great benefit of teaching in such an institution was that while I spent most of my time teaching Psychology, I also had an opportunity to co-teach courses with faculty in History, Philosophy, Literature, and Religious Studies. Even though I taught in several disciplines, I also taught courses that repeated yearly.

Muse

As I was easily bored by teaching the same classes repeatedly,

I often assigned new articles and books to transform what I was teaching and learning. Two particular courses, Theories of Personality and History and Systems of Psychology kindled my burgeoning conceptualization of a biographical self and then much later to begin thinking about a reading self. Eventually, these reading habits led me to Arnold Ludwig's' *Do I Know Who We Are? A Biography of Self*,[1] Dan McAdams's *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (1993),[2] and Jerome Bruner's *In Search of Mind: Essays in Autobiography*,[3] *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*,[4] and *Acts of Meaning*.[5]

One of the chapters in Ludvig's book stood out as an inspiration to think about the nature of a Self. The chapter 'Living Backward' had a specific influence on the writing of this essay. Ludvig writes in the opening line of the Living Backward chapter that Stephen Crane lived out events in his imagination long before he experienced them in reality".[1] The specific connections between living backward and Self will be examined later in the discussions of Don McAdam's article 'The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author'.[6] Turning now to Jerome Bruner's *In Search of Mind: Essays in Autobiography*,[3] I saw this work as instructive as to how an academic might think about his or her life and how the mind and the Self are storied. *Acts of Meaning*[5] further enhanced my ability to connect stories with the Self.

The Self played a pivotal role in getting me thinking about personality and reading style; in a similar vein, I also taught Don McAdams's *Stories We Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*[2] in several Elderhostel programs and Theories of Personality courses. These teaching and reading activities formed the background for this essay.

With this personal background, I turn to the autobiographical self and eventually to a reading self. My first tactic is to provide the

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[1]During the past two years, I have hosted a podcast called "Talking Smart: Conversations with Colleagues in Education and Philosophy from Around the World" (https://youtu.be/zSuSPQvGIus?si=JP2_SbP_YG09qPD7).

reader with a brief description of Ludvig's, Bruner's, and McAdams's work, which has led me to a view of personality within a biographical framework. The overview of these authors is informed by a discussion of my reading habits, their implications for learning and teaching, and to my first attempt at articulating the concept of a reading-self.

Framework

These three authors provide the framework for introducing a perspective on a biographical Self, which also provides a structure for the Reading Self[2]. The Reading Self is the extension of the autobiographical Self. The relationship between the Autobiographical Self and the Reading-Self will be presented later in this section.

All three of these theorists have similar but unique perspectives on the autobiographical Self. This presentation of the construction of the autobiographic Self may appear a bit unorthodox as it does not begin with the earliest work on an autobiographical self. Ludvig's book is the most recent of the three books and Bruner's book is the oldest of the three. The reason for writing in this order is in part to give credit to Arnold Ludvig for providing the spark that led me to this essay.

A quick look at an overview of the three books provides a hint at the origins of this article. Ludvig's subtitle provided me with a name for the working concept of this section, 'A Biographical Self.' McAdams's Subtitle is 'Personal Myths and the Making of the Self.' The concept of personal myths made that connection more intimate. *Acts of Meaning*,[5] one of Bruner's books, does not have a subtitle, so allow me to create one as a heuristic devise[3]: 'Folk Psychology, Meaning Making, and the Autobiographical Self.'

To better understand how these three theorist are connected I will introduce a term from anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss – bricolage. A bricolage is a construction or creation of something new derived from a diverse construction or creation of something unique out of a collection of apparently unconnected artifacts or ideas. Lévi -Strauss used the concept of bricolage to refer to the process that led his understanding of the creation of mythical thought. With apologies to anthropologists, here bricolage is used as a thinking tool to understand some of the connections between the three personality theorist discussed in this essay.

I opened with Ludvig's Biographical Self. Arnold Ludvig creates a bricolage[4] by collecting a series of easily recognizable personalities, including Marylyn Monroe, Sigmund Freud and Adolf Hitler[5].

Stephen Crane, as you will see in the next section, plays a key role in my presentation of a biographical Self.

Personal Myths connect McAdams to Ludvig and Bruner. Personal myths are the stories we tell ourselves using the mythical forms of comedy, romance, tragedy, and irony. These mythical forms provide a structure for storytelling, regardless of our conscious knowledge of the names or our use of them.

Bruner introduces folk psychology. This orientation to psychology and personality builds on everyday experiences and insights. Its uses commonplace explanations that contextualize one's life and lives of others. Bruner helps us understand the relationship between storytelling and meaning-making. I make meaning by the stories I tell and the worlds I create. Reflexivity is a key element in this self-creation as developed by all three of these theorists.

A biography of the self

Arnold Ludvig is an E.A. Edwards Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Kentucky School of Medicine. The subtitle, A Biography of the Self, provides a context for discussing the chapter that inspired this essay: Looking Backwards. Ludvig's idea of a biographical Self is one of a growing group of theorists who use autobiography or biography[6] as a way of understanding personality. The book, taken as a whole, argues that the concept of Self can be conceptualized as a biography, that is, a story with a beginning, middle, and end in which Self is the central character born into a culture and influenced by many currents and eddies.

Enter Stephen Crane and the title of Ludvig's Chapter, 'Living Backward.' In that chapter, Ludvig cites one of Crane's biographers, Christopher Benfey, as making the case that Crane wrote about things, not from experience, but before he experienced them. A prime example is *The Red Badge of Courage*.[7] While this book was written about the American Civil War that occurred decades after the writing of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane wrote so compellingly about the battlefield scenes that many readers thought he had been a participant in the war or at least an eyewitness. Steven Crane had no war experience until three years after the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage*.[7]

Ludvig rhetorically asks: "Does this mean that you live portions of your life backward with the future experience preceding the present ones, like rewinding a videotape?" Ludvig asks the reader. "Of course not," is his straightforward answer. Ludvig goes on to explore an idea that Christopher Benfey called "lived doubleness." Lived doubleness is not a unique experience; it is a familiar experience of living in our imagination and the real world simultaneously.

When the imagined experiences you explicitly think about, write about or express in other ways come true, they create an illusion of a reversal of time. Because the future comes to be experienced before it happens, it takes on aspects of the past.

This "lived doubleness" may also be related to Deja vu. Both Deja vu and "lived doubleness" speak to the plasticity of our imagination that "lets us defy the biological linearity of time".[1]

The last chapter of the book includes this paragraph:

You have no choice but to live your life within a biological format, proceeding inexorably from one life chapter to the next – from birth to childhood, to adulthood, to death – but you needn't do so as a passive bystander in your unfolding personal drama. … While cultural myths and psychological needs shape your conception of yourself, you only gain the freedom to alter it when you recognize the powerful influences that make you think as you do.

Cultural myth and psychological need, Ludvig, McAdams, Bruner and others, argues, are crucial elements that shape your sense of Self;

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[2] Rom Harré's *The Discursive Mind* (Harré & Gillette, 1994) and *The Singular Mind*, (1998) along with Charles Taylors *The Explanation of Behavior* (1964, 2021) and *Sources to the Self: The Making of a Modern Identity* (1989) and the five works of Sherry Turkle found in the bibliography round out the main sources that make up the framework for this essay.

[3] The following three chapters in Acts of Meaning are based are the basis for my pseudo subtitle: Folk Psychology as an Instrument of Culture, The entry of Meaning, and Autobiography of The Self.

[4] Sherry Turkle led me to think about bricolage to conceptualize a collection of ideas.

[5] For a more detailed discussion of an application of how the biographies in Ludvig book may be applied see (Morehouse, Doing Philosophical Psychology: Helping Adolescents Discover their Place in History, 2020)

[6] See for example, but Belenky, et al., (1986, 1997); Addies, D. R. & Tippett, L. J. (2008) Arnett, J. J. (2000), Braddeley & Sinner (2007); Landau, Greenberg & Sullivan (2009); McLean & Pratt (2006); Mead, G.H. (1932; 1934); Rochat, P. (2010); Taylor, C. (1989), and Turtle, S. (1984; 2011).

it is only you, a unified person, who has the freedom to alter your future by recognizing your power as an agent.[8] This description of our limited but powerful degree of free will, gained by our linguistic abilities and use of self-reflection, is central to grasping the ways that the scholars cited in this essay understand a "self."

The takeaway from this short look at *How Do We Know Who We Are? A Biography of the Self*[1] is that we know who we are by the stories we tell ourselves and the stories one tells others. Storytelling is also a way that we understand what it is to be a Self.

It is within the milieu of narrative freedom that one shapes those malleable aspects of our life. Coupling cultural myths and lived experiences enables a person to think about some essential influences that form self and the other. Among these influences are what one reads, how, and who we read. Within that context, the idea of the Reading-Self was born.

Personal myths and the making of the self

Dan P. Mc Adams is a professor of Psychology and Human Development at Northwestern University. Don McAdams's most recent works are in Narrative Psychology. He has developed a life-story model of human identity. Among his areas of expertise are Generative and Adult Psychology, Modernity, Self, and Autobiographical Memory.

In Stories We Live By, he writes about how personal myths are a part of what makes a Self.

Human beings are storytellers by nature. The story appears in every known human culture in many guises, such as folk tales, legends, myths, epics, history, motion pictures, and television programs. … Storytelling appears to be a fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others.

Following Paul Ricoeur,[9] McAdams argues that human time is organized after the manner of narrative.[10] So, stories are organized around chronological time with a beginning, middle, and end. Our lives are lived in stories. One tells stories to one's self and others to create ourselves and to better understand what we have made, that is, self and myself.

It is important to state expressly that life stories are never final; they can always be revised. The myths one creates shape who we are, so we continually revise ourselves and our definitions of what a Self is. Within the context of an always self-editing life story, McAdams writes in the tradition of Erik Erikson's understanding of identity. Identity is a stage in Erikson's developmental theory as expressed in *Childhood and Society* and *Identity: Youth in Crisis* and other of his works such as *Vital Involvement in Old Age*.[11,12]

In *Vital Involvement,* Erikson suggests that adults enter a final stage in old age, called Integrity versus Despair. As with all of Erikson's stages, Integrity versus Despair evolves from previous stages and is revised and rethought within that stage of development. The task of each age or stage may be conceived as an extension of identity as each of the stages is connected to all the other stages of development. Asking and reflecting on the question "Who am I as I look back at the arc of my life?" becomes a question of identity within an autobiographical personal and cultural tale[7].

Citing Daniel Dennett,[13] McAdams also understands Self as a center of narrative gravity, wherein the 'Me' becomes the story that

is told by the autobiographical 'I'. This is now commonly called the Narrative Identity.[6,14]

Dan McAdams has been writing about personality for decades, so he has a lot to say about personality theory and this writer has a lot of McAdams to draw from. One article that is important for this essay is an article he wrote with Jennifer Pals, 'A New Big Five: Fundamental Principles for an Integrative Science of Personality'.[14]

That article provides a perspective for shaping our understanding of life stories and the reading-self. One can itemize individual traits of personality but beyond traits, it is important to directly look at how human beings respond to situated social tasks and make meaning of their life within their culture. To paraphrase and simplify these five principles does a disservice to the McAdams and Pals article, but hopefully, it stays true to the spirit of their work.

The first principle, evolution and human nature, is that there are some things about us humans that are shared by most personality theorists. The understanding of our species roots derived from our common evolutionary history is the starting point for most theories of personality. The second principle is also widely shared, i.e., there are certain shared dispositions. McAdams and Pals call this the dispositional signature. Next are the characteristic ways that humans use as adaptive mechanisms within the environment or characteristic adoptions.

The fourth characteristic deals specifically with narrative and identity. McAdams and Pals call this Life Narratives and the Challenges of Modern Identity. Finally, the importance of culture writ large and its effects on role is the last element of McAdams and Pals' article, the deferential role of culture. The narrative aspect of personality within our unique cultures will play the largest part in our discussion of personality and eventually what it means to the reading self.

Principle four in McAdams and Pals's article is Life Narrative and the Challenge of Modern Society. These authors write: "*Beyond dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations, human lives vary with respect to the integrative life stories, or personal narratives, that individuals construct to make meaning and identity in the modern world*. [Italics in original]. McAdams summarizes the role of culture in the modern world, life story or personal narratives concerning self:

(1) Culture sets norms and constraints on the agentic behavior of an actor,

(2) the goals of the agent are established within a cultural setting that provides timetables, scripts and priorities, (3) culture enables the construction of a menu gleaned from psycho-literary patterns providing the agent-author to select images, metaphors, and narratives that can be used to make a Narrative-Self. Agentic self is also extensively examined in 'The Self in Action'.[8]

McAdams developed a method for understanding our lifestyle and exploring our personal myths. He suggests that eight key events are helpful to explore if one is going to understand our own stories or the stories of others through conversation and interviews. He presents events that are key to exploring:

(1) Peak experience,

(2) Nadir experience,

(3) Turning point,

(4) Earliest memory

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[7]As I was at the last stage of Erikson's developmental theory, questions of the arc of life loom large is itemized in the opening paragraph of this essay.

(5) Important childhood memory,

(6) Important adolescent memory,

(7) Important adult memory, and

(8) Other important memories.[15]

By using these topics as prompts, one can develop an interview profile for exploring a biography or an interview schedule for interviewing others regarding their life story[8].

Anthony Giddens makes a similar case for narrative understanding of personality from a sociological perspective. In *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in Late Modernity*,[16] Giddens reflects on social life, lifestyle, and one's continuously revising biographical narrative.

The reflexive project of self, which consists in sustaining a coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narrative, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, and the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diverse of options.[16]

One of the repeated points about narrative is that it is a reflexive activity; it is an intrinsic part of the meaning of narrative as a life story. McAdams and Giddens suggest that one not only has a life story but also a lifestyle, both of which are self-creations. There is no life story, no lifestyle, without reflexivity. Reflexivity leads us to Jerome Bruner.

Folk psychology, meaning making and the autobiographical self

Jerome Bruner, who died in 2015, was a University Professor at New York University. He has held the G.H. Mead University Professor at The New School for Social Research, New York, and the Watts Chair of Psychology at Oxford University. Bruner's life work is best symbolized by the title of his autobiography, *In Search of Mind: Essays in Autobiography*, and one of the books that is a focus of this essay, *Acts of Meaning*.[3,5]

So how does this essay, which focuses on Self, relate to Bruner's life work? *In Search of Mind*, Bruner's autobiographical book, shows the unfolding of his search for a cognitive science based in meaning-making and story. *Act of Meaning* looks at the construction of the Self as a meaning maker with a wider lens. This examination of the Self is arrived at via folk psychology and its understanding of mind and meaning - making by, in part, addressing the Janus two-sided coin of mind and personhood. It is fair to say, I think, that an embodied self is a seeker of meaning, and that seeker is the human person.

Reading Bruner, while ruminating on McAdams's discussion of reflexivity in *Stories We Live By*,[15] an attempt is made to take account of a Self in discussion with others, that is, reflection on Self-in-the-World. Bruner understands Self within a cultural framework. "Culture", Bruner writes in a response to a series of commentaries on his work in *Language, Culture, Self*, "does not influence mind: its products used by individuals do".[17]

Stated differently, the products of the mind influence culture. This statement is an interesting misdirection, a sort of sleight of hand or hallway of mirrors. What the mind produces changes culture, but the mind itself does not change anything. Bruner's emphasis on epistemology is seen in his mind and cultural-change statement. He argues that ontology is an artifact of epistemology.[17]

In addition to addressing issues on ontology and epistemology, one of Bruner's aims during the first Cognitive Revolution was to prompt psychology to join forces with its sister interpretive disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. It is the focus on interpretation that allows Bruner to write that ontological realism comes after epistemology.[5]

Freed from the shackles of ontological realism, a new set of concerns about the nature of Self begins to emerge, rather more "traditional" concerns. Is not Self a transactional relationship a relationship between a speaker and an Other, indeed, a Generalized Other? Is it not a way of framing one's consciousness, one's position, one's identity, or one's commitment concerning another? Self, in this dispensation, becomes "dialogue dependent," designed as much for the recipient of our discourse as for intrapsychic purposes.[5]

To highlight my position on psychology's integration of mind and Self, it is worth repeating that Self, like the mind, is not a thing but a relationship between the speaker and the generalized other[9]. I argue with Bruner that "human reflexivity is our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in light of the present. Neither the past nor the present stays fixed in the face of this reflexivity".

Bruner writes that Psychology has preferred to rely upon its own research paradigm and to define its concepts thus lessening its broader impact. However, there is a counterargument, one that moves toward a broader, more inclusive view of psychology as seen in the quote below.

We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts to me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shaped the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, our ways of interacting with others, our public and private persona, our sense of control over life events, our view of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality.[18]

This quote from *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* appear to me built on Bruner's ideas of folk psychology, specifically, the conjunction of "ordinary people" and "difficult and profound questions" as a reflexive understanding of being an agent within the world. Again, the subtitle of the above work points to a broader view of understanding of agency and reflexivity.[18]

Bruner goes on to lament psychology's isolation from other human sciences and philosophy. He writes that psychology has preferred to rely upon its research paradigms and to define its concepts and thus lessen its broader concerns,[5] also see Morehouse.[19] However, there is a counterargument penned by Bruner himself. Years earlier, in

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8   A version of this format was used in our study: Morehouse, R., Visse, M., Singer- Towns, B., Vitek J. (2019) juggling the many voices inside: what it means to be an emerging adult. *International Journal of Psychological Research and Review*, 2019, 2: 13.

9   Rom Harré Writes in *The Singular Self* (1998), "I shall be trying to show that what people call 'selves' are, by and large, produced discursively, that is in dialogue with another form of joint action with real and imagined others. Selves are not entities, but evanescent properties of the flow of public and private action.

comments in an essay in *On Knowing: Essays on the Left Hand* called "Myth and Identity,"[20] he explores the nature of myth and its influence on the person and her culture.[21]

Bruner's essay is part of a group of chapters[10] in which each of these essays includes some psychology but it also goes beyond the parameters of discipline to examine culture generally as well as in the arts, especially novels and paintings.

As stated earlier, as the Self is a "dialogue-dependent disposition," then for both our intrapsychic purposes and our discourse partners the Self is distributed. Within this context, Bruner claims a Self can re-envision alternatives[21] much as Ludvig did in *How do I know who I am?*.[1]

I think, moreover, that we are sensitized by our evolutionary past to draw inferences about others' mental states with respect, principally, through the possible actions they may bring about – the so-called' arguments of action'. We seem preternaturally disposed to recognize agency, actions intended, goal sought, instrumentality and the effect of setting. In other words, we organize our perceptions of others as involving actions in an Actor, a circumscribed Act directed at some Goal and employing certain Means, all constrained by particular kinds of Settings.[17]

To repeat, a dialogical-dependent disposition coupled with a capacity to envision alternatives is a definition of reflexivity. In this context, it implicitly engages the understanding of the Self with an understanding of the Other[11].

That integration of the Self may be considered a distributed rather than a subjective nucleus.[5] He suggests that one might start with Kenneth Gergen's 'Self,' that is, the 'Self' created from 'the outside in' to which Bruner adds a 'Self' created from 'the past to the present.' In addition the Self as an 'inside to outside' construction, Bruner argues that two generalities might be pulled from Gergen's work. The first is human reflexivity, our capacity, our immense repository of past encounters, may be used to turn around on the past and alter the present in light of the past or re-conceptualize it. The second universal is our 'dazzling' intellectual capacity for envisioning alternatives – to conceive of other ways of being, acting, and striving.[5]

For Bruner, there is a sense of generalized knower much like there is a 'generalized other,' thus, "to know anything" implies to know one-self. He argues that overlooking this situated-distributed nature of knowledge also means losing sight of the cultural nature of knowledge. The cultural nature of knowledge includes the cultural construction and understanding of the Self. Cultural Psychology considers the Self as including the Other nested within one's culture. Bruner asks, 'How would I define myself in terms of cultural psychology'? The idea Self, as constructed and distributed, is born in a process of negotiation, and of 'putting into practice.'

Bruner illustrates this in his study of the Goodhertz family[12]. In his chapter 'Autobiography and Self,' he attempts to show how the Self and lives are constructed as an outcome of the process of meaning-making. He further argues that Self is not just in the head but is distributed interpersonally. "Nor do selves arise rootlessly in response to the present; They take meaning as well from the historical

circumstances that gave shape to the culture in which they are in expression".[5]

Toward a constructions of a reading-self

This brief look at three authors' understanding of personhood as a biographical construction provides an introduction to articulate the concept of a reading-self. The idea of the Reading-Self is, as illustrated here, a developmental perspective on one reader. It is one perspective, gleaned from Arnold Ludvig, Dan McAdams, and Jerome Bruner.

Bruner argues in *Acts of Meaning*[5] that narrative must assent to the particular. The particular and the universal different way of grounding a narrative. "Once it achieves its particularities, it converts them into tropes: its agents, actions, scenes, goals, and instruments (its troubles as well) are converted into emblems". These emblems are the building blocks of the Self and a reading self.

Dan McAdams, writes in *Stories We live by*, that "Life becomes mythic in our teenage years. The formation and reformation of identity remains thereafter the central psychosocial task of the adult years".[15] What he calls becoming a mythmaker in 1993, becomes the idea of author in his 2013 article "The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent and Author".

A developmental perspective from the particular experiences of one reader is put forward here. The argument is presented in four part plus a summary.

1. **The reading – self**
   a. Myths we live by
   b. Things to think with
   c. A reading-self as a creator of bricolage
2. **Reflexivity: reading and change**
   a. Deanna Kuhn: argument, self, and mind
   b. McAdams: reading as storytelling
3. **Examining the reading-self**
   a. Actor
   b. Agent
   c. Author
4. **Becoming a reading self**
   a. Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf
   b. Reading literature and philosophy
   c. Teaching reading
      i. How to read a book
      ii. The four design questions
   d. A reading self as a reading thinker
   e. Reading one's self into the world
5. **Pulling it all together**

Myths we live by

While parts of this essay relating to the reading self was mostly written before reading 'Getting a Life'[23] and 'Getting a Life Takes Time: The Development of the Life Story in Adolescence, its

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[10]"Identity and the Modern Novel," "Art as a Mode of Thought" and "The Art of Discovery".

[11]Note that reflexivity can be either conscious or unconscious; conscious reflectivity and unconscious awareness within an integrated self is a working understanding for this essay.

[12] Goodhertz is a pseudonym for the family in the 1991 Bruner study.

Precursors and Consequences,[24] I used their article as a framework for what is presented in the last section of this work. It seems I gained an understanding of Habermas,[23,24] through reading Jerome Bruner, Arnold Ludvig, Dan McAdams, and Sherry Turkle[13].

Sherry Turkle's *Psychoanalytic Politics: Jaques Lacan and Freud's French Revolution*,[25] was my introduction to Turkle as I turned to a secondary source in order to understand Lacan. This led us to *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*.[26] My fascination with human development within the context of emerging technology continued with her next publications: *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*,[27] *Alone Together: Why We Expect More of Technology and Less of Each Other*,[28] *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*,[29] and *The Empathy Diaries: A Memoir*.[30]

While these books did not follow the standards presented by Habermas and Bluck[23] for telling and understanding life stories, the style of Turkle's writing blending personal narrative with the exploration of the interface between technology and human development as well as theory and practice provided a scaffolding on which to build. Turkle's style of writing was consistent with the series of studies done by Dan P. McAdams and Ruthellen Josselson that germinated in me an understanding of how to think about the ideas of a reading self and myths I live by. The approach to narrative and human development over the past forty or so years was also consistent with what was occurring more broadly within the social and human sciences.[31]

This essay therefore focuses on a developmental bridge between childhood, adolescence and emerging adulthood. Autobiographical reasoning is the process by which life story is formed and used.[23] This essay is formed by an autobiographical reasoning process of self-reflective thinking. This self-reflective thinking helps form connections between elements of life and the Self in an attempt to relate past experiences to the present and the future.

Life story or narrative has some advantages over social psychology or sociology according to Habermas and Reese:[24]

1. Adolescent life stories of are a format that allows the creation of self-continuity across biographical change with identity over time,

2. Self-authored stories facilitate the integration of identity by providing continuity among various aspects of an individual life across situations in social contexts,

3. The life stories fulfill another requirement of identity, that of demonstrating a person's individuality,

4. Life story allows one to explain the objective aspects of identity and also the implicit expression of subject sense of identity.

Life as narrative

Jerome Bruner argues that narrative is a constructivist endeavor. Following Nelson Goodman's view he posits that 'world making' is "the principal function of mind, whether in science or in the arts". However, if one attempts to construct narrative through autobiography, one is confronted with a number of potential dilemmas. The constructivist view is that "stories" do not "happen" in the real world, that is to say, the construction of a life-story is made in one's head. In his discussion of culture and autobiography Bruner presents two theses:

(1) There is no other way to describe a lived experience except as a story,

(2) Life and narrative is a two Way Street; while it is true that life imitates art, it is also true that art imitates life and narrative is an art.[32]

The human imagination is often manifested in a narrative form. It is constructed by human beings through judgments by a process of logic, by the same rationale through which one constructs narrative. "The story of one's life is of course a privileged but troubled narrative in the sense that it is reflective: the narrator and the central figure of the narrative are the same".[32]

The heart of Bruner's argument is this: "eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to construct perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very events of a life". Thus, there is value in creating a developmental autobiography; how one talks about one's selves changes and how these accounts come to control one's way of life is of value to anyone interested in developmental psychology. It is also a framework for outlining a personal myth to live by, i.e., a reading self.

Things to think with

Following Jerome Bruner's ideas of life as narrative, the next step is a look at Sherry Turkle's small collected-essays in a book called *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*.[33] Evocative objects are tangible or symbolic things that have an impact on a particular person; these objects, sometimes spontaneously bring strong images, memories, or feelings to mind.

Turkle's introduction to *Evocative Objects* begins with a discussion of what she calls a "memory closet". It was a closet, Turkle writes, that included "my aunt's and my mother's books, trinkets, souvenirs, photographs – they were stored in the kitchen closet, set high, just below the ceiling". Turkle makes a connection between the memory closet and Levi-Strauss's bricolage[14]. We open the possibility of understanding a culture by identifying objects that are important to us, and then we move these objects around in order to discern patterns within the culture.[33]

Turkle argues that moving cultural objects around allows one to create a picture of a cultural phenomenon. Levi-Straus did this in his anthropological work; I extend this idea of a bricolage in my argument as what a Reading-Self does[9]. Turkle has scientists, humanists, artists, and designers write about evocative objects, that is, she asks them to author a biographical essay on objects that connected them to ideas and people. There are about forty short essays in *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*. To my surprise, only two of the essays include books as evocative objects.[33]

Evocative objects are those things that conjure strong images and bring memories of feelings to mind; sometimes Turkle refers to evocative objects as things I think with as her subtitle states. She also refers to evocative objects as things that matter. Sometimes she argues that these sorts of objects bring "philosophy down to earth". What is consistent about these essays is that these objects have personal meaning.[33]

A reading-self as a creator of bricolage

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[13]McAdam's and Truckle's work were more influential as sources of inspiration for exploring stories and cultural connections with development than were Bruner and Ludvig.

[14] Bricolage, according to Apple dictionary, is a work of art constructed using mixed media. Turkle (2007) rates that Levi-Strauss used it as a way of combining and recombining a closed set of materials in order to create something new. We use the objects around us to create a picture of a cultural phenomenon.

Books provide a limited set of things that I use to think with. They are more than resources to consult, they are for me foils to think against, and supporters to think in tandem with. Books are puzzle pieces that can be moved around to create a new picture or create a new perspective. It is not just specific paragraphs or ideas that I think with, but whole books, or my ideas of the content of a book. Sometimes the reader compares one author to another author, but sometimes the reader compares one author's book to their previous book. A bricolage is an effort to create something new out of what is already known.

Importantly, it is not just the back and forth between readers and authors that is involved to create a bricolage. It is the combining and re-combining of a closed set of objects that creates something new. I understand this to mean, as it relates to books and other written material, thinking with other people's ideas. Thinking with other people's ideas is to digest those ideas to the point where those ideas become your own[15]. Creative re-arrangement of someone else's ideas is a dialogical endeavor. The process requires knowing and claiming one's thinking and testing those "units of meaning[16]" with and against the units of meaning of other thinkers.

Reading, as others have observed, is an active process. To engage a book actively is to be an interlocutor with a book or books. The reader asks the book questions, and the book responds with an answer. But a book or books ask the reader questions as well. It is within this creative conversation that a bricolage is formed, innovative ideas are born, and a Reading-Self is formed. The reading self learns to think for him or herself by creating a bricolage.

Implicit in the definition of an active reader is the ability to be open-minded. Here enters Deanna Kuhn and re-enters Dan McAdams.

Reflexivity: reading and change

Reading and change are connected processes. To read is to be immersed in another world. Such immersion implies entrance and exit; the exit almost forces one to reflect on the world you exited and the world where you re-emerged. The entry and exit happens whether one reads fiction or non-fiction. Deanna Kuhn provides some tools that enhance our reflexivity and stimulate change.

Deanna Kuhn: argument, self, and mind

Deanna Kuhn is a professor of Psychology and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She has written widely on argument and its relation to thinking and learning. In *Education for Thinking*, Kuhn provocatively states: "Only the holder of a belief can decide to change that belief".[34] Explicitly stated: one can only change one's idea if one has, that is to say, owns, and can convey that idea. This statement mirrors Charles Taylor's statement in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*;[35] Taylor claims that our interpretation of ourselves and our experience is constitutive of what I am, and therefore cannot be considered as merely a view on reality, separable from reality, nor as the epiphenomena, which can be bypassed in our understanding of reality. Many of our feelings, emotions, and desires, in short much of our experiences, are such that saying properly what they are like involves expressing or making judgments about the object they bear on. Emotions intimately are related to certain objects.

[15]See discussion of student challenging an instructor in the section A *Reading-Self* as Thinking Self in this paper.

[16]'Units of meaning' is a concept used in Qualitative Research as a method identify significant statement from interview as a step toward creating an empirically based theme or trend.

Near the beginning of *The Skills of Argument*,[36] Deanna Kuhn asks her readers to look at their belief structure.

Do people know *why* they believe what they do, in a way that can justify to themselves or to others? Do people know *what* they believe, in the sense of being consciously aware of those beliefs as choices they have made among many different beliefs that they might hold? Do they understand what sort of evidence bears on the correctness of their beliefs and what sort of evidence would indicate that a belief should be modified or abandoned? [Emphasis in original].

These questions are important to understand what it means to be open-minded. To be open-minded is to admit that you might be wrong. Your ability to answer the above questions is one way to know if you have an open mind.

Citing John Stuart Mill and Karl Popper, Kuhn writes that supporting evidence is not all that is required for a theory or idea to be correct. One must recognize the possibility that the theory or idea might be wrong; then one ought to seek out evidence that might disprove or approve the theory or idea. Or in the more poetic language of Oliver Cromwell, who wrote to the general assembly of the Church of Scotland in August of 1650, "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

From reading Kuhn, one finds that other questions may make you aware of your open-mindedness or lack thereof: How long have you thought that? or how long have you held that belief? If you take the time to ask that question and resist the temptation to say: Have I always thought that or held that opinion, you open an opportunity to reconstruct your thought process and to change your mind.

The "how-long" question implies place and time. Therefore, the question allows two types of opportunities to think about one's beliefs:

(1) Questions of origins and

(2) Questions of context.

It may be helpful to start with context. What was the setting in which these ideas came to be held by me? Where did those ideas originate in my experience or reading or both? Moving to origins I might ask: Do my ideas have a beginning point? Is this a specific or fuzzy beginning point? These questions may give one pause to think.[36]

A reading self, I argue, is built on our answer to two questions: What do I value? And what is useful? Kuhn, in *Education for Thinking*, argues that an educated person values inquiry and argument and they are also the skills needed to survive and flourish in school and more importantly in the world.[34] My point here is to illustrate a couple of ways a Reader engages with books and ideas, and how those encounters shape the Self as actor, agent, and author. If I am a reflexive 'beings' I have at least some degree of freedom over my lives.

Don McAdams: the reader as storytelling

Following Dan McAdams's 'The Psychological Self as Actor, Agent, and Author,' this essay will examine how a Self of a reader may be understood in this three-part reflexive arrangement of the subjective "I" and the constructed "Me". Building on the work of William James, Charles Taylor and Rom Harré, McAdams articulates the features of the Self as:

(1) The Self's content,

(2) The mechanisms of the Self,

(3) Self''s temporal emphasis,

(4) The psychosocial problem of the Self,

(5) The developmental emergence of Self, and

(6) The examination of the cultural contributions to Self.[6]

Within this context, I will explore my conception of the reading self. As this essay moves forward, I will use McAdams's scaffolding to explore a reading self that is intended to be consistent with his theory. Special attention will be paid to his tripod frame of Actor, Agent, and Author. McAdams writes that Self holds at least three distinct kinds of psychological content. Each kind specifies what the "I" can see and know as it reflexively engages with the "Me."

His tripod framework for studying human personality is based on his earlier works.[37] "The theory contends that human Selves understand themselves from three different psychological standpoints: as actors, agents, and authors. Each of these three stages emerge at different underlying points in ontology and follow their own developmental trajectory over the life cycle course".[6,10,14,31,37,38]

An examination of a reading-self

Dan McAdams divides the psychological stages Self into three stages: Actor, Agent, and Author. Each stage presents a level of a developing Self. The actor age is early childhood, roughly from ages 2 or 3 to 6. The next stage is the Agent – ages 7- 14. The third stage is 15 through emerging adulthood. I have in the next sections of this essay written about the stages in terms of reading selves from a personal perspective.

Actor

The Reading-Self as Actor is the first stage in McAdams's tripod framework. As a reading-actor, I played the usual roles and followed the norms of classroom readers. The first level is Self as an actor. While children are, at this level, beginning readers and therefore at the early stage of having a Reading-Self, this stage is most concerned with social roles, skill development, and social reputation. As reading actors, in other words, they are most concerned with performing social norms, displaying rules, and following behavioral constraints of the classroom.[6,10,14,31,37,38]

In Kindergarten, I remember taking the *Dick and Jane Reader* home and reading the book from cover to cover. The *Dick and Jane Reader* was less than ten pages with big pictures and large print letters. While being an early reader felt like an accomplishment, reading aloud was another story. I could de-code words well, but when reading aloud, I often substituted similar meaning word for the words that I read in the book. This disconnect placed me with a group of low readers.

Agent

Following McAdams, I argue that the Reading-Self, the agent stage emerging at around ages 7 to 9, begins to take shape and lasts to about age 14. This is the stage where personal goals, plans, values, and hope and fear surface. McAdams extends that idea of an agent with the adjective "motivated".

By the time children are eight or nine years old, they are defining and evaluating themselves through experiences in the family, among peers, on the playground, and in school in terms of culturally valued goals and their progress, or lack thereof in accomplishing valued goals.

These stages of the motivated agent are never a lock-step process. Also, I argue that regarding the reading self, this stage is complicated by the availability of reading materials accessible to the elementary-aged person. We further argue that regarding the reading self, this stage is influenced by reading environment of the individual household: parents and siblings alike.

To set the stage for this Reading-Agent, there were two libraries near our home. Our parish Catholic elementary school was one. It was housed within the building. There was also a well-stocked branch library within walking distance of our home, but I took little advantage of either library. Most every day the elementary class was read to - usually a novel appropriate to our age level. Adventure stories, often a novel about a child and his, and sometimes her, dogs, were often the teacher's choice. Sometimes students would take turns reading. I was not often among them. I learned to like being read to but not to read to others or even myself. At home, I learned instead a lot from listening to the radio, mysteries like "The Shadow," "The Lone Ranger", and a children's show called "Big John and Sparky."

Of course, there were comic books, though I was not an avid reader of them. The family had about ten, what were called "Big Little Books[17]," which were small books with a page-size picture on one page and the facing page had a large-print text. Our home library contained about four or five incomplete sets of the Little Big Book series such as The Red Rider series. That series was a personal favorite. That three-shelf library had a small set of encyclopedias, and my dad's half dozen Zane Grey novels. The encyclopedias and our father's novels were in my awareness as valued objects to the family but not very much so for me as a reader.

Author

McAdams' next stage of self-development is the Author stage. It begins at about age 15 and continues to about 25 years old. As an author, I only began to think of myself as a reader in my early 20s. In high school, I read two assigned Shakespeare plays, some poems, and novels, also assigned. My memory is that I discussed these works of literature, but I did not involve myself in working to interpret or even understand them. Any interpretation of literature or non-fiction did not happen until college. I remember two literary works that changed my way of reading.

Becoming a reading self

Allow me to write a couple of "How I Became a Reading-Self" tales. The first occurred over about a year. Several years into college, I began reading assigned work that I had to understand but I remember still not being engaged in reading as a part of how I was as a person. Army Basic Training somehow got me interested in reading more seriously. Beginning with the fact that after the rigorous physical training, I was too exhausted to read, coupled with the lack of any reading material available during boot camp, there was little opportunity to read. That lack of opportunity got me interested in beginning the process of becoming a serious reader. During the on-the-job-training part of our National Guard training, a couple of us got a weekend pass and we went into Louisville, Kentucky. We bought a couple of books from a turn-style rack in a drugstore.

Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?

One of the books was the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia* Woolf by Edward Albee. I bought it because it was a small book. It was a quick read, but the meaning of the play was beyond my understanding. I asked my National Guard buddies to read the Albee play and tell me

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[17]*The Big Little Books*, first published in 1932 by Whetman Publishing company of Racine, WI, I re small, compact books designed with an illustration opposite each page of text (Wikipedia).

what they thought. Neither of the two guys had any thoughtful things that would help understand the play's meaning. However, all three of us thought that the play was important on some level. The puzzle of seeking meaning in the written word coupled with an awareness of potential value was the beginning of a turning point in my life as a reader. And, for this essay, I became aware of myself as an author, and a story of myself as a reader began to take the shape of a personal story. That conversation with my National Guard buddies was a beginning: a reading self was emerging.[39]

Back at the University, I learned that a traveling Broadway troupe was coming to town to do a production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. So, I read the play again. This time I had some sense of the play's meaning and power. Seeing it on stage, as the saying goes, blew me away. It also gave me a sense that I was able to understand and interpret works of literature, however imperfectly and ploddingly that ability was developed. I read the play again just before the Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* opened in a local movie theater. To my surprise, as my understanding of the play increased, I was able to venture our criticism of the movie version. The authoring-self began telling a story of a reader capable of interpreting literature; a story still told with a barely self-aware sense of myself as a reading-self.[39]

Reading literature and philosophy

The next tale of a reader happened during my non-semester at the university. As a child of the sixties, I spent a semester on and around the campus without being enrolled in any classes. I fortunately fell in with a couple of guys who liked to read literature and philosophy. One of the novels the three of us were reading at the time was *Zorba the Greek* by Nikos Kazantzakis. The Kazantzakis novel was a turning point in terms of self-awareness as a reading self and as a narrator of my reading self. Through late-night discussion and idle chit-chat, I began talking out my newfound ability to read and interpret literature. Engaging in discussion of Albert Camus' philosophy, novels and short stories enhanced my sense of a reading-self.

Teaching reading

Early in my teaching career, I began to recognize that one of the major tasks of teaching within one's discipline is to teach students how to read, not as a student but as a burgeoning professional within one's major area of study. Almost all college students are good decoders, but reading is more than decoding as I learned when accidently picking up a copy of *How To Read a Book*.[40] Adler and Van Doren showed me a new way to think about reading as a skill to be learned and taught.

How to read a book: As I began teaching, first high school students, undergraduate students, and then graduate students, I embarked on a more conscientious effort at articulating my story as a reader. The narrative Self as a reader was "jump started" by finding *How to Read a Book: A Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading*. This work opened my eyes to both reading and writing. One section of the book still stands out to me today. As I remember it now, the authors were discussing what was required to critique a book. The section begins with something like before one does anything else, make sure that one understands what the writer said. They went on to say: Do not criticize disputatiously. Next, make sure to criticize what the author wrote, not what one wishes he or she had written. They go on to write that an author, once you have understood her, can be criticized for being inaccurate, misinformed, or incomplete.[40]

The four design questions: The next step in my evolution as a reading-self came about in the process of tutoring individual and small groups of students how to approach texts that are difficult to read at the first

attempt. While exploring Harvard's Project Zero, I discovered David N. Perkins's *Knowledge as Design*.[41] In that work, Perkins argues that one should not think about knowledge as information. A better way, he says, is to think of knowledge as a design[18]. A design can be understood by asking four questions: What is the purpose? What is the structure? What is a model case? What is the argument?[41,42]

I tried out Perkins' four design questions on a text that was challenging to this reader. I was somewhat surprised that the design questions were of great help when attacking difficult text. This led to thoughts of application: If the design questions worked for me, could the design questions be useful to undergraduate students?

After assigning students to read silently a half-page paragraph from a book by an author unknown to the students, I asked them to summarize the paragraph. The students shared what they had written in small groups of three to four students. The results of the summaries were mostly inaccurate and inconsistent. As the instructor, I explained each of Perkins's questions within the context of *Knowledge as Design* with special attention to the 'What is the purpose' question. I then asked them, while still in their small group, to write the purpose of the author's paragraph. I then explained the four questions from perspective of Knowledge as Design as against knowledge as[1]. Back in their small groups, I asked them as a team to answer the four design questions using a single sentence as the answer to each question. A discussion followed. There was general agreement that the Perkins questions were helpful as a tool for understanding challenging pieces of writing.

The Perkins questions along with ideas from Stephen E. Toulmin's *The Use of Argument: Updated Edition*,[43] *How to Read a Book: The Intelligent Way to Read*,[40] and *The Skills of Argument*[36] ended with an instructor developed matrix which eventually worked its way into several classes and evaluation matrixes used in many of my classes. Thus, we, students and instructor, grew as reading-selves.

Michael Westerman argues that life is always in media res, that is, in the middle of things. Life, and reading, begins in the middle of things. I, as a person, am born into history. I gradually learn where I came from and must figure out where I am going. So too as readers.

The reading-self is thrown into the world of a discipline without a known beginning point. I am an historical creature so when I talk about reading, particularly reading philosophy or psychology, I always, start where I am (psychologically, chronologically, and developmentally) not where the overall content of the discipline is. Put more plainly, if one is interested in philosophical ideas, it seems more likely that one might begin with a contemporary philosopher such as Martha Nussbaum and *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* than with Plato and *The Republic*.[44,45]

A reading self as reading-thinker

Beginning in the middle of things applies to individual authors as well as disciplines. Let me illustrate with another example of beginning in media res and how where I begin influences how I read. Early in my university teaching career, one of the books that I used was a book by Sydney Jourard. This first-year course used *Healthy Personality: A Humanistic Perspective* as one of its main text for an introductory psychology class. The edition we were reading was the fourth edition because it was the edition used as the course developed over time. As the text was well-liked by students and other instructors, I was interested in having some sense of how Jourard started writing

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[18]For an application of the design questions see (Morehouse, Critical Thinking and The Culture of the School, 1997)

about his theories of personality. I went back to his first edition of the textbook which was called by the same name.[46]

Sidney Jourard,[46] in that first edition of that book, often used direct quotes from authors that he had drawn on, but in his later additions, Jourard had integrated these quotes so thoroughly into his thinking that while he cited many of the same quotes, he was doing his own thinking with the ideas from Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, for example. This was a fascinating discovery for me in that it was one of the early times that I realized that writers always think with other people's ideas which paradoxically are a way of thinking for one's Self. Allow me to go back to a related experience as a way of contextualizing 'thinking with other people's ideas' as thinking for one's Self.

I first became aware that people think with other people's ideas in a sociology class when I was an undergraduate. During this class, an older student asked the instructor a question, or more accurately challenged the instructor's train of thought, by citing Eric Fromm as a counterpoint to the point that the instructor was making. His question was presented in a non-contentious way and what I observed was that my fellow student was using the thinking of Eric Fromm, even a direct quotation for Fromm to 'think with'. The student was not plagiarizing, he was, instead, thinking with someone else's idea. Good thinkers often use other people's ideas to think with; to do that one must first digest, personalize, and contextualize the other's idea in order to make it one's own. This is a multi-step back-and-forth process always open to revision.

As Paul Ricoeur writes in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*,[47] "… it is always a question of entering into an alien world, of divesting oneself of that earlier 'me' in order to receive as in play, the self-conferred by the work itself. The process of thinking with other people's ideas means to be committed to getting the author's ideas correct and then recognizing the fallibility of one's interpretation of it. Ricoeur says regarding appropriation: "I should say that appropriation is the process by which the revelation of a new mode of being – or, if you prefer Wittgenstein to Heidegger, a new form of life – gives the subject and new capacity for knowing himself". He goes on to suggest that a reader's work is to broaden their capacity by projecting the self into the text by receiving a new mode of being from the text itself.[47]

Reading one's place into the world

One's place in the world is learned slowly over time. Identity is to find one's place within a community that one aspires to be a part of. This includes one's place within a profession or career as well as within a social group and family. But it also includes finding one's position in the larger world. For this reader a full awareness of the value of finding one's place in the world came from reading *Making Connections: The Relational World of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School*.[48] Carol Gilligan writes in the prologue to *Making Connections* that she came to the Emma Willard school, in Erik Erikson's terms, to study "the intersection between life and history which becomes acute during adolescence".

So how does it happen that a then middle aged college professor came to learn about one's place in the world at midlife? One sentence in Carol Gilligan's prologue to *Making Connections* stood out for me. "As the river of a girl's life flows into the sea of Western culture, she is in danger of drowning or disappearing". Gilligan is writing about privileged adolescent girls. For a middle class person growing up in a small Midwestern city, I had never thought of my life flowing into the sea of Western culture. I, by in large, thought of culture as separate

from my lived experience – but I should have been prepared for such a metaphor. I had read and been inspired by Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal of America*[49] and H. Stuart Hughe's *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Thought 1890-1930*,[50] as I read Michael Harrington's *The Accidental Century*,[51] but yet the words of Gilligan placed those long ago works in a new light.

And as mentioned earlier, Kazantzakis and Camus perhaps led me close to recognition of the flow of life to the sea of Western culture, but the phrasing of Gilligan's insight was a unique awareness. For some reason, until then I did not take the message of these works personally. To go back to Carol Gilligan sentence, I saw myself as a part of the sea of Western culture but not as a part of the river flowing into that Western cultural sea. Seeing one's Self as a part of the river of life and the sea of culture changed my awareness of our identity as a reader and a thinker. I became aware of being a very small part of this thing call Western culture.

Pulling it together

At the beginning of this essay, I hoped to show how understanding Self from a narrative, biographical perspective develops a Self within a meaning-making perspective. I then moved on to examine "Getting a Life: The Emergence of the Life Story in Adolescence".[23] I then went on to discuss the narrative Self.

A narrative self is a self-creating process. One uses stories to create meaning; in the process one creates a self. Arnold Ludvig's *How Do We Know Who We Are: A Biographical Self*[1] sets the stage for our discussion of Self as actor, agent and author. The three qualities, action, agency and self-authoring, allow Ludvig, Bruner, and McAdams to, each in their own way, aid the reader in understanding their perspective Self. Ludvig asks: how much control does one have over one's life?,[1] while Bruner queries: How does the life one constructs from a cultural history evolve within a meaning-making Self?[22] McAdams explores how, building on meaning-making premises, humans understand themselves from three different psychological standpoints: as actors, agents, and authors.[6]

I argue that acting, agency, and authoring are all built within the context of Imanuel Kant's understanding of free will. Man is free, Kant argues. Humans have original naive liberty, and "this liberty gives us the privilege of ourselves and makes us our own". As Isaiah Berlin, in *The Roots of Romanticism*, argues, "Man is man only because he chooses".[52] All other entities are under the law of causality. The human will, 'free will,' distinguishes human beings from all other parts of nature. "There is no merit in choosing what is right unless it is possible to choose what is wrong".[52]

In making a case for self-determination, Berlin argues that Kant also saw humans as developing with a specific culture. "Civilization is maturity, maturity is self-determination".[52] It is this nexus between culture, human maturity, and self-determination that I argue is central to the making of a Self, including a reading-self.

As Jaume Agusti-Cullell writes in 'Intelligence Understood as the Agent of Human Life,' we are primarily a cultural species and our intelligence develops together as we create the culture in which we live. In other words, although human intelligence develops through the creative interactions between nature and culture (body and mind), the growth of culture lies essentially in the hands of each one of us- in our lifelong physical and mental education, always in interdependence.[53]

It is this interaction between culture and nature that is the crucible of the development of Self.

The last part of the essay develops a concept of a reader-self using the author as an example. This section of the essay hopefully showed a gradual unfolding of levels and types of reading of this particular reader. It is my intention to encourage others to explore their reading history that they might find their own singular experience as a reading self. It is hoped that others may find this singular experience as a helpful way for the reader to reflect on their own experiences.

This essay ends with a quote from Jerome Bruner's, 'Life as Narrative' which provides a bit of a caution regarding the truthfulness of the stories one tells one selves.[22]

Our precommitment about the nature of life is that it is a story, some narratives however incoherently put together. Perhaps I can say one other thing: any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told. That must surely be true of the life stories I tell as of any others. In that case, I have come full round to the ancient homily that the only life worth living is a well examined one.[22]

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest relevant to this manuscript.

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