

Narrating the Self in the Past and the Future: Implications for Maturity

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In this article, we review research on narrative possible selves as correlates and predictors of well-being and ego development in individuals who have experienced important life transitions. This research has shown that positive well-being is best predicted by investment in current life goals and a divestment of interest in “lost goals.” In contrast, ego development is correlated with the capacity to elaborate on one’s lost possible selves. In addition, this capacity to elaborate on lost goals predicts enhanced development over time. Based on our findings, we propose a general model of goal processes in personality development, suggesting that the outcome of maturity is best captured by a convergence of happiness and ego development.

In psychology, motivation has often been portrayed as that aspect of human life that lends coherence to our behavior (e.g., McClelland, 1985; Murray, 1938). Events gain meaning because of their relevance to the ends we seek (e.g., Cantor, Norem, Langston, & Zirkel, 1991). Our research begins with the necessity of motivation as the core of experience. Although often motivation has been portrayed as largely unknowable, particularly to the person himself or herself, we have relied on subjective accounts of motivation or goals in our research. Conscious intents have been shown to function as motivational units in a variety of contexts (e.g., Little, 1999), suggesting that the goals people seek provide a psychic hub in their lives—lending a sense of purpose to what people do. Goals are inherently contextualized. They attach people to the events of the day and are situated in the circumstances that make up the psychological context of their lives. Truly embracing life’s second chances requires that these goals remain flexible—that these aspects of the person remain sensitive to changing contingencies in the environment. Yet, cherished goals may be the very aspects of

people's lives that are particularly difficult to surrender when circumstances change because of their central place in the experience of life as coherent and meaningful.

In our work, we (e.g., King & Raspin, 2004; King & Smith, 2004) have explored the role of narrated "possible selves" in well-being and personality development. We argue that such goals represent a fertile ground for understanding the role of motivational processes through life transitions. When we ask individuals to provide narrative descriptions of their goals, we are asking them to describe and illuminate the phenomenological experience of motivation in their lives. When human beings consider their lost or forsaken goals, they are thinking back on their previous sources of meaning—those things that made their life make sense at one time. Relying on these self-generated narrative accounts of motivation, one can examine the role of goals in the process of identity change—how individuals perceive their goals changing over time and how the capacity to invest in and revise a life dream relates to important life outcomes. Such goal narratives allow for an examination of the implications of how individuals take stock of their "first chances" and reconstruct their life goals with an eye toward the second chances offered by life experience.

HAPPINESS, PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT, AND MATURITY

It may be valuable, before describing research examining the relations of the possible self variables to well-being and personality development, to consider the potentially multifaceted nature of positive functioning. Often, when psychologists discuss positive human functioning, we are talking about how generally happy a person is. It hardly seems necessary to argue for the importance of psychological well-being to any notion of optimal functioning. People want to be happy (Baumeister, 1987; King & Broyles, 1997; King & Napa, 1998; Schwartz & Bilskey, 1987). Furthermore, it may be that happiness is not only a consequence of positive life outcomes but a predictor of these outcomes as well (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, in press). However, such an emphasis has drawn criticism, suggesting that it has limited psychology's appreciation and understanding of the multiple facets of the good life (King, 2001; King, Eells, & Burton, 2004; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998). From a goals perspective, it is important to keep in mind that happiness is only one value among many that humans may seek in their lives. Within the larger framework of motivation, happiness may be sacrificed in the pursuit of other ends. Motives toward self-understanding, personal growth, generativity, and so forth may take precedence over the pursuit of happiness. Furthermore, coping with life-changing experiences may lead to important outcomes that are independent of happiness itself.

One variable that appears to be independent of positive emotional experience is ego development (ED; cf. Noam, 1998; Vaillant & McCullough, 1987). ED refers to the level of complexity with which the person is able to experience himself or herself and the world (e.g., Hy & Loevinger, 1996; Loevinger, 1976; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). According to Loevinger's (1976, 1998) theory, at the earliest stages of ED, people are dominated by impulses, lack insight, and engage in simplistic thinking. With ED comes an increasingly complex experience of themselves and the world. People come to control and channel impulses. They recognize that life's big questions may have a variety of valid answers. As people develop, they increasingly recognize conflict in the world and in themselves. Individuals become occupied with issues of identity and mutuality. The more developed individual is capable of experiencing a degree of ambivalence that escapes the less developed person. High levels of ED involve a more complex but also more expansive view of the self and world. Not surprisingly, then, Westen (1998) referred to ED as the development of character.

Loevinger (1976) conceived of the ego as a buffer between the person and the world, a buffer that is changed via life experience. This perspective is particularly appropriate to the study of goal change and personality development. Goals represent individuals' hopes for the future—what they expect to happen. In Loevinger's (1976) view, growth may only occur when the environment fails to conform to the person's expectations. Loevinger (1976) referred to "pacers" as complex interpersonal situations that might pull an individual to a higher level of ego functioning.

In considering the relationship between ED and experience, we suggest that a lens may be an appropriate metaphor. The relatively less developed ED sees the world "through a glass, darkly"—in simple ways, missing the nuances that a sharper focus might provide. Experiences confront the person, perhaps beveling the lens in particular ways, allowing aspects of reality to come into sharper focus. When people are faced with significant life events, they have the opportunity to develop the complexity of their perspectives and ultimately themselves. Research on important life changes has supported the notion that the ego may well develop through such experience (Bursik, 1991; Helson, 1992; Helson & Roberts, 1994; Helson & Wink, 1987; King & Smith, 2004).

Block (1982) borrowed the Piagetian concepts of assimilation and accommodation to describe the process of personality development. In assimilation, the individual avoids any meaningful change of orientation and manages to interpret and incorporate a new experience into his or her existing framework. Alternatively, when faced with extraordinary circumstances, the person may "construct or invent new schemes that are equilibrating" (Block, 1982, p. 291). In the process of accommodation, frameworks are revised and rewritten. Accommodation cannot occur if a person is not invested in his or her frameworks for understanding life. Thus, development requires that the individual is committed in some real

sense to his or her first chances, to goals that are ultimately forsaken due to changing circumstances. Note also the potentially active role of the person in his or her own development here. The ego is not simply a passive recipient of experience but also the active creator and interpreter of that experience. True change can be avoided if all new experience is effectively relegated to “old news.” Furthermore, the person’s ego can grow by seeking out challenging experience and actively and deliberately processing those experiences (Singer, King, Green, & Barr, 2002). Thus, a person can come to a psychological understanding of the examined life as one in which the person can engage in his or her own development by actively confronting loss and reconstructing a life worth pursuing.

As previously mentioned, historically, research has shown no consistent relation between ED and measures of mental functioning. This empirical fact may be viewed as a failure of ED to capture the true sense of maturity (Noam, 1998). In our view, maturity is best understood as multifaceted—as combining the complexity that Loewinger (1998) described with a sense of positive well-being and perhaps other important characteristics such as wisdom, generativity, and so forth. By examining both measures of happiness and measures of ED, we hope to present a portrait of maturity that includes at least two of these important facets. We treat these two variables as relatively equal in importance. A complex life of misery is certainly possible but not likely to be generally desirable. An individual who is overwhelmed by the conflict and ambivalence afforded by development clearly falls short of some important aspects of maturity (e.g., contentment, self-acceptance). Similarly, an undifferentiated self in an undifferentiated world, even in the context of happiness, is likely to lack important capacities requisite for maturity such as compassion, tolerance, and insight.

POSSIBLE SELVES IN WELL-BEING AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

In research of possible selves by King and colleagues (King & Raspin, 2004) participants are asked to generate written narrative descriptions of their current best possible self (BPS) and an unattainable BPS that they may have once cherished, but that is no longer possible, what we refer to as a lost possible self (LPS). Possible selves are representations of goals and serve as cognitive resources that motivate the self throughout adult development (Cross & Markus, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Narrative methodology is ideal for this research because it allows one to gather a richer portrait of the individual’s life goals than would be afforded by questionnaire measures of these constructs (Whitty, 2002). Typically, the instructions used to generate possible selves are the following (e.g., King & Raspin, 2004):

We would like you to consider the life you imagine for yourself currently, and in the future. What sorts of things do you hope for and dream about? Imagine that your life has gone as well as it possibly could have. You have worked hard and achieved your goals. Think of this as your “best possible life” or your “happily ever after.”

In addition to writing about their current BPS, participants write about goals that are no longer a part of their lives. This LPS represents a part of the individual’s life story that previously provided the individual with a source of meaning and coherence in his or her life. The instructions for the LPS are variations on the following:

We would like you to consider your future as you imagined it *before (the life changing event)*. Try to remember how you imagined your future to be. What sorts of things did you hope for and dream about for your life? Think of this as your “best possible life” or your happily ever after, if you *had not experienced (the event)*.

Using these narratives, research has examined two aspects of possible selves—salience and elaboration. *Salience* refers to the extent to which individuals think about the possible self and the ease with which it can be recalled in memory. A salient possible self is one that is frequently activated in the working self-concept. This possible self may be chronically available to the person—a relatively constant source of motivation. Typically, salience can be measured using self-report by simply asking individuals to rate how much they currently think about that possible self, how easy it is for them to imagine, and so forth (e.g., King & Smith, 2004).

Elaboration, on the other hand, refers to the detail, vividness, and emotional depth of the possible self. Here, we focus on the richness of the narrative the person has generated. Elaborate narratives suggest the individual has a complex and intricate understanding of his or her life story. In studies (e.g., King & Smith, 2004), elaboration has been reliably content analyzed by independent raters coding these protocols on dimensions such as elaboration, vividness, emotionality, and detail.

Although possible self-narratives can be both salient and elaborate, they need not be both (or neither). An individual may often think about a possible self but not have a detailed, rich understanding of these particular future goals. For example, premed majors might often think about becoming doctors without having a rich understanding about what their lives would be like if they achieved their goals. Conversely, an individual may be able to generate a rich, detailed description of a possible self but not often think about that possible self much in everyday life. For instance, a person may have once thought deeply about pursuing a career in medicine and developed a vivid idea of what that life might be like. After com-

ing to the conclusion that such a life path is not necessarily a preferred life, however, the person may not often think about the once important goal.

To examine the role of possible selves in well-being and personality development, King and colleagues recruited samples of individuals who had undergone important, sometimes extraordinary, identity-challenging experiences. Presently, these studies include samples comprised of parents of children with Down Syndrome (DS; King & Patterson, 2000; King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000), women who experienced divorce after more than 20 years of marriage (King & Raspin, 2004), and gay men and lesbians (King & Smith, 2004). Many people in these samples have had to endure the difficult process of disengaging from a set of important, desirable goals. Although quite unique in many ways, these samples share a common theme: they have all experienced a life change that impinges on identity, that has implications for the future, and as such requires a consideration or reconsideration of the next chapter of their lives. Using these exceptional samples, we have been able to direct the types of possible selves participants write about using a particular life transition as a focal point.

The inclusion of gay men and lesbians perhaps warrants some discussion. In this sample, participants were asked to write about their best possible "straight" selves (along with their best possible gay selves). Best possible straight selves are not necessarily lost goals *per se*. It is possible that many gay men and lesbians had once thought of themselves as straight, subsequently constructing a future life narrative in which they were straight (this would be assumed by most theories of gay identity development, for instance, Cass, 1979). Moreover, even among gay men and lesbians who never thought of themselves as being straight, identity (and goals) likely developed in a context in which important aspects of the self stood opposed to essential assumptions of the dominant culture. Thus, even gay men and lesbians who never considered themselves straight are likely to be well aware of the opportunities they might have pursued or the benefits they might have enjoyed if they were straight.

These tasks may seem to assume a great deal of insight on the part of our participants. We do not maintain that these narratives are necessarily completely accurate descriptions of previous (or even current) motivational concerns. Rather, we can think of these narrative accounts of motivation as reflections of life experience as viewed through the lens of the survivor of that experience. What the person tells us is at least partly a function of "what really happened" and partly a function of the person's capacities to perceive, encode, recall, imagine, and narrate that experience. For this reason, these narratives are thought to bear the markings of important psychological characteristics. Clearly, the person's current levels of well-being and development may play a role at each stage of the translation of experience into narrative. As we discuss following, the capacity to imagine or reimagine one's forsaken goals may reveal important aspects of one's current and future personality development.

As previously described, research to date has examined how salience and elaboration of narrated selves are related to well-being and personality development. Psychological well-being has been measured using questionnaires that gauge an overall sense of how happy a person feels generally with his or her current life circumstances. The use of self-report to measure well-being is certainly the established method in the research literature.

To measure personality development, participants completed the Sentence Completion Task (SCT; Hy & Loevinger, 1996), a measure of ED. On the SCT, participants respond to a variety of stems, and these responses are content analyzed according to published guidelines. Research supports the notion that this test measures sequential stages of personality development (e.g., Redmore & Loevinger, 1979) and that it can be used to track development in response to life events (e.g., Bursik, 1991). Most studies (King & Raspin, 2004) have included follow-up measures in order to track changes in well-being and ED over time. The data analytic strategy employed begins by examining cross-sectional relations among the variables in terms of bivariate and multivariate relations. Prospective hierarchical regression equations are then conducted, regressing the two indicators of maturity (well-being and ED) at follow-up on their values at the first wave of data collection along with the possible self narrative variables of salience and elaboration (King & Raspin, 2004; King & Smith, 2004).

Happiness and Goal Change: Letting Go and Investing in the Present

Generally speaking, pursuing and progressing on important goals is associated with enhanced psychological well-being (e.g., Little, 1999). Thus, not surprisingly, results with regard to the salience of possible selves have shown a strong relationship between the salience of current possible selves and subjective well-being. For example, salience of current BPS was concurrently related to subjective well-being for the parents of children with DS (King & Patterson, 2000), divorced women (King & Raspin, 2004), and gay men and lesbians (King & Smith, 2004). These results have suggested that investing in one's current goals is a strong correlate of happiness. Interestingly, in the gay and lesbian sample, the salience of the BPS (i.e., the gay BPS) was also correlated with being "out" such that more out individuals tended to have more salient identity-consistent goals.

Previous research has shown that goal failure or the loss of incentives is related to distress and depressive affect (e.g., Klinger, 1975, 1977). Indeed, the role of goals in positive well-being implies that when goals don't go well, the person is likely to suffer (see King & Burton, 2003, for a review). Thus, again, it is not surprising, that in samples of adults who have experienced life change, in general, the salience of the LPS (i.e., the goals one is not currently pursuing) has been associated with lowered well-being, heightened distress, and increased regret. For both

the divorced women and the gay men and lesbians, results (King & Raspin, 2004; King & Smith, 2004) showed that salience of LPS was negatively related to well-being. In addition, gay individuals with very salient straight possible selves were more likely to be “in the closet.” In sum, thinking about goals that are no longer attainable is related to psychological distress. Few, if any, prospective relations have been identified predicting well-being from possible self-variables. Rather, one’s current mental life, the working self-concept, appears to be more strongly related to one’s overall feelings of happiness. The sole exception was in the gay and lesbian sample (King & Smith, 2004) in which the salience of the gay BPS was associated with decreasing levels of distress over time.

Overall, results have indicated that happiness is best predicted by investment in current goals and the capacity to relinquish goals that are not available. To be happy and avoid regret, it is best to relegate lost goals to “what might have been” and move on. The person cannot persevere on old goals and maintain happiness. Rather, the pursuit of happiness requires a central change in one’s motivational system—relinquishing one’s previous sources of meaning and embracing life’s second chances.

Ego Development and Goal Change: What Doesn’t Kill Me Makes Me More Interesting

From a narrative perspective, the ego can be considered the creator of the “Me” (McAdams, 1998). Thus, the ego might be viewed as the generator of possible selves. From this perspective, higher levels of ED would be expected to relate to more elaborate possible self-narratives, demonstrating the capacity of the relatively developed ego to generate a rich motivational landscape toward which to strive. Thus far, research has provided inconsistent results with regard to this possibility. Among divorced women, current BPS elaboration was related to enhanced ED (King & Raspin, 2004), but this result is not typical. It may be that producing a rich description of one’s current life dream is not particularly diagnostic of ED (although cf. McAdams, Ruetzel, & Foley, 1986). Instead, it has been found that the elaboration of lost goals, goals one has forsaken or cannot pursue, is consistently related to higher levels of ED. It may be that this task, requiring the individual to acknowledge incoherent aspects of the self—those things the pursuit of happiness dictates one might be better off forgetting—is particularly likely to reveal the individual’s ED level.

Although happiness may require that individuals truly divest themselves of previously sought after goals, ED may require an examination of these very goals. Consistent with this notion, among divorced women, LPS elaboration related to current ED in interaction with time since divorce (King & Raspin, 2004). Time is an important variable in this regard. For women who had only recently divorced, a highly elaborate LPS might simply demonstrate good memory for recently lost goals. Importantly, then, LPS elaboration was related to higher levels of concurrent

ED only in interaction with time. Among these women, ED related specifically to narrating a long-lost aspect of the self with rich, vivid detail. In addition, gay men and lesbians who described an elaborate straight possible self scored higher in ED than others (King & Smith, 2004). In a related vein, parents of children with DS who were able to elaborate on their LPS were more likely to report growing as a result of the experience of having a child with DS (King & Patterson, 2000). Thus, elaborating on goals that may once have held the promise of positive affect is a correlate of ED and personal growth concurrently. The more mature ego is apparently not threatened by the contradictory aspects of the self that are made salient when one is writing about an LPS. To place these results explicitly in the context of second chances, we might say that although investment in one's second chances is a key to happiness, the capacity to acknowledge life's previous chances, those one has lost or forsaken, appears to be the hallmark of the developed ego.

In addition to looking at these samples cross-sectionally, research has examined how the capacity of the ego to elaborate on lost goals not only relates concurrently to ED but predicts increased development over time. Lost self-elaboration predicted enhanced ED among divorced women (King & Raspin, 2004), in interaction with time prospectively, over 2 years. Similarly, gay men and lesbians who elaborated on a straight possible self also demonstrated increased ED 2 years later even after controlling for such potential confounds as gay self-elaboration, age, age of commitment to gay identity, and income (King & Smith, 2004). These results have suggested that being able to elaborate on lost goals not only reveals a capacity of the developed ego but also may also reveal processes that lead to enhanced ED over time. Elaborating on one's lost goals suggests a tolerance for one's own vulnerability, an acknowledgment of change, and a lack of defensiveness in the face of one's inconsistencies. These qualities may be viewed as characteristics of the developed and developing person.

Some examples of elaborate lost possible selves help to provide a flavor of the mature person's construction of previously cherished goals. The following excerpt from a divorced woman (King & Raspin, 2004) illustrates the capacity to fully acknowledge the promise of positive affect that characterized one's previously cherished life dream:

I imagined a deliriously happy "empty nest" syndrome. Neither of us likes to travel, but sports are a big priority. I figured we would exercise, go to see the Rangers/Mavericks/Cowboys, etc., together. I envisioned weddings with lots of family pictures. There would be grandchildren to baby-sit. Life would be calm, easy and sweet. (from King & Raspin, 2004, p. 616)

Similarly, the following excerpt from a lesbian in King and Smith (2004) demonstrates the developed person's capacity to (enthusiastically) acknowledge the value in goals one is not pursuing:

Here I am a happy . . . straight woman: I've lived independently for about five years after college, traveled my country and the greater part of Europe. During these years I have scraped to get by but that is okay with me. I feel complete and whole as a strong independent woman. Nothing could be better until . . . I meet HIM. He is worldly, strong intelligent, and equipped with the best sense of humor of anyone I've met. Of course he is also extremely good looking and loaded but not pretentious. We fall madly in love and live our lives as rich gypsies, traveling the world until we find the perfect place to call home and start a family. . . . Our kids grow up in a nurturing non-judgmental environment. (from a dataset described in King & Smith, 2004)

Here one can see the capacity of the developed ego to see valuable lives in a variety of life contexts and to see one's values legitimately attainable in a very different life.

Finally, the following excerpt from a mother of a child with DS (King & Patterson, 2000) demonstrates the capacity of the more developed ego to take a long, unflinching look back at the full details of one's lost goals:

Before I had my son, we were considering taking a job in California. I had visions of my blonde-haired son playing on the beach, being a movie star, or model. I also had planned on going back to work after a couple of months and continuing on with my career. I thought my son would ride his bike around the neighborhood with all his friends, play football, baseball, and all the other "boy" sports with the neighborhood children, effortlessly. I thought the developmental milestones would be attained, effortlessly. (from a dataset described in King & Patterson, 2000)

The preceding excerpt demonstrates the discovery process that may occur when a person's first chances meet reality. One can imagine that it is only through the retrospective lens of experience that this woman is able to see explicitly the "effortlessness" that she expected in her previous life. This quality may have remained implicit except for her life experience.

These narratives of lost selves demonstrate the importance of considering the complex trade-offs of being happy and growing—the compromise that is likely to be required for true maturity. These data allow for a portrait of the healthy, sometimes happy, mature person as one who can sacrifice happiness to fully confront and examine the legitimate losses of life.

Goal Processes in Life-Changing Experience: A General Model of Personality Development

The model of personality development that we propose here involves two processes. First, to maintain a sense of positive well-being, the individual must relin-

quish cherished goals that are no longer available and reinvest in new goals commensurate with what has been lost or forsaken. A second process involves the place of those forsaken goals in the individuals' enduring self-story. Here, the capacity to acknowledge a previous self in its fullness is associated with heightened development and increasing development over time. Previous research has focused on individuals whose life experience was known, a priori, to have included a life-changing event. More garden variety goal change occurs in every life. Transitions to parenthood and marriage, career changes, significant losses, and so forth all may involve similar processes to those described here. We believe that the research described here may contribute to a more general model of the role of goals in adult development—that motivational concerns provide a general framework for one's understanding of developmental change in adulthood.

First, we begin with a consideration of motivation—a person's goals. Progress on these goals provides a sense of well-being. Changing circumstances requires a change in goals. Note that life circumstances themselves have impact to the extent that they are relevant to one's valued ends (e.g., Cantor et al., 1991). Furthermore, goal-relevant events themselves may serve to heighten a person's awareness of his or her values: People may "not know what they've got 'til it's gone" or at least threatened. When valued goals are lost because of changing life circumstances, the distress that is likely to ensue is well-documented (e.g., Kuhl & Helle, 1986). Negative emotional experience has been shown to have specific effects on cognitive processing such that negative affect is associated with narrowing of focus, analytical processing, and self-focus (e.g., Salovey, 1992; Schwarz, 1990; Wood, Saltzberg, & Goldsamt, 1990). These cognitive effects suggest that this time of distress may also be a time of intense self-examination. Surely, negative affect may promote rumination, and there is a danger during this time that the person will fall prey to a downward spiral of rumination and self-focus (e.g., Lyubomirsky & Nolen-Hoeksma, 1993).

Truly relinquishing a lost identity and its concomitant goals may require that the person acknowledge the potentially threatening truth that he or she has been changed in some central way by the circumstances of life. The individual must stop waiting "to go back to normal" and instead invest deeply in a new, foreign life. An appropriate metaphor here might be that of acculturation—to thrive in this new life, the person must adopt a new system of meaning and acknowledge new values while maintaining the capacity to see the value of one's old ways of being. Our examination of the role of goals in self-change and development suggests, ironically, that the very level of investment that might contribute to the "disequilibration" resulting from goal loss also makes it more likely the individual will grow through such experience. Importantly, distress over lost goals provides evidence of prior goal engagement—without previous investment, the person wouldn't feel the loss so keenly. This history of goal investment may indi-

cate an enduring capacity for planfulness, hope, and a lack of cynicism. Goal loss may be viewed as a focal aspect of the crisis of life change. At this point, the person can step into a new way of living (accommodation) or step back into the comfort zone (assimilation).

That comfort zone is likely to be a tempting alternative to change. Research on goal change has tended to show that when individuals are confronted with failure, they tend not to change their goals but rather to redouble their efforts (e.g., Emmons, Colby, & Kaiser, 1998). However, our research (King, Baker, & Burton, 2004) has shown that perseverating on unavailable goals is not likely to bring fulfillment. Rather, one must acknowledge (even tacitly) that one has been changed by life events and shift one's incentives and sources of pleasure accordingly (King, Baker, & Burton, 2004). Rather than viewing personal growth through life experience as a means of "coping" or as a positive illusion used to fend off the negative feelings promoted by life-changing events (Taylor & Armor, 1996), a person might begin to see such change as part of the hard work of accommodation and as part of constructing a self that can experience meaning, happiness, and fulfillment in one's present circumstances. The difficulty associated with this admission of vulnerability is revealed in this quote from a parent of a child with DS (King & Patterson, 2000): "Parenting a child with DS has not changed my life, at all (except in very *very* small ways)."

We suggest that the process of confronting one's losses during a challenging time may serve as a pacer in Loevinger's (1976) sense. Responding to this challenging life circumstance with openness to new and different life directions may be the hallmark of developmental change. The capacity to acknowledge one's past values, desires, and life dreams involves an admission of the bittersweet truths of adulthood.

Some factors may facilitate personality development via goal change. First, clearly, research has indicated that "the rich are likely to get richer" when it comes to ED (e.g., King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000). Individuals who are relatively more developed may be those who are most likely to continue to develop through life transitions. It may be that ED transforms the experience of distress itself, causing the person to view life change in more varied, differentiated, and potentially expansive ways.

Another potential contributor to the capacity to develop through life-changing experiences is the frequency of positive emotional experience even during difficult times. Research on coping has begun to recognize that positive emotional experiences may have a role to play even during very stressful times (e.g., Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). The tendency for positive affect to relate to taking an approach orientation toward life, to be more open to exploring and pursuing new goals (e.g., Carver, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), is well documented. In addition, the cognitive effects of positive emotional experience (e.g., Clore, 1994; Isen, 2003) suggest that even during turbulent times, positive affect may facilitate

the making of meaning, the capacity to see “the big picture” and allow the person an awareness of a broad array of opportunities (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, in press).

Evidence from another investigation (King & Smith, 2004) leads us to surmise that personality development might also be more likely to occur through life transitions if the person is able to experience the life change within a warm interpersonal context. A study (King & Smith, 2004) that examined the coming-out stories of the gay men and lesbians from prior research, King and Smith found that those whose coming-out stories were characterized by high levels of intimacy motive imagery were higher in both well-being and ED.

Of course, it is possible for someone to emerge from this process disillusioned—sadder but wiser. The experience of goal loss might, in fact, lead to a desire to remain unencumbered by caring. We suggest that although this is possible, it is not the optimal outcome of such a process. It may be that dedication to commitments is an important aspect of maturity itself. Indeed, we suggest that the capacity to commit to goals, within the context of having experienced goal loss, may be the best expression of maturity. One may be made well aware of the folly of planning or the potentially disastrous consequences of hoping by life’s disappointments and calamities. The mature person is one who maintains the central notion that life does matter and that there is meaning in one’s attachment to the events of the world.

These rather lofty sentiments are made more concrete in the narratives of the current BPS provided by the happy and ego-developed participants studied to date. As noted previously, happiness and ED are unrelated to each other. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility that individuals can be both happy and ego developed. Indeed, the person who experiences the complexity of Loevinger’s (1998) developed ego without being overwhelmed, who nevertheless maintains a capacity for positive feelings toward the self and others, may embody the ideal of maturity. From the work reviewed here, we conclude that the happy and ego-developed individual is one who is confident in his or her coherence and has the capacity to acknowledge and expound on inconsistencies or incoherent aspects of the self. The following excerpt is from a happy and ego-developed mother of a child with DS (King & Patterson, 2000):

I see myself on an exciting journey. I like who I am. I have many areas that need work but for the most part I’m present and attentive to my needs and dreams and goals. . . . I am finding that giving is truly more satisfying than receiving. I have had a challenge in accepting my son’s DS. It’s taken time but unconditional love and acceptance are truly there. . . . I want to work within the community to be an agent of change. We all have a time of being a caregiver—to our children or parents, or someone. I want to offer . . . tools for people to find their own balance and peace. . . . I am quite selfish by nature: My son has

opened that perspective—a new window for loving and caring now exists for me. I'm proud that I have taken responsibility for my own growth and challenges.

This mature participant demonstrates a level of self-knowledge but also self-deprecation that is typical among mature individuals. Note that the capacity to admit one's mistaken expectations sits alongside an energetic commitment to continue to expect. Within the mature person's motivational life, second chances exist within a larger, explicit context of lost or forsaken opportunities.

Goal Loss Versus Goal Change: Life Experiences and Changing Priorities

We may also apply this work to individuals who have experienced life changes that do not preclude the pursuit of previously cherished goals but that serve as catalysts for goal change. Indeed, a lifetime may be experienced as a process of discovering "true" goals. Life experiences may catch people as "wake-up calls" to reprioritize and rethink their values. A heart attack may lead to a reprioritization of the importance of work-related goals. Although these goals may still be attainable, their value may become lessened, whereas other goals (e.g., reconnecting with family members) may become more important. These revisions in one's best possible future may be less painful than those reviewed here, but they may impinge on identity in important ways nevertheless.

Second Chances: The Motivational Layers of Maturity

A motivationally informed discussion of personality development, then, suggests that the goals a person seeks may be viewed as existing on layers (and layers) of previously cherished hopes and dreams. The metaphorical archeological dig through the ruins of one's previous goals is a sign and portent of personality development. From our perspective, to understand people standing at the threshold of a new life, we must take into account what they have left behind—those first chances that serve as reminders of who they might have been, who they thought they were, and that lay the groundwork for who they are hoping to become. Even forsaken goals serve as markers of values and beliefs about the self and world. The mature person reveals the capacity to recognize and even celebrate those relics of an earlier self—a more naïve self, to be sure, but one who might nevertheless be lauded for her or his optimism, enthusiasm, and innocence.

Importantly, motivation may play a role in development even beyond giving one a tool through which to gauge such self-examination. Although we have examined ED and happiness as two aspects of maturity, individuals may vary in the

degree to which they personally value these outcomes. It may be that a person's idiosyncratic view of maturity may inform the direction of development itself. Thus, if an individual views peace of mind or contentment as the end result of development, the potentially painful introspection required for ED may be viewed as a pointless exercise. If, however, the person views maturity as characterized by wisdom, self-understanding, or compassion, then the goals that inform development may lead to greater levels of ED. A full understanding of the role of second chances in human life requires an acknowledgment of the range of motives for taking those chances.

CONCLUSIONS

Because of their central role in the experience of meaning, goals are the domain where central aspects of self-change are played out. Lost and found possible selves provide important indicators of two aspects of maturity—happiness and complexity. Clearly, much remains to be done in terms of clarifying and further delineating the role of motivational units in adulthood, life change, and development. We have suggested that motivational variables provide a useful framework for studying life transitions. Focusing on these units allows for a rich understanding of the developmental implications of our answers to the questions, “Who was I?,” “Who am I?,” and “Who do I want to be?” We propose that the mature person is able to look on his or her multiple possible selves with characteristic fearlessness, to acknowledge life's second (and third, and fourth . . .) chances as part of the unfolding of a rich and valuable human life.

Do I contradict myself?
 Very well then I contradict myself,
 (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
 Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

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