A good life story: Deconstructing (and integrating) elements of narrative identity and a good life, featuring themes of humanistic growth[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We draw on a new framework of value to show how deconstructed elements of narrative identity (and hybrids of them) convey core elements of broad goods in life. An interview-based study of 95 adults suggests the following. Narrative *tones* of *affectively positive outcomes* uniquely convey *hedonic satisfaction*. Narrative *themes* of humanistic, *experiential-growth motives* (regardless of positive or negative outcomes, but also in hybrid with positive outcomes, i.e., growth fulfilled) uniquely convey *eudaimonic meaningfulness*. Narrative *structural complexity* (especially in hybrid with *themes* of humanistic, *reflective-growth motives* to form *autobiographical reasoning*) uniquely conveys *wisdom*. Findings are discussed in terms of humanistically motivated themes of growth and the bildungsroman genre as a cultural master narrative of a good life, notably in marginalized contexts.

1. Introduction

Theories of narrative identity and theories of the good life both address life's enduring questions of how people create meaning in life and live well. However, these two bodies of theory have their own distinct traditions in psychology. Grand theories of narrative identity (e. g., McAdams, 2008; McLean et al., 2007; Singer & Bluck, 2001) are not established on theoretical principles of the good life, and grand theories of the good life (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2001; Vittersø, 2016; Waterman, 2013) are not established on theoretical principles of narrative meaning-making. While some work in psychology has explicitly examined their theoretical intersection (e.g., Bauer et al., 2008; King, 2001; McAdams, 2006; Schwab, 2020), most scientific research tends to treat narrative identity and the good life as "correlates." Here we also approach them as two sides of the same coin of meaning-making. We aim to show how narrative identity and goods in life are fundamentally informed by each other and are rooted in each other at a linguistically elemental level.

First we explain how specific features of *value* underlie deconstructed elements of narrative identity (tone, theme, and structure) and also underlie specific elements of broad goods in life (satisfaction, meaning, and wisdom, respectively). We then present a study to demonstrate which of these deconstructed narrative elements (and hybrids of them that form common measures of narrative identity) do the heavy lifting in predicting common measures of a good life, namely hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and wisdom. In doing so, we explore the narrative elements of *the transformative self* (Bauer, 2021) which is a prototype of narrative identity that features humanistically motivated themes of growth toward the well-being and wisdom of the self and others. Finally we discuss these ideas in terms of the bildungsroman genre of literature, which crystallizes a cultural master narrative of growth in the context of social marginality.

2. Value orientation and actualization as goods in life

Value lives as the shared root of both narrative identity and the good life (MacIntyre, 1981; Taylor, 1989). The Value Orientation and

Actualization (VOA) framework helps to show how deconstructed elements of narrative identity directly convey core qualities of broad classes of goods in life (Bauer, 2016, 2021; see Table 1 for an overview). The VOA framework distinguishes value orientations (i.e., values or motives for goods in life) from the actualization of those value orientations (i.e., the manifestation of those goods).

Value orientation refers to a *type* of value or *good*. Value here is defined broadly, as constituting any of myriad kinds of values, motives, goods, meanings, pleasures, needs, reasons, purposes, ideals, or justifications (Baumeister, 1991; Rohan, 2000; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Regardless of how well they turn out, value orientations guide behavior and mental processes, including the formation of self-identity. Importantly, most value orientations in everyday life consist of unconscious or implicit motives and needs (e.g., needs for food or safety, motives for pleasure or various forms of meaning). A value orientation *is not necessarily chosen consciously by the self*, even though one may identify with that value orientation and regularly use it (again, largely unconsciously) to give events meaning. Value *orientations* are characteristic of different people to different degrees (which is not to be confused with the degree to which those people's values are *fulfilled*, as we will explain). A value or motive *orients* the self (and other human systems) toward action and interpretation within a social ecology.[1]

Goods in life come in countless forms. Two broad classes of value orientations—pleasure and meaning—differentiate two grand theories of the good life: hedonia and eudaimonia. Hedonic theories claim that pleasure is the ultimate good, criterion, or value orientation in life. "Pleasure" here refers specifically to affectively positive *experiences* and *affective evaluations of satisfaction* (Haybron, 2008; Diener et al., 2006). In contrast, eudaimonic theories, broadly defined, claim that *meaning* is the ultimate good or value orientation in life. "Meaning" here refers to a sprawling array of goods that fall under categories of subjectivist concerns for well-being (e.g., meaningfulness, competence, relatedness) as well as objectivist concerns for moral virtue, wisdom, and growth (e.g., Huta & Waterman, 2014; King & Napa, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Steger, 2016). We take the perspective of "euvitalic personhood," in which the goods of pleasure and meaning are each necessary but not sufficient, are irreducible to each other, and yield a host of "candidate goods in life." No one candidate good is likely to be definitive or ultimate in evaluating the self or others across varying contexts and times (Bauer, 2021).

For any definition of the good, it is one thing to be oriented or motivated toward it, and another to actualize it. *Value actualization* has two dimensions: value fulfillment and value perspectivity. Value fulfillment largely involves *subjective* assessments of *feeling good*, whereas value perspectivity largely involves *objective* assessments of *thinking well*. Not coincidentally, value fulfillment and value perspectivity underlie the desired endpoints of two broad forms of personality development and the good life: well-being and wisdom (Bauer & McAdams, 2004a).

Value fulfillment refers to the subjective, *affective assessment* (i.e., appraisal or evaluation) that a particular value orientation has been

actualized satisfactorily (e.g., Haybron, 2008; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2018; Tiberius, 2015). In other words, value fulfillment is what is commonly meant by (and measured as) subjective assessments of well-being as satisfaction—whether hedonic or eudaimonic. *Hedonic* value *fulfillment* is the *satisfaction* of the value orientation of *pleasure*. Similarly, hedonic well-being is operationally defined by experiences and appraisals of *satisfaction* in life (Haybron, 2008; Diener et al., 2006), notably *without regard to specific contexts of meaning* in life (Bauer, 2016). *Eudaimonic* value *fulfillment* is the *satisfaction* of any of myriad value orientations of *meaning*, i.e., a sense of *meaningfulness* (Wolf, 2010). Eudaimonic well-being is operationally defined in many ways (see Huta & Waterman, 2014), but they all involve appraisals of *satisfaction within contexts of meaning*, i.e., a sense of *meaningfulness* (Martela et al., 2018). This difference in the *contextuality of meaning* not only differentiates hedonic well-being (without context) and eudaimonic well-being (within context) but also elements of narration (Bauer, 2016, 2021; see next section).

Value perspectivity is the more objectively assessed (and theoretically more novel) dimension of value actualization: *Value perspectivity* refers to the degrees of both *coherence and complexity* by which a value orientation is interpreted (Bauer, King, & Steger, 2019). Value orientation and fulfillment both deal with the *content* of value, whereas value perspectivity deals with the organizational, value-orientation-free, abstract *structure* of value. Similarly, Martela & Steger (2016) have framed *coherence* as the "value-free" quality of meaning that involves structural *integration*. However, we argue that the *structure* of value (and of meaning) is *also* a matter of *complexity* (i.e., *differentiation*), which has critical implications for the development of meaning-making (Bauer, 2016; see also integrative complexity, Suedfeld & Bluck, 1993). Value perspectivity refers to the degrees of structural coherence and complexity by which any one value orientation is interpreted, *whatever* the value orientation happens to be. While theoretically and empirically extractable from value orientation, a value orientation is always and everywhere *interpreted to varying degrees of coherence and complexity*. Structural coherence and complexity are baked into the interpretation of any one value orientation. Thus value perspectivity can differentiate multiple interpretations of any "single" meaning or concept of the good. Take the value orientation of freedom. "Freedom" can be interpreted structurally as either relatively simple (e.g., uniperspectival, egoistic, impulsive, and unreflective, where freedom means "I can do whatever I want") or relatively complex (e.g., multiperspectival, self-and-other-concerned, principled, and reflective, where freedom means "I can act freely but am concerned about how my actions affect others' freedoms").

Particularly regarding the *objective assessment* of complexity and perspective-taking, value perspectivity is, we argue, the critical feature of *wisdom* as "expert reasoning" (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). However, wisdom involves more than value perspectivity. The eudaimonic notion of "practical wisdom" (i.e., *phronesis*) tends to involve an ethical value orientation (e.g., Fowers et al., 2021; Kristjánsson et al., 2021; Tiberius, 2008). Thus we define wisdom as relatively high levels of value perspectivity brought to bear on *humane* value orientations (Bauer, 2021; see also Grossmann, 2017). In other words, *wisdom is a matter of thinking complexly, coherently, efficaciously, and humanely about the self and others*. Such measures of wisdom (also as "maturity"; Staudinger & Glück, 2011) include ego development (Hy & Loevinger, 1996), affect complexity (Labouvie-Vief, 2003), wise reasoning (Grossmann, 2017), and the subject-object interview (Bauger et al., 2021; Kegan, 1982).

In a nutshell, value orientation conveys what one wants or is motivated by (however unconsciously), value fulfillment conveys subjectively the degree to which one has attained it, and value perspectivity conveys objectively how thoroughly-one has thought about those things.

3. Deconstructing narrative identity and a good life story

People use specific elements of narration (theme, tone, and structure) to conceptualize the VOA facets of value to make sense of their

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[1] While values are often thought to be "in" a person or "in" a culture (e.g., in virtue ethics), and then in relatively static ways, values can also be said to emerge intersubjectively "among" person-ecological systems (e.g., Hodges & Raczaszek-Leonardi, 2022). Values in VOA may be modeled *both* ways simultaneously. Thus a person might be said to "own" (i.e., have) a value orientation but also *to be owned by it*, rendering concepts like agency and self-other boundaries more malleable than are often conceptualized. We hint at such concerns from the start because the bulk of the following analysis can be too easily misinterpreted to mean positivistic things like "one consciously chooses their narrative themes" and "to have a good life, tell your life story this way." Such views are far afield from the models of the transformative self, VOA, narrative meaning-making, a good life, and personhood in Bauer (2021, see Chapter 11 on individuality as an ecologically and dynamically emergent, pluralist, organismic system).

Table 1

How facets of value are expressed in narrative elements and goods in life.

Value Facets	Narrative Elements	Salient Qualities of Those Elements	Goods in Life Conveyed by Those Qualities
Value Orientation	Theme	Motive for Pleasure/Satisfaction	Hedonic Motive
		Motive for a Type of Meaning	Eudaimonic Motive
Value Fulfillment	Tone	Positive Affect[a]	Hedonic Well-Being (Satisfaction)[a]
	Tone X Theme	Positive Affect X Humanistic Motive[b]	Eudaimonic Well-Being (Meaningfulness)[c]
Value Perspectivity	Structure	Coherence	
		Complexity	Eudaimonic Wisdom as Expert Reasoning
	Theme X Structure	Humanistic Motive X Coherence and Complexity	Eudaimonic Wisdom as *Phronesis*

[a] Measures of narrative tones (i.e., degrees of positive and negative affect, whether as global affect or as positive-outcome affect) and scale measures of hedonic well-being both signal hedonic value fulfillment, i.e., the degree to which events are satisfying (but not why they are meaningful).

[b] Humanistic/experiential motives versus egoistic/status-oriented motives.

[c] Measures of tone-theme hybrids (i.e., degrees to which themes are satisfactorily enacted) and scale measures of eudaimonic well-being both signal eudaimonic value fulfillment (i.e., the degree to which events are specifically meaningful and not merely satisfying).

lives in context. McAdams (1985) has argued that narrative tone, theme, and structure comprise fundamental qualities of narration. Various theories and empirical models have since argued for frameworks in which qualities of narration involve combinations of tone, theme, and structure (e.g., Adler et al., 2016; Blagov et al., in press; McLean et al., 2020). We argue that, while later models offer important advances in the study of meaning-making, a deconstructed version of McAdams' original model both (1) yields non-overlapping elements of narrative identity and (2) shows how basic elements of narrative identity have direct ties to superordinate goods in life (for elaboration of the following, see Bauer, 2016, 2021). As an overview: narrative tone conveys value fulfillment, narrative theme conveys value orientation, and narrative structure conveys value perspectivity (see Table 1).

3.1. The state of the science of narrative elements

Recently-two landmark articles have proposed frameworks of components of narrative identity. Importantly, both frameworks emerge inductively from a wide array of extant measures of narrative constructs. First, Adler et al. (2016, p. 157) have organized "four categories of commonly examined narrative variables" in an extensive review on the incremental validity of extant narrative measures in predicting well-being. Second, McLean et al. (2020) have factor-analyzed a wide range of measures from those four categories in a massive narrative study, finding three factors that correspond closely to those of Adler et al.: "motivational and affective themes" (which combine the first two categories of Adler et al.), "structure" (e.g., chronological and context coherence), and "autobiographical reasoning" (e.g., meaning-making, exploratory processing, self-event change connections).

We first emphasize that McLean et al. employ an exceptionally rigorous analysis that yields important findings and implications for the componential structure of *existing measures* of narrative identity. However, to demonstrate the need for deconstructing those measures: McLean et al. find that affect and motive load onto the same factor. The reason, we argue (as they also suggest), is that their analysis relies on *common narrative measures whose operational definitions themselves conflate affect and motive from the start.* In other words, it is little wonder that measures of *affect* load onto the same factor as measures of motives *when those motives are measured as affectively fulfilled* in the first place—i.e., common measures of themes confound value orientation with value fulfillment. However, affect and motive (and furthermore structure) in narratives can be distinguished empirically (Bauer et al., 2019). The empirical question emerges: Do narratives correlate with well-being owing to themes' motivational orientations (i.e., specific types of meanings) or merely to affective satisfaction (i.e., pleasure)—or to their combination?

3.2. Deconstructed narrative tone conveys degrees of hedonic satisfaction

We start with the claim that narrative tone is how narrative identity conveys *affect*—the narrator's positive and negative evaluations of events and experiences (McAdams, 1985; McLean et al., 2020). As it turns out, tone has been measured apart from motivational themes (i.e., as deconstructed tone) for decades, e.g., global positive and negative affect, outcome affect, and redemption sequences (i.e., changes from negative to positive affect). These measures capture affect exclusively——either globally or as changing in valence—*without reference to specific contexts of meaning* that are conveyed by a motivational theme (Adler et al., 2016; Bauer et al., 2019; Dunlop, in press; McAdams et al., 2001). In this way, tone is simpler than theme or structure (McAdams, 1985). As such, tone, by itself, conveys the simplest good in life: satisfaction. In VOA terms, a *deconstructed narrative tone is how stories convey hedonic value fulfillment,* i.e., the degree to which an event is deemed satisfactory, regardless of context. In narrative terms, *narrative tone is how people convey (and how they and others recognize) hedonic well-being or happiness in their narrative identity.* (To convey *eudaimonic* value fulfillment and well-being, a tone must be considered or measured with a theme, which we explain later.) Narrative positive affect (especially positive outcomes)—apart from associated themes—predicts well-being (e.g., Adler et al., 2016; Blagov et al., in press; Thomsen & Vedel, 2019). Redemption sequences (McAdams et al., 2001), which are essentially a form of positive-outcome tones that start off explicitly poorly, correspond to well-being, but perhaps only in bad times but not good times (Bauer et al., 2019; for a review, see Dunlop, in press).[2]

3.3. Deconstructed narrative theme conveys types of eudaimonic meaning

In non-overlapping contrast, a *deconstructed narrative theme is how stories convey value orientations*—the specific values, motives, meanings, needs, reasons, emotions, etc. of the narrative—*but not value fulfillments.* This is the motivational core of common measures of "motivational themes," stripped of affective valence. A measure of deconstructed theme captures *only* what one values (is motivated by, identifies with, etc.), *but not* whether one appraises those desired meanings as fulfilled or not. Thus, whereas narrative tone conveys *whether* (or degrees to which) an event is satisfying or not, deconstructed narrative theme conveys *why* it is satisfying or not. When considering the life story,

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[2] Also, we argue that redemption sequences are properly classified as tones, not themes, because the measure typically captures *changes in affect only* and does not differentiate the types of themes that coincide with redemption sequences (Dunlop, in press), such as "rags to riches" (thematic value orientation of wealth), "slavery to freedom" (freedom theme), or "ignorance to enlightenment" (wisdom theme; McAdams, 2006; see Bauer, Graham, et al.).

deconstructed *narrative theme is how people convey (and how they and others recognize) the broad range of values, motives, and meanings of their narrative identity*, but *not* their sense of fulfillment or meaningfulness with regard to them.

Three great themes in personal narratives feature the value orientations of not only agency and communion (Bakan, 1966; McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, & Day, 1996) but also growth (Bauer, 2021). We consider agentic and communal themes later, as they are typically measured as value fulfillments, not value orientations. In contrast, and unlike most measures of "growth" in narrative research, deconstructed growth themes do *not* rely on claims indicating growth fulfilled (e.g., "I have grown"), which signal *value fulfillment* Instead, the measure of growth themes here reflects narratives with humanistic/humane (versus materialistic/egoistic) *value orientations alone*, regardless of whether those values or motives turn out well or poorly (e.g., Bauer et al., 2019; Bauer & McAdams, 2004a, 2010; Bauer et al., 2015). Humanistic value orientations in narratives are called "growth themes" (or themes of "eudaimonic growth") because they theoretically foster the organismic, longer-term development of goods in life like well-being and wisdom (e. g., Bauer & McAdams, 2010; Kasser et al., 2002; Kasser et al., 2014).

Themes of eudaimonic growth come in two forms: experiential and reflective. *Experiential growth themes* are defined much as just described—featuring humanistic (versus egoistic) value orientations—and have theoretical roots in growth versus safety orientations (Maslow, 1968) and the motives of self-determination theory (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2004). *Reflective growth themes*, while also humanistic, more specifically involve a motivation to learn or to intellectually explore new conceptual points of view on the self and others, such as an interest in gaining insights, critical self-examination, and cultivating wisdom (Bauer, 2016), with roots in Piaget (1970) and social-cognitive development (e.g., Kegan, 1982; Labouvie-Vief, 2003; Loevinger, 1976). Theoretically, whereas *experiential growth themes aim toward value fulfillment and well-being as their desired value actualization, reflective growth themes aim toward value perspectivity and wisdom*. Empirically, whereas experiential growth themes correlate primarily with well-being, reflective growth themes correlate primarily with wisdom and psychological maturity, even prospectively, and even when controlling for a host of possible confounds, including tones of positive outcomes and even self-reported growth motivation (e.g., Bauer et al., 2019; Bauer et al., 2005; Philippe et al., 2011; but see cultural differences in motivation, Bauer et al., 2020). Importantly for the present study, reflective growth themes incorporate the *motivational* qualities of several forms of autobiographical reasoning, notably exploratory processing (Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Pals, 2006), meaning-making (McLean & Pratt, 2006), and self-event connections (especially of the "change" type in Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006; Lilgendahl & McLean, 2020; McLean et al., 2020; see also the integration of *doing-* and *being-*based self-evaluations as a linguistically elemental form of self-event connections in Bauer & Bonanno, 2001).

3.4. Hybrids of tone and theme convey degrees and types of eudaimonic meaningfulness

To convey a sense of meaningfulness, a deconstructed theme can *help* to convey value fulfillment *if it is considered (*e.g.*, measured) with a positive tone*, especially a positive "ending valence" or "outcome affect" of the narrative. In doing so, the narrative conveys the specific *context, meaning,* or *orientation* of that fulfillment—i.e., a *eudaimonic* value fulfillment. In other words, *the coupling of a positive tone with a specific theme is how people convey (and how they and others recognize) eudaimonic meaningfulness (*i.e.*, eudaimonic well-being) in story form*.

Again, most measures of "themes" capture not only the motives' orientation but also the fulfillment of those motives (for exceptions see, e.g., Adler et al., 2012; Bauer et al., 2019). For example, the most widely used operational definition of a "communal theme" (McAdams, 2002) is coded for narratives with phrases like "we have a loving relationship" but *not* like "we don't have a loving relationship," even though "loving relationships" is clearly the value orientation, even if it did not turn out well. In terms of deconstructed narrative constructs, *not* having a "loving relationship" would be coded as having, separately, a communal theme and a negative tone, which could then be combined for as a measure of value *unfulfillment* or a sense of *lacking* meaningfulness (see Dunlop et al., 2020). Communal themes as commonly measured (i.e., as value fulfillments) correlate with well-being (McAdams et al., 1996). Similarly, measures of "growth themes" that include value fulfillment rather than only value orientation ("growth fulfilled") also correlate with well-being (e.g., Booker et al., in pressa, Booker et al., in pressb; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; McLean et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2015). In contrast, agentic themes, even though they *are* measured as value fulfillments (see McAdams, 2002), tend to correlate modestly or not at all with well-being (McAdams et al., 1996)—unless those agentic themes also involve humanistically motivated themes (Bauer & McAdams, 2000; e.g., Adler, 2012; Lind et al., 2019). In the present study we test whether well-being corresponds to deconstructed tonal affect, thematic motive, or their hybrid.

3.5. Deconstructed narrative structure conveys degrees of value perspectivity

Narrative structure is distinct from both tone and theme, which are forms of narrative content (McAdams, 1985). Narrative content refers to what a story is "about" (who, what, where, when, why, and how well events turn out). Narrative structure refers to how a story's contents are organized, notably in terms of *coherence* and *complexity* (e.g., Suedfeld & Bluck, 1993; although structure does much else, such as positioning characters and framing time, e.g., Bamberg, 1997; Brockmeier, 2000; Freeman, 1998). On the one hand, narrative content and structure are inseparable, just as a building's bricks and architectural design fuse to make the building what it is. On the other hand, we can certainly distinguish a building's materials from its abstract organizational design, just as we can distinguish a story's content (e.g., actions, people, and their experiences and evaluations) from a story's structure (e.g, the coherence and complexity of organizing that content). In this way, *narrative structure is how people convey (and how they and others recognize) value perspectivity in story form*, regardless of value orientation or value fulfillment.

Structural *coherence* refers to degrees of integration, in which the narrative of an event or events come together conceptually and "make sense" (see Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). A deconstructed structural coherence, however, refers to narrative integration as measured across (i.e., without respect to) particular themes, times, or contexts. Structural *complexity* conveys how deeply or broadly a narrative expresses varied points of view, distinct details, or varied levels of context (see degrees of multiple perspectives or differentiation in Woike et al., 1999), regardless of the content of those particular perspectives.

Narrative coherence tends to correlate with well-being (e.g., Adler et al., 2016; Baerger & McAdams, 1999; although perhaps not for young adolescents, Reese et al., 2017). In contrast, narrative complexity correlates primarily with wisdom and maturity (e.g., Booker & Dunsmore, 2016; Graci et al., 2018; Grossmann et al., 2016; King et al., 2000; King & Smith, 2004; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Reese et al., 2017; Weststrate & Glück, 2017), not well-being (McLean et al., 2020), except when coupled with coherence in relation to healthy adjustment to difficult life conditions (Booker et al., 2020; Mansfield et al., 2010).

3.6. Hybrids of humane themes and structural perspectivity convey degrees of wisdom

As noted earlier, wisdom is a matter of thinking complexly, coherently, and humanely about the self and others—that is, thinking with a relatively high degree of value perspectivity about humanistic value orientations. Thus, deconstructed narrative structural perspectivity

conveys key facets of wisdom that differentiate wisdom from other virtues (Bauer, 2021). However, wisdom in narrative form is a hybrid of theme and structure. *Narrative structural coherence and (especially) complexity, coupled with humane themes, are how people convey (and how they and others recognize) wisdom in their narrative identity.*

The narrative measures that converge on the latent construct of "autobiographical reasoning" (McLean et al., 2020; see McLean & Fournier, 2008; Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006), we argue, fuse structural coherence and complexity with deconstructed *reflective*-growth themes (Bauer, 2021). The hybrid of autobiographical reasoning may well function on its own as the master construct of wisdom and maturity in narrative identity. Measures of reflective-growth themes, complex structure, and autobiographical reasoning all correspond to measures of wisdom and social-cognitive maturity more so than to well-being (e.g., Bauer et al., 2008; Bauer et al., 2015; Bluck & Glück, 2004; Guo, Klevan, & McAdams, 2016; King & Hicks, 2007; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; McLean et al.; Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Again, we argue that these constructs *are how* narratives convey wisdom; they are instances of *what wisdom sounds like.*

4. The present study

In the present study we examine measures of deconstructed narrative tones, themes, and structures—as well as hybrids of them that reflect common narrative constructs—in relation to self-report measures of well-being and wisdom, drawing from a larger project on life stories and the good life with a group of 95 adults. Given this sample size, we present the hypotheses and results as an initial exploration of the deconstructed and hybrid elements of a good life story.

4.1. Narrative elements and well-being

General Hypothesis 1: Narrative constructs of positive-outcome tones, experiential-growth themes, and structural coherence will correlate with self-report measures of well-being (consistent with past research and theoretical ties in the VOA model, as described earlier and as outlined in Table 1). Hypothesis 1.1: Deconstructed positive-outcome tones and experiential-growth themes will be the strongest deconstructed narrative predictors of well-being. Hypothesis 1.2: Deconstructed positive-outcome tones will correlate particularly with hedonic well-being, whereas experiential-growth themes will correlate particularly with eudaimonic well-being. *Hypothesis 1.3:* Two hybrids—communion fulfilled and experiential growth fulfilled—will predict well-being when controlling for their respective component parts of tone and theme. *Replication Hypothesis:* To test recent findings on the context-dependent relation between redemption sequences and well-being (as noted earlier), redemption-sequence tones will correlate with well-being in narratives of low points but not high points.

4.2. Narrative elements and wisdom

General Hypothesis 2: Narrative constructs of reflective-growth themes and structural complexity will correlate with self-report measures of wisdom (consistent with past research and theoretical ties in the VOA model, as described earlier and as outlined in Table 1). Hypothesis 2.1: Deconstructed reflective-growth themes and structural complexity will predict wisdom independently. *Hypothesis 2.2:* The hybrid of exploratory processing (an interaction of reflective-growth themes X structural complexity)—but not necessarily meaning-making (reflective-growth themes X structural coherence; see Method)—will continue to predict wisdom when controlling for its components.

5. Method

5.1. Participants and procedure

This study began with 100 participants who completed a life story interview (lasting approximately-two hours via Skype) as well as an online personality survey (lasting approximately-one hour). Participants were randomly selected for recruitment via email from the database of a larger study (directed by the lead author) of nearly 3,000 alumni of a mid-size university in the Midwestern United States. The present study involves no data from that larger study (see Bauger et al., 2021). One other article reports on findings from the present study, drawing on exclusively qualitative findings from only two participants (Bauer & DesAutels, 2019). Participants were each paid $100 total for the interview and survey. Interviews were audio-recorded only and were transcribed professionally. Five of the interviews could not be transcribed in part or in whole, yielding a final sample of 95 participants. The present study originated in 2015, was not preregistered, and is not available for public use, given the personal nature of the interviews. Sample demographics include: 60 percent women; 98 percent White (1 percent Black, 1 percent Hispanic); a *M* age of 49.6 years (*SD* = 11.8); a median household yearly income between $100,000 and $125,000; 82 percent married or in a committed relationship (6 as divorced, 2 as widowed, and 8 as single), and 64 percent having children (*M* number of children = 1.7, *SD* = 1.5, range from 0 to 7).

5.2. Narrative measures

This study employs three narrative episodes (high points, low points, and turning points in life) from the interview's 20 distinct narratives that were modified from the McAdams (1999) protocol. These three narrative prompts are commonly used in research on narrative identity, well-being, and wisdom, as these measures tap into the highs, lows, and dramatic changes in a life (e.g., Bauer et al., 2005; Dunlop, in press; McLean et al., 2020). Two raters among a team of seven coded each narrative independently for each category (but not every rater rated each category or each narrative type). Discrepancies were resolved by discussion with the first author. We report results on only the aggregate narrative measures, which we computed by adding scores for narratives of high points, low points, and turning points. See Appendix for examples.

5.2.1. Coding for narrative tone
The following narrative tones, when measured as distinct from theme, convey different forms of hedonic value fulfillment—i.e., degrees of satisfaction or changes in degrees of satisfaction—as expressed in a narrative.

Tones of Positive and Negative Global Affect. Degrees of Global Positive Tones and Global Negative Tones were measured separately by the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (Pennebaker et al., 2007).

Tone of Positive-Outcome Affect. Coders rated degrees to which the outcome of a narrative event was mostly negative (coded as "0″), neutral ("1"), or mostly positive ("2"). This measure reflects degrees of hedonic value fulfillment of an event in terms of its outcome. Interrater Pearson correlations: High points (HP), 0.94; low points (LP), 0.91; turning points (TP), 0.92.

Tone of Redemption Sequences. Coders rated the presence ("1″) or absence ("0") of a Redemption Sequence in each narrative, i.e., whether or not a narrative event starts off as demonstrably bad and ends up explicitly good (for details see McAdams, 1999; McAdams et al., 2001). Interrater kappas: HP, 0.81; LP, 0.71; TP, 0.81.

5.2.2. Coding for narrative theme
The following narrative themes, when measured as distinct from tone, convey different forms of value orientation—i.e., types of values,

motives, needs, or desires—as expressed in narratives.

Themes of Agentic Motives. Coders rated the presence ("1″") or absence ("0") of values or motives for agency, apart from any associated affective tone that would indicate how well that motive turned out (i.e., not only for the presence of a sense of positively valenced agency fulfilled, like it is usually coded, but also for the lack or loss of a sense of agency). Agency may be expressed in any of four categories: achievement/responsibility, power/impact, self-insight, and status/victory (see McAdams, 2002). Interrater kappas: HP, 0.81; LP, 0.78; TP, 0.84.

Themes of Communal Motives. Coders rated the presence ("1″") or absence ("0") of values or motives for communion, apart from any associated affective tone that would indicate how well that motive turned out (i.e., not only for the presence of a sense of positively valenced communion fulfilled, like it is usually coded, but also for the lack or loss of a sense of communion). Communion may be expressed in any of four categories: love/friendship, dialogue, caring/help, and unity/togetherness (see McAdams, 2002). Interrater kappas: HP, 0.92; LP, 0.74; TP, 0.76.

Themes of Experiential-Growth Motives. Coders rated the presence ("1″") or absence ("0") of value orientations for experiential, humanistic (versus materialistic or egoistic) growth (but not an associated affective tone, such as how well that motive turned out). Experiential-growth motives express a concern for the meaningful *experience* of specific activities or relationships of either the self or others, rather than merely for the *evaluation* of social status/approval or self-image associated with activities or relationships, as described in the introduction (see Bauer et al., 2019). Interrater kappas: HP, 0.73; LP, 0.74; TP, 0.80.

Themes of Reflective-Growth Themes. Coders rated the presence ("1″") or absence ("0") of values or motives for reflective growth (but not an associated affective tone, such as how well that motive turned out), expressed as a concerns for self-reflection and gaining new conceptual perspectives or points of view on one's life, on the self and others, or on society (as described earlier; see Bauer & McAdams, 2010). Interrater kappas: HP, 0.84; LP, 0.78; TP, 0.73.

5.2.3. Coding for narrative structure

The following elements of narrative structure, when measured as distinct from tone or theme, convey-two forms of value perspectivity—i. e., degrees of coherence and complexity—as expressed in a narrative.

Structural Coherence. Coders rated the degree to which a narrative conveyed conceptual integration from an objective (i.e., the reader's) perspective, *regardless of narrative tone* (i.e., value fulfillment; i.e., *not* how affectively well the narrator portrayed events as turning out or having closure), *regardless of which themes* are used, and *regardless of structural complexity* (i.e., of how simple or complex a story is). Coders rated coherence in three degrees: "0″" for "no integration, highly incoherent in its meaning or is lacking meaning," "1" for "basic thread of integration, but still disjointed" (including rambling stories that still have a "clear main storyline"), or "2" for "integrated and coherent," where "the events and experiences of the story tie together and make sense from the reader's perspective" (see Woike et al., 1999, on integration). Interrater Pearson correlations: HP, 0.83; LP, 0.74; TP, 0.77.

Structural Complexity. Coders rated the degree to which a narrative conveyed conceptual differentiation from an objective perspective (i.e., not how much the narrator *wanted* to learn or understand but how multiperspectival the narrative was from the reader's perspective, regardless of narrative tone, theme, or structural coherence). Coders rated complexity in three degrees: "0″" for "no or almost no differentiation in the narrative" (e.g., simple, uniperspectival descriptions or evaluations of events), "1" for "some differentiation in the narrative" (e. g., two opposing motives or points of view from the self or others), or "2" for "much differentiation" (e.g., complex emotional states beyond dichotomous choices or conflicts; elaboration on chains or networks of psychological causality or associations; on differentiation see Woike et al., 1999; on elaboration see Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011). Interrater Pearson correlations: HP, 0.83; LP, 0.72; TP, 0.79.

5.2.4. Computing hybrid variables of narrative Tone, Theme, and structure

We computed hybrids of deconstructed narrative constructs to create measures that correspond to measures of narratives that are used more commonly—measures that combine (and conflate) tonal affect, thematic value/motive, and structural coherence and complexity. Hybrids of deconstructed narrative variables were computed as interactions of deconstructed narrative variables at the level of individual narratives, which we then aggregated by adding scores across high-, low-, and turning-point narratives.

Tone-Theme Hybrids. We computed three tone-theme hybrids that mimic common measures of "themes," which typically target value fulfillment, not just orientation. Agency Fulfilled was computed as the interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Agentic Themes. Communion Fulfilled was computed as the interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Communal Themes. Experiential Growth Fulfilled was computed as the interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Experiential-Growth Themes.

Theme-Structure Hybrids. We computed two theme-structure hybrids that function operationally like facets of autobiographical reasoning (McLean et al., 2020), noting that both incorporate features of self-event connections via reflective-growth themes. Meaning-Making was computed as the interaction of Reflective-Growth Themes X Structural Coherence (which functions operationally like "meaning-making" in McLean & Pratt, 2006; McLean et al., 2020). Exploratory Processing was computed as the interaction of Reflective-Growth Themes X Structural Complexity (which functions operationally like "exploratory processing" in Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Pals [Lilgendahl], 2006; and "exploratory growth" and "integrative memories" in Bauer & McAdams, 2004a, and Bauer et al., 2005).

5.3. Self-report measures

5.3.1. Well-being

Subjective Well-Being. As our primary measure of hedonic well-being, Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is an standardized aggregate of life satisfaction, positive affect, and (inversely scored) negative affect (Diener et al., 2006). The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) is a well-validated, five-item measure of overall life satisfaction. The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (Diener et al., 2010) is a 12-item, five-point scale with two subscales that assess the tendency to experience positive affect and negative affect in the past four weeks.

Psychological Well-Being. As our primary measure of eudaimonic well-being, Psychological Well-Being (PWB; Ryff and Keyes, 1995) is a well-validated, scale with six dimensions of seven items each, rated on a six-point scale: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Here we use only the aggregate measure of the dimensions.

5.3.2. Wisdom

In the interest of space, the following three self-report measures were standardized and aggregated into a single variable called "Wisdom." The first is a common measure of wisdom. The other two finesse the elements practical wisdom that involve intellectual self-exploration and emotional perspectivity (e.g., Glück & Bluck, 2013; Grossmann, 2017; Staudinger & Glück, 2011).

Three-Dimensional Wisdom. The Three Dimensional Wisdom Scale (TDWS; Ardelt, 2003) is a well-validated, 39-item, five-point scale assessing three dimensions of wisdom: affective (e.g., compassion, sympathy), cognitive (thinking about life's complexities), and reflective (involving self-insight, self-examination). We standardized and aggregated the subscales.

Empathic Perspective-Taking. The Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (EPT; Davis, 1983) is a well-validated, 16-item, five-point scale that assesses compassionate and caring feelings and motives toward others (empathic concern) and attempts to take and listen to other people's points of view (perspective-taking).

Identity Exploration. To assess Erikson's (1968) construct of identity exploration (a key feature of psychosocial maturity), we use the Information Orientation subscale of Identity Style Inventory (IE; Berzonsky, 1989; as a feature of reflective growth and wisdom, see Bauer et al., 2015). The well-validated, 11-item, seven-point scale assesses how the tendency search for information on relevant situations, explore new perspectives, and seek a complex understanding of psychosocial life.

6. Results

6.1. Descriptive and preliminary statistics

Descriptive statistics for deconstructed narrative variables and self-report variables appear in Table 2. Descriptive statistics for hybrid narrative variables appear in Table 5. Given the skewed distributions of Redemption-Sequence Tones and both Experiential- and Reflective-Growth Themes, we dichotomized those variables in a presence-absence manner, such that, across the three narratives, 57% of participants had at least one narrative with a Redemption Sequence, 50% of participants had at least one narrative with a Experiential-Growth Theme, and 35% of participants had at least one narrative with a Reflective-Growth Theme.

Gender correlated with no variables reported below. Race and ethnicity did not correlate with any variable, but only two participants identified as non-White. Age correlated with Global Negative Tones (inversely), $r = -0.23$, $p < .05$ and without affecting relations reported below. Income correlated with none of the narrative variables but did correlate with SWB, $r = 0.35$, $p = .000$, and PWB, $r = 0.19$, $p = .047$, but without affecting relations reported below. The components of the aggregate Wisdom measure intercorrelated as follows: TDWS and EPT, $r = 0.53$, $p = .000$; TDWS and IE, $r = 0.36$, $p = .000$; EPT and IE, $r = 0.57$, $p = .000$.

6.2. Deconstructed narrative measures and self-report measures of well-being and wisdom

6.2.1. Correlations

Global Positive Tones correlated with PWB and Wisdom (see Table 2). Global Negative Tones did not correlate with any measure of well-being or wisdom. Positive-Outcome Tones correlated with SWB and PWB. Redemption-Sequence Tones correlated only with SWB. Neither Agentic Themes nor Communal Themes correlated with SWB, PWB, or Wisdom (noting that these themes, contrary to most past research, were *not* coded for whether their motives were *fulfilled*, which we treat as a hybrid variable below). Experiential-Growth Themes correlated with SWB, PWB, and Wisdom. Reflective-Growth Themes correlated with PWB and Wisdom. Narrative Structural Coherence correlated only with SWB. Structural Complexity correlated with PWB and Wisdom. Thus we found general support that deconstructed narrative constructs correlated with well-being or wisdom as expected in General Hypotheses 1 and 2, although with some overlap that will be addressed in regressions to test the sub-hypotheses.

6.2.2. Regressions of Well-Being and wisdom on deconstructed narrative elements

Hypothesis 1.1. We ran two regressions to test how deconstructed narrative elements that held bivariate correlations with SWB and PWB competed to explain variability in SWB and PWB. In a regression of SWB (see Table 3), only Positive-Outcome Tones remained predictive (in partial support of the hypothesis). In a regression of PWB, only Positive-Outcome Tones and Experiential-Growth Themes remained significant (in support of the hypothesis).

Hypothesis 1.2. We ran two regressions to test narrative variables in relation to hedonic versus eudaimonic well-being, this time by regressing one of the hypothesized narrative variables on a simultaneous model of SWB and PWB. In a regression of Positive-Outcome Tones, SWB was

predictive, B = 0.59, SE = 0.24, β = 0.31, p = .014, but PWB was not, B = 0.33, SE = 0.28, β = 0.14, p = .239. In a binary logistic regression of Experiential-Growth Themes, PWB was predictive, B = 1.68, SE = 0.62, Wald = 7.28, p = .007, but SWB was not, B = 0.28, SE = 0.51, Wald = 0.30, p = .584. Thus Positive-Outcome Tones corresponded to hedonic more than to eudaimonic well-being, whereas Experiential-Growth Themes corresponded to eudaimonic more than to hedonic well-being (in support of the hypothesis).

Replication Hypothesis. In support of our hypothesis to replicate recent research, Redemption-Sequence Tones correlated with SWB in low-point narratives, $r = 0.26$, $p = .009$, but in neither high points, $r = 0.14$, $p = .157$, nor turning points, $r = 0.08$, $p = .464$. Redemption-Sequence Tones did not correlate with PWB in high points, $r = 0.07$, $p = .482$, low points, $r = 0.19$, $p = .059$ (unexpectedly), or turning points, $r = 0.08$, $p = .449$.[3]

Hypothesis 2.1. In a regression of Wisdom, we found partial support for the hypothesis: Structural Complexity was an independent predictor of Wisdom (as expected), and so was Experiential-Growth Themes (instead of the expected Reflective-Growth Themes). Global Positive Tones also remained significant.

6.3. Hybrid narrative measures and self-report measures of well-being and wisdom

Correlations between deconstructed and hybrid narrative variables appear in Table 4. As statistical interactions, the relations between hybrid narrative variables and well-being or wisdom were tested in regressions controlling for their component, deconstructed narrative parts.

6.3.1. Narrative Tone-Themes

Correlations. The narrative hybrid of Agency Fulfilled (commonly called "agentic themes"; see introduction section and McAdams, 2002) correlated with PWB (see Table 5). The narrative hybrid of Communion Fulfilled ("communal themes") correlated with SWB, PWB, and Wisdom. The narrative hybrid of Experiential Growth Fulfilled correlated with SWB, PWB, and Wisdom.

Regressions testing Hypothesis 1.3. Here we tested whether hybrid variables—as interactions of deconstructed variables—continued to predict well-being when controlling for their (deconstructed) component parts. Of six possible iterations, five tone-theme hybrids held bivariate correlations with SWB or PWB, so we regressed those well-being variables on models of those particular narrative hybrids and their component parts (see Table 6). The tone-theme hybrid of neither Agency Fulfilled (as hypothesized) nor Communion Fulfilled (contrary to the hypothesis) continued to predict either SWB or PWB when controlling for their respective, component tones and themes. The tone-theme hybrid of Experiential Growth Fulfilled did predict PWB when controlling for its component parts (as hypothesized).

6.3.2. Narrative theme-structures

Correlations. The narrative hybrid of Meaning-Making correlated with PWB and Wisdom. The narrative hybrid of Exploratory Processing correlated with PWB and Wisdom (see Table 5).

Regressions testing Hypothesis 2.2. In support of H2.2, we found that both of the theme-structure hybrids (Meaning-Making and Exploratory Processing) remained significant when controlling for their respective, component narrative elements (see Table 6).

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[3] Redemption sequences were coded in 15% of high points, 38% of low points, and 29% of turning points, which is consonant with Bauer, Graham, et al. (2019).

Table 2
Correlations and Descriptive Statistics among Deconstructed Narrative Elements and Self-Reported Well-Being and Wisdom.

	SWB	PWB	WIS	GPos	GNeg	POut	Redem	Agen	Comm	E-Grw	R-Grw	Coher	M	SD
SWB													4.33	0.55
PWB	0.63***												4.83	0.48
WIS	0.32**	0.47***											0.00	0.81
Narrative Tone:														
Global Positive	0.14	0.21*	0.32**										2.87	0.75
Global Negative	−0.02	0.11	−0.04	0.06									1.30	0.47
Positive Outcome	0.40***	0.34**	0.17	0.21*	−0.18								7.28	1.11
Redemption Seq	0.23**	0.17	0.11	0.10	0.05	0.50***							0.57	0.50
Narrative Theme:														
Agency	−0.12	0.14	−0.02	0.06	−0.10	0.06	0.03						2.08	1.03
Communion	0.18	0.14	0.13	0.07	−0.10	0.28**	0.08	−0.09					2.04	0.92
Experiential Growth	0.30**	0.37***	0.28**	0.01	−0.02	0.24*	0.16	0.07	0.29**				0.49	0.50
Reflective Growth	−0.11	0.25**	0.22*	0.07	−0.03	0.12	0.12	0.24*	0.22*	0.21*			0.34	0.49
Narrative Structure:														
Coherence	0.21*	0.14	0.17	0.17	−0.05	0.28**	0.10	0.08	0.26*	0.24*	−0.10		4.99	0.88
Complexity	0.08	0.31**	0.34***	0.07	−0.11	0.20	0.32**	0.29**	0.32**	0.28**	0.47***	0.39***	2.71	1.33

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

Note. Only Pearson correlations are reported, for the sake of space. SWB = Subjective well-being. PWB = Psychological well-being (aggregate of the six subscales. WIS = Aggregate of the three (standardized) wisdom measures. Global Positive (GPos) = Global Positive Tones (range = 1.39 to 4.50). Global Negative (GNeg) = Global Negative Tones (range = 0.28 to 2.49). Positive Outcome (POut) = Positive-Outcome Tones (range = 5 to 9). Redemption Seq (Redem) = Redemption-Sequences Tone (dichotomized range = 0 to 1; full range = 0 to 3). Agency (Agen) = Agentic Themes (range = 0 to 3). Communion (Comm) = Communal Themes (range = 0 to 3). Experiential Growth (E-Grw) = Experiential-Growth Themes (dichotomized range = 0 to 1; full range = 0 to 3). Reflective Growth (R-Grw) = Reflective-Growth Themes (dichotomized range = 0 to 1; full range = 0 to 3). Coherence (Coher) = Structural Coherence (range = 3 to 6). Complexity = Structural Complexity (range = 0 to 6).

Table 3
Regressions of Self-Reported Well-Being and Wisdom on Deconstructed Narrative Elements.

	B	SE	β	p
SWB on:				
Tone: Positive-Outcome Affect	0.14	0.06	0.27	0.016
Tone: Redemption Sequences	0.07	0.06	0.13	0.232
Theme: Experiential-Growth Motives	0.18	0.11	0.16	0.105
Structure: Coherence	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.475
PWB on:				
Tone: Global Positive Affect	0.09	0.06	0.16	0.100
Tone: Positive-Outcome Affect	0.08	0.04	0.20	0.048
Theme: Experiential-Growth Themes	0.26	0.09	0.28	0.006
Theme: Reflective-Growth Motives	0.08	0.10	0.08	0.453
Structure: Complexity	0.06	0.04	0.15	0.149
WIS on:				
Tone: Global Positive Affect	0.32	0.10	0.30	0.002
Theme: Experiential-Growth Themes	0.34	0.15	0.21	0.031
Theme: Reflective-Growth Motives	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.672
Structure: Complexity	0.15	0.06	0.24	0.026

Note. SWB = Subjective well-being. PWB = Psychological well-being (aggregate of the six subscales. WIS = Aggregate of the three (standardized) wisdom measures.

Table 4
Correlations between Deconstructed and Hybrid Narrative Variables.

	AF	CF	EGF	MM	EP
Narrative Tone:					
Global Positive	0.13	0.19	0.11	0.25*	0.25*
Global Negative	−0.20	−0.13	−0.07	−0.15	−0.17
Positive Outcome	0.47***	0.63***	0.40***	0.15	0.07
Redemption Seq	0.19	0.24*	0.17	0.02	0.00
Narrative Theme:					
Agency	0.87***	-0.16	0.03	0.16	0.20*
Communion	0.00	0.84***	0.31**	0.30**	0.28**
Experiential Growth	0.17	0.39***	0.79***	0.25*	0.21*
Reflective Growth	0.21*	0.21*	0.23*	0.69***	0.64***
Narrative Structure:					
Coherence	0.19	0.35***	0.25**	0.16	0.18
Complexity	0.29**	0.24*	0.34***	0.53***	0.57***

$*p < .05.$ $**p < .01.$ $***p < .001.$

Note. Only Pearson correlations are reported, for the sake of space. Importantly, the hybrid narrative variables are statistical interactions—at the level of individual narratives, then aggregated—of the deconstructed narrative variables. Thus, many of the very high correlations are between hybrid variables and their component-part variables. AF = Agency Fulfilled: Interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Agentic Themes (cf. agentic themes in McAdams, 2002). CF = Communion Fulfilled: Interaction of Positive-Outcome X Communal Themes (cf. communal themes in McAdams, 2002). EGF = Exp Growth Fulfilled: Interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Experiential-Growth Themes. MM = Meaning-Making: Interaction of Reflective-Growth Themes X Structural Coherence. NEP = Narrative Exploratory Processing: Interaction of Reflective-Growth Themes X Structural Complexity.

7. Discussion

We have studied elements of a good life story by deconstructing narrative identity into non-overlapping elements that inherently convey core features of goods in life. We have found that deconstructed narrative tones of positive affect (positive outcomes, especially), narrative themes of experiential-growth (i.e., humanistic) motives, and narrative structural complexity seem to play critical roles in conveying hedonic satisfaction, eudaimonic meaningfulness, and wisdom. We have also found that some narrative elements combine to form hybrids that function as gestalts, with experiential-growth fulfillment incrementally predicting meaningfulness and autobiographical reasoning incrementally predicting wisdom. We hope this linguistic, componential-and-hybrid approach to the study of narrative identity sheds light not only on the architecture of narrative identity but also on *how people know and*

convey distinctions among hedonic well-being, eudaimonic well-being, and eudaimonic wisdom *in actual, lived contexts*. We discuss these findings within the context of cultural master narratives of personal growth, notably in terms of social marginality and changing, sociohistorical

Table 5
Correlations between Hybrids of Deconstructed Narratives and Self-Reported Well-Being and Wisdom.

	SWB	PWB	WIS	AF	CF	EGF	MM	M	SD
Tone-Themes:									
Agency Fulfilled	−0.07	0.22*	0.02					3.07	1.69
Communion Fulfilled	0.31**	0.41***	0.30**	0.09				3.12	1.69
Exp Growth Fulfilled	0.35***	0.51***	0.40***	0.20	0.47***			1.42	1.54
Theme-Structures:									
Meaning-Making	0.01	0.29**	0.43*	0.17	0.30**	0.36***		0.66	1.19
Exploratory Processing	−0.01	0.29**	0.26*	0.17	0.24*	0.36***	0.95***	0.54	1.08

*p <.05. **p <.01. ***p <.001.

Note. Only Pearson correlations are reported, for the sake of space. SWB = Subjective well-being. PWB = Psychological well-being (aggregate of the six subscales. WIS = Aggregate of the three (standardized) wisdom measures. Agency Fulfilled (AF; range = 0 to 6) = Interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Agentic Themes (cf. agentic themes in McAdams, 2002). Communion Fulfilled (CF; range = 0 to 6) = Interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Communal Themes (cf. communal themes in McAdams, 2002). Exp Growth Fulfilled (EGF; range = 0 to 6) = Interaction of Positive-Outcome Tones X Experiential-Growth Themes. Narr Exploratory Processing (NIE) = Interaction of Reflective-Growth Themes X Structural Complexity ((dichotomized range = 0 to 1; full range = 0 to 6). Narr Meaning-Making (NMM) = Interaction of Reflective-Growth Themes X Structural Coherence (dichotomized range = 0 to 1; full range = 0 to 6). Findings with dichotomized variables for Experiential Growth Fulfilled (whether dichotomizing at 1-and-higher or 2-and-higher), Meaning-Making, and Exploratory Processing yielded findings at similar magnitudes and levels of significance for correlations and regressions.

Table 6
Regressions of Well-Being and Wisdom on Hybrids (i.e., Interactions) of Deconstructed Narratives.

	B	SE	β	p
PWB on:				
Tone: Positive Outcome Affect	0.23	0.08	0.52	0.006
Theme: Agentic Motives	0.22	0.16	0.48	0.154
Tone X Theme: Agency Fulfilled	−0.13	0.11	−0.44	0.241
SWB on:				
Tone: Positive Outcome Affect	0.11	0.08	0.21	0.158
Theme: Communal Motives	-0.13	0.14	-0.21	0.321
Tone X Theme: Communion Fulfilled	0.13	0.09	0.39	0.143
PWB on:				
Tone: Positive Outcome Affect	0.08	0.07	0.18	0.247
Theme: Communal Motives	-0.10	0.12	-0.20	0.378
Tone X Theme: Communion Fulfilled	0.19	0.08	0.34	0.215
SWB on:				
Tone: Positive Outcome Affect	0.16	0.05	0.30	0.004
Theme: Experiential-Growth Motives	0.02	0.17	0.01	0.929
Tone X Theme: Experiential-Growth Fulfilled	0.08	0.06	0.23	0.162
PWB on:				
Tone: Positive Outcome Affect	0.07	0.04	0.16	0.101
Theme: Experiential-Growth Motives	0.00	0.14	0.00	0.983
Tone X Theme: Experiential-Growth Fulfilled	0.14	0.05	0.44	0.006
WIS on:				
Theme: Reflective-Growth Motives	−0.20	0.23	−0.12	0.376
Structure: Coherence	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.406
Theme X Structure: Meaning-Making	0.34	0.09	0.50	0.000
WIS on:				
Theme: Reflective-Growth Motives	-0.18	0.21	-0.10	0.408
Structure: Complexity	0.11	0.07	0.17	0.144
Theme X Structure: Exploratory Processing	0.28	0.10	0.37	0.007

Note. SWB = Subjective well-being. PWB = Psychological well-being (aggregate of the six subscales). WIS = Aggregate of the three (standardized) wisdom measures. Each hybrid variable is a statistical interaction of the other variables in that model (at the level of the individual narrative—high point, low point, turning point—and then aggregated). We do not present a regression of SWB on Agency Fulfilled and its component parts because that hybrid variable did not correlate with SWB.

ideals for a good life.

7.1. Narrative elements and well-being

We find that deconstructed narrative tones of positive outcomes are the primary predictor of hedonic well-being, whereas deconstructed narrative themes of experiential-growth motives are the primary predictor of eudaimonic well-being. This finding reflects the proposition that affective tone is how narratives convey hedonic happiness, whereas motivational theme is how narratives convey eudaimonic meaning (Bauer, 2021). In other words, the mere tone of narrative identity is *what hedonic happiness sounds like*, whereas (specific) themes are *what (specific) meanings sound like*. As for meaning-*fulness*, it seems the hybrid of positive-outcome tones and experiential-growth (i.e., humanistic) themes is *what eudaimonic meaningfulness sounds like*.

Our findings extend past research showing that the deconstructed theme (i.e., value orientation) of experiential growth motivation predicts well-being (which is a value fulfillment), even when controlling for how well events turn out (measured as positive-outcome tone, which is a value fulfillment; Bauer et al., 2019). One reason for this finding may be that our measure of "growth themes" here is specifically a measure of *humanistic value orientations* (Bauer, 2016; Kasser & Ryan, 1996), which depends in part on having satisfied more basic psychological and safety needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Tay & Diener, 2011). In other words, perhaps the mere presence of experiential growth themes in a personal narrative is a proxy for safety-oriented value fulfillment. Merely having experiential-growth motives as a theme in one's life story is a luxury (Bauer, 2021)—a topic we take up later.

Getting back to the narrative expression of meaningfulness, we have argued that common measures of narrative "theme" (even when called "motivational themes") are hybrids of positive-outcome tone (i.e., value fulfillment) and motivational theme (i.e., value orientation). We have found only one such tone-theme hybrid—experiential-growth fulfilled—to exhibit incremental validity beyond its component tone and theme in predicting well-being. This result extends the finding that the self-perception of having grown (i.e., of growth fulfilled or attained) is an especially potent predictor of well-being, as has been found in much past research, albeit previously without controlling for its deconstructed parts (e.g., Bauer et al., 2005; Booker et al., in pressa, Booker et al., in pressb; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; Mansfield et al., 2015; Philippe et al., 2011).

Contrary to expectations, we find that "communion fulfilled" functions in bivariate correlations as does the common measure of communion (McAdams, 2002), with moderately strong ties to both SWB and PWB (Adler et al., 2016; McAdams et al., 1996). Yet the tone-theme hybrid of "communion fulfilled" no longer predicts well-being when

controlling for components of positive-outcome tones and communal themes, so further study is warranted. Agency fulfilled, as expected (given its incorporation of contrasting humanistic and egoistic motives, which are driving forces of well-being; Bauer & McAdams, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2000), plays little role in explaining well-being variance. In any case, we have found evidence that a deconstructionist approach to themes can help researchers tease apart common measures of narrative themes into components of motivational theme and affective tone.

Furthermore, as for the intraindividual variability of redemption sequences (Bauer et al., 2019; Dunlop, in press; McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008), we find that, whereas well-being seems to favor narratives of low points with redemption sequences, well-being seems to have little to do with narrating life's good times as starting off bad and ending well.

As for hypotheses with narrative structure, we find that coherence predicts well-being, but not strongly or consistently, compared to tones and experiential-growth themes. We argue that much of coherence is tied up in perceptions of positive-outcome tones (see Bauer, 2021).

7.2. Narrative elements and wisdom

Whereas narrative structural coherence seems more to convey well-being, structural complexity seems more to convey wisdom. Notably, we find that structural complexity predicts wisdom measures even when controlling for experiential-growth themes (which were also independently predictive) and tonal affect (see Grossmann et al., 2016; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011; King et al., 2000; Reese et al., 2017; Weststrate & Glück, 2017). However, that same regression model yielded a nuanced contrast to past research, which has shown themes of reflective, not experiential, growth motives to predict wisdom (e.g., Bauer & McAdams, 2004b, 2010; Bauer et al., 2005; Bauer et al., 2015; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011). Perhaps the difference here lies in the fact that the present study employs self-report measures of wisdom, which include features of emotional well-being, whereas past research has used researcher-coded measures of wisdom, which emphasize objectively demonstrated complexity of thinking (Brienza et al., 2018; Staudinger & Glück, 2011). Additionally, we find further support that self-reported wisdom corresponds to global positivity (here, in narratives, controlling for themes and structure; Etezadi & Pushkar, 2013). Finally, we find that the "experiential-growth fulfilled" hybrid incrementally predicts wisdom, which supports the claim that wisdom is conveyed in the fulfillment of *humane value orientations* (Glück et al., 2020; Kristjánsson et al., 2021).

We wish to highlight the finding that two theme-structure hybrids show incremental validity in predicting wisdom beyond their component parts: meaning-making (i.e., the interaction of reflective-growth themes X structural coherence; e.g., Mansfield et al., 2010; McLean & Pratt, 2006) and exploratory processing (i.e., reflective-growth themes X structural complexity; Lilgendahl & McAdams, 2011). These two hybrids represent two facets of autobiographical reasoning (McLean et al., 2020). These findings support past conclusions that, while autobiographical reasoning has demonstrated ties to well-being (as we also found here), its primary function may be one of thinking coherently and especially complexly (i.e., value perspectivity) with a vested interest in reflective growth (as a value orientation), perhaps especially when adjusting to difficult times (Booker et al., in pressa, Booker et al., in pressb; McLean & Mansfield, 2012; Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Also, we argue that autobiographical reasoning is in fact a combination of deconstructed themes of eudaimonic growth and structural complexity (especially, but also coherence), which together convey "richness," "maturity," "sophistication," "identity processing," "meaning-making," or "integrative self-evaluations" in personal narratives (e.g., Bauer & Bonanno, 2001; Booker et al., 2020; Cox & McAdams, 2014; Graci et al., 2018; Grysman & Hudson, 2010; Lodi-Smith et al., 2009; Pals, 2006; McLean & Breen, 2009; Park & Moon, in press). However, we wish to note that *autobiographical reasoning has functioned in our study as a gestalt or dynamic phenomenon in its own right*—i.e., *not reducible to its component parts—in relation to wisdom*. Thus autobiographical reasoning seems to function as a prominent form of *how narratives express and convey wisdom* (e.g., Weststrate & Glück, 2017)—at least where wisdom differs from other, putatively "wise" constructs like love and humane meaningfulness (Bauer, 2021).

7.3. The paradoxical cultural master narrative of humanistic growth

The phenomena of the present study—how narrative elements convey goods in life—do not arise "within" a self-contained and static individual. They emerge epistemologically and as ethics within psychosocial and material ecologies. For instance, ideals for a good life story come packaged in cultural master narratives. These culturally sanctioned, popular, prototypical narratives convey, among other things, a culture's values for living a good life (Hammack, 2008; McLean & Syed, 2016; Thorne, 2004)—value orientations such as happiness, love, wisdom, and growth but also such as health, wealth, and social status. As individuals interpret and plan their own lives, they incorporate features of master narratives into their own life stories, thereby evaluating themselves in terms of the culture's notions of the good. To the degree one's life story corresponds to a cultural master narrative, one tends to feel good about one's life, as when one's life story contains features of a redemptive self, where bad turns into good (e.g., slavery to freedom, rags to riches, sin to salvation; Adler & Poulin, 2009; Dunlop & Walker, 2013; McAdams, 2006). However, master narratives also reinforce a culture's rigidity and hegemony in what is considered to be a "good" in life (McLean & Syed, 2016)—that is, in value orientations. Individuals who do not share in a society's power structure are more likely to lack resources for enjoying the ideals or goods of a cultural master narrative. These individuals require an *alternative* narrative that expresses and validates the particular (and notably marginalized) goods of their lives (McLean & Syed).

But what happens when a cultural master narrative itself features themes (i.e., value orientations) of humanistic/humane motives to foster the development of the self and others, as examined in the present study? On the one hand, it is a luxury to be in the position to have and especially to enact such concerns, even if they are humane rather than hegemonic (Nussbaum, 2000; Tay & Diener, 2011), meaning that the degree to which such a cultural master narrative can be enacted by all is limited. On the other hand, such motives also serve to revolutionize power structures to expand the franchise of freedoms (McAdam, 1988; Nussbaum, 2000). After all, humane value orientations have been culturally sanctioned since at least the Axial Age (Taylor, 2012). Heterodox beliefs and alternative narratives emerge against the hegemonic orthodoxy of master narratives (e.g., Buddhism against the orthodoxy of Vedic or ancient-Hindu institutional culture). But over time the alternative beliefs become wisdom *traditions* in their own right, complete with social institutions and corresponding hierarchies and levers of power. So, can a single narrative prototype, at least within a sufficiently complex culture, contain both the hegemony of a master narrative and the alternative narrative's means to subvert it?

Such may be the scenario with the *bildungsroman* genre of literature and film, which crystallizes the narrative-identity prototype of the *transformative self* (Bauer, 2021), which like the present study, features themes of humanistically motivated growth and structures of complex perspective-taking. The *bildungsroman* is the genre of character development, personal maturation, and self-actualizing (Jeffers, 2005). The bildungsroman story begins as the protagonist (think Stephen Dedalus, Jane Eyre, or Harry Potter), typically in youth, comes to realize that their social milieu prioritizes qualities like social power and conformity over individual freedom and creativity. The protagonist then sets off on a path of adventure, discovery, and self-invention—often toward artistic, intellectual, or spiritual development, and often with the aim to help make the world a less oppressive, more humane place.

The theme of oppressive versus humane value orientations is dominant in the bildungsroman genre, ever since Goethe's *Meister Wilhelm's*

Apprenticeship, which is credited as having launched the genre at the approach of the nineteenth century (Jeffers, 2005). The bildungsroman originally functioned as a counter-cultural narrative against bourgeois ideals of the good life such as materialism, social status, and ever-upward mobility. As such, the bildungsroman would seem to serve as an *alternative* narrative—an antidote to hegemonistic master narratives of a good life that marginalize and oppress people based on qualities in life such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or disability (e.g., Bhatia, 2007; Hammack, 2008; Syed & McLean, 2021). However, in the time since Goethe, the bildungsroman has itself transformed into a cultural master narrative in its own right, complete with the problems of hegemonistic rigidity that all cultural master narratives share. For instance, the bildungsroman genre has historically featured the self-exploration and development of privileged White male protagonists who set off on adventures that presume privilege and power from the start (e.g., Lazzaro-Weis, 1990). Yet over the centuries even these same protagonists have continued to challenge the hegemonic social structures of their day, drawing on humane value orientations that have evolved to incorporate the increasingly complex struggles of modern marginalities (Jeffers, 2005). Might the bildungsroman genre today serve both "master" and "alternative" functions as a narrative prototype, notably as the genre or subgenres of it evolve?

To help make sense of the simultaneously humane and hegemonistic qualities of the bildungsroman genre, Bauer (2021) has distinguished *hard and soft marginality*. The hard margins largely involve demographics like those just mentioned—margins that one is largely born into and that entail oppression and unfreedoms (Sen, 1999). Hard marginality limits the likelihood of one's being able to enact the ideals of one's cultural master narratives for a good life (such as the cultural ideal of humanistic growth), which require material and social resources (Nussbaum, 2000). As examples of bildungsroman novels set in the *hard margins*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* showcase the internal and outward struggles of personal growth for Black and female Americans, respectively (see Bauer, Chapters 10 and 12. The protagonist of *Invisible Man* (who fittingly goes nameless) tries two paths of self-improvement: the path of upward mobility as well as the path of experiential and reflective growth (as in the present study). Yet *both* paths prove to be physically, socially, and psychologically dangerous for the protagonist, right to the very end—an example of the hegemonic problems of the bildungsroman ideal for living in the hard margins of society.

In contrast, the historically more common bildungsroman features a White, upper-middle-class, male protagonist (e.g., Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*). This protagonist seeks, with the privilege of choice, the *soft margins*, rejecting the materialistic and hegemonistic values (and comforts) of their given social group, seeking the margins of society to pursue a life of more humanistically motivated growth, particularly of the reflective-growth type in the present study. Then again, while the soft margins do involve material and social risks (e.g., poverty, social alienation), these risks are generally more reversable than for the person who is thrust into the hard margins. But the aim—and typically the result by the end of the story—is to arrive at a more humane understanding of the self and a more compassionate understanding of the world. For instance, regarding gender, the typical White male bildungsroman protagonist crafts a life story with themes emphasizing the exploration of inner emotional experience, which is culturally aligned with feminine typicality (Grysman et al., 2016). Still, it is a luxury to be able to successfully explore one's identity and to craft a life to one's orientations of value—a luxury of the soft margins.

Perhaps the bildungsroman functions as a cultural *master* narrative in that its ideals of self-exploration and life-experimentation become decidedly more difficult or impossible to enact, the greater degree to which one's life is marginalized, especially intersectionally. At the same time, perhaps these same bildungsroman ideals function as a cultural *alternative* narrative to subvert the hegemonistic status quo *from within*—in the person who lives within the circles of privilege. In any case, we see in the bildungsroman a cultural prototype of a good life story featuring the qualities of a transformative self that are examined in the present study, such as themes of humanistic motives for actions and relationships, coupled with relatively complex perspective-taking in one's structural understanding of the self and others.

7.4. Concluding comments

We conclude with some remarks on what our theoretical model and findings do and do not suggest. First, we do not mean to suggest that particular features of narrative identity *cause* a good life: Our study (like most studies on the topic) are correlational, plus theoretically we view narrative identity and the good life as rooted in each other at an elemental level. Second, our measures of narrative elements may be theoretically deconstructed, but they still emerge within the lived contexts of people's lives. Third, we strongly advise against interpreting any such study as prescriptive: We have studied only how people *already* narrate and evaluate their lives, not how they might if they tried to change themselves (which is difficult; Baranski, Gray, Morse, & Dunlop, in press). Finally, we do not mean to suggest that a good life or a good life story must have *all* the features of its prototype, much less sound alike: The "good" elements of narrative identity are *candidate* goods in life (Bauer, 2021), such that *each* one may lend a greater or lesser degree of flourishing to one's life story—and then certainly not for every-one person in every cultural context, and then not in proportions suggested by standardized betas, which apply only to averages anyway.

What we do mean to suggest is that the elements of both narrative identity and a good life are interfused and scaffold each other into existence within people's lives and social ecologies. We all know and talk about our lives as having relative degrees and types of goodness, relative to our specific life contexts. We do this by using basic elements of narration to convey basic elements of the good, combining them in dynamic ways as we attempt to construct a good life story. If one element of narration and the good stands out in this study, one that theoretically fosters capabilities for human flourishing across cultures and history and demographic categories (Nussbaum, 2011), it is a thematic value orientation for humanistic growth—the concern for fostering experientially and reflectively motivated activities and relationships for the self and others (e.g., Bauer, 2021; McAdams, 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2000; MacIntyre, 1981; Sheldon, 2004; Taylor, 1989.).

Declaration of Competing Interest

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

Appendix A

All narratives combine tone, theme, and structure, so the following excerpts compare and contrast hybrids of those narrative elements. All excerpts are from narratives about low points in life, for the sake of comparison. These excerpts convey the same tone, theme, and structure as their entire (much longer) narratives.

Hybrid Tone-Theme of Communion Fulfilled (and Moderate Complexity, High Coherence).

"when our fifth child was born. […] We're in the room and the pediatrician comes in. […] And it was like a freight train hit me right at that point because [now] I had a child with down syndrome. […] I had all these visions of terrible, terrible things. […] But in the end, it's turned out to be one of the best blessings we've ever had in our life. So, I mean, I'm not sure many people have a 22-year-old who comes in from work and comes in, and gives you a big ol' hug and says, 'You're the best.' […] boy, he's very loving, very wonderful. But you know […] All the kids are out, they're empty nesters. We're not. We still have a child

that will be a child for a long time. But he is just a wonderful soul and is a blessing in many ways.".

Note: Also, this narrative has a redemption sequence (further noting that low points with Positive-Outcome Tones are typically Redemption Sequences).

Hybrid Tone-Theme of Communion Unfulfilled (and Moderate Complexity, High Coherence).

"I was [in school]. Things at home were really awful. […] mom had just had [a life-changing event], and […] that was [unexpected and] that sort of changed the whole family. […] I was now an adolescent and […] things just got really difficult at home. […] It [was] a form of depression that [my mom] was going through, and […] we didn't […] understand a whole lot about [it…] and Dad […] wasn't around. And so mom […]was just [at] a point of exhaustion [and it] was a really hard time for the whole family.".

Note: Also, this narrative does not have a redemption sequence.

Three Hybrids: (1) Tone-Theme of Experiential Growth Fulfilled, (2) Theme-Structure of Meaning-Making, and (3) Theme-Structure of Exploratory Processing.

the first time as an adult [in college] I would be donating blood. […] identifying myself as a proud gay male, this time, I filled out the questionnaire a little differently […] they ask you, "Have you had sex with a man?" […] And so I circled that box, […] so the guy pulled me aside, I'll never forget it, and he said, "I think you made a mistake on the questionnaire […] I just needed to double check that one question, because you're actually not gonna be able to donate blood today, because you're in a high risk group for HIV/AIDS." […] But it was really, like, not open for discussion. I think that was what took me aback. And that's when it really hit me that, as a gay man and somebody who was becoming adult at that time, that this is gonna be kind of a struggle […] being discriminated against […]. I had gotten all that growing up as a kid, being bullied in a variety of different ways. But I never thought about it as an adult once I got through that stage […] And so it really all hit me in the moment. […] And so that was a real struggle. […] And as I tried to process that [with] one of my […] professors […] to the point where I was like emotionally distraught, because […] I would probably have at least a few more of these moments in my life. […] it was a very eye-opening moment. There was a lot of emotions. For me, it was an inner low point because it impacted that part of my identity which was supposed to be getting stronger at the time. […] But it actually ended up giving me a lot of inner strength.

Note: In the interest of space, we provide a single excerpt to illustrate three hybrids. As Experiential Growth Fulfilled, this narrative features themes authentic and experientially meaningful self-understanding and turn out well. As two forms of autobiographical reasoning, this narrative features the theme of reflective self- (and societal) exploration, combined with structural coherence (Meaning-Making) and structural complexity (Exploratory Processing). Also in the interest of space and in lieu of another excerpt, we leave to the reader the exercise of imaging this story not turning out well but still having themes of reflective growth and structural complexity and coherence.

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