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**Culture, Self-Narratives and Autobiographical Memory:
Using a Semiotic Narrative Approach to Investigate Cross-Cultural Differences**

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Abstract

Various methods have been utilized to study culture and self. Despite advances in research on narratives and culture in understanding the self, to date, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating the cross-cultural differences in self-narrative structure. A self-narrative approach is important to unpack how the self differs cross-culturally because *'What'* and *'How'* people narrate about themselves is informed by their cultures. This thesis demonstrates the use of a semiotic narrative structure proposed by Greimas, particularly the Actantial Model, as a methodologically principled way of understanding how individuals construct culturally-informed selves in their self-narratives. To address the overarching aim of investigating cross-cultural differences using a semiotic narrative approach, three questions are raised concerning *'What'* contents and *'How'* people narrate about themselves as well as *how* self-narration relates to autobiographical memory in constructing a self-narrative in different cultures. Three studies are conducted. Study 1 utilized interviews to explore and test the coding system as well as the viability of Greimas's framework as a systematic approach in analyzing self-narratives in cultural comparative research. Qualitative differences in self-narrative contents consistent with past research are replicated with this method. Key episodes in autobiographical memory were found in the contents of the self-narrative structure, showing that the experiences stored in autobiographical memory are used to construct self-narratives. Study 1 results are used to develop an online survey for self-narrative research, which was piloted and validated in Study 2. Through a mixed-method design, Study 2 found variations in self-narrative structure and self-narrating style between European-Australians and Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese. Contents of key events and self-narrative structure were associated, with self-agency as a major theme of what individuals recall. Study 3 employed an online survey developed from Study 2, with a sample of European-Australians ($n = 60$)

and Singaporean Chinese ($n = 60$). Firstly, qualitative and quantitative evidence indicated cross-cultural differences in 'What' people share in the contents of their self-narratives. European-Australians present with more individual self-focused contents compared to the Singaporean Chinese, who had more other-focused contents in their self-narratives. Secondly, *how* people share their self-narratives, which is their self-narrating style, also differed cross-culturally. European-Australians use an elaborative style consistent with previous research, and prioritize the individual self in the foreground, which is termed a *decontextualized self-narrating style*. In contrast, the Singaporean Chinese showed evidence of repetitive style consistent with previous research, and present a self that is embedded in social context, which is termed a *contextualized self-narrating style*. Thirdly, *how* self-narration and autobiographical memory are related was demonstrated through the key events of individuals' lives which were again found in the self-narrative structure. The memories that engage self-agency are recalled most in key events and used in self-narrative construction. Lastly, important to both cultural groups is the role of religion in individual lives, which can now be investigated within the self-narrative structure as it influences identity and self-processes. Together, these findings reveal the importance and implications of a semiotic narrative approach in understanding not only cross-cultural differences, but also how culture and self co-construct.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

- i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
- ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and
- iii) the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies, and appendices.

Lidia Lucia Lae

July 2019

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Chapter 1. General Introduction

Do people think of themselves differently across cultures? Decades of research have shown that they do. For example, European-Americans tend to think of themselves as separate and disconnected from others, while the Japanese and Chinese think of themselves as connected to others (e.g., Heine, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; Na et al., 2010), and this cultural difference seems to persist even between Asian and European Americans within the United States (English & Chen, 2007). From this example and others, there is now a large body of cultural comparative research (for reviews, see Cross & Gore, 2003; Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Kitayama & Uskul, 2011; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Nisbett & Masuda, 2003; Vignoles et al., 2016) on cross-cultural differences in self-conceptions between Westerners and Easterners, using various approaches from rating scales (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kashima et al., 1995; Leung & Kim, 1997; Singelis, 1994) to functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (Zhu, Zhang, Fan, & Han, 2007).

Increasingly used in research into self is a self-narrative approach. Self-narratives are stories that people tell about themselves (e.g., McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Jerome Bruner (1991a, 1991b), a doyen of culture and psychology, emphasized the importance of both narratives and culture in understanding the self. This is because narratives give meaning to people's life experiences and help them to organize those experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988). They also express the culture's beliefs and values, as well as transmit cultural meaning (Kashima, Peters, & Whelan, 2008). Culture is itself rich with meaning, which is often expressed through narratives (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). From this perspective, how people narrate about themselves is informed by the cultures that they come from.

Given that self-narratives can enlighten the study of self, and that culture is inexorably linked to both cultural and self development, it seems obvious that cultural comparative studies on self-narratives should be conducted. Indeed, there are a handful of studies of this sort (e.g., Miller, Fung, & Mintz, 1996; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Wang & Leichtman, 2000). These studies to date have mostly focused on the East-West cultural differences in self-narrative practices and content in early socialization, that is, the socially situated practices such as everyday family discourse that shapes a child to behave in a way that is acceptable to their family and society (Miller et al., 1996), and which support the child's ability to self-narrate. Yet, there is no empirical research to date that has examined cross-cultural differences in *structures* of the self-narrative among young adults, that is, how self-narratives are organized to give form to the life story. This thesis explores the use of a systematic narrative approach to studying the structure of self-narratives in Western and Eastern cultures. This approach enables a methodologically principled way of understanding how individuals construct culturally-informed selves.

A culturally-informed self is now understood to be constructed through the self-narrative that integrates a coherent sense of self over time with unity and purpose, referred to as a *narrative identity* (McAdams, 1985, 1989, 1996, 2001; McAdams et al., 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Therefore, identity is now understood as an ever-evolving life story of the self (McAdams, 2001), which often takes into account the stories of one's culture and family (McLean, 2015) that provide the meaning frameworks which guide individuals on how to live and what to value. A narrative approach that captures these meaning frameworks that form the template to remembering, articulating and cognizing, is crucial to understanding culture and self. Current research emphasizes the importance of narrative meaning-making across the

life span (Fivush, Booker, & Graci, 2017; Weststrate, Ferrari, Fournier, & McLean, 2018) and that the stories individuals construct about themselves are derived from the available stock of “cultural narratives based in myth, fable, literature, popular entertainment, and ethnic family history that define the meaning-making parameters of their lives” (Singer, 2004, p. 445). From this perspective, the study of self-narratives and culture requires a semiotic approach, that is, a study of meaning-making.

Meaning is at the heart of semiotics. There is a dearth of psychological studies that involve semiotics (Petocz, 2011) although meaning is said to be critically important in human psychology (Bruner, 1990). Peirce’s semiotics, which began in the United States of America, has influenced cultural psychology to some extent (Rosa, 2007; Valsiner, 2007), and seems to be more applied in psychological research generally (Cunningham; 1998; Jorna & van Heusden, 1998; Smythe & Chow, 1998; Valsiner, 2007). However, my research will focus on Greimas’s (1966,1990) semiotics, which has its roots in continental Europe, because it provides a method to analyze narrative meaning that is lacking in Peirce’s approach (Arnold, 2011). As noted earlier, a narrative approach seems critical in understanding how culture and self are interwoven, and therefore my choice of Greimassian narrative semiotics seems warranted.

According to Greimas (1966), his approach provides a method by which the structure that underlies all narrative discourse can be analyzed, whether that be scientific, sociological, psychological, or artistic (Martin & Ringham, 2000). He argued that his model of narrative structure is applicable as a methodological framework within which to analyze narrative discourse across different cultures. If he is right, his framework should provide a systematic way of examining cross-cultural differences in structure of self-narratives as well. This thesis attempts to use Greimas’s approach which has not been used in any of the earlier cultural comparative studies in

psychology.

In particular, three main questions are posed that investigate European Australian and Singaporean/Malay Chinese cultures, considered here broadly for convenience in accordance with previous research, as Western and Eastern cultures:

What content do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultures?

How do they narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultural contexts?

How does self-narration relate to autobiographical memory in constructing a self-narrative in Western and Eastern cultures?

The first question concerns the ‘*What*’ or the contents of the self-narrative while the latter two focus on ‘*How*’ self-narratives are narrated in terms of the style and use of autobiographical memory. I will next elaborate on each question, explaining the significance of each question within the current literature of culture and self.

Research Question 1: What content do people narrate in Western and Eastern cultures?

This thesis addresses the first question of cultural differences by examining the content of self-narratives. There has been a proliferation of research on self-narratives in the recent decades (Bamberg, 2011; Bruner, 1991b, 2004a; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, 2009; McAdams, 1985, 2001, 2006b, 2015b; McAdams, Hanek, & Dadabo, 2013; Wang, 2013); however, cross-cultural research into the content of self-narratives is only just gaining a momentum. In her recent work, Wang (2013) examined the differences between Western and Chinese autobiographies and found striking contrasts on a number of features. For example, Western autobiography positions the self at the center as the protagonist and has concrete details with rich

emotions for meaning-making, whereas Chinese autobiography has the self in the shadow as a bystander and lacks details as well as emotional expression but focuses on external facts (Wang, 2013). Wang (2013) noted that these divergent cultural features about autobiography seem to be reflected in parent-child conversations which have been found in culture and self studies.

Studies into culture and self from a self-narrative perspective have indeed focused intently on the family unit, especially mother-child relationships (Fivush & Wang, 2005; Wang & Fivush, 2005; Wang, 2001b) or family conversations and stories (McLean, 2015; Miller, Fung, & Koven, 2007; Miller et al., 1996; Miller et al., 1997). It has primarily relied on interviews, questionnaires, observations and recordings of self accounts or conversations to capture narratives. These narrative accounts are then analyzed in regard to their content, function and/or structure. Broadly, these studies have found that from an early age, children participate in oral narrative practices, which carry cultural meanings and hence, this early socialization process draws children into forming particular systems of values and meaning that construe the self in divergent ways (Miller et al., 1997). In a sense, the self-narrative content is very much researched with the question in mind of ‘what’ is different cross-culturally through the early socialization process.

Nonetheless, it is research on self-construal that has given a more focused attention to what may be the cross-cultural differences in the content of self-concept (see Cross et al., 2011; Oyserman et al., 2002), particularly the *Independent* and *Interdependent self-construal* as a pivotal dimension on which selves varied across cultures (Markus and Kitayama, 1991a). That is, in Western cultures such as North America and Australia, the independent self is conceptualized as distinct, bounded and an autonomous entity standing out from its social context, but in Eastern cultures such

as China and Japan, the interdependent self is viewed as embedded within its context, connected to significant others and flexible. Recent research has shown that independent-interdependent self-construal is not a single dimension, but has multiple facets. For instance, Vignoles et al. (2016) proposed a seven-dimensional model that captured different ways of being independent and interdependent. However, they cautioned that their seven-dimensional model was not a conclusive cultural model of selfhood and that possibly other dimensions might exist. One of the limitations they highlighted was that their model was derived from contents of previous measures of independence and interdependence. They suggested a more open-ended approach may be needed to explore other forms of selfhood to better account for patterns of global variation (Vignoles et al., 2016). It raises a question of whether the Greimassian framework, as a comparative research tool, can reveal through the self-narrative structure these sorts of cross-cultural differences in the divergent self-construal, which have not been identified in the previous research.

Research Question 2: How do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultures?

It has been well documented that European American parents encourage the child to develop their ‘Self’ by encouraging independence, self-assertiveness and expression. However, Chinese parents seek to help their child to develop a sense of connectedness, and thus emphasize compliance, consistency, correct behavior, social responsibility and group accomplishments (Chao, 1995; Hsu, 1981; Wu, 1996). These Western and Eastern socialization practices are also reflected in Chinese children’s stories and memories, showing more emphasis on social engagement, moral correctness, concern with authority and less autonomous orientation than their American

counterparts (Chen et al., 1998; Wang, 2001b; Wang & Fivush, 2005). Given that self-narration is learned through these socialization practices in everyday interaction of what people think about themselves, i.e., the content of their self-narratives, it is very likely intertwined with *'How'* they have spoken of themselves in the past. Therefore, the second main question of the thesis is concerned with the *style of self-narration* in narrative discourse.

Narrative discourse involves both a narrator and an audience in social interaction (Melzi, Schick, & Kennedy, 2011). Usually in early narrative development, the audience is the parents, who selectively attends to particular aspects of their child's story, and thus, guides the narrator in regards to the communication styles, norms and rules of behavior expected in their community (Fivush & Haden, 2003; McCabe, Bailey, & Melzi, 2008). Fivush and Fromhoff (1988) identified two maternal styles of discourse about the past with their sample of White American mother-child dyads, an *elaborative style* and a *repetitive style*. White American mothers who used the elaborative style talked more with their children, asked more memory questions and sought to elicit more information about the topic as well as elaborate on their questions, compared to the White American mothers who used a repetitive style that simply repeated questions without further embellishment (Fivush & Fromhoff, 1988).

Wang (2001b) found cross-cultural differences to deepen understanding of maternal styles of discourse and narrative skills in children. For example, American mother-child conversations sought causal explanations to emotional experiences that highlighted individual themes; their language was more elaborative and centered on the child's roles, in comparison to Chinese mother-child conversations that used emotional experiences to focus on teaching proper behavior instead of explaining its causes. Chinese mothers were reported to talk less about past events with their children and

provided fewer details when talking about the past, as well as asking more close-ended questions with forced answers compared to their American counterparts in Boston (Wang, 2001b). Therefore, from early childhood, children learn narrative discourse styles of their cultures through interacting with their parents (Fivush, Habermas, & Reese, 2019; Minami & McCabe, 1993).

The narrative discourse styles seem to be the building blocks to linguistic practices and communication styles. Research into linguistic practices for person description show variations cross-culturally (e.g., Y. Kashima, E. Kashima, Kim, & Gelfand, 2006) and communication styles also show that culture influences communication behavior (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua 1988; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Singelis & Brown, 1995). Therefore, narrative discourse style is important to understand across cultures and may have developed from daily narrative practice. Bamberg (2011) argued that it was important to look at the way narrative practice is communicated in everyday conversations, as this is what constructs identity, and narrators naturally position a sense of who they are and how they intend to come across. Narration then seems dependent on the way narratives are elicited and the relationship between the narrator and the audience who are embedded in a culture. How narratives are elicited may be an important question in terms of how it is then produced or the way it is self-narrated. Could a Greimassian framework provide further insight into our understanding of self-narrating style in different cultures? If so, what underlying semiotic structures in self-narration can be uncovered? These are important questions to answer because there is sparse research specifically on self-narrating style among young adults cross-culturally.

Research Question 3: How does self-narration relate to autobiographical memory in constructing a self-narrative in Western and Eastern cultures?

There is evidence to suggest that discourse arises from and also shapes cognition (Edwards, 1997), and that patterns of narrative discourse vary cross-culturally (McCabe & Bliss, 2003). From this view, how people self-narrate may be linked to how they have encoded and stored their social-cultural experiences in autobiographical memory. That is, self-concept as expressed through the self-narrative may be discursively constructed by using autobiographical memory, which has a store of information about the self, including social and cultural experiences of narrative discourse.

This raises the third question in this thesis of '*How*' self-narration is related to autobiographical memory in its construction in different cultural contexts. Autobiographical memory is the memory system of important personal experiences from one's life (see Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Wang & Conway, 2004). There is an on-going reciprocal relationship between the self-concept expressed as self-narrative and autobiographical memory (Fitzgerald, 1992). In narrative discourse, what has been articulated by the self and how it was narrated, that is the *content* and *style*, becomes not only then part of the self-narrative but also autobiographical memory for the future. It is stored in the autobiographical memory knowledge base (Conway, 2005) ready for the next time one engages in self narration. Therefore, autobiographical memory provides the material for the self-narrative, but once self-narration takes place, it contributes further to the database of autobiographical memory, and this reciprocal relationship continues throughout life.

Singer, Blagov, Berry and Oost (2013) expanded on this reciprocal relationship by suggesting that memories are generated in association with meaning-making that is relevant to the self-concept, these memories are referred to as self-defining memories.

Self-defining memories are life-story memories associated with significant goals that define the self and which provide the narrative scripts for self-narrative (see Conway, Singer, & Tagini, 2004; Singer & Conway, 2011). In many ways, autobiographical memory and self-narrative are directed towards a goal of defining the self as it interacts with its environment. Wang (in press) has argued that one's own memory is always in a dynamic transaction with one's changing environment and it is shaped by the culture one comes from. Our recall and telling of our self-narrative is influenced by how others within our culture respond to it and these cultural factors impact on the way it is encoded, as well as how we recall and tell it. Hence, once we narrate in words, the combination of language, concepts, experience and meaning becomes not only structured into our self-narrative but also autobiographical memory. As children, we absorb cultural knowledge about the self, how to think, talk and remember, along with how we construe our past experiences (Wang, 2016, in press).

In personal memory studies with children and adults, research has found that individuals who have grown up in Western cultures which are 'individualistic and independent' were more able to provide earlier, lengthier and more detailed childhood memories that were more self-focused compared with those in Eastern cultures which are considered 'collectivistic and interdependent' (Mullen, 1994; Wang, 2001a; Leichtman, Wang, & Pillemer, 2003). Leichtman et al. (2003) attributed this to differences in what independent and interdependent cultures value.

Current researchers like Wang and colleagues have provided empirical support for Bruner's (1987) hypothesis that "the ways of telling and ... conceptualizing ... become so habitual ... for structuring experience itself, ... laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but also directing it into the future" (Bruner, 1987, p. 31). Bruner (1987) further suggested that culture provides

canonical forms or templates that influence and shape our perceiving and remembering so much so that “a life is not ‘how it was’ but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (Bruner, 1987, p. 31). This kind of interpreting involves narrative meaning-making, which Wang, Song and Koh (2017) argued was one of the two sides of the same token as remembering. We remember what we make sense of, which is meaningful to ourselves. In their *Cultural dynamic model of memory and narrative self-making*, Wang et al. (2017) proposed a framework to conceptualize the process of remembering as a process of meaning-making to serve culture-specific goals and functions (Alea & Wang, 2015). What Wang et al. (2017), Bruner (1987) and Singer et al. (2013) have proposed is that meaning-making is central to understanding the autobiographical self. This then raises the question, ‘Can a semiotic tool like Greimas’s Actantial Model be helpful in gaining further insights into the intimate relationship between self-narratives and autobiographical memory?’

Summary and Outline of the Thesis

The study of self-narrative and culture is a worthy pursuit as it aims to provide further understanding on a number of topics, such as self-construal, autobiographical memory, narrative discourse and meaning-making. Both a semiotic and narrative approach using Greimas’s semiotics might prove promising to answer the questions of ‘*What*’ and ‘*How*’ raised in regard to self-narratives across cultures. These questions are considered crucial because from studies of Westerners and Easterners, we now know that there are differences in self-concept and the way the self is construed. Self-concept is expressed in self-narratives, constructed through the everyday internal dialogue and social interactions involving narrative discourse within cultural environments. We have come to understand that culture permeates and informs the self and self-narration. This

raises the question of how cultural differences in the content of self are found in self-narratives, which has been a focus of Wang's research (Wang, 2013; Wang et al., 2017). How culture infuses self-narratives may also be addressed through Greimas's semiotic approach, which may shed further light because of the underlying meaning structures that may be revealed with a semiotic tool.

In my clinical practice as a psychologist, having worked with meaning-making issues for almost two decades with people from culturally diverse backgrounds, I have endeavored to be impartial, sensitive and professional in my approach. However, I am aware that I bring into any situation and process my own frames of reference. I have been brought up by Chinese parents with Buddhist, Taoist, Animist, Confucian and Catholic beliefs and practices, but lived almost my entire life in the Western world and converted to Protestant Christianity as a young adult. Having experiences of different cultures and religions affords me an understanding of different worldviews, but my Chinese background and Christian beliefs may influence the way in which I frame this research, gain access to participants in Study 1, and interpret the findings. I acknowledge that I have an assumption that all humans share a common humanity and may grapple with similar issues in social-cultural contexts, and therefore there are both similarities and differences in self-narrative structures. Nonetheless, a greater focus is given to the differences cross-culturally because of the nature of my research on how the Greimassian framework can be used to understand cross-cultural differences.

In the present thesis, I not only attempt to examine *'What'* self-narrative is discursively constructed in social interaction, but ask also, *'how'* that self-narrative may be narrated to others. This question of *'how'* is important for the reason that self-narrative is discursively constructed in an on-going social interaction, and a Greimassian perspective may provide another means of understanding self-narrating

style. The thesis's third question relates to how self-narrating draws upon autobiographical memory. That is, how people use autobiographical memory to construct a self-narrative. From this, we can gain insight into what the link is between autobiographical memory and the self-narrative.

This thesis attempts to answer these questions in five chapters. In Chapter 2, the current study is situated within relevant literature and the research methodology is discussed. In particular, the theoretical underpinnings of culture and the self are discussed, showing the lack of cross-cultural research on adult self-narratives. This covers a critical review of the historical context, methodological issues and our current understanding of narrative approaches. In conclusion, Chapter 2 argues for a need for a systematic method to studying self-narratives using a semiotic framework particularly based on Greimas's approach, and discusses how it is used in this thesis.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, a case is built for the use of Greimas's approach in self-narrative research, as it can offer rich insights to extend our knowledge on culture and self, and empirical studies about cultural differences in self-narrative structure are reported. In Chapter 3, I report an interview study with European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese showing how the interviewees' self-narratives could be analyzed using the Greimassian framework. It provides initial preliminary findings in order to develop a more efficient research method and also to construct a coding manual for subsequent studies. Chapter 4 reports Study 2, which develops an efficient research method using an online survey tool, pilots this method and the coding manual developed in Study 1. This then culminates in Study 3, reported in Chapter 5, which investigates the cross-cultural differences in self-narratives between European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese. All three chapters together, highlight the use of a mixed-methods design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand

better the differences in self-narrative structure in Western and Eastern cultures.

Finally in Chapter 6, I provide a general discussion and conclusion of the current study in light of the key findings of self-narratives and self-narration, along with the implications in order to advance our knowledge of ‘Culture and Self’, which invariably involves autobiographical memory and suggest directions for future research.

Chapter 2. Culture and Self from a Semiotic Narrative Approach

Introducing Culture and Self

Our human quest for meaning again generated academic interest in psychology when Bruner (1990) asserted that it was time to “establish meaning as the central concept of psychology”. He challenged psychologists to “construct a mental science around the concept of meaning and the processes by which meanings are created and negotiated within a community” (Bruner, 1990, p.11). Bruner’s was one of the major voices that re-established the importance of culture in psychological research. He not only emphasized the significance of culture, but also that self formation was very much tied to cultural formation because “autobiography involves not only the construction of self, but also a construction of one’s culture” (Bruner, 1991a, p.77). Therefore, both the construction of culture and self, of our human reality in Bruner’s view, involved meaning making through the medium of narratives (Bruner, 1991a). Bruner asserted, “I cannot imagine a more important psychological research project than one that addresses itself to the development of autobiography” (Bruner, 2004a, p. 694-695). Autobiography, according to Bruner is the avenue in which meaning is made, and what perpetuates and is constitutive of culture and self.

Following a brief discussion about how I approach the concepts of culture and self as inspired by Bruner’s conceptualization, I will review the voluminous research on culture and self with a view of highlighting major criticisms and shortcomings as well as more recent advances that attempt to rectify these issues. I will then relate my critical considerations of this literature to Bruner’s reflection on the importance of narratives, especially autobiography in understanding culture and self, and review the growing literature on the role of self-narratives and autobiographical memory in constructing self

and identity in cultural contexts.

Based on these reviews, I will argue that a self-narrative approach is particularly useful in addressing some of the criticisms and furthering the investigation of culture and self. The self-narrative approach, which I will adopt in this thesis, uses a semiotic framework to unpack the narrative structure of meaning in people's narration about themselves. I will justify why a semiotic narrative approach is important in examining cross-cultural differences in how the self is construed and reconstructed to further our understanding of the relationship between culture and self.

What is culture? Although there are many definitions of culture (e.g., Kroeber, Kluckhohn, & Untereiner, 1952; Keesing, 1974; Geertz, 1966, 1973; see Jahoda, 2012, for a discussion), there is an emerging consensus about culture in psychology in recent times – culture is concerned with information or meaning (Kashima, 2000, 2016; Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006). In this sense, culture is distinguished from society, which is a collection of people and their groups, their relationships and institutions (Kashima & Gelfand, 2012). Some scholars, Markus and Hamedani (2007) defined culture as “patterns of representations, actions, and artefacts that are distributed or spread by social interaction” (p. 11). Likewise, Chiu and Hong view culture as dynamic networks of knowledge (Chiu & Hong, 2006, 2013; Hong, 2013). These researchers all regard culture as some form of information or meaning.

Nonetheless, as Kashima (2000) noted, theorists have approached culture from two broad perspectives: a systems or a process perspective. The systems view sees culture as an enduring system of shared meaning that is rather stable and gives structure to experience. In contrast, the process view considers culture as the process of signification, of producing and reproducing meanings in individuals' concrete practices in specific contexts in time and space. The culture-as-practice or process view adopts a

shorter term perspective focusing on the situated and dynamic patterns of practice (Kashima, 2000). It is from this perspective of how the self is constructed in process that I try to approach culture and self by using a self-narrative approach.

What is self? William James' (1890) chapter on 'The Consciousness of Self' in his *Principles of Psychology*, was perhaps the first detailed psychological discussion of the self (Leary & Tangley, 2003). James (1890) argued that the Self consisted of two aspects of consciousness, 'I'- *the knower* (the self as subject of experience) and 'Me'- *the empirical self* (the self as object of experience). The 'I' the knower was thought of as the 'thinking self', referred to as the 'pure ego', while the 'Me' which was the empirical self, was the self as known. The concept of the Me was further analyzed by James (1890) into the *material, social and spiritual self*. The *material self* was described as one's bodily self and one's possessions. The *social self* encompasses the self that is recognized by others, including reputations. Lastly, the *spiritual self* was according to James (1890) "the inner or subjective being.... the most enduring and intimate part of the self", composed of the "intellectual, moral and religious aspirations of the individual" (p.296 and p. 329). James's (1890) analysis laid the foundations for a multi-dimensional self that guided future models (Harter, 1996, 2015).

The complexity of the self as a psychological construct has been an issue acknowledged by researchers (see Baumeister, 1987, and Leary & Tangney, 2003, for a detailed account). Hamachek (1992) regarded *self* as that part of us which we are consciously aware of, whereas self-concept is the clusters of ideas or attitudes, or the organized cognitive structure acquired from the experiences about our own self (Hamachek, 1992). Hence, from these experiences, we derive ideas or concepts which are cognitive appraisals of who we are (Hattie, 2014; Kernis & Goldman, 2003). In contrast to self-concept, Hamachek (1992) referred to self-esteem as the affective part

of the self in that we have feelings and evaluations about who we are. These few aspects of the self highlight the way the self has been investigated in terms of its processes, that is attentional, cognitive, regulatory aspects of the self intertwined with emotion and motivation (see Leary & Tangney, 2003 for full exposition). To clarify, Leary and Tangney (2003) characterized ‘Self’ as “the psychological apparatus that allows organisms to think consciously about themselves” (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 8).

One of James’s (1890) many contributions to the psychology of self is his explicit acknowledgement that the experience of one’s self is intimately linked to social processes, that is, his recognition of the social self. This perspective was further developed by symbolic interactionists including Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), and Goffman (1959) into one of the most fundamental premises of social psychological research about self-processes. That is, we become aware of ourselves as an object in the world due to other people’s responses to us in the past and present. Thereby, we adopt the perspectives of others in order to develop our own self-view (Vallacher, 1980). More recently, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) elaborated that self is the referential point in daily life, to make sense of our behavior and experience, and to model our actions based on the responses of others. Furthermore, the self in a social world “is not only something we are, but an object we actively construct and live by”, often via the means of discursive practice (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 10). Therefore, in their view, we are in part our own making as we attend to, motivate, regulate and build up an assemblage of our self through discursive acts with others as our explicit audience and privately with an implicit audience in our own minds.

Holstein and Gubrium’s (2000) symbolic interactionism is highly resonant with the conceptualization of culture as process, and Bruner’s (1990) approach to culture and self. If the self is constructed in discourse as Holstein and Gubrium (2000) suggests, the

self must be informed by culture. This is because culture consists of information and meaning, the very thing that the discourse is made of. Thus, the discussion about culture and the self are converging to Bruner's (1990) counsel that the construction of culture and the construction of self go hand in hand, and that a productive approach to this process of mutual constitution of culture and self (Shweder, 1990) may be to examine people's discursive practices of self-narration. The next section will review the research on culture and self, and examine some of the criticisms of the existing literature, to argue that a self-narrative approach may provide us with a way forward.

Contemporary Research on Culture and Self

According to Kashima and Gelfand (2012), although there has been a long history of cross-cultural research in psychology, much of the contemporary social psychological research on cultural comparisons began in the 1980s, which provided a theoretical framework for subsequent comparative research on culture and self. They suggested that it was Hofstede's (1980) *Culture's Consequences* that gave a strong impetus to the emergence of the standard theory. Based on the data he collected from IBM employees, Hofstede identified four primary dimensions of cultural variation in the values and practices of organizations. These were power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. Yet, it was the individualism and collectivism dimension that received much attention.

Hofstede explained that individualist cultures emphasize the interest of the individual over the interests of the group where the relationship between individuals are loose and people primarily look after their self and immediate family (Hofstede, 1983, 1997). Therefore, individualists focus on 'I' consciousness, autonomy, emotional independence, individual initiative, right to privacy, pleasure seeking, financial security,

need for specific friendship, and universalism (Triandis, 1988, 1989). On the other hand, collectivist cultures emphasize the interest of the group instead of the individual and people are integrated from birth into close-knitted loyal in-groups which continues throughout life (Hofstede, 1983, 1997). Collectivists therefore accent on ‘we’ consciousness, collective identity, emotional interdependence, group solidarity, duties and obligations, and particularism (Kim, Sharkey, & Singelis, 1994). Hofstede’s index of individualism and collectivism treated individualism as one end of the dimension and collectivism as its polar opposite, and highest in individualism were countries of the West, including the United States, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, and so on, whereas most collectivist cultures were countries from Latin America and Asia such as Venezuela, Japan, China, and Singapore. As I will describe below, this seminal work provided an empirically based partial ‘map’ of world cultures in which to investigate the relationship between culture and self.

Cultural dimension, self-construal, and cognitive style. Triandis (1989) explicitly linked the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism to the self, and the tendency for people to activate different types of self-concept in their everyday life in different cultural contexts. He distinguished three types of self-concept, the private, public and collective self that exist in anyone. The private self consisted of cognitions that encompassed traits, states or behaviors of the person, such as “I am introverted”, “I am honest”, etc. The public self composed of cognitions about the self publicly presented to others. Lastly, the collective self referred to cognitions that viewed the self as a member of some collective such as family, tribe, co-workers, etc. Triandis (1989) suggested that depending on the cultural context in which people are socialized, different types of selves are more or less likely to be activated and therefore, accounted for the patterns of social behavior seen in different cultures. To characterize different

cultural contexts, Triandis (1989) theorized that three dimensions of cultural variation would affect the likelihood of activating different selves: individualism-collectivism, tightness-looseness and cultural complexity. Borrowing Hofstede's (1980) individualism-collectivism dimension, he suggested that in collectivist Asian cultures, people tend to activate the collective and public selves more and the private self less than in individualist Western cultures (Triandis, 1989).

Markus and Kitayama (1991a) consolidated Triandis's (1989) three-part theory of self into two types of self-construals, i.e., different ways in which a person may construe oneself. They called them independent and interdependent self-construals, and suggested that these distinct self-construals can systematically influence various psychological processes in cognition, emotion and motivation. They contended that in many Western or individualistic cultures, individuals have a tendency to have an independent construal of the self, where the self is viewed as autonomous, separate, bounded and unique, "whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one's own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and action, rather than by reference to the thoughts, feelings and actions of others" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p. 226). In contrast, in Eastern or collectivistic cultures, individuals tended to have an interdependent construal of the self where the self is seen as "part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on, and to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p.227), along similar notions such as "sociocentric, contextualist, connected, and relational" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p.227).

There are consequences of activating an independent or interdependent self-construal. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991a), the tasks of people with an

independent self-construal included “being unique, expressing oneself, realizing internal attributes, promoting one’s own goals and being direct” (p. 230). On the other hand, for those with an interdependent self-construal, the tasks included, “belonging or fitting in, occupying one’s proper place, engaging in appropriate action, promoting others’ goals and being indirect” (p. 230). With regards to the affective consequence of activating self-construal, Markus and Kitayama (1991a) highlighted that the concept of self-esteem is more of a Western phenomenon and may be better replaced by self-satisfaction because in the interdependent self-construal, one does not esteem oneself but derives self-satisfaction in the ability to adjust, restrain self and maintain harmony with one’s social context. It is only in the independent self-construal, that self-esteem is highlighted because at the heart of self-esteem is the ability to express the self and validate internal attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a).

Thus, the notion of the self offered a mechanism underlying psychological processes in the mind and heart, describing how it mediated the influence of cultural individualism and collectivism on psychological processes. Although different theorists used different terms, I will use the term self-construals in the following discussion to refer to different types of self-concepts that are associated with different cultures. In line with Triandis’s (1989) theory, the multiple types of selves were all postulated to co-exist in any person and to be activated in different contexts.

Closely linked to individualism-collectivism and independent-interdependent self-construal is the dimension of holistic-analytic cognitive styles, another dimension that has contributed to cultural differences in self-views (see Chen, Spencer-Rodgers, & Peng, 2017; Spencer-Rodgers, Anderson, Ma-Kellams, Wang, & Peng, 2017). Nisbett, Peng, Choi and Norenzayan (2001) argued that people from East Asian cultures (like the Chinese, Japanese and Koreans) tend to adopt a holistic cognitive style whereas

those from Western cultures (like the Americans, Australians and Canadians), an analytic style. Holistic cognition is defined as “an orientation to the context or field as a whole, including attention to relationships between a focal object and the field, and a preference for explaining and predicting events on the basis of such relationships” (Nisbett et al., 2001, p. 293); it relies on experience-based knowledge instead of abstract logic. It also rests on dialectical reasoning, which emphasizes change and coexistence of contradictions (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Analytic cognition is defined as “involving detachment of the object from its context, a tendency to focus on attributes of the object to assign it to categories, and a preference for using rules about the categories to explain and predict the object’s behavior” (Nisbett et al., 2001, p. 293). Hence, the analytic style makes inferences from decontextualizing structure and content, the use of formal logic and avoidance of contradiction.

Kashima and Gelfand (2012) suggested that Triandis (1989), Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Nisbett et al. (2001) in combination provided a theoretical framework in which much of the subsequent research on culture and self was conducted. In what they called the *Standard Theory*, the cultural dimension of individualism and collectivism was to describe a cultural context in which independent or interdependent self-construals are activated, which then also precipitate analytical and holistic cognitive styles.

The construct of self-construal gave rise to a great deal of research in social psychology because self-construal was thought to mediate and explain cultural differences. Two most commonly used self-report measures to examine self-construal were devised by Singelis (1994) and Gudykunst et al., (1996). Studies into the independent and interdependent self-construal using these measures and others have proliferated in many areas, from attitudes towards behavior (Park & Levine, 1999),

attribution errors (Krull et al., 1999), coping and stress (Cross, 1995), and emotional distress (Okazaki, 2000; Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002), to neurological processing (Hitokoto, Glazer, & Kitayama, 2016) and well-being, (Hyun, 2001; Novin, Tso, & Konrath, 2014; Pandey & Srivastava, 2012) to just name a few. In the following, I will review the most relevant literature by focusing on cultural comparisons about people's conceptualizations about the self, that is, the research that directly pertains to how the self is construed differently in Eastern and Western cultures.

Empirical research. Over the past decades, there has been a robust collection of work conducted on systematic differences in self-related processes across cultures. However, the most widely studied have been between Western (mostly North Americans) and Eastern (mostly East Asians) cultural groups. I start my review of the cultural comparative research on self-conceptualizations with the research using structured self-construal scales, and then highlight major shortcomings and criticisms that have mounted to these approaches. I will then turn to more recent advances in the culture and self research, which developed in response to these shortcomings and began to provide a more solid empirical ground for further research. I then end my review with cultural comparative studies about self-description, which involves open-ended explicit verbal descriptions of the self. This is because my research is concerned with how the self is constructed in self-narratives. It was surmised that verbal and written descriptions of the self across cultures would provide me with the most direct empirical grounding for my research. I then move on to the research that uses self-narrative approaches to complement the insights gained from the self-description studies and structured approaches.

Structured scale-based research on self-construal. The structured approach

using scales has been most widely used in cross-cultural psychological research. Singelis (1994) developed the initial scale to measure the strengths of an individual's independent and interdependent self-construals using a sample of university students that included Africans, Europeans, and Asian Americans, as well as Pacific Islanders, including Hawaiians. The initial 45 items in the Singelis (1994) scale included some rewritten items derived from other scales that measured the psychological counterparts of individualism and collectivism (Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1992) and independent and interdependent self-construal constructs (Cross & Markus, 1991). The final 24 item Singelis (1994) Self-Construal Scale (12 items each of distinct independent and interdependent self-construals) asked respondents to indicate their agreement on a 7-point Likert-type format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with some descriptive items of oneself and some items that were similar to attitude statements. Singelis (1994) stated that the two dimensions of independent and interdependent self-construals could coexist within individuals, and were found to be orthogonal in their samples. His research showed that Asian Americans were found to be more interdependent than European Americans and conversely, European Americans were more independent than Asian Americans (Singelis, 1994), and this was replicated with other studies (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). In addition, it was also found that Asian Americans with a higher interdependence scores indeed attributed more influence to the situation than European Americans, consistent with previous research (Miller, 1984; Shweder & Bourne, 1984). Singelis (1994) claimed that his measure was both valid and reliable, and consistent with Markus and Kitayama's (1991a) descriptions of North Americans as independent and Asians as interdependent.

In line also with Markus and Kitayama's (1991a) assertion that the distinct self-

construals could explain cultural differences and have implications on cognition, motivation and emotion, Singelis and Sharkey (1995) administered their Self-Construal Scale and the Embarrassability Scale to Asian Americans and Euro-Americans. They found that Asian Americans who scored higher on interdependence also reported more embarrassment than Euro-Americans. Their results provided evidence of independent and interdependent self-construals explaining cultural differences in emotion. These results were consistent with a further study by Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, and Lai (1999) on embarrassability, with European Americans (higher on independence and lower on embarrassment) compared with Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese, who scored higher on interdependent self-construal and also reported higher embarrassment. The results of their studies led them to conclude that self-construal may have a mediating influence of culture on embarrassability.

The mediating role of self-construal was theorized and investigated by Singelis and Brown (1995), who sought to highlight the importance of constructs like self-construal in linking culture to behavior, such as communication. In communication information theory, Hall (1976) distinguished between two different communication styles that focused on code and context, that is high-context and low-context communication. In high-context communication, which is usually seen in countries like Japan, Korea, and China, most of the information in a message is either contextualized, with little coded and involves indirect communication. In contrast, low-context communication is more predominant in countries like the United States, Australia, and those in Northern Europe, where information is conferred in the explicit communication code and directly communicated (see Hall, 1976, for full description). Singelis and Brown (1995) showed that indeed an interdependent self-construal mediated the effect of culture on high-context communication but results for independent self-construal was

not significant.

Their study results were also later replicated using another well-known self-construal scale developed by Gudykunst et al. (1996). They found that through their 30 items scale of self-construal (14 items for independent and 16 items for interdependent) reflecting two factors measuring independence and interdependence, that the individual level factors of self-construal and values were better predictors of communication styles. That is, independent self-construal and individualistic values mediated the influence of cultural Individualism-Collectivism on the use of low-context communication, which involves using explicit and direct messages (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Conversely, the interdependent self-construal and collectivistic values mediated the influence of cultural Individualism-Collectivism on the use of high-context communication, which involves using implicit and indirect messages (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Gudykunst & Lee, 2003).

Both Singelis (1994) and Gudykunst et al.'s (1996) Self-construal Scales had items phrased in a positive direction and overlapped closely with measures of individualism and collectivism such that both individualism/collectivism and self-construal scales were used interchangeably in some studies to measure self-construal (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). These scales had adequate to good reliability, were translated into different languages and opened up an explosion of research into culture and self processes (see Cross & Gore, 2003; Cross, Hardin & Gercek-Swing, 2011, for reviews).

In researching self processes, the independent and interdependent self-construals were found (using the Singelis scale) to be related to different regulatory focuses. Regulatory focus theory describes different ways that people self-regulate, that is, the way individuals control, maintain or adjust their actions to obtain a goal on the basis of

approaching gains or avoiding losses (Higgins 1997, 2002). The different selves in Higgin's self-discrepancy theory (1987) has acted as a framework for examining cultural differences in motivation and affect. According to Higgins, self-regulation towards a specific goal may be the pursuit of aspirations towards ideals (promotion-focused), or the avoidance of losses, and the fulfillment of oughts or obligations (prevention-focused; Higgins, 1997). Hence, individuals would regulate their cognition and action in terms of the discrepancy of their *actual self* in relation to their self-guides, *ideal* and *ought* self. Lee, Aaker and Gardner (2000) found that North Americans with a dominant independent self perceived promotion-focused information as more important than prevention-focused information, whereas the opposite held for the Chinese with a dominant interdependent self. Furthermore, Aaker and Lee (2001) showed that European Americans had better recall for promotion-focused than prevention-focused information and this information was consistent with the self-regulatory focus of promotion goals associated with approach, for example, gaining health. In contrast, the Hong Kong Chinese had better recall for prevention-focused than promotion-focused information and this information was consistent with the self-regulatory focus of prevention goals, such as, avoidance of illness.

Like self-regulation, studies into self-enhancement have shown cross-cultural variations (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Heine, Kitayama, & Hamamura, 2007; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Kurman, 2001, 2002, 2003). Self-enhancement is defined as the general sensitivity to positive self-relevant information, that is, a tendency to see the self in a positive light (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Kitayama et al., 1997). Heine and Lehman (1995) proposed that self-enhancing biases which involves viewing the self with unrealistic optimism, might be viewed as ways in which individuals maintain their

independent selves. They asked European Canadian or US and Japanese born respondents to answer questions about future positive and negative life events and found that the Canadians exhibited more unrealistic optimism about future life events than the Japanese. Heine and Lehman (1995) concluded that self-enhancing biases might be more specific to Western cultures as it was not typical for the Japanese from interdependent cultures whose ideal is more in line with self-effacement, the tendency to draw attention away from the self, so to maximize their sense of connectedness and belonging.

Kitayama et al. (1997) suggested in accordance with Heine and Lehman (1995) that Americans in the United States self-enhance while the Asians in Japan self-criticize so that they could subsequently make improvement of the self. They proposed that the tendency to self-enhance fosters and promotes the independence and uniqueness of the self in Western individualistic societies. In contrast, the sensitivity to negative self-relevant information as practiced by self-criticism is fostered and promoted to allow the relational and embeddedness of the self in Eastern collectivistic societies (Kitayama et al., 1997).

Kurman (2003) investigated the low self-enhancement in collectivists and found that indeed, the collectivists (Singaporean-Chinese, Japanese and Ethiopian Israelis participants) had lower self-enhancement levels than the individualists (Israeli-born, secular, urban participants). Exploring possible explanations to the cultural differences in self-enhancement, Kurman (2003) found that modesty, the public under-presentation of one's favorable traits and abilities, mediated the relationship between culture and self-enhancement rather than the notion of relatedness to the group or unique self-identity. The findings suggested that cultural restrictions on the self, like modesty, rather than self-enhancement motive may explain cross-cultural differences in self-

enhancement (Kurman, 2002, 2003). Furthermore, Kurman (2001) demonstrated that self-enhancement of agentic traits (based on intelligence, health and sociability) is predicted by independent self-construal and modesty (negatively); however, self-enhancement of communal traits (based on cooperation, honesty and generosity) is predicted by interdependent self-construal. Hence, while the need for positive self-regard is indeed lower for those in collectivistic cultures, it may be a result of social restrictions on self-development, and that the self-enhancement motive is present in East Asian culture like Singapore and Japan.

Kurman's (2001) research highlights a controversy in theoretical stances concerning self-enhancement raised by Sedikides and his colleagues (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005) and that of Heine and his colleagues (Heine et al., 1999; Heine et al., 2007). Sedikides et al. (2003) showed in their first study that American students mostly self-enhanced on individualistic attributes while the Japanese students mostly self-enhanced on collectivistic attributes. This was replicated in their second study using Singelis's (1994) scale, which demonstrated that in contrast to independents who self-enhanced on individualistic attributes, interdependents self-enhanced on collectivistic attributes. They argued for the stance that self-enhancement was a universal motive.

The debate about self-enhancement tendencies being pancultural has not been resolved (Heine et al., 2007; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2007). Scholars who support the theoretical distinctiveness of Western versus Eastern cultures have shown research contending that East Asians' tendency to self-enhance is less than those of Westerners (Heine et al., 1999; Heine et al., 2007; Kitayama et al., 1997). On the other hand, different scholars argue for the universal motive of self-enhancement in that both Easterners and Westerners self-enhance equally but do so in domains that are important

to them. For example, the Japanese self-enhance on interdependent/collectivistic traits and attributes while the Americans on independent/individualistic traits and attributes (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2003; Sedikides et al., 2005). Further research may possibly elucidate on this issue of self-enhancement and whether indeed self-enhancement is influenced by cultural and social restrictions.

As the above studies illustrated, it was possible to use the measures of self-construal to investigate a range of self-processes that were thought to explain and/or mediate the effects of culture. However, as more research was generated, there was controversy particularly regarding the scale-based approach to independent and interdependent self-construal. Theoretical, conceptual and methodological issues with self-construal were raised. Many times, measures of self-construal did not show the anticipated cross-cultural differences, nor did it mediate cultural differences in certain behaviors (see Cross et al., 2011, for review). Firstly, the methodological flaws in measurement will be discussed, followed by considerations about the validity of the theoretical and conceptual framework of self-construal.

Shortcomings and criticisms. The lack of cultural differences in self-construal scales may be due to measurement equivalence and response style problems. They are particularly relevant in studies that rely solely on self-report measures such as Singelis's and Gudykunst et al.'s self-construal scales. To begin, measurement equivalence is needed to ensure that the scores on a measure can be compared between cultures (Laungani, 2006, see also Milfont & Fischer, 2010, for a discussion). First of all, if measures are used in two or more languages, the items in different languages need to have the same meaning. In order to ensure this, the measures constructed in one language are translated into other languages, and then back translated into the first

language to ensure the translation is adequate (Brislin, 1970; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). It is important in back translation to capture the subtle differences in the nuances of test items in different languages or cultures. For example, 'highly assertive' carries a positive connotation in North America, but being highly assertive has a socially undesirable connotation in East Asian cultures (Chiu & Hong, 2006). Thus, even if the same word may be appropriately translated, it may still have different meanings in various cultures (see Ji, Schwarz, & Nisbett, 2000; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997).

Response biases are another issue. For example, in many cultures, it has been noted that respondents try to give answers that they think would be pleasing to the researcher (socially desirable response) and what constitutes socially desirable responses varies across cultures (Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006). Lalwani et al. (2006) found that participants in the United States compared with those from Singapore, and European Americans compared with Asian Americans, scored higher on self-deceptive enhancement (SDE: the tendency to be cast in a positive light and inflate one's skills and abilities) but lower on impression management (IM: misrepresenting their self-reported actions to be seen as normatively appropriate; Lalwani et al., 2006). An additional type of response bias is the effect of acquiescent response style (Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013; Vignoles et al., 2016), which is the general tendency for individuals to agree to all the questionnaire items (e.g., Dolnicar & Grun, 2007; Hofstede, 1980; Smith et al., 2013). This is an issue raised in scales like Singelis (1994) and Gudykunst et al.'s (1996) where items are all phrased in a positive direction, and hence, results may be impacted by acquiescent responding to obscure mean differences in cross-cultural comparisons, or distort individual-level dimensional structures (see Smith et al., 2013 and Vignoles et al., 2016 for further discussions).

Another issue pertinent to measurement was raised by Heine, Lehman, Peng and

Greenholtz (2002). They showed in three studies that cross-cultural comparisons can potentially be compromised due to a reference-group effect. This is “the confounding role of context in comparisons of mean questionnaire responses across different groups” (Heine et al. 2002, p. 904). That is, when people evaluate themselves, they usually compare themselves with similar others; for example, the Chinese would compare themselves with other Chinese, but Australians would compare themselves with other Australians. If Chinese and Australians think about different distributions of behaviors on a given psychological construct, even if the Likert scales return similar scores, there may actually be group differences (see Heine et al., 2002).

Another potential reason why the self-construal scales failed to show cross-cultural differences may be that the link between the cultural level individualism and collectivism and the individual level independent and interdependent self-construal is not as straight forward as the Standard Theory has assumed. Matsumoto (1999) raised this issue in his critical evaluation of the then available research on self-construal. He cited substantial evidence to argue that there was no evidence to support the assertion that individualistic cultures are associated with independent self-construal and collectivistic cultures are associated with interdependent self-construal. Hence, the evidence gathered challenged the validity of Markus and Kitayama’s (1991a) theoretical construct for explaining the noted national differences in psychological phenomena (Matsumoto, 1999). Takano and Osaka (1999) also raised a similar issue in their review of individualism and collectivism research which failed to show cross-cultural differences. Basically, they both questioned the validity of the common view that the Japanese are more collectivistic than Americans as it raises a conceptual issue underpinning the assumption that individuals with an interdependent self-construal like the Japanese are from non-Western cultures that are considered collectivistic.

In using the example of Japanese to represent the interdependent self in Markus and Kitayama's (1991a) theory, Matsumoto (1999) argued that Japanese culture has changed after World War II, especially in its affluence and the availability of resources. Y. Kashima, Koval and E. Kashima (2011) emphasized the importance of any cross-cultural work to consider the historical trajectory of a cultural change. For example, Japan, with its idiosyncratic history of social and economic change especially after the defeat in World War II, may not be 'representative' of East Asian cultures (Y. Kashima et al., 2011).

Levine et al.'s (2003a) meta-analysis of studies about cultural differences in self-construals gave statistical evidence supporting Matsumoto's (1999) arguments. Levine et al. (2003a) reasoned that for self-construal to mediate and explain cultural differences, the independent and interdependent self-construals must demonstrate the expected cultural differences. They argued that to establish the theoretical and construct validity of self-construals, research must show that the independent self-construal is more prevalent in individuals in Western than non-Western cultures, whereas the interdependent self-construal is more prominent in non-Western than Western cultures, particularly Asian cultures (Levine et al., 2003a, 2003b). The evidence was inconsistent in that individuals from Japan, Korea, China, or Taiwan were not necessarily more interdependent than those living in the U.S., Canada, or Australia. In the same vein, evidence contradicted the claim that individuals from Asian countries were more interdependent than independent (Levine et al., 2003a). For example, some studies showed differences in self-construal with North Americans and Japanese having equally high independent self-construal (Krull et al., 1999; Sato & Cameron, 1999), and others found that North Americans were higher in interdependent self-construal than the Japanese (Kleinknecht, Dinnel, Kleinknecht, Hiruma, & Hirada, 1997; Oyserman et al.,

2002; Sato & Cameron, 1999).

The data seemed to echo a speculation that self-construal is a Western concept and that structured self-report questionnaires are more suited to European-Americans (Park & Levine, 1999; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Markus & Kityama, 1998). Research data suggested that associations between self-construals and dependent variables were not always found and claims of self-construal as individual level dimensions corresponding to cultural level individualism and collectivism were not sufficiently empirically supported. Therefore, ratings on self-construal scales may not actually show reliable cultural differences as self-construals might have different meanings in different cultures and be more multidimensional. They called for further conceptual and operational refinement.

Furthermore, Oyserman et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis of cross-cultural comparisons of individualism and collectivism raised a number of issues. First, Oyserman et al. (2002) showed that individualism and collectivism were both multi-faceted constructs operationalized differently by different studies, and that when they are aggregated, they tended to form orthogonal dimensions. They also found that there were reliable cultural differences, but they were not as large or systematic as previously thought. For example, European Americans were more individualistic, but not necessarily less collectivistic than the Japanese and Koreans (Oyserman et al., 2002). Evidence indicated that with Asians, only the Chinese showed large cross-cultural differences with North Americans in that they were both less individualistic and more collectivistic.

The anthropologist, Spiro (1993) also criticized the self-construal construct, raising concerns about the conceptual framework and the 'we're egocentric/ they're sociocentric view', asserting as did Triandis (1993) the sociocentric theories of the self

and that individualism and collectivism co-exist in most societies. Gregg (2010) noted that these developments brought the field and particularly the study of ‘culture and self’ to a crisis point.

Advances in approaches to culture and self. In response to these empirical shortcomings and theoretical and methodological criticisms, conceptual refinements were made and improved methodological approaches were developed. These advances began to provide more replicable empirical insights into culture and self.

Other Scale-based studies of East-West cultural comparisons of self-conceptions. There are other studies that compared Eastern and Western samples on explicit measures of self-construal other than those developed by Singelis (1994) and Gudykunst et al. (1996). Researchers have questioned the two-dimensional structure (Hardin, Leong, & Bhagwat, 2004; Christopher, Norris, D’Souza, & Tiernan, 2012), and suggested that it needed to be further analyzed (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Harb & Smith, 2008; Hardin et al., 2004; Levine et al., 2003b). For example, Kağitçibaşı (2005) suggested that independence and interdependence included both dimensions- interpersonal distance (relatedness vs. separateness) and agency (heteronomy vs. autonomy), and that aspects of interpersonal distance (i.e., relatedness) and agency (i.e., autonomy) can coexist (Kağitçibaşı, 2005; Smith et al., 2013).

Researchers also have investigated interdependence as distinct relational and collective interdependence (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; E. Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Y. Kashima et al., 1995; Sedikides & Brewer, 2015), unpacking interdependence in terms of relationships with significant others (relational interdependence) and relationships with general groups

(collective interdependence) (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Cross et al., 2000; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). In these studies, a three-dimensional view of the self was adopted, namely, the individualistic, collective and relational selves (Breckler & Greenwald, 1986, Greenwald & Breckler, 1985, Triandis, 1989). This three-dimensional model of the self was further elaborated by Brewer and Gardner (1996) to be a distinct form of self-representation within the self-system.

In investigating cultural differences within the three-dimensional model of the self, Y. Kashima et al. (1995) found evidence that the individualistic, collective and relational dimensions of self-construal were empirically separable. Further clarifying the three dimensions, they found four factors that tapped the different dimensions of the self-construal: agency, assertiveness, collectivism and relatedness. *Agency* and *assertiveness* both appeared to tap an individualist dimension, with *agency* emphasizing the independence of action and *assertiveness* exemplifying independent expression of opinions. *Collectivism* highlighted a positive attitude towards the group and *relatedness* expressed the relationship between the self with others, both of which tapped the interdependent self-construal differentiated into the collective and relational selves. Y. Kashima et al. (1995) found that, consistent with the Standard Theory, Americans and Australians were higher on agency and assertiveness, but lower on collectivism than Koreans and Japanese, with Hawaiians in between the Westerners and the East Asians. However, they also found that women were more relational than men and higher levels of relatedness were reported by the Koreans than the Japanese, highlighting a difference between specific Eastern Asian cultures.

Further research showed that a three-dimensional consideration of self-construal seems to explain better the anomalies of research findings. E. Kashima, Hardie, Wakimoto and Y. Kashima (2011) found that collective self-descriptions were, as

expected, more notable in Asian than Australian participants, but the relational self-descriptions were similar between both these cultural groups. Even though this observation seemed contrary to the notion that the Eastern self-construal is more interdependent than the Western self-construal as postulated by Markus and Kitayama (1991a), they found it is consistent with the previous findings from studies that measured relational and collective self-aspects separately (Bochner, 1994; Y. Kashima et al., 1995; Y. Kashima et al., 2004). Despite further salient evidence for the support of a separable three-dimensional model of self (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005), much of research has subsumed the latter two dimensions of self under the superordinate category of interdependent self-construal.

Nonetheless, Harb and Smith (2008) proposed their Six-Fold Self-construal Scale (including the personal self, relational horizontal and relational vertical selves, collective horizontal and collective vertical selves, and humanity-bound self-construal) with consideration of the three dimensional self-construal model, including personal, relational and collective dimensions to explore more details of the interdependent self. The vertical and horizontal dimensions either emphasize hierarchy or equality in relationships (see Harb & Smith, 2008 for further explanation). Although there is ambiguity between the lines of relational and collective interdependent selves, cultural groups may vary on collective interdependence, in comparison to gender groups on relational interdependence (Cross & Madson, 1997; Cross et al., 2011; Kashima et al., 1995; Smith et al., 2013).

Researchers have also explored the differing ways people may be independent and interdependent across different cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Smith et al., 2013; Vignoles et al., 2016), and investigated the different dimensions of self-construal (Guo, Schwartz, & McCabe, 2008; Fernández, Paez, & González (2005). Hardin and

colleagues (2004, 2006) proposed a multidimensional self-construal construct with six factors which provided a close fit to the data. The factors included *Autonomy/Assertiveness* (e.g., being able to speak up for oneself), *Individualism* (e.g., having a personal identity independent of others), *Behavioral Consistency* (e.g., acting the same way in various contexts), and *Primacy of Self* (e.g., primary concern of looking after oneself), which represented specific types of Independence; while *Esteem for Group* (e.g., importance of maintaining harmony within groups) and *Relational Interdependence* (e.g., feeling that relationships with others takes precedence over accomplishments), represented specific types of Interdependence (Hardin et al., 2004; Hardin, 2006). They indicated that better methods were required for assessing self-construal as a multidimensional construct.

In 2016, Vignoles and colleagues investigated a seven-dimensional model of independent and interdependent self-construal based on some previous scales, and using factor analyses, identified the dimensions (with their domains in brackets): *self-reliance vs. dependence on others* (looking after oneself), *self-containment vs. connectedness to others* (experiencing the self), *difference vs. similar to others* (defining the self), *self-interest vs. commitment to others* (dealing with conflicting interests), *consistency vs. variability* (moving between contexts), *self-direction vs. reception to influence* (making decisions), and *self-expression vs. harmony* (communicating with others). The domains of personal and social functioning contrasts the independent with interdependent ways of being. For examples, looking after oneself can either be *self-reliance* (for independents) vs. *dependence on others* (for interdependents), etc.

Unique to Vignoles et al.'s (2016) approach were that, a) they employed a broad range of cultural groups with two large multi-national surveys, including 2924 high school students from 16 countries, and 7279 adults from 55 cultural groups in 33

countries; b) they viewed each dimension as bipolar sides of independence and interdependence, which means individuals could have varying degrees of independence or interdependence on each dimension; and c) they included both positive-scored and reverse-scored items to control for the effect of acquiescent response styles. Vignoles et al. (2016) effectively focused more on how cultures are characterized with different ways of being independent and interdependent.

A seven-dimensional model of self-construal was able to demonstrate a better diversity of cultural models of selfhood, with different dimensions emphasized across world regions, which varied in divergent ways with individualism-collectivism, socioeconomic development, and religious heritage (see Vignoles et al., 2016). They suggested that neither individualism-collectivism nor self-construal should be reducible to the other due to individualism-collectivism incorporating self-representations as well as values, beliefs, etc. In addition, aspects like *self-reliance vs. dependence on others*, and *consistency vs. variability*, did not covary with individualism-collectivism in their research. They found that Westerners scored above average on *difference, self-expression, self-direction* and, unexpectedly on *commitment to others*. On the other hand, Southern/Eastern Asians emphasized *similarity, harmony, variability across contexts*, along with slight tendencies toward *dependence on others* and *commitment to others*. Vignoles et al. (2016) also explored religious heritage and affluence as contextual variables that are established predictors of cultural differences. They found that indeed religious heritage was important, with emphasis for Protestant samples on *self-containment*, Catholic samples on *difference, consistency and self-expression*, while Buddhist samples on *variability across contexts* together with marginal tendencies toward *greater dependence on others* and *greater harmony*. Vignoles et al. (2016) did caution that their seven-dimensional model was not definitive and that possibly other

dimensions might exist, and recommended that future research consider an open-ended, bottom-up approach.

Dialectical self. In contrast to the research on individualism and collectivism or self-construal, there is a body of research about culture and self based on culturally shared *lay theories* (Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Mori, Wang, & Peng, 2009). Naïve dialecticism was proposed by Peng and Nisbett (1999) to explain East Asian lay beliefs characterized by three main principles: change (Bian Yi Lu), contradiction (Mao Dun Lu), and holism (Zheng He Lu). The principle of *change* maintains that reality is a process in constant flux, that existence is dynamic and changeable. The principle of *contradiction* holds that because reality is ever changing, contradiction exists everywhere, like new and old, good and bad, hot and cold, etc. The ancient Yi-Jing/I-Ching (The Book of Changes) expressed the basic theme that the world is a single entity unified by dynamic balance of opposites and the evolution of events as a process. The principle of *holism* is the essence of dialectical thinking and thought to be the consequence of the principles of change and contradiction. This holism is underpinned by the assumption that everything exists divinely in the integration of Yin and Yang, opposing forces that coexist in an active harmony and are connected in time and space as a whole. The Chi (spirit) keeps Yin and Yang unified and in motion (principle of holism and contradiction) and consequently, the world is in flux (principle of change; Peng and Nisbett, 1999). Easterners are more attentive to social context and relationships than Westerners, and they discern more relations among the objects in the field (Choi & Nsbett, 2000; Ji, Peng, & Nisbett, 2000; Masuda and Nisbett, 2001; Miyamoto, Nisbett, & Masuda, 2006) due to the holistic understanding that “all

phenomena in the universe, including the self, are seen as interconnected and mutually dependent” (Spencer-Rodgers et al. 2009, p. 2).

The effects of naïve dialecticism on self-evaluations and psychological adjustment was examined by Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, Wang and Hou (2004). To explain the findings in literature that East Asians reported lower self-esteem and psychological well-being compared to Westerners, Spencer-Rodgers et al. (2004) showed in four studies that the mainland Chinese and Asian Americans had more ambivalence or evaluative contradictions in their self-attitudes and spontaneous self-descriptions than the European Americans. They also found that naïve dialecticism (assessed using the Dialectical Self Scale) played a mediating role in the observed cultural differences in self-esteem and well-being. Lastly, they primed naïve dialecticism and found that increased dialecticism was related to decreased psychological adjustment. Their findings suggest that dialectical cultures embrace both positive and negative aspects of self, and that self-esteem and well-being in East Asian cultures are better “conceptualized as two-dimensional, dynamic constructs that change over time and context” (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004, p. 1429). This has important implications in the cross-cultural study of self-esteem but also points to the broader understanding that different cognitive styles have significant effects on psychological outcomes and self-processes. These differing cognitive styles have more recently been investigated to have been shaped by cultural practices.

Experimental Priming. Cross et al., (2011) summarized that since the proposal of individualism/ collectivism and self-construal models, there has been a reconfiguration by researchers to not consider these models as cultural types but fluid ways of conceptualizing the self that are likely shared across cultures. As Triandis

(1989) had noted, different concepts can be activated by different contexts. In line with this, researchers have adopted the view that self-construals (independent and interdependent) are constructed and coexist within each individual, but cultural norms, values and practices highlight one over the other depending on the situation or task. As a consequence, this research focus has generated much interest in the use of priming methods (environmental cueing procedure) to enable one or another self-construal to be more salient in a given situation (Oyserman & Lee, 2008).

Trafimow, Triandis and Goto (1991) showed in two studies with North American and Chinese students that access to private or collective self-concepts could be manipulated experimentally. In the first task, they randomly assigned participants into either a private self-prime where they were asked to think about what made them different to their family or friends, or a collective self-prime which asked what they had in common with family or friends. They then completed Kuhn and McPartland's (1954) self-attitudes instrument (Twenty Statements Test; TST). Results indicated that participants given the private self-prime showed greater independence in their TST scores and those given the collective self-prime showed greater interdependence in their TST scores (Trafimow et al., 1991). In the second task, participants were asked to read a story about an ancient Sumerian warrior who behaved either in a manner that was independent (private self-prime) or interdependent (collective self-prime). Their results were consistent with the first task even though a different priming task was used. These findings suggested that cultural tendencies like individualism/independence and collectivism/interdependence can be primed.

The literature on self-construal priming proliferated and it was found to affect a broad range of cognitive processes (see Oyserman & Lee, 2007, 2008 for reviews). For example, recently Choi, Connor, Wason and Kahan (2016) found that priming

interdependent relative to independent self-knowledge did in fact generate different thinking styles among Western participants. They demonstrated through their experiments that by priming different views of the self, individuals can activate a mode of thinking that affects attention (Choi et al., 2016).

Oyserman and Lee (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that had used priming methods related to individualism-collectivism. They found 67 studies that were successful in shifting attitude, value and belief measures that were often used in cross-cultural research. In fact, the average effect sizes were in many cases similar to those found in Western and East Asian comparative research findings. The results of priming studies have lead Oyserman (2011) to propose that culture can be defined as ‘situated cognition’, that is, culture can be a specific meaning-making framework, a mindset that cues people to think and behave in culturally relevant ways in concrete situations.

These findings from priming research suggest that “cultural differences in independent and interdependent thoughts, feelings, motivations and behaviour are sustained at least in part by variable features of the social context, and not only by the internalized beliefs, values or self-construals of individual cultural members” (Smith et al, 2013, p. 176). They show the dynamic nature of self processes. More importantly, they allowed another way of understanding self-construal as a dynamic process in which both culture and self can be in flux (Kashima & Gelfand, 2012). This in many ways aligns with the current research program of the dynamic nature in which self and cultural construction go hand in hand as one constructs their self-narrative and self-construal within cultural contexts.

Cultural neuroscience approaches. Kitayama and Park (2010) proposed that cultural practices shape the brain and that neural connectivity changes may be a by-

product of recurrent “participation and engagement in culture’s conventions, routines and socially shared scripts for action” (p. 120). Kitayama and Uskul (2011) summarized empirical evidence using brain imaging studies, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) (e.g. Chiao et al., 2009; Chiao et al., 2010; Kobayashi, Glover, & Temple, 2007; Zhu et al., 2007), event-related potential (ERP) (e.g. Goto, Ando, Huang, Yee, & Lewis, 2009; Goto, Yee, Lowenberg, & Lewis, 2013) and other methods (see Kitayama & Uskul, 2011, for a review) that demonstrated that brain processes vary cross-culturally particularly in the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC). The MPFC is known as the structure of the brain involved in autobiography (Araujo et al., 2014), social and moral cognition (Yoder & Decety, 2014; Hyatt, Calhoun, Pearlson, & Assaf, 2015; Spunt et al., 2015; Van Bavel, FeldmanHall, & Mende-Siedlecki, 2015), and self-related processes (Northoff & Bermpohl, 2004).

For example, Zhu et al. (2007) investigated the differences of MPFC in the self-representations of Americans (with independent self) and Chinese (with interdependent self) by recording neural activity using fMRI while the participants performed a self-referential task, judging whether personality trait adjectives applied to the self, their mother or a public person. Their results indicated that the MPFC and anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) displayed stronger activation in self- than other-judgment conditions for both the Americans and Chinese. Intriguingly, mother-judgments activated the MPFC in the Chinese, but not in the Americans. Their findings suggested that the Chinese use the MPFC to represent both the self and the mother, but the Americans use the MPFC to represent exclusively the self

Kaplan et al. (2016) reported additional evidence showing the role of the independent and interdependent self-construal in relation to functional brain activation differences between American and East Asians. In their study, they set out to investigate

how the brain processes personal narratives as opposed to narratives about mundane activities. Personal narratives embed protected values, that is, values that participants refuse to abandon at any cost and which are likely to constitute a significant part of their identity. Kaplan et al. (2016) found that there is some universality in brain activation patterns across cultural groups including Americans, Chinese and Iranians; however, they also found some cultural differences. Specifically, the same brain regions which seem to be involved in the processing of self-relevant narratives (i.e., posterior medial, medial prefrontal, and temporo-parietal cortices) responded to the task in all three groups, but the level of intensity varied. The Chinese participants showed the least differences in brain activity between protected and mundane narratives, compared to the American and Iranian groups, suggesting cultural differences in the degree of concern for protected values that reflect identity. Kaplan et al. (2016) explained that the Chinese may have processed values in a more intuitive, holistic manner (Kaplan, et al., 2016) as they tend to see themselves as part of a context, and had smaller differences in the activation of the MPFC when thinking about the self as opposed to the other.

This particular study is pertinent to the current research, as it shows the importance of narratives and their linkage to neural mechanisms involved in meaning-making regions of the brain in individuals from different cultures. The complex interaction Kaplan, et al. (2016) described between narratives, moral values, culture, and identity at the neural level does highlight that indeed narratives play a significant role in self-processes.

Self-description studies. Closest to the narrative approach in the early phase of research into culture and self were the self-description studies. Shweder and Bourne (1984) explored individuals' concept of the person and ideas about the self by asking 17

Americans from the US and 70 Oriyans from India to describe their acquaintances. Shweder and Bourne found that Americans used more personality traits (e.g., funny, friendly, etc.) to describe their acquaintances than the Oriyans, and the Oriyans used more contextual qualifications than the Americans (e.g., “she brings cakes to my family on festival days”; p. 178). Similarly, in other self-description studies, cross-cultural differences were found. Bond and Cheung (1983) studied the spontaneous self-concepts of students in Hong Kong, Japan and the US, using Kuhn and McPartland’s (1954) Twenty Statements Test (TST) which elicited responses to the question, “Who are you?” in 20 sentences beginning with the phrase ‘I am...’. Their results indicated that Japanese students provided fewer direct references to qualities of oneself (e.g. ‘I am friendly’) than the Hong Kong and US students. Subsequent TST studies from different nations also reported analogous cross-cultural differences (e.g. Bochner, 1994; Cousins, 1989; Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, Thapa, & Rettke, 1995; Ip & Bond, 1995, Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990).

These studies examined different dimensions of self-construal in the spontaneous open-ended self-descriptions of individuals. For example, Cousins (1989) explored the dimension of abstract-concrete dimension in regards to perceptions of the self in Japan and the United States. In his research, the Japanese were proposed to be more concrete in their “focus on situation-bound behavior and social role, rather than on abstract personality or dispositions” (Cousins, 1989, p. 124). In fact, the tendency towards concrete mode of thought for Easterners, like the Japanese, have been suggested by a number of scholars (e.g. Bond & Cheung, 1983; Ishida, 1974; Nakamura, 1964). In Cousins’s work, by *concrete* he meant a description bounded to perceptual stimuli and a tendency to perceive things as part of the real-life setting. Cousins (1989) elicited self-descriptions using two versions of free-response formats,

the non-contextualized TST and a contextualized questionnaire asking participants to describe themselves at home, school and with friends. His results were consistent with prior research that the Japanese listed fewer abstract, psychological attributes (e.g., “I am easy going”) than the Americans on the TST and made more references to social roles and behavioral context. When they did use abstract language, it was highly abstract and in global terms (e.g., “a living form”). On the contrary, in the contextualized format, the Japanese used more abstract attributes than the Americans. Cousins (1989) noted that the reversal of abstract-concrete trends in self-perception suggests the impact of different cultural conceptions of the person based on context instead of the divergent cognitive ability in Americans and the Japanese.

Extending Cousins’s (1989) research, Rhee, Uleman, Lee, and Roman (1995) compared TST responses of students from Korea and the United States, coding the student responses into two self-concept dimensions, along the classifications of either *abstract* or *specific* and as either *autonomous* or *social*. They proposed that individuals in collectivistic cultures are not viewed as autonomous beings with abstract qualities but in terms of specific relationships to significant others, and hence, the focus is on specific, situation-bound behaviors and social categories rather than on abstract personality traits because the person may change across social contexts (Rhee et al., 1995). Their results revealed that indeed Koreans’ spontaneous self-descriptions were more specific than abstract, and they used more social roles and contextual qualifications (Rhee et al., 1995). In comparison, Euro-Americans used more traits, pure traits (e.g. kind, friendly) and emotional states (e.g. worried, afraid), which were in the abstract and autonomous categories. Lastly, Asian American results varied and fell in between that of the Koreans and Euro-Americans (Rhee et al., 1995).

Y. Kashima et al. (2006) found consistent results to that of Rhee and colleagues' (1995) when they investigated *abstractness-specificity* and *autonomy-sociality* with a sample of Koreans and Australians, using a modified TST approach. However, they raised the issue that the Westerner's likelihood over the East Asians to describe both the self and other by personality trait words may not be only interpreted as suggesting the Western emphasis on the individual person but may also be interpreted as the Westerner's tendency to use objectifying language (e.g., preference for nouns and adjectives rather than verbs) as it relates to the social world. To investigate this issue, they asked Koreans and Australians to describe three types of social targets: person (self and friend), group (one's own and friend's family), and relationship (one's own and friend's relationship). They found that indeed, English speakers employed more objectifying descriptions than Korean speakers regardless of describing a self or other at the individual, interpersonal, or group level. In addition, objectifying language use possibly statistically accounted for the cultural difference in using personality traits across cultures (Y. Kashima et al., 2006). In this sense, linguistic practices and cognitive style may be mutually constitutive and may account for the cultural differences in their results.

Thus, when verbal descriptions of the self are compared between Easterners and Westerners, there appears to be systematic cultural differences that are potentially bound up with differences in their language uses and/or discursive style. Largely in line with Triandis (1989) and Markus and Kitayama (1991a), the self seems to be described by North Americans more abstractly with a greater emphasis on its agency and autonomy when compared to East Asians including Koreans and Japanese.

The self-description studies, whilst closer to the approach to culture and self that Bruner advocated (Bruner, 2004a; 200b) compared to the structured approaches, was

still restrictive in the sense that only words or simple statements were elicited and it did not inform how the self is narrated. A more spontaneous and open-ended approach, which the self-narrative approach adopts, may enrich culture and self studies. Kashima et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of keeping in mind language use in the study of culture and self, and that discursive style might play an important role in self construction. In light of this, the self-narrative approach through analyzing the narratives and discursive style we use to not only describe, but also to discursively construct ourselves and possibly our cultures may provide us with more knowledge.

Self-narrative Approaches

In the 1960s, there was a ‘narrative turn’ in some areas of psychology (Riessman, 2008). It was a move towards collecting life histories and using the narrative account as a means of sourcing data for studying cultures and lives (Langellier, 2001). Much work had already been completed in continental Europe by scholars like the Russian structuralists (Propp, 1968) and, later, French poststructuralists (Barthes, 1967; Culler, 1981, 2002; Genette, 1983; Todorov, 1990) incorporating postmodern (Foucault, 1974; Lyotard, 1984), psychoanalytic (Lacan, 1977), deconstructionist (Derrida, 1982) and philosophical (Ricoeur, 1984/2010) perspectives to lay the groundwork for narrative as an important cultural object to study. However, it was in the mid-1980s to 1990s that prominent psychologists like Bruner, Sarbin and Polkinghorne, who had absorbed the ideas of their European colleagues, decisively shifted to narrative and ignited the study of narrative in various fields of psychology (Murray, 2007).

Sarbin’s (1986) seminal book *Narrative Psychology: The storied nature of human conduct* suggested that narrative organizes episodes, actions, and accounts of actions, as well as coordinates mundane facts and imaginary creations within time and

space. In it, he argued for narrative as an organizing principle for human action and posited the narratory principle, that human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures (Sarbin, 1986). Kashima et al. (2008) reinforced Sarbin's premise that narrative is implicated in cognition, emotion, communication and self processes. They argued that narrative is a cognitive tool that assists people to encode events and actions as well as recall events (Kashima et al., 2008). People can reinterpret events through the stories they create and use, thereby assisting them with their problem-solving and planning, understanding about the past, and emotional regulation (Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Gick & Holyoak, 1980, 1983; Josephson, Singer & Salovey, 1996; McGregor & Holmes, 1999).

In view of the cognitive, emotive, and communicative implications of narrative on the self, Kashima et al. (2008) posited that narrative and self are intimately connected. Indeed, scholars have suggested the internalized and evolving life story as a narrative identity of self (McAdams, 1985, 2001, 2005, 2015b; McAdams et al., 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007), and that the narrative constructions of the self and identity is achieved in social interaction (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990; Hermans, 1996). As one of the earlier voices asserting narratives' importance in the human sciences and in relation to the self, Polkinghorne (1988) suggested that *self* is not static but is constantly configuring (and perhaps reconfiguring) personal events into a self-narrative, which includes not only past experiences but it also anticipates what one will be (Polkinghorne, 1988, 1991).

Culture and self are intimately and meaningfully interconnected with and by narratives. The overarching premise of narrative theory is that we exist in a storied world, and we live our lives through the formation and transaction of narratives (Murray, 2008). In a cyclical relationship between 'self making' and 'world making' to

borrow Bruner's (1991a) words, narrative enables individuals to not only make meaning of life but to form their 'Self' through meaningful relationships and stories in their own cultures. Therefore, we return to the introduction of this chapter of why Bruner called us to make meaning central to psychology. He saw life as narrative (Bruner, 1987; 2004a) and hence, the "proper study of man (sic)" should "begin with the concept of culture and its constitutive role" (Bruner, 2004a, p.11). Bruner elevated the life story or self-narrative within culture as crucial for the proper study of human psychology.

'Life stories', 'life narratives', and 'autobiographical stories' all refer to the stories which describes the trajectory of the self over time or the 'lived life' (Ricoer, 2002, 2010). They may be used interchangeably by different researchers but in this study, they would all refer to the umbrella term of *self-narratives*. Self-narrative is defined as an oral discourse and/or written recount (both oral and literary genres) of an individual's life and development. It usually includes an organized sequence of represented events structured in such a way that it expresses a plot, characters, tension or conflict, and themes (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1993). The plot is the scene in which the story is set with main figures as characters revolving around a tense situation or dispute and having a certain topic that prevails in the story. For example, the creation story and imminent fall of humankind according to the Christian tradition has the scene set in the Garden of Eden with the characters, Adam and Eve, deceived by the Serpent who represented Satan, as the conflict with the theme of sin, which is centered on disobeying God. These stories are confined to humankind and prevalent in certain cultures which are then internalized into the self for those who claim to be Christians. Every culture and religion may have its own stories about human history which impacts on self-narratives.

The current climate of research is capturing the social-cultural frames that are

giving more multi-faceted perspectives to the self and its autobiographical capabilities. In the following, I discuss the contemporary understanding of self-narrative as a way of constructing self and identity.

Self-narrative as construction of self and identity. Bruner (2003) suggested that “Self- making is a narrative art . . .” comprising of both “inside” and “outside” experiences (Bruner, 2003, p. 210). The “inside” included memories, feelings, ideas, beliefs, and subjectivity, and interacts with the “outside”, which includes cultural influences that guide us on interpreting and communicating our perspectives to ourselves and others (Bruner, 2003). Bruner’s work in many ways opened up research into self-narratives, and has been studied extensively in relation to identity, particularly in the last few decades.

Theories of narrative identity. One of the most prolific researchers of self-narratives is Dan McAdams. McAdams (2001) regards Tomkins’ (1978) Script theory as the initial contemporary personality theory to situate the story-making features of thought as one of prime importance for personality and motivational development. Script theory (Tomkins, 1978) suggests that specific emotionally laden scenes in one’s life are intensified through internal rehearsing and repetition to become overarching schemas for comprehending specific interpersonal interactions. These schemas are the templates or ‘scripts’ that may then influence and potentially bias the way we interact (Tomkins, 1978). Tomkins’s (1978) theory influenced McAdam’s (1985, 1993, 1996) *Life story model of identity*, which contends that identity is an internalized and evolving self-story that draws together the past, present and future anticipations to form a unifying narrative of self that gives meaning and purpose. Identity then takes a story

form incorporating a setting, scenes, character, plot and theme in what are psychosocial constructions coauthored by the individual and the cultural context in which the individual is lodged and derives meaning from (McAdams, 2001).

McAdams (2001) proposed that intentionality is at the heart of narrative for human agents, who ‘act’ on their desires and beliefs to fulfill their goals. Taking a developmental approach of how the life story model of identity works, his research has suggested that children as early as one to two years old comprehend other persons as intentional agents and hence participate in joint attentional social activities (Stern, 1985; Tomasello, 2000). By the end of the second year, the subjective self which William James (1892/1963) referred to as the “self-as-I” is fully understood through intentional action (see McAdams, 2001). Autobiographical memory is said to emerge towards the end of the two year mark, after children consolidate their basic sense of ‘I’ and start forming a primitive comprehension of the ‘me’ (Howe & Courage, 1997). By their third birthday, children can actively engage in conversation with others to co-construct their past experiences in conversation, produce their own narratives about personal memories, and appreciate the standard features of stories. However, it is only during late adolescence and early adulthood that the cognitive and psychosocial developments have been sufficiently accomplished to enable the individual to employ the task of integrating his or her life into a comprehensible culturally meaningful story, which is the self-identity (McAdams, 2001).

McAdams (2001) qualified that children implicitly gather through their experiences, dominant images and themes of adult life stories, to work on them in adolescence and emerging adulthood, and which later on influences the themes of their adult lives. In contrast to Erikson’s (1958, 1959) stage model which highlights distinct tasks at each developmental period with identity formation occurring in young adult

period, identity work, according to McAdams (2001), is not confined to a particular period in life, but is continually reworked throughout adult life. McAdams (2011) incorporated the concept of *narrative identity* into his personality theory, the concept suggested by Ricoeur (1991) to capture the formation of self-continuity across change over time. Therefore, “*narrative identity* is a psychosocial construction, a joint product of individual and society” (McAdams, 2015a, p. 251).

Within the research tradition of life story model, redemption is one of the most prevalent themes that researchers have identified. McAdams and McLean (2013) reviewed studies demonstrating that people who narrated redemptive themes found meaning in suffering and adversity, and those who formed life stories with a strong emphasis on personal agency and exploration were more likely to enjoy greater levels of mental health, well-being and maturity. McAdams (2006b) noted that *redemptive stories* describing the ‘*redemptive self*’ is the ideal and quintessential American narrative identity, which follows the plot of a “gifted and innocent protagonist who, equipped with strong but simple convictions, journeys forth into a dangerous world, overcoming adversity, and ultimately trying to redeem the self and the world” (Adler & McAdams, 2007, p. 98). Redemptive stories follow themes of bad or negative situations turning to good and positive ones.

McAdams and McLean (2013) suggested that the construction of redemptive narratives may increase well-being and generativity, which is understood by Erickson (1963) as “the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 267). McAdams & de St Aubin (1992) found that whilst generativity is not confined to a discrete stage of development, it can become more salient for adults as they age due to increasing cultural demand. Midlife adults who scored high on self-report measures of generativity also scored significantly high on levels of redemption and low on levels of

contamination sequences (i.e., themes with the move from a good positive life scene to a bad negative life scene, such that the good is spoiled or ‘contaminated’) in their scripts (McAdams, 2000; McAdams, Diamond, de St Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997; McAdams & de St Aubin, 1992).

Other themes associated with wellbeing were found in Adler’s (2012) longitudinal study, in that the theme of agency (i.e. emphasizing personal autonomy, achievement and self-mastery) was related to improved mental health as well as the individual’s sense of meaning and purpose. Tavernier and Willoughby’s (2012) study also reported that meaning making correlated with high psychological well-being in their sample of adolescents. Meaning is central, as McAdams (2001) pointed out, because people’s unique self-narrative provides them with meaning and differentiates them from another as well as enables them to relate to others by their self-defining contents. These self-narratives may have the salience of content that runs along thematic threads as agency versus communion (where communion emphasizes intimacy, relationships, helping others and community) (Bakan, 1966; Singer, 1997), and redemption versus contamination (Maruna, 1997, 2001; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). They also may differ from other self-narratives in terms of their structural complexity (McAdams, 1985; Woike, Gersekovich, Piorkowski, & Polo, 1999) and narrative coherence (Baerger & McAdams, 1999). Narrative coherence is the degree to which a story makes sense and is comprehensible.

McAdams (2005) asserted that the coherence and comprehensibility of narratives adhere to the prevailing cultural norms because ‘stories live in culture’, in that “life stories mirror the culture wherein the story is made and told” (p. 250). This same notion is reiterated by Phinney (2000) who suggested that there is a universal need to define oneself in one’s context. McAdams (2006a) in seeking to answer the question,

“what is a coherent story?” explained that life stories are situated in social contexts and therefore, most criteria for coherence are based on the culture where the narrative originates and is embedded. Hammack (2008) and McAdams (2013) have described how cultural narratives about national history, ethnicity, religion, and politics shape the personal stories people live by, and how personal stories can sustain or transform culture. Therefore, over the course of development within the socio-cultural context, selves create stories, which in turn create selves (McLean et al., 2007).

McAdams qualifies that culture influences self-narratives because they define the norms that dictate what the life story should contain and how it should conform to the culture’s concept of biography (McAdams, 2001; 2006b). Hammack (2008) and other scholars (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patton, & Bowman, 2001; Westrate & McLean, 2010) refer to this as the relationship between the *master narrative* (culture’s concept of narrative) and the personal narrative (self-narrative). The term *master narrative* usually refers to pre-existing sociocultural forms of interpretation (Bamberg, 2005). The concept was introduced by Boje (1991) when he studied how members of a work organization used stories for sense making: how they constructed stories in their organization to legitimate specific actions and values (Thorne & McLean, 2003). In the current literature, *master narratives* are defined as “culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors” (McLean & Syed, 2015, p. 323). The perspective in this research is aligned with McLean and Syed’s (2015) definition of master narratives as the culture’s acceptable norms and practices of narratives.

Narrative identity and cognitive processes. Being able to internalize the master narrative or normative grid of cultural expectations for a life story requires cognitive tools (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Habermas and Bluck’s (2000) *Life*

Story Schema extends McAdam's narrative identity approach by postulating the cognitive tools essential for autobiography reasoning (the process by which the life story is created and applied) in order to form an identity. These cognitive tools of *temporal, cultural biographical, causal and thematic coherence*, emerge in childhood at different points and rates, but by adolescence, they are attained to assist in identity formation (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). *Temporal coherence* is defined as remembered events that are temporally associated to other events to form a coherent narrative (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). According to Habermas and Bluck (2000), temporal and cultural biographical coherence emerge to develop the skeletal coherence in life narratives in regards to a sequential order and normative content. *Cultural biographical coherence* refers to the cultural norms around events and factual information that ought to be incorporated into life narratives, which may differ among cultures.

Studies (Chandler, Boyes, Ball, & Hala, 1987; Low & Durkin, 1998; van den Broek, 1989) indicate the emergence in early adolescence of a consolidated person-concept, due to developed cognitive abilities, which may enable the integration of differing life episodes, and thereby produce *causal coherence*. Causal coherence allows the individual to explain actions across situations and across time according to underlying psychological traits as well as account for change and development over time (i.e., personal continuity), thereby causally connecting later to earlier selves (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). By mid to late adolescence, Habermas and Bluck (2000) argued that individuals may have developed the ability to reconcile situational factors (such as the contrast between one's past and present life situations) with differences between perspectives (such as one's own perspective and others') which would allow for *thematic coherence* between the past and the present (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Thematic coherence conveys the quintessence of who the individual is and what his or

her life story is all about, based on his or her beliefs and values expressed in the self-narrative.

Habermas and Köber (2015) reasoned that the self-narrative “serves to interpret lives and to constitute narrative identity” (as cited in Kober, Schmiedek & Habermas, 2015, p. 260). Narrative identity has an empirical structure that has been proposed to be related to and predictive of psychological wellbeing (McLean et al., in press). This empirical three-factor structure has prominent features of life narratives which are termed *motivational and affective themes*, *autobiographical reasoning*, and *structure*. McLean et al. (in press) described *motivational and affective themes* as consisting of motivational themes such as agency and communion in addition to affective themes such as redemption, contamination, tone, and ending valence. *Autobiographical reasoning* was described as a reasoning process of making sense of change in significant life events consisting of thematic coherence, interpretations, exploratory processing, meaning, change connections, and growth. Lastly, *structure* consisted of facts, contextual coherence, and chronological coherence of life narratives (see, McLean et al., in press, for full exposition). Among the three factors, *motivational and affective themes* was the factor which was most reliably associated with well-being. However, *autobiographical reasoning* was vital in adapting to change.

Narrative identity and psychological adaptation. Studies of narrative identity have particularly focused on the association between life stories and adaptation (McAdams, 2013; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). This is also central to the theory of McLean, Pasupathi and Pals’s (2007) *Process Model of Self Development*, where they argued that what keeps us stable and also helps us with adapting to change is storytelling. Storytelling using situated stories assist in developing

and sustaining the self with mutual impacts on both self-concept and the life story. Situated stories are defined as “narrative account of personal memory that is created within a specific situation, by particular individuals, for particular audiences, and to fulfill particular goals” (p. 263). They are important for adaptation because they enable the dynamic development of the self. That is, sharing stories with particular themes not only discursively constructs the self but it is what McLean et al. (2007) consider to be the mechanism through which individuals build their self-concept and life story as they adapt to their changing contexts.

While situated stories are specific narrative accounts, they may overlap with Singer et al.’s (2013) self-defining memories that are linked to central themes and have repetitive emotional sequences that generate *narrative scripts* - the raw materials to supply for the subjective construction of situated stories. The narrative scripts are templates that influence the mode of cognitive-affective processing. For example, the woman who repeatedly remembers an abusive father may eventually find it hard to commit to a man in an intimate relationship because her narrative script may have the theme of ‘men can hurt me’. The individual’s autobiographical memories and narrative scripts are what Singer et al. (2013) considered the building blocks of narrative identity. Singer et al. (2013) therefore proposed an *Integrative Model of Narrative Identity* which integrates autobiographical memories such as self-defining memories with narrative scripts and life stories, to advance that all are necessary to form narrative identity.

What Singer and colleagues highlighted from their clinical research is that a healthy narrative identity has the flexible combination of two narrative processes, that of *memory specificity* and adaptive *meaning-making*, which contribute to insight, and psychological health and well-being (Singer & Conway, 2011; Singer et al., 2013).

Memory specificity is defined as the recall of a unique set of events in a single episode

within 24 hours (Singer & Blagov, 2002). A lack of memory specificity has been linked to defensiveness and maladaptive functioning (Blagov & Singer, 2004; Raes, Hermans, Williams & Eelen, 2007; Williams et al., 2007). Also important for healthy functioning is meaning-making, which was found to be associated with psychological adjustment (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005; Blagov & Singer, 2004; Pals, 2006). Meaning-making is understood as the process of connecting recollected experiences or memory narrative to the conceptual structures of the self. The linking of remembered experiences to the self has been referred to by Pasupathi and colleagues as ‘self-event connections’ (Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007; Pasupathi & Wainryb, 2019). Memory and narrative meaning-making are both involved in the self-event connections to provide a coherent self-narrative.

Autobiographical Memory. It is difficult to study self-narratives without considering autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is a form of episodic memory (Nelson, 2003). Tulving (1972) differentiated long-term memory into episodic and semantic memory. He defined *episodic memory* as the “personally experienced events”, concerning the “self’s experiences in subjective space and time”, while *semantic memory* stores general facts and “knowledge about the world” (Tulving, 1993, p. 67), such as knowing that the earth is not flat.

Most research into self-narratives and autobiographical self has used self-defining memories rather than full autobiographical accounts (e.g., Grysman & Hudson, 2011; Jobson & O’Kearney, 2008; McLean et al., 2007; Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006; Singer & Moffitt, 1991; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004). While full autobiographical accounts entail comprehensive autobiographical memories of life

events, self-defining memories are the memories of key events in peoples' lives that are usually vivid, emotionally laden, and well-rehearsed (Singer et al., 2013). Studies found that individuals recall more positive events than negative events, in particular, for the 'autobiographical memory bump period' between the ages of 10 to 30 years when identity formation takes place (Conway & Rubin, 1993; Conway, Wang, Hanyu, & Haque, 2005). Though self-defining memories seem to be concentrated during the period around identity formation, McLean and Fournier (2008) noted in their research on self-defining memories that it would be beneficial for future studies to consider full life stories, in order to better understand the contents and processes in constructing life stories. My dissertation research not only examines key events or self-defining memories, but also the life story or self-narrative, and how these key events are incorporated into the self-narrative. Self-narrative invariably draws from autobiographical memory to form narrative identity. Thus, I now turn to the literature on autobiographical memory as it most closely relates to culture and self.

Current theories of autobiographical memory. Central to Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's (2000) integrative, hierarchical model is the idea that autobiographical memories are momentary mental constructions within a *Self-memory system*. In this system, there is a *working self* and an *autobiographical knowledge base* with information at three levels of specificity: i.e., *lifetime periods*- a themed period of life, such as 'when I was at school'; *general events*- a single representation of events, such as 'my first romantic relationship; and *event-specific knowledge*- a particularly detailed information about specific, individual events, such as re-experiencing the smells and sounds of a graduation dinner. They are associated to personal goals generated by the working self. The *working self* is a set of active goal hierarchy and self-schemas similar

to Markus and Ruvolo's (1989) 'working self-concept' and working memory as it acts as a central control process, controlling both the encoding and recalling of specific autobiographical memories by activating the knowledge structures (Conway, 2005; Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000).

These specific memories are encoded and eventually retrieved according to the self's active goals at the time of retrieval. They are possibly utilized by the working self to integrate into the *long-term self*. The *long-term self* was later introduced by Conway, Singer and Tagini (2004) to refer to two aspects of the non-immediate knowledge of the self, that is, the *autobiographical knowledge base* and the *conceptual self*. The *conceptual self* involves the personal scripts, possible selves and beliefs held by the individual about him/herself. These may be the raw material that can be used to construct self-narratives which over time build self-identity.

To this end, active goals influence how autobiographical information is assimilated and structured initially. Goals also reciprocally determine access to the knowledge base and generate retrieval models to guide the search process. Thus, the autobiographical knowledge base grounds the working self's goals (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Both the *autobiographical knowledge base* and the *conceptual self* are the two components of the *long-term self*, along with the *working self* as the goal-driven set of control processes all working together in the *Self-memory system* (Conway et al., 2004).

Interpersonal approaches to autobiographical memory. Whilst the Self-memory system may highlight the intrapsychic processes within the mind, researchers are realizing that these internal processes are profoundly influenced by interpersonal processes, largely the socio-cultural contexts in which individuals are lodged. Fivush,

Habermas, Waters and Zaman (2011) described the development and empirical evidence for the *Sociocultural model of autobiographical memory*, which was initially introduced by Nelson and Fivush (2004).) Nelson and Fivush's (2004) theory explained the developmental emergence of the autobiographical memory during the preschool years and the pathway to adolescent life narrative formation, as impacted by sociocultural factors like one's culture, gender, individual differences and language.

Autobiographical memory was defined as "an explicit memory of an event that occurred in a specific time and place in one's personal past" (Nelson & Fivush, 2004, p. 486).

Fivush and colleagues (2011) expounded autobiographical memory as "the heart of human understanding of self and other, as the way in which individuals create a sense of self as continuous and coherent through time, with a past that explains the present and projects into the future" (Fivush et al., 2011, p. 323) and locates the individual with regard to their family, community, and culture.

In their review, the main arguments that Fivush et al. (2011) made were firstly, that individual differences in the way parents reminisce with their children were connected to their children's developing self-narratives. Parents who co-construct more elaborated coherent personal narratives with their young children assist them to have more detailed and coherent personal narratives, and in addition, a more differentiated and coherent sense of self. In Western and Eastern cultures, mothers vary in how they approach and scaffold conversations about past events with their young children, and these variations have been demonstrated to differentially impact their children's narrative development (see Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006, for a review). Leichtman, Wang, and Pillemer (2003) suggested that different narrative environments may impose specific cultural values and emphasize particular aspects of the role of personal memories in the individual's life. Girls and boys are also socialized differently through

different narrative emphasis (McLean et al., 2019), and therefore, females later told lengthier personal narratives than males, and used more language about their intentions, cognitions and feeling states (Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995). Hence, the socialization and cultural practices have a direct impact on children and adolescents who are immersed in families.

Secondly, narrative structuring of autobiographical remembering requires the development of cognitive tools (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) that enable autobiographical memories to be configured into an overarching life narrative informed by social and cultural contexts that interpret emerging identity (Fivush et al., 2011; Nelson & Fivush, 2004). During adolescence, individuals start using culturally available canonical biographical forms, life scripts and master narratives, which provide a framework to create a life story and thus their individual autobiographical narrative identity. Specifically, the cultural life script is a set of events culturally shared and outlines what is normal (e.g., getting married then having children) (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004).

Thirdly, narrative structuring of autobiographical remembering continues to be socially constructed in local interactions in that parents assist adolescents to configure life narratives during co-constructed reminiscing. Additionally, adolescents use parents and families as a source for their own autobiographical content and structure. For example, family stories are common everyday interactions (Bohanek et al., 2009; Miller, 1994). Family stories such as intergenerational narratives in Western families may assist adolescents to individuate from parents and develop their own values and beliefs, and/or simultaneously, stay connected to the parental identity (Grotevant & Cooper, 1998; McLean & Pasupathi, 2010). Fivush, Zaman, Waters, and Merrill (2010) discovered that adolescent females in Western families report more identity development and self-esteem when they can make intergenerational connections

through linking their parents' experiences to their own experiences and view of the world (Fivush et al., 2010). However, this was not found for adolescent males in which intergeneration narratives may function differently because they may require more autonomy from the family, especially their father (Fivush et al., 2010; Gilligan, 1982).

Lastly, Fivush et al. (2011) summarized that autobiography is a critical developmental skill because narrating our personal past links us to ourselves, our families, our communities, and our cultures (see also McLean, 2015). In an experiment to explore culture and self-priming effects on memories of European American and Asian American adults, Wang and Ross (2005) found that European Americans were more inclined to recall specific, one-moment-in-time events that focused on the individual as the focal character. In comparison, Asians were more likely to provide memories of general, routine events focusing on collective activities and social interactions. These findings support how autobiography links us to our cultures and “ultimately autobiographical memory is about weaving together multiple specific episodes into an overarching life narrative that explains an individual life course” (Fivush et al., 2011, p. 324).

Thus, Fivush et al. (2011) have provided a synthesis of findings to date regarding the developmental perspective to autobiographical memory and narrative development emphasizing the social-cultural factors. However, it was Wang, Song, and Koh's (2017) *Cultural dynamic model of memory and narrative self-making* that highlights specifically how culture shapes the processes of remembering and meaning-making in forming autobiographical memory. At the heart of Wang et al.'s (2017) model is the dynamic relationships among culture, memory and narrative.

Wang et al.'s (2017) model comprises three themes. Firstly, processes such as remembering and narrative meaning-making occur simultaneously in the dynamic

transaction between the individual and their changing environment. This environment has multiple layers of social, cultural and historical variables, with micro and macro contexts in which the processes of remembering and narrative meaning-making are contextualized. There is then an active process of co-construction in which selves and cultures become mutually constitutive. Secondly, the processes of remembering and narrative meaning-making are constantly shaped by culture throughout the various phases of information processing. Thirdly, early socialization practices instigated by parents and important carers harness the skill for cultural specific ways in remembering and narrative meaning-making in children. In parent-child joint reminiscing and through daily interactions, parents demonstrate to their children how to narrate, interpret and evaluate experiences as well as how to remember and share what is endorsed by their culture (Wang et al., 2017). The cultural dynamic theory highlights that autobiographical memories and the ways of remembering are shaped by culture to employ goals and purposes that are significant to particular cultural contexts (Alea & Wang, 2015).

Wang (in press) argued that her cultural dynamic theory did not only apply to autobiographical memory, but also to episodic memory without personal significance and vicarious memory, which is memory of events that happened to others, e.g., aunts, sister, parents, etc. She argued that the organizational components of episodic, vicarious, and autobiographical memories highlight the influential role that culture plays in shaping the processes of remembering. Therefore, she contended that it was crucial to integrate culture into research to better comprehend human memory and cognition (Wang, 2016). In formulating her cultural dynamic theory, Wang (in press) drew on extensive comparative research which is covered in the following sections.

Cross-cultural differences in narrative discourse and autobiographical memory. If we are to understand the relationship between culture, self-narrative and autobiographical memory, and thereby, shed more light on the co-constitutive nature of culture and self, then perhaps we need to take seriously what Bruner (2004a) postulated, that “life stories must mesh...tellers and listeners must share some ‘deep structure’ about the nature of a ‘life’” (p. 699). Hence, the need to turn to an approach that allows us to examine the structure of self-narratives that enables clarity to be gained about the deep structure that tellers and listeners share. I suggest that this would involve a semiotic narrative approach. This is because culture-specific ways of viewing oneself become a constitutive part of children's developing self-concepts and configure their personal memories as well as narrative structuring of autobiographical memory. It is probable that the varied linguistic practices in narrative discourse support the differences in cognitive processing and autobiographical memory, which may be revealed in the self-narrative structure. In the following, I will discuss the ‘*What*’ and ‘*How*’ of cultural differences in narrative discourse and autobiographical memory, which would then lead to my thesis of unravelling these questions with a semiotic narrative approach.

What? Cultural differences in autobiographies. In summarizing the differences in thematic content and character of Western and Chinese autobiographies, Wang (2013) pointed out that Western autobiography usually has the self as the central protagonist, embellished with concrete details and rich emotions for meaning-making, whilst Chinese autobiography positioned the self as a bystander in the shadow, with little details and emotions while focusing on objective facts (Wang, 2013). Other differences found were that Westerners have more of their inner life revealed with a subjective

perspective, memory as the source for autobiography, focus on the importance of childhood, assign significance to single events and emphasize the role of self-functions and the individual's uniqueness respectively (see Wang, 2013). In contrast, the Chinese in their autobiographies seem concerned with authenticity and subduing the personal voice as well as concealing the inner life, where memory is viewed as unreliable and childhood unimportant (Wang, 2013). In addition, life-changing events were briefly accounted for with little meaning attached and autobiography served different functions, that of didactic historiographical purposes (see Wang, 2013).

Similar to Wang and colleagues' findings, Minami and McCabe (1991) found that Japanese children's recounts were more succinct and often a collection of similar experiences instead of a detailed series of events based on one experience as in European American narratives. In examining mother-child conversations between the Japanese and North American mothers, they found that Japanese mothers requested relatively less description and evaluation from their children and they paid frequently more verbal attention to boys than girls compared to their North American counterparts (Minami & McCabe, 1995). These cultural differences are notable but the contents of self-narratives learnt so far have been gathered from children's accounts, and from more formal autobiographies (e.g. Wang, 2013) rather than self-narrating in interaction or in writing. Empirical studies on self-narration in narrative discourse especially with adults cross-culturally have been lacking, which is highlighted in the following section.

How? Cultural differences in narrative discourse. Along with Wang's extensive research, there is an expanding collection of literature to indicate that very young children participate in oral narratives, and that these 'primary' stories are culturally distinguished at an early stage (Li, 2012; Miller, Fung, & Koven, 2007). Oral

narrative practices involve both the use of language and how that language is communicated to and received by an audience. The role that language plays is seen as crucial for cognitive development (Clark & Chambers, 1998; Hauser, Chomsky, & Fitch, 2002; Nelson, 1998; Vygotsky, 1962). Initially language is developed as a means of social communication, but is later internalized as the 'inner voice' and used crucially as a tool in configuring cognitive processes that enable abstract symbolic systems to assist the child to organize mental representations (Ji, Zhang, & Nisbett, 2004; Piaget, 2005; Vygotsky, 1930/1978).

Pennebaker, Mehl and Niederhoffer (2003) proposed that the words used by people in everyday life can reveal much about their linguistic and cognitive styles, emotional states, and social identity. Empirical evidence on the effects of culture and children's language use and skills have been investigated (Kim, 2003). School-grade differences between the fourth- and first-grade children robustly indicated that middle-class Korean culture facilitates children to become attentive listeners while middle-class European American culture promotes children to become articulate speakers (Kim, 2003). Kim (2003) elaborated that Asian cultures give prominence to the listener's role and responsibility in establishing successful communication, whereas Western cultures place the responsibility predominantly on the speaker. This pattern highlights cultural differences in language development pathways in that Asian children may establish better receptive skills whilst Western children develop better expressive skills. Minami (2002) found that East Asian cultures prefer a style of narration where listeners are expected to be more attentive than in Western ones and they also socialized their children to practice omission of pronouns (e.g., "I" and "you"). This pronoun drop was also found in cultures that were less individualistic (E. Kashima & Y. Kashima, 1998) and was suggested by Y. Kashima and E. Kashima (2003) to reduce the psychological

prominence of the individual as well as embed symbolically the individual in the context.

Indeed, Li (2012) explained the different cultural pathways of how individuals learn in the West and East, including how they are taught to speak. She identified the Western speaking style as one that involved adherence to quantity (speak no more and no less), quality (speak truth and avoid falsehood), relevance (speak to the point), and clarity (speak directly). In contrast, the East Asian speaking style emphasized paucity in speaking (speak little), ambiguity (speak indeterminately) to maintain the social system, indirectness (speak amicably) to value harmony, and listenership (listening before speaking) to decipher the full meaning of what is heard (Li, 2012).

Differences in conversational styles with children were examined between North American and Asian cultures. North American mothers were found to talk more about objects when conversing with their children, and their speech featured proportionately more concrete nouns. On the other hand, Asian mothers' speech consisted of more verbs and fewer nouns, seemingly less object-oriented (Fernald & Morikawa, 1993; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, Cyphers, Toda, & Ogino, 1992; Tardif, Shatz, & Naigles, 1997). Hoff (2006) suggested that these differences can be explained somewhat in terms of the structural differences evident in English (alphabetic language) and Asian languages (non-alphabetical languages), but it may be better accounted for by the way in which North American and Asian mothers want to present the world to their children.

Consequently, the North American-Asian difference in object focus showed that the early vocabularies of English-speaking children featured proportionately more nouns than the vocabularies of Mandarin or Korean speaking children (Choi & Gopnik, 1995; Gelman & Tardif, 1998; Tardif, Gelman, & Xu, 1999) but Chinese children learn verbs at a more rapid rate than nouns (Tardif, 1996). They align with Kashima et al.'s

(2006) findings of English speakers using more objectifying language (e.g., preference for nouns and adjectives rather than verbs) relating to the social world compared with Korean speakers. Hoff (2006) noted that the rate and content of language acquisition depended on a number of factors including the communicative opportunities and language models provided to young children.

Ji et al. (2004) found that children who learn two languages at an early age, such as those in Hong Kong and Singapore, may share the same representational system, resulting in no effect of language on testing (compound bilinguals). However, Mainland and Taiwanese Chinese children who learn English at a much later age, may have distinctive representations associated with English and Chinese (coordinate bilinguals). When they are using Chinese, they may have a tendency to think more from a Chinese viewpoint than an English one. This finding is relevant to the current study as the Singaporean Chinese have been chosen as the research participants in comparison to European-Australians in the current study to discount language with its representational system as another variable in cross-cultural comparisons. The role of language and differences in narrative discourse may impact on the development of autobiographical memory, which leads to the third question, of how self-narration makes use of autobiographical memory which stores the raw experiences we remember.

How? Cultural differences in autobiographical memory. The cultural differences in self-narrative content and self-narration style may be linked to how events have been encoded and recalled in the autobiographical memories of Westerners and Easterners, which has been extensively studied by Wang and colleagues (see Wang, in press, for a review). According to Wang (in press), European American adults and children readily access significantly more memories than their Asian counterparts, and

this also includes more distant and detailed memories, including earliest childhood memories (e.g., Han, Leichtman, & Wang, 1998; Mullen, 1994; Peterson, Wang, & Hou, 2009; Wang, 2001a, 2006; Wang, Conway, & Hou, 2004). She explained that European American culture which prioritizes autonomous self-goals may have individuals emphasizing event information regarding their own roles and views that give prominence to the uniqueness and agency of the individual. This information is possibly well represented in memory and highly accessible during recall. In contrast, East Asian cultures which prioritize relational self-goals for social harmony may have individuals emphasize and recall information about collective activities and important others. The self-goals also impact on memory content focus. When recalling recent or distant personal events, European American adults and children (from preschool age) tended to focus more on their own roles and perspectives, taking the central character role in their stories, compared with East Asian adults and children, who focused more on the roles of others and social interactions (e.g., Han et al., 1998; Wang, 2001a, 2004; Wang & Conway, 2004). Wang and colleagues noted similar cultural differences for episodic memory related to stories and vicarious memory (Wang & Ross, 2005; Wang, 2006).

As previously mentioned, Wang and Ross (2005) asked European American and Asian college students to describe themselves as either unique individuals (i.e., autonomous-self prime) or as members of social groups (i.e., relational-self prime). They found that while priming did influence the content focus for both memory representations and narratives, the cultural differences in either memory was still significant regardless of priming, in that European Americans recalled more self-focused and protagonist-focused memories than did Asians. Wang (2013, 2016) suggested that these findings show the influence of cultural self-goals not only

impacting on people's retrieval of information from memory, but also on memory encoding via the way people attend to, perceive, feel, and analyze meaning as they experience an event. Hence, this determines 'how, what, and whether' the event information is encoded in memory (Wang, in press).

The cultural differences in self-goals and memory were explained by Wang (in press) to have originated in early narrative interactions between parent and child, as documented in cross-cultural research (Miller et al., 1997; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang, 2001b; Wang, Leichtman, & Davies, 2000). These research findings indicated that memory sharing between European American mothers and their children is usually based on a child-centered approach because the child as well as his/her roles and perspectives is the focus of the conversations. However, memory sharing between East Asian mothers and their children is usually based on a mother-centered, hierarchically organized approach because the mother is in charge of the conversations and the focal point is on social interactions and group activities. Wang (2013) also found corresponding cultural differences in parent-child discussion of vicarious events.

Similar trends were also found in sharing subjective experiences where European American mothers more frequently encouraged their children to express their inner needs, thoughts, preferences, wishes, and perceptions compared to the East Asian mothers, who focused to a greater extent on their children's behaviors to comply with social norms and expectations (Martini, 1996; Miller et al., 1997; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang et al., 2000; Wang, 2001b). Chinese and European American mother-child conversations regarding positive and negative emotionally salient events (e.g., birthday parties, conflict with parents or peers) also indicated that American mothers talked more about the causes of emotions experienced by their children while Chinese mothers emphasized the social and behavioral implications of their children's emotions (Fivush

& Wang, 2005).

The early sharing of subjective experiences in different cultures are then etched into autobiographical memory. For example, in asking middle-aged Chinese and European Americans to each recall twenty memories from any period of their lifetime, Wang and Conway (2004) found that Americans referred more frequently to their own thoughts and emotions in the memory events than did the Chinese, regardless of the life period the memories came from. These findings of cultural differences in the recall of internal states were also reported for adults' memories of recent events (e.g., Chua, Leu, & Nisbett, 2005) and long-term memories, like earliest childhood recollections (Wang, 2001a), whereby emotions, personal opinions, and agency in the past events were more frequently described by European American adults than the Chinese and Taiwanese. According to Wang (in press), the cultural differences in attending to subjective experiences in memory events appear as early as preschool age (Han et al., 1998; Wang, 2004).

In regards to the structural components of memory, Wang (in press) demonstrated through a series of studies that European American adults and children readily gave more elaborate and coherent memories about what happened, organize the information in a clearer causal sequence, and recall more specific event details, compared with their Asian counterparts whose accounts of the past events were often bare-boned and more focused on general information (Chae, Kulkofsky, & Wang, 2006; Han et al., 1998; Wang & Song, 2018). For example, European American adults and children were found to retrieve more unique, one-time episodes (e.g., "I was so happy the day I graduated") and more elaborate in detail, compared with their Asian counterparts who frequently recalled more general or routine events (e.g., "My family go to the shops every Friday") but were less detailed (Wang, in press).

Wang (in press) suggested perceptual styles (Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005; Norenzayan, Choi, & Peng, 2007; Wang, 2009, 2013) and values (autonomy vs relatedness) to “modulate the encoding process, influencing whether and how event information is structured and represented in memory and further determining the type of event information being recalled” (Wang, in press, p. 27). Wang (in press) added that maternal styles of memory sharing influence how cultural differences in memory specificity develop.

Indeed, the values of the culture are communicated by primary caregivers to their children. What has become clear from previous research is that differences in core Western and East Asian cultural values impact on what is narrated, remembered and recalled. East Asians all share a common Confucian heritage that emphasizes the significant role of relationships with others in the construction of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Essential to Confucianism is the importance of the maintenance of interpersonal harmony within each individual’s basic relationships: the father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger, emperor-subject, and friend-friend relationships (Su et al., 1999). Each individual bears roles with specific relationships in order to achieve a stable society, hence, each person needs to know their place and act accordingly (Chiu, 1991). There is an emphasis on filial piety, the virtue of respect and care for one’s parents, elders and ancestors to continue the family line (Ikels, 2004).

For East Asian children, their world is one of a highly involved and predetermined social world where they are required to submit to their parents, and their social world of parents and siblings in addition to their kin or extended family. In contrast, European American children experience individual choice even to the kin group, as put forth by Hsu (1981), “The American’s relationship with other members of his/her kin group is strictly dependent upon individual preference. The American must

see early in life that a powerful force composed of many aspects of individual choice-making operates to create, maintain, or cancel out interpersonal relationships' (p.88).

Chao (1995) affirmed that with European Americans, there is a broader cultural value for individualism that encourages children to be self-confident, assertive, and to a certain extent, self-serving. Underlying these values is the American goal of attaining "self-actualization", that is, realizing one's "full potential". On the other hand, Chao (1995) highlighted that there is a larger cultural concern for the Chinese to live in harmonious relationships with their significant others and to attain scholarship. Attaining moral education and advancing oneself through education is one of the key teachings of Confucius (Sheridan, 1999). Central to these cultural goals and values is the integrity of the family unit and the maintenance of the family's social status. These distinctive socialization practices and goals in European Americans and East Asians are intentionally taught from a very young age.

Much has been learnt about Western and Eastern cultural differences in self-narratives and autobiographical memory and how goals and values can influence these divergent pathways, but what is still lacking is an understanding of how autobiographical memories contribute to self-narrative, to allow self-narration to take place across cultures. Gaining this knowledge would further this body of work and shed light on the co-constitutive nature of culture and self. Therefore, what other insights might be gained from understanding the intersection of self-narrative, self-narration style and autobiographical memory in different cultures, is a question worth exploring further.

Semiotics and Self-narrative Approach

To better study these cross-cultural differences in culture and self, scholars

(Kashima, 2000, 2013, Kashima & Haslam, 2007; Sandage, Cook, Hill, Strawn, & Reimer, 2008) have called for a hermeneutic approach because meaning is at the heart of culture and self. Hermeneutics, which includes semiotics, is a theory and methodology of interpretation, based on the assumption that in order to understand this world of meaning, “one must interpret it and focus on the processes by which these meanings are created, negotiated, sustained, and modified within a specific context of human action” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 225). Perhaps semiotics, the study of meaningful symbols and signs may be able to better unravel cultural differences. This thesis replies to these scholars’ calls to use a hermeneutic approach in cross-cultural psychology to better understand culture and self and its structure (Kashima, 2000; Kashima, 2016; Kashima & Haslam, 2007; Y. Kashima, Koval, & E. Kashima, 2011). To date, there are no empirical studies that have focused on understanding cross-cultural differences in the structure of self-narratives. In the following, I introduce Greimas’s semiotic narrative approach as a conceptual method for cross-cultural analysis of self-narrative structure.

A semiotic approach: Greimas’s Actantial Model. Semiotics is a term originating from the Greek word *semeion* meaning ‘sign’. Conceptually, semiotics refers to a theory of signification and sign processes. Ferdinand Saussure (1857-1913) proposed a dyadic model of signs, which specify the relationship between the *signifier* as the form of the word or phrase uttered (sound-image or material substance) to the *signified*, the mental concept. Saussure considered language to be a social phenomenon and that meaning was to be found not in individual words but in the complex system of relationships or structures (Martin & Ringham, 2000). Saussure’s semiotics influenced Algirdas Julien Greimas, who founded the Paris School of Semiotics. Greimas argued that universal structures exist that underlie and give rise to meaning, which can be

captured in models and also be applied to any signifying object to decipher and explicate its effects of meaning (Martin & Ringham, 2000). Greimas's semiotics provides a framework to analyze the structures of narratives.

Premise of semiotic and narrative structures. Greimas's (Greimas, 1966; Greimas & Courtés, 1982) semiotic theory of narrative was inspired by Russian formalists - the works of Roman Jakobson, Viktor Sklovskij and particularly Vladimir Propp (1968) - who analyzed Russian fairy tales and posited the function of form in the transmission of meaning. Propp deduced thirty-one 'functions' (or fundamental components that formed the basis of any tale) and seven spheres of action from his analysis of a hundred fairy tales (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). Through his structural analysis, Lévi-Strauss (1963/1972) suggested that Propp had discovered minimal units of signification that fit into a definite order, and simplified Propp's analysis by applying the principle of binarity (Katilius-Boydston, 1990). Greimas developed a further simplified minimal units of signification and more generalized model of narrative structure by working on Levi-Strauss's (1963/1972) reduction of Propp's mythical actants and functions. Actants refer to "someone or something who or which accomplishes or undergoes an act. It may be a person, animal, a thing or an abstract entity" (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 18).

Greimas (1966, 1990) described his Actantial Model as a conceptual model about the structure of a narrative. It consists of six essential actantial roles or functions organized in three binary oppositions (known as axes), that of Subject/Object, Sender/Receiver and Helper/Opponent. The six actants set in the three axes of narrative structure were considered by Greimas to "account for all possible relationships within a story and indeed within the sphere of human action in general" (Martin & Ringham,

2000, p.19). Greimas (1966, 1983) suggested that his Actantial Model can analyze any real or thematized actions which takes place in a fictional or non-fictional story that can be broken down into the six actants described in the following.

Firstly, in the Axis of Desire, the Subject/Object relationship is the most fundamental. The Subject goes in quest for an Object. The Object could be concrete, such as a person or a thing, or abstract, like knowledge, happiness or truth. To use a classic fairy tale as an example, in the story of Cinderella (who is the Subject), her Object of desire is the Prince. Secondly, in the Axis of Conflict with the Helper/Opponent relationship, the Subject could be intervened positively by the Helper or negatively by the Opponent in its quest. Again, these actants could be both abstract (for example, people, objects or internal qualities such as courage, laziness or lack of money). In Cinderella's case, her fairy godmother came to the rescue as a Helper when she was opposed vehemently by her stepmother (Opponent) to get to the ball, and hence, to the prince (Object). Thirdly, the Axis of Communication consists of the Sender-Receiver relationship, where the Sender (person or idea usually with authority, or a moral agent) usually initiates an act to take place and thereby, communicates to the Receiver the desire to act. Hence, the contract is established between the Sender and Receiver. The role of the Sender is to motivate the Receiver into action, thereby transforming the Receiver into a Subject. In Cinderella's story, the King is depicted as the Sender who initiates a ball for the Prince and who releases the Object of desire (the Prince) to Cinderella, the Receiver and thus, Cinderella and her Prince live happily ever after! The Cinderella example is captured by the Actantial Model in Figure 2.1.

Aside from fairy tales, the self-narratives that people construct can be subjected to the Greimassian analysis. The self-narratives constructed addressing life questions such as, Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? Who or what is going to help me? What or

who is stopping me from getting there? What do I believe or seek that would release what I want and who or what will derive benefit from having seized that which was desired? These very questions of meaning may be captured by the actants and axes of Greimas's Actantial Model.

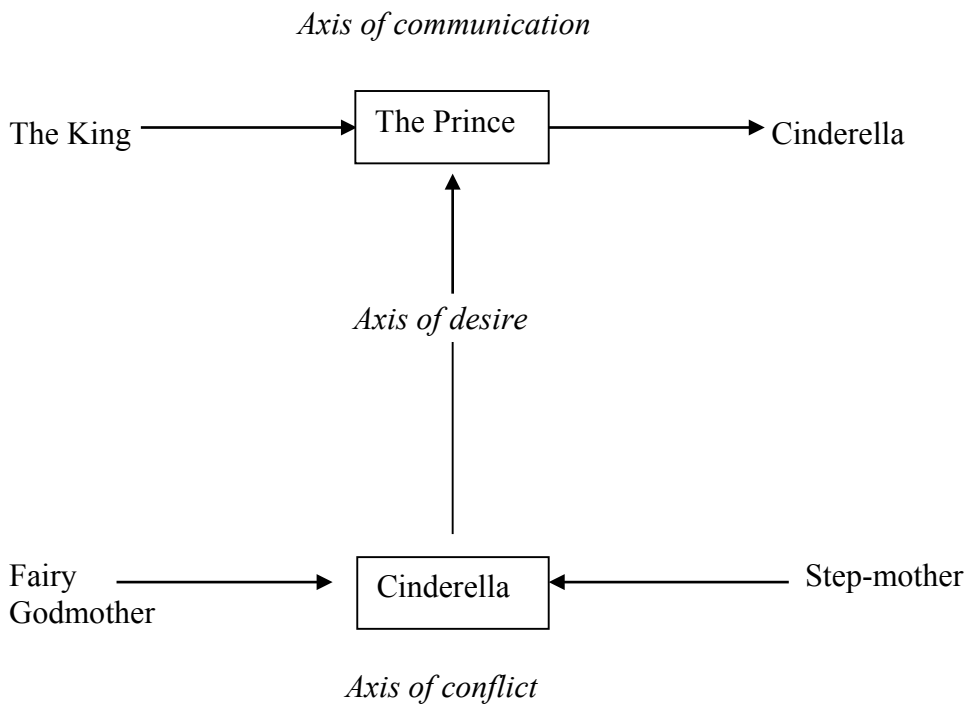


Figure 2.1. Actantial analysis of the Cinderella story

Deep structure of narrative and semiotic square. Greimas postulated that the actantial level of analysis can be understood in terms of a deeper structure, which he called the semiotic square. It is what he regarded as the elementary structure of meaning that underlies discourse. The semiotic square describes the relationships of basic semantic or thematic contradictions or oppositions which logically express any semantic category (Martin & Ringham, 2000). The semiotic square is defined by three relationships; contrariety, contradiction and implication.

Firstly, in contrariety, meaning is seen basically as a product of opposition, for

example, there can be no ‘life’ without ‘death’, no ‘good’ without ‘evil’, no ‘beautiful’ without ‘ugly’. In this relationship of contrariety, as seen in Figure 2.2, there are usually two terms or contrary signs, S1 and S2 which must have a feature in common, for example, ‘good and ‘evil’ have the notion of morality in common, with morality in this context known as the ‘complex term’. S1, therefore, presupposes the existence of S2. Just as S2 is the opposite of S1, S1 is also the opposite of S2 in the binary pair.

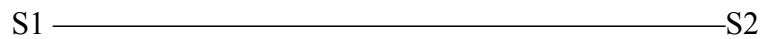


Figure 2.2. The contrariety relationship in the semiotic square

Secondly, in contradiction (S1 and –S1, S2 and –S2), the principle of difference is introduced where every element in a system is defined by its differences from the other elements. For example, when S1 (‘good’) is negated, it generates –S1, which is ‘non-good’; and when S2 (‘evil’) is negated, it generates –S2 (‘non-evil’). This is depicted in Figure 2.3 in the following.

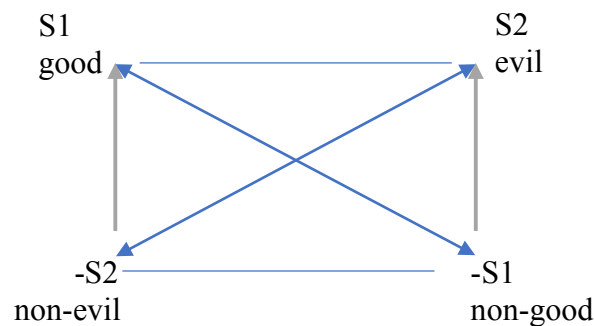


Figure 2.3. The semiotic square

Lastly, the third relationship is of implication or complementarity (grey lines in Figure 2.3), which seals the square. This relationship connects the term and the

negation of its opposite, for example, 'good' implies 'non-evil' and 'evil' implies 'non-good'. It equates to the act of the assertion, thereby establishing the coherence of meaning, and that S1 and -S2 or S2 and -S1 are complementary terms (Martin & Ringham, 2000). Greimas showed how all sorts of semiotic phenomena can be analyzed by this semiotic logic and postulated it as a critical concept in his narrative theory.

According to Greimas and Courtes (1976), there are two fundamental dimensions of narratives, which are the cognitive and the pragmatic dimensions. The cognitive dimension is in the realm of internal mental activities, like knowing, believing, persuading, etc. On the other hand, the pragmatic dimension refers to external physical events or the 'doing' such as, giving a speech, writing, etc. Depending on the nature of the discourse, each dimension may be more emphasized for its importance, for example, the cognitive plane dominates in legal discourse whilst the pragmatic plane in adventure stories (Martin & Ringham, 2000).

The narrative schema. Greimas and his Paris School of semiotics have attempted to analyze all forms of discourse and to understand the production of meaning in a particular context in the semantic universe. Situated in the intellectual traditions of structuralism, phenomenology and narratology, Greimas's theory and its bold claims, as well as the Semiotic Square and Actantial Model have been met with criticism. These criticisms will be appraised in the following, but nonetheless, I will argue that the actantial organization of narrative structures may still prove to be useful in analyzing self-narratives.

Critics of Greimas's theoretical models argued that his work is speculative and abstract, and continues to grasp onto arid formalism (Lenoir, 1994). Another critic, Culler (1975) argued that Greimas's models fail to account for all semantic effects and

was also incapable of yielding objective and repeatable results. Culler's bone of contention is that the semiotic square is so open to interpretation by the reader that "the reader can pass from one opposition to another, trying them out, even inverting them, and determining which are pertinent to larger thematic structures which encompass other antitheses presented in the text" (Culler, 1975, p. 225-226). In addition, as post-structuralists have argued, not all things are in binary opposition and Culler suggested that a semiotic square would therefore fail to describe the coexistence of all contrary terms.

Given that the semiotic square is at the most abstract and deep level, and most narrative analysis on life stories is performed in the discursive level, it would be important to at least understand the semiotics of action or behavior at the narrative level of actantial organization. Greimas and Fontanille (1993) argued that this level, between the discursive and epistemological constituents was the best-explored and most efficient. It is also the level closest to the manifest discourse and hence, less abstract.

This research focuses on the Actantial Model to analyze self-narratives in different cultures because the notion of goal-directed agency seems to be universal. That is, across different cultures, the Subject-Object axis is likely to exist and, in the pursuit of any goal, there is likely to be something or someone that helps and/or opposes the attainment of that goal (the Helper-Opponent in the Axis of Conflict). In addition, the goal (which is considered the 'Object' of desire) is legitimized by somebody or some principle to derive benefit for the recipient that is represented by the Sender-Receiver, Axis of Communication. Chirkov, Sheldon and Ryan (2011) claim that it is universal and applicable to people in all cultural communities that their well-being is inseparable from their autonomous pursuit of chosen life-goals, actions and behaviors. Universal also is the phenomenon of conflicts. Conflicts with regard to goal pursuit are inherent in

every life, particularly within the self in regards to conflicting values and goals (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2007, 2015). Therefore, Greimas's Actantial Model may be able to capture the universal structure of goal pursuit and the conflict dimension which seems to be present in any social life. I would argue then that the micro-social structure of human lived experience is represented in the Actantial Model, which is in line with Greimas and Fontanille's (1993) claim that the Actantial Model may be utilized in examining cross-cultural differences in narrative discourse as it captures the universal elements of human psychology.

Cultures are full of meaning and meaning may also be structured differently in the semio-narrative levels that give rise to our respective discursive structures. For example, different meaningful goals are attributed to individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Heine and colleagues (Heine, 2005; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006) argued that self-esteem did not appear to be a primary source of meaning in collectivistic East Asian cultures as it is in individualistic Western European-based cultures. However, *'face'* was considered more a focal source of meaning in East Asia, and that threats to *face* would lead to significant meaning-boosting efforts in that culture. In view of this, without subscribing to the whole theory of Greimas, the Actantial Model may provide a principled approach and a systematic way of understanding cross-cultural differences. For example, through the different configurations of actantial organization in narrative structures, we can glimpse that the Westerner Subjects' goal (Object of desire) may be 'self-esteem', but for Easterners, their Subjects' goal (Object of desire) may be 'saving *face*'. These would be explored in this research with Western and Eastern self-narratives.

In order to ascertain that Greimas's Actantial Model can be used as a systematic method to investigate cross-cultural differences, it is important to consider emic-etic

issues in cross-cultural research (Pike, 1967; Berry, 1969, 1989; Triandis, Malpass, & Davidson, 1971). The emic approach examines culture-specific phenomenon, studied within a specific context (e.g. culture, country), whereas the etic approach examines a phenomenon analyzed from outside a specific context that is universal and independent of cultural contexts (Poortinga, 1997). Although an emic approach offers a culture specific perspective, the etic approach (comparative research using what is purported to be universally applicable constructs such as individualism-collectivism) attempts to take a perspective that is neutral to the cultures that are being compared. However, an ‘imposed etic’ bias can occur when researchers assume that what is actually an emic construct is treated as if it was etic, that is when a culture-specific idea or phenomenon is wrongly imposed on another culture (see Berry, 1989, and Ratner & Hui, 2003).

Hui and Triandis (1985) advocated a combined etic-emic approach, which uses multiple methods to establish cross-cultural equivalence in order to make cross-cultural comparisons. Investigating self-narrative data through the Greimassian analysis offers an etic framework for cross-cultural comparisons because the actants are proposed as universally applicable etic concepts. However, it would be important in this research to establish the empirical basis of Greimas’s claims and see whether in fact the actants can be used to analyse self-narrative contents. In addition, within the Actantial Model analysis, culturally specific elements may be discovered in people’s self-narratives. In other words, emic instantiations of the etic concepts like Subject/Object, Helper/Opponent, and Sender/Receiver may be gleaned. Therefore, Greimassian analysis may provide an etic-emic approach for culture and self research.

Applications of Greimassian framework. The Actantial Model was proposed by Greimas as a deep structure underlying both sentence and discourse. Perhaps his

narrative structure can provide a semiotic account of discourse, but the gap between theory and actual discourses has yet to be convincingly reconciled (Katilius-Boydston, 1990). In the last few decades though research is continuing in this area to bridge Greimas's theory and actual empirical semiotic account of discourse.

Greimas's Actantial Model has been applied in diverse fields of research: philosophy, religion, arts, literary studies, law, history, health, social sciences and media. Some examples include analyzing urban media story telling (Kim & Hong, 2014), research into international business using intercultural collaboration stories (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011), and analyzing newspaper articles for health promotion (Aarva & Tampere, 2006). Of relevance to this thesis is its application to the study of culture, self and narrative, for which there is a paucity of research. Wang and Roberts (2005) found value in using Greimas's actantial approach to analyze a single account of a rural elementary Chinese school teacher's losing and regaining her valued identity as reported in the People's Daily on July 17, 1974. They reasoned from this exercise that the Actantial Model afforded a language for expressing cultural and historical variations that provide an understanding of how realities are constructed by others (Wang & Roberts, 2005). From another perspective, Kashima, Gurumurthy, Ouschan, Chong, and Mattingley (2007) also applied Greimas's Actantial Model to investigate how narrative can be viewed as a symbolic representation about self-regulation, and they found that if appropriated, narrative may provide people with guidance for construing themselves (Kashima et al., 2007). In support of Greimas's model, Kashima et al. (2008) extensively reviewed literature to explain narrative as a medium of cultural transmission and proposed the possibilities of Greimas's Actantial Model in psychological research for understanding psychological phenomena.

The Current Research

The present research endeavors to further our understanding of cross-cultural differences in self-narratives. Greimas's Actantial Model is used as a systematic approach to studying cross-cultural differences in the structures of self-narratives, while addressing the following questions:

What content do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultures?

How do they narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultural contexts?

How does self-narration relate to autobiographical memories in its construction?

In the context of the present research, two methodological points need to be discussed further: the choice of a mixed-method approach and the cultural contexts.

Mixed-method approach. In the current research, I use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, which is called a mixed-method approach. It has been argued that this approach would enable us to answer the research questions that either methodology alone cannot (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). In the current research, it was surmised that a qualitative approach will enable me to explore cultural differences in self-narratives and self-narrating styles while generating more specific hypotheses at an early stage of my research. Quantitative research methods have been extensively used in cross-cultural research, so much so that cross-cultural researchers have called for a return to qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews (Matsumoto, 1999). Nonetheless, once specific hypotheses are generated, a quantitative approach may be used to test those hypotheses in later stages of the research.

Thus, I believe the mixed-method approach provides a systematic way of analyzing comparative self-narrative data cross-culturally using a semiotic tool, Greimas's Actantial Model. To the best of my knowledge, this has not been attempted in cross-cultural comparative research on culture and self.

Cultural contexts. This study covered mainly European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese cultural contexts, with the term Westerners referring to European-Australians and Easterners referring to Singaporean Chinese. European-Australians were chosen because they are generally considered as representing an individualistic cultural context where the 'Self' may be more consistently identified as autonomous and self-contained. According to Hofstede (1980, 2001), the United States and Australia are among the most individualistic cultures, with the United States ranked with the highest Individualism index (*IDV score*) of 91 and Australia second with an *IDV score* of 90 (ahead of Great Britain and Canada), out of the 50 countries and 3 regions studied by Hofstede. In contrast, Singapore is regarded as one of the more collectivist cultures. It has the *IDV score* of 20 and listed at the 7th from the lowest with Venezuela at the score of 12. Thus, Australia and Singapore are culturally different in their cultural orientation of individualism and collectivism.

In addition, the similarity between Australia and Singapore in historical and linguistic backgrounds makes them useful contexts for cultural comparisons. On the one hand, Australia was settled by Europeans with a similar ancestry to the United States. Both were prior British penal colonies. America's independence from Britain in the 1770s meant an alternative site was sought by the British to establish another penal colony. Captain James Cook claimed the East Coast of Australia for Britain in 1770, and the First Fleet of British ships arrived into Botany Bay in January 1788. Many

British colonies were soon established thereafter around the continent and hence, Australia initially defined its identity as an outpost of Britain (Rizvi, 1997). Penal colonies with convicts who had served their time, were then emancipated and granted democratic rights to settle down like the free settlers. Indigenous Australians, the original caretakers of the land, were greatly weakened and their population shrank due to the introduction of diseases and conflict with the European colonists (Macintyre, Atkinson, Lake, Pons, & Macintyre, 2008). The tense relationship between white settlers and indigenous Australians, which is an ongoing issue of reconciliation, is one that has persisted until today. Now, Australia is a multicultural society with English as the common language for communication though 300 languages are believed to be spoken (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Singapore was also colonized by the British in the 1800s. Its history began with Sir Stamford Raffles' establishment of Singapore as a British trading post of the East India Company. Singapore was integrated along with Penang and Malacca (now part of Malaysia) into the Straits Settlements, an administrative entity in the 1820s (Koh, 2010). Due to its expanding need for workforce, many Chinese from the mainland arrived during the opening of the Treaty Ports in 1840 to seize the opportunity of improving their means to support themselves and their families (Koh, 2010). The majority of the Chinese migrants came from provinces in the southeast of China, with different Chinese dialect groups that included Cantonese, Hokkien, Hylam (Hainan), Kheh, and the Teochew (Koh, 2010). The descendants of these migrant Chinese, including the substantial Chinese group already in Malay Peninsula before the migration, collectively make up the majority of Singapore's population. Singapore became a sovereign nation in 1965 after a period of Japanese occupation during the Second World War, then gaining independence from Britain after the war. Today, it is a

global hub for commerce, finance and transport.

According to Koh (2010), Singaporean Chinese have been documented in research literature to have a long tradition of fluency in English because, as a British colony, it was the language of governance and law. In addition, English as the *lingua franca* of the trading world was argued by Koh (2010) to be the fundamental factor in determining class structures among the Chinese in Singapore. Those who are proficient in English had better access to top schools and also high paying jobs. It is moreover the Singaporean Chinese's level of English language proficiency that they have been selected as a cultural group in this study because language is no longer a variable that may interfere with cultural comparison. In addition, Ji et al. (2004) found that Singaporean Chinese were compound bilinguals, presumed to share the same cognitive representational system of Chinese and English languages, which resulted in no effect of language of testing.

Considering that both the European-Australians and Singapore Chinese share a common history of British colonization and national independence, immigration, and English as an established language of public communication, these groups provide an excellent opportunity to compare the effects of their cultural traditions and backgrounds on self-narratives. In addition, Australia and Singapore are comparable in terms of their national wealth. Although national affluence in terms of socioeconomic development and religious heritage is often related to cultural differences (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Vignoles et al., 2016), this will not pose a major methodological issue to the Australia-Singapore comparison. According to The World Factbook - Central Intelligence Agency (2018), Australia and Singapore are countries with developed socioeconomic systems and enjoy affluence, with similar GDP- real growth rates (real growth rate compares GDP growth on an annual basis adjusted for inflation and expressed as a percent) in the

last three years between 2.2% to 2.5% for Australia and 1.9% to 2.5% for Singapore. The religious heritage of each of the cultures would also be explored in terms of its relevance in the-self-narrative in this research.

The research program. Study 1 in Chapter 3 details the exploratory study, interviewing European-Australians and Singaporean-Chinese with the purposes in mind of establishing the procedure to gather qualitative data and developing a coding system to code the data. The other objectives include analyzing the self-narratives using Greimas's Actantial Model to establish the validity of this method and, lastly, obtaining feedback from the participants. Participant feedback about the method used would inform and guide the development of the subsequent studies. The preliminary results were examined to see if any cultural differences emerged in the self-narratives.

Following Study 1, the research method was further developed to capture more efficiently the self-narratives in Study 2, Chapter 4. Study 2 adopted a mixed methods approach with an online questionnaire to examine self-narrative accounts. European-Australian and Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese self-narrative accounts were analyzed and compared to those obtained in Study 1. The primary objective of this study was threefold. Firstly, I aimed to develop an online questionnaire to capture self-narratives that would be refined for use in Study 3. Secondly, the online questionnaire with a different format was piloted and validated along with the coding system. Thirdly, any cultural differences were examined through the use of Greimas's Actantial Model. Based on this, the online questionnaire and the coding system were further refined for Study 3.

In Study 3 reported in Chapter 5, the refined online questionnaire and coding system was used to analyze European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese self-

narratives. Unlike in Studies 1 and 2 where participants were recruited in Australia, participants were recruited from their respective countries in Australia and Singapore. I investigated 'What' was culturally different in the contents of Western and Eastern self-narratives, and 'How' these individuals from their respective cultures narrated about themselves and 'How' their self-narration related to autobiographical memory.

Chapter 3. Study 1: A Qualitative Understanding of Cultural Differences in Western and Eastern Self-narratives

Introduction

The overall purpose of the project is to examine cross-cultural differences in self-narratives using Greimas's Actantial Model. To begin this process, the primary aim of this first study is to explore the use of Greimas's model for analyzing self-narratives. This is achieved by addressing four components. First is to explore the procedure for eliciting self-narratives using interviews to obtain qualitative data. Second is to develop the coding system to code the self-narratives. Third is to conduct a preliminary analysis of the self-narratives using Greimas's model and to establish the validity of this method for investigating culture and self with preliminary evidence. This third component involves some further steps which includes establishing whether Greimas's model can be used to analyze self-narratives given spontaneously in an interview, elicit sufficient self-narrative data comparable to McAdams's Life Story account, and whether using this model can replicate cross-cultural differences reported in past research. Fourth is to obtain participant feedback from this study, which would then inform the creation of the online questionnaire for subsequent studies. The findings of this study are discussed within the broader questions raised in the past two chapters, that of *'What'* and *'How'* of cultural differences in self-narratives, self-narration and autobiographical memory.

Interviews have traditionally been used in research into self-narratives. Here, the person shares his or her experiences, the events that have taken place, and the people and/or things that are important to him or her. Interviews provide a way for the person to narrate their stories within cultural context. The interviewer's goal is to generate detailed accounts instead of brief answers or general statements (Riessman, 1993,

2008). The interview approach has been adopted by McAdams who has proposed a Life Story account (McAdams, 1993, 1996, 2008) that has also been applied in this study as a way of capturing the self-narrative of each participant.

In interviews, the researcher participates in the creation of narratives by facilitating the storytelling (Riessman, 2008) and is involved in shaping the stories the respondent chooses to tell (Riessman, 1993). Mishler (1986) went one step further and suggested that the interview process is a dialogical process, a joint construction of meaning because the question put forth to the respondent is part of the circular process through which its meaning and that of its reply are generated in the discourse between interviewer and respondent (Mishler, 1986). Hence, interviews are co-constructed between two active participants who together create narrative and meaning.

The interviews in this exploratory study seek to elicit spontaneous self-narratives to determine the validity of using Greimas's model for culture and self investigations. Spontaneous self-narratives are open-ended accounts that allow the participant to share their story freely. In addition, I envisage to elicit details of self-narratives by making prompts relevant for Greimas's Actantial Model. I call this prompted self-narratives. It is intended to emulate a conversational style in which someone's narrative is then probed into by seeking further elaboration on a specific aspect of the story. It is surmised that this provides a way to investigate the 'How' of self-narration, that is, the *style* by which self-narratives are constructed in social interaction (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Rollo, Longobardi, Spataro, & Sulla, 2017).

To determine whether the Greimassian framework could be applied on spontaneous accounts, I seek to establish some degree of correspondence between spontaneous and prompted versions. That is, I plan to show that what the researcher regards as key actants in spontaneous self-narratives are seen also by the interviewee as

those actants. By doing so, I believe I can provide at least preliminary evidence that the Actantial Model analysis I conduct is to some extent validated by the interviewee as well. After demonstrating this, it is also critical to establish that both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives provide sufficient information comparable to McAdams's (2008) Life Story account. McAdams's method may be regarded as one of the gold standards of capturing life stories in psychological narrative research. By showing that methods based on the Greimassian model can elicit self-narratives that are in some way comparable to McAdams's method, I would be able to provide initial evidence for the validity of the Greimassian approach.

Furthermore, in order to demonstrate the viability of the Greimassian framework to analyze self-narratives, it is hoped that past research on cultural differences can be replicated. For example, self-orientation and *self-goals* (autonomous vs. relational; Triandis, 1988, 1989; Wang, 2013) in examining the axis of desire, it is expected that European-Australians may have more a self-oriented *Subject* and autonomous self-goals as captured by the actant *Object*, compared to the Singaporean-Chinese who may have more of an other-oriented *Subject* and relational self-goals as the *Object* of desire (Jobson & O'Kearney, 2008; Wang, 2016, in press). These replications will enable the validity of the current method to be established. In addition, the inter-rater reliability between two coders on the self-narrative accounts needs to be addressed for the coding system which sets out a procedure to analyze self-narratives. Having both a valid and reliable method will ensure that Greimas's Actantial Model can be used as a systematic approach to investigate cross-cultural differences.

Method

Participants. The participants ($N = 12$) were recruited by email

advertisement/invitation to the Singapore Students Society of the University of Melbourne and referral via friends and acquaintances, which led to the sourcing of individuals known by them but not known by the researcher. All the European-Australians and five Singaporean Chinese were recruited by referral via friends and acquaintances. One Singaporean student was recruited through the email advertisement. This was a convenience sample through word of mouth for the purpose of piloting the interview protocol. A total of 12 adults were interviewed (4 females and 2 males European-Australians and 4 females and 2 males Singaporean Chinese) ranging from ages 20 to 40 years old. Ten participants reported being single and two reported being divorced. All participants were completing or had completed undergraduate studies with 3 participants who had completed postgraduate studies (1 European-Australian and 2 Singaporean Chinese). The majority reported practicing a religion (Christians: 6 European-Australians and 4 Singaporean Chinese; Buddhist: 1 Singaporean Chinese), except for one Singaporean Chinese who reported no religion. Table 3.1 outlines the inclusion criteria for the study.

Table 3.1

The Inclusion Criteria for Participants

| | Westerner | Easterner |
|--------------|---|--|
| Background | European-Australian who has lived in Australia most of his/her life and who has grown up with parents who are also European-Australians | Singaporean Chinese who was born in Singapore and lived in Singapore most of his/her life, and who have parents born of Chinese ancestry |
| Age & Gender | 18 years+, 6 males/females | 18 years+, 6 males/females |
| Health | Not diagnosed with any terminal illness or psychological disorder | Not diagnosed with any terminal illness or psychological disorder |
| Education | Completion of Secondary Schooling | Completion of Secondary Schooling |

Procedure and materials. Participants were provided with a Plain Language Statement, Consent and Demographics forms, and Debriefing Statement (see Appendix A). An iPhone application called iTalk was used to record the interview sessions. Sessions were then de-identified and saved as Mp3 files and transcribed. The transcription was then coded according to the Coding Manual (see Appendix B). A debriefing form was provided to the participants at the conclusion of the interview session.

Interview schedule. Participants were asked to attend an interview of approximately two hours in duration. The session began with participants provided with the time to first read the Plain Language Statement as well as the Consent form (see Appendix A). Participants completed the form and were given the opportunity to ask any questions they had. Prior to the interview session, they were told, “*In this interview, I will be asking you a number of questions about your life story. I will be recording this session and later transcribing it. Are you ready to begin?*” When they started, the iTalk app was turned on and recording of the interview began. The interview session was semi-structured in that the interview was guided by the format but not dictated by it (see Appendix C for exposition of why semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study). It was important to follow the respondent’s lead in his or her self-narrative and to ask for further clarification to understand the meaning of what was shared.

The interview format (see Appendix D for details) consisted of two sections. Section A sought to obtain the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, while Section B requested further data from an adapted version of McAdams’s (2008) Life Story account to test the validity of Greimas’s method. Section A started with the *spontaneous sharing* of the self-narrative. When the participants were ready, they were asked the first

question, “*Can you please summarize your life story in several minutes, of anything that comes to mind?*” This was a relatively unstructured introduction where the respondents were invited to speak in their own voices, and allowed to control the introduction and flow of ideas, with encouragement to extend their responses (Mishler, 1986). They were then asked to answer the questions regarding their *prompted self-narrative* according to Greimas’ Actantial Model; to reflect on the questions about their main character(s) (Subject: “*Who or what is the main character in your story?*”), goals (Object: “*Are there any goals or pursuits that have been prevalent in your (or the main character’s) life? If so, what are the goals?*”), who or what helped them achieve their goals (Helper: “*Was there anyone or anything that helped you (or the main character) achieve the goal(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?*”), who or what opposed them in achieving their goals (Opponent: “*Was there anyone or anything that opposed you (or the main character) in achieving your goal(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?*”), if there was an authority figure or moral agent in their life story (Sender: “*Was there anyone or anything that guided you (or the main character) in your life story? For example, an authority figure or a moral principle that provided you with guidance about what should be done? If so, who or what?*”). Following these questions, they were then asked about the benefactors of achieving their goal(s) (Receiver: “*Who or what are the benefactors of your achieving your goal(s) if any? Is that only yourself, only others, or yourself AND others? If not only yourself, but some other people or things are also receiving benefits, who are they or what are they?*”). This Greimassian framework allowed the gathering of data for the actants Subject, Object, Helper, Opponent, Sender and Receiver to be analyzed. Hence, in the first part, participants were allowed to talk freely, but in the second part of Section A, the Greimassian framework questions were

imposed. This was formulated to examine whether spontaneous accounts cohere with prompted accounts of the self-narrative.

It was important to capture the spontaneous self-narratives initially before the prompted self-narratives using the Greimassian framework to avoid imposing Greimas's Actantial Model on self-narratives. In so doing, this research could establish the feasibility of Greimas's Actantial Model in analyzing self-narratives whether spontaneous or prompted, and not run the risk of an imposed etic approach (Berry, 1989; Ratner & Hui, 2003) by assuming that the Actantial Model only worked when the self-narratives were elicited by its model's own concepts.

In Section B, the semi-structured interview was conducted using an adapted version of McAdams's (2008) Life Story account to gather the rich qualitative data. The Life Story account was shortened to adapt to the current context but remained clear and concise to capture the same meaning. McAdams (2008) and McAdams and Guo (2014) found that focusing on a few key things in a person's life – such as selected key scenes, characters, and ideas would enable the person to talk about the important things that have defined them. These key scenes, characters, and ideas are part of the narrative that shapes them in terms of their self-identity and what they believe about their world. This is outlined in Table 3.2.

McAdams and Guo (2014) acknowledged that variations of the Life-Story Interview format have been developed for different studies, so that it can tailor to the aims of that particular study. Hence, the adapted version in this study along with Greimas's Actantial Model was used to capture an individual's life and enable them to reflect on the key episodes in their lives that may have defined them. The Life-Story Interview format which outlined the main characters in the self-narrative, the challenges they had and the values and beliefs they held, were investigated to see whether it

corresponded to the Greimassian narrative structure. For example, the main characters of the Life Chapters are linked to the Axis of Desire of Subject-Object relationship, with

Table 3.2

McAdams (2008) Revised Life-Story Interview

| Life Story Interview | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 1. Life chapters | Participant divides life into its main chapters and provides a plot summary for each |
| 2. Eight key episodes | <p>For each of eight scenes, participant describes what happened, who was involved, what he or she was thinking and feeling in the scene, and what he or she thinks the scene says about who he or she was, is, or might be. The eight episodes are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. High point 2. Low point 3. Turning point 4. Earliest memory 5. Important childhood episode 6. Important adolescent episode 7. Important adult episode 8. One other important episode |
| 3. Life challenge | Participant identifies and describes the biggest challenge or problem he or she has faced in life, how the challenge developed, and what he or she has done to meet the challenge |
| 4. Main characters | Participant identifies and describes in detail the one character with the most positive influence in the story and the one with the most negative influence |
| 5. Future plot | Participant provides an account of where the story is going, what will happen next, what the future chapters will look like, including main goals, dreams, and fears for the future |
| 6. Personal ideology | A series of questions on fundamental values, religious and political beliefs, and so on, including how those values have developed over time |
| 7. Life theme | Participant identifies a single integrative theme in the life story |

the Subject as the main character and what they pursue as the Object(s), which is part of the Future Plot and Integrative Theme in the life story because this Axis of Desire captures self-agency as each character is motivated by a goal in life's challenges. The drama of Life Challenges is often seen in the Axis of Conflict of the Helper-Opponent relationship, where problems usually exist and barriers (opponents) and/or helpers are identified. In any given life, the person is situated in a socio-cultural context where Personal Belief is derived or influenced by, and may be reinforced by the Key Episodes of life, which is linked to the Axis of Communication involving the Sender-Receiver, as this is the moral framework where authoritative figures (Sender) in the socio-cultural context guides who or what the Subject looks to and who gets to benefit as Receiver(s) when the Object has been obtained. Therefore, the Life Story interview may be captured as part of the narrative structure Greimas proposed because each of the actants outlined above accounts for life's dramas.

After the interview was completed, the participants completed the Demographics form and also read the Debriefing Statement (see Appendix A). They were finally asked if they had any further questions and what feedback they would like to provide in regards to their interview experience. Once the interview data was collected, it was immediately coded so that the participants were not identified at all. Careful adherence was made to the ethical stipulations obtained from the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). The contents of the interview were then analyzed using the coding system explained in the following.

Coding system. Once the interview data was gathered, the collected data was transcribed into text. Marshall and Rossman (2014) proposed that analyzing the data involves identifying categories, recurrent themes, ideas or language, and belief systems

that are common (or divergent) throughout research participants and contexts. What is recommended in the analysis of data is the use of codes to create themes, and in the process of coding, to categorize data into major groups and therefore, allow the different groups of data to be sequenced into meaningful patterns (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Consequently, a codebook or coding manual enables the researcher to make more meaningful sense of the data.

In making sense of the data, it was important that each coder analyzed the data separately to address any researcher's bias in the analysis process. To also ensure that the researcher's reflexivity did not compromise the process, it was only after the analyses were completed that the researchers discussed their coding results according to the guidelines of the coding manual.

The coding manual. The Coding Manual consisted of three components. Firstly, to explain what Greimas' Actantial Model is, with an example of the Prince Hero obtaining the Princess, and the different components of the Actantial Model of narrative structure. Secondly, a concise definition of all the concepts, the axes and actants as described in the Coding Manual are shown in Table 3.3 and the definitions of '*Abstract vs. Concrete*' as well as '*Implicit vs. Explicit*', as shown in Table 3.4. Thirdly, instructions on how to proceed with the coding analysis.

After the explanation of the Greimassian framework, conceptual and definitions sections were given. The third section of the coding manual included instructions on how to proceed with coding by specifying the steps involved for the following procedures:

- 1) Coding for Absence and Presence of actants
- 2) What are the contents and themes in different self-narratives?

3) Coding for Abstract vs. Concrete/ Implicit vs. Explicit for each actant.

Table 3.3

Definitions of Greimas's Actantial Model as outlined in the Coding Manual

| Greimas's Actantial Concepts | Definitions |
|------------------------------|---|
| Axis of Communication | This axis involves the sender and the receiver. The sender is the element who requests the establishment of the junction between the subject and the object, and the receiver is the one who benefits from achieving the junction. |
| Axis of Desire | This axis is the relationship established between the subject and the object in which the subject desires to obtain the object. The relationship between the subject and the object is called a junction. |
| Axis of Conflict | This axis outlines the challenge in which the subject has the helper that assists in achieving the desired object as well as the opponent that hinders the subject from obtaining the object. Hence, the helper assists in achieving the desired junction, and the opponent tries to hinder the same. |
| Sender | Someone or something that motivates the subject to undertake a concrete action and/or releases the object to the subject. For example, "King" (in the above example, issues a reward of the princess as a bride and releases the princess to the Prince-Hero), "God", "Parents", "Moral Principals", etc. |
| Receiver | Someone or an element for which the quest is being undertaken and who/that benefits from achieving the junction between the subject and object. For example, "Prince", "Princess", "King", "Kingdom", "Self", "Community", etc. |
| Subject | The main character(s) of the story who desires an object. For example, "Prince" (in the above example), "I", "we" etc. |
| Object | A desired outcome, person or thing the Subject wants to obtain. For example, "Princess" (in the above example), "Happiness", "Success", etc. |
| Helper | Helper: Someone or something that assists the subject to obtain the object. For example, "Friends", "Faith", "School", etc. |
| Opponent | Someone or something that hinders the subject from obtaining the desired object. For example, "Villain" (in the above example), "Boss", etc. |

In the first procedure, Coding for Absence and Presence of certain actants, step by step instructions in the Coding Manual are reproduced in the following in italics.

Read through the transcripts:

- a) Read the (question/ answer) transcript in Section A.*
- b) Identify who is/ are the Subject(s) and what is the Object in the Axis of Desire. Once this is identified, write it down under each actants' columns.*
- c) Identify the Helper and Opponent in the Axis of Conflict for Section A and complete in the relevant columns. Write out the actants.*
- d) Identify the Sender and Receiver in the Axis of Communication for Section A, and complete in the relevant columns. Write out the actants.*

Following the written instructions, the different levels of abstraction discussed in Chapter 2 have been adopted and hence, the actants were coded for either being *Abstract vs. Concrete*. Also coded was the notion of '*What is Implicit vs. Explicit?*' to capture the nuances of communication. Before the next set of instructions section for coding, the definitions of *Abstract versus Concrete* and *Implicit versus Explicit* were outlined and shown in Table 3.4.

Following the definition of the concepts in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, a step by step instruction was outlined as shown in the following. For a full version of the Coding Manual, see Appendix B.

Table 3.4

Definitions of Abstract, Concrete, Implicit and Explicit in the Coding Manual

| Concepts coded for | Definitions |
|---------------------|--|
| Abstract (General) | Existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence. For example, abstract concepts such as love or beauty. Something that is dealing with ideas rather than events, not based on a particular instance but is theoretical. Something denoting an idea, quality, or state rather than a concrete object, for example, abstract words like “truth”, “equality”, “happiness”, etc. |
| Concrete (Specific) | Existing in a material or physical form; real or solid; not abstract, for example concrete objects like specific people, it exists as a physically concrete form. It is specific, definite, denoting a material object as opposed to an abstract quality, state, or action. |
| Implicit | Concepts implied though not plainly expressed. For example, comments here and there that suggest a theme but not obviously stated, such as “I felt a bit uncomfortable with my grandmother”. |
| Explicit | Concepts stated clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt. For example, something obviously stated, such as “I really dislike my grandmother because she didn’t treat me well as a child”. |

Read through the transcripts and the identified actants:

- a) *For the identified Subject and Object in the Axis of Desire, are the Subject and Object contents Abstract or Concrete? Are they Implicit or Explicit? Please complete in the relevant columns under the specified headings, e.g., “Subject Abstract”, “Subject Concrete”, “Object Abstract”, “Object Concrete” in the excel spreadsheet, with ‘1’ for present or ‘0’ for absent.*
- b) *For the identified Helper and Opponent in the Axis of Conflict for Sections A and B, are the Helper and Opponent contents Abstract or Concrete? Are they Implicit or Explicit? Please complete in the relevant columns under the specified headings for Helper and Opponent in the excel spreadsheet.*
- c) *For the identified Sender and Receiver contents in the Axis of Communication, are they Abstract or Concrete? Explicit or Implicit? Please*

complete in the relevant columns under the specified headings Sender and Receiver in the excel spreadsheet.

The Coding Manual was used by the two coders independently to establish inter-rater reliability in this study, and in the two further studies in the later chapters.

Coding the narratives. In this study, 12 interview narrative accounts were gathered with the average length for a single narrative interview transcript being about 6,550 words. The researcher conducted the coding using the coding system. A research assistant was engaged to also code four interviews (33.33%) of the 12 narratives separately to ascertain inter-coder reliability, and to ensure coding was completed in adherence to the Coding Manual (see Appendix B for details of the manual) described previously. Hence, two coders independently coded the 4 narratives for the actants and axes of Greimas's Actantial Model. Cohen's (1960) *kappa* (κ) was run to determine if there was agreement between the two coders for the actants and for determining whether the concepts were abstract or concrete (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). Inter-rater reliability was $\kappa = .787, p < .001$ for actants and $\kappa = .792, p < .001$ for abstract or concrete concepts. Any disagreements between coders were resolved through discussion. According to Fleiss (1981), kappa values lower than 0.40 can be interpreted as poor, between 0.41 and 0.75 as fair, and above 0.75 as excellent agreement. There was 100% agreement for the presence or absence of axes.

As in McAdams et al.'s (2006) study, a single coder examined the narrative complexity because they had already been "trained to high levels of reliability on extensive practice materials for content analysis of written materials" (McAdams et al., 2006, p. 1381). In this study, the inter-rater reliability for actants and abstract/concrete

concepts had already been established between two coders. Therefore, only the principal researcher who had already been trained to high levels of reliability for content analysis of the interview scripts coded Section B. This was also an exploratory study, so the use of a single coder was sufficient in examining preliminary findings of the content and thematic analyses to investigate any linkages to Greimas's narrative structure.

Results

The three main issues pertaining to the validity of Greimas's Actantial Model for culture and self studies are addressed. First, in order to investigate whether spontaneous self-narratives can be analysed with Greimas's framework, general characteristics of Section A's spontaneous self-narratives were examined to determine whether they corresponded to those responses in the prompted self-narratives. Next, the different actants were analysed to see if some of the cross-cultural differences can be replicated with this method. Then, I examined whether self-narratives in Section A were consistent with participants' answers to Life Story accounts in Section B. This would provide evidence that self-narratives elicited by Greimas's narrative structure is sufficiently comparable to that obtained through McAdam's (2008) Life Story accounts. The *Key Episodes* in the Life Story accounts related to autobiographical memory are analysed to understand the association with the self-narrative structure. Then, unexpected findings of the role of religion in individual lives, featured in many of the interviewee's self-narratives are discussed. Lastly, the feedback from the interviewees are presented to inform the next study.

Do spontaneous self-narratives capture actants identified in prompted self-narratives? Spontaneous self-narratives appear to have a structure that is analyzable in

terms of Greimas's Actantial Model. This is discernible from the observation that spontaneous self-narratives often show a clear correspondence to the responses generated in response to prompts that are designed to elicit the actants. For example, the shortest narrative of a 'summary of life' was provided by a 25 year-old Singaporean-Chinese female:

"I was born in Singapore; I studied until junior college or the high school equivalent of year 12. I did one semester in the National University of Singapore before coming over to do my undergraduate degree at Monash Uni here in Melbourne."

Despite the brevity of this spontaneous self-narrative, it corresponds with the prompted self-narrative as captured by the axis of desire in the Greimassian framework. For example, this interviewee reported that one of her goals was to do well in her studies as captured by the Object of desire. Indeed, academic pursuit was an important theme in her life narrative as seen in this spontaneous self-narrative.

Another narrative by a 23 year-old Singaporean-Chinese male also showed the same pattern of spontaneous self-narrative structure and content which corresponded to his prompted version:

"I was born in Singapore and I pretty much went to school there until I was say about 18, so 17 or 18 we have our high school back in Singapore. When I was 19 and 20, I took two years off to do my National Service. So, it was two years in the Army and meanwhile, I did a bit of applications to various universities and stuff. When I was 21, that was three years back, and then I came over to Melbourne to do my undergraduate course in medicine. That's the first year. I just spent three years and I'm in my third year now."

In this 23 year-old Singaporean-Chinese male's prompted self-narrative, he reported that his goal was "to do very well at whatever I was doing" and he shared about doing well in his studies and then the army as it was a "very strong cultural thing in Singapore to be the best at whatever you do". Schooling and completing his current undergraduate course in medicine were featured in both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives and

in the prompted version, he further explained that it is his Object of desire, for example, he stated, “I want to do well in med school”. The army featured in his spontaneous self-narrative, which he completed two years of National Service and in his prompted self-narrative, he explained that he made friends during his National Service that helped him to understand his values and himself better and attributed his time at National Service as a Helper.

All the Singaporean Chinese spontaneous and prompted self-narratives showed similar patterns and that spontaneous and prompted versions cohered, with prompted versions providing more information to unpack what was brought up in spontaneous accounts. This was also found to be the case for European-Australian self-narratives. The European-Australian spontaneous self-narratives tended to be lengthier than Singaporean-Chinese self-narratives as evidenced by the following examples.

Spontaneous self-narrative of 32 year-old European-Australian female:

“Okay, growing up in a loving Christian home, parents and one sister. I went to a Christian school, had sort of solid friends right throughout primary and high school. I went to university; I study nursing and health promotion and I’ve worked as a nurse ever since. For so many years I’ve continued studying; I’ve studied at Bible College, although I should take a step back in-between all that. I got married quite young at 21 and that marriage ended when I was 25; divorced at 26. Following that, having good support from my family, so I went back to live with my family for about 18 months in that recovery period and in that time, that’s when I started Bible College. Subsequently, I moved out with another friend and just sort of started to rebuild my own life again. I continued nursing, Bible college study, and I am now pursuing counselling as a new career path. I’ve recently got engaged and looking forward to a bright future.”

This spontaneous self-narrative also corresponded with the prompted self-narrative reported by this participant, whose Object of desire was ‘continual education and having my own family’ with the Subject as mainly ‘herself’. Her marriage breakdown and divorce as reported in her spontaneous self-narrative is captured in the axis of conflict where she reported that her Opponent was her ‘first husband’ and her

Helpers were her 'relationship with God, friend and family'. In the axis of communication, she reported that her Sender is 'God' and this is implied in her spontaneous narrative about religion being central in her life especially through her studying at Bible College, and that her Receiver was 'myself (herself) and others', which she ends with looking forward to a bright future (for herself) as she was engaged (to another man).

Another example provided by a 23 year-old European-Australian Male shows also a much longer spontaneous self-narrative in comparison to the Singaporean-Chinese, which also corresponds to his prompted account:

"So I was born in West Gibson in a town called Warragul in that hospital. Both my mum and dad are from England - they were both born in England and came out here with their separate families in their teenage years. They met whilst they were teaching and then got together and then in about 1987, oh, hello, here I come. So I was born in 1987 in Warragul where they were living at the time. Then we grew up in Drouin, a pretty normal sort of upbringing, I guess, in the country. I have one older sister, and that's all. I am currently 22 and she's 25. I just went to normal kindergarten. The weekends I played a lot of sport; that sort of thing. I played a lot of computer games. I did a lot at school. I went to Drouin kindergarten, then to Drouin primary school and then Drouin High School, all in the same town. I lived in the same house for the first 18 years of my life; all that stretch. When I finished year 12 in high school, I applied to universities; I applied to the prestigious University of Melbourne and got into there doing a double degree in geometric engineering and mixed measured systems. Now I'm in my fifth year of that, so I'm just about to complete that. I guess that's sort of what I've done in my life. A big part of it is my Christian faith. It's very important to me... I guess most of my life, the first 20 years, I wasn't a Christian; I wasn't of any religion per se. I didn't believe in God, but when I was about 20-21, I had a definite season of depression. I was suicidal. That came about because of the circumstances I was in. What happened was that in about two weeks everything in my life just crashed. The band I was playing in split up. The girlfriend I had been with for two years, I split up with her. Uni started to go bad, got bad marks. I got fired from my job, all that happened within two weeks.... Through that I found Jesus to be historically accurate and the claims that he made are accurate. So I decided to believe what he said and believe in God and become a Christian. That changed my life perspective quite a bit because then my life had purpose because I believed that God created me and loved me and has a relationship with me and so that gave my life a different perspective it did - a completely different meaning. So now, in my current state, my life in essence is to give glory to God, to live the way that he wants me to live, that's trying to be as holy as I can and trying to live in a relationship with him every day. So it's doing that every day, I guess that's

what I do with God and then what I do with people, I try and show that love of God to other people so that other people will discover the love and grace that God has for people. So my life purpose would be to make disciples of Jesus for God's sake, not for my sake."

In his prompted self-narrative, this interviewee reported that his Objects of Desire were to "get married and have a family, draw close to God, know Him well, know the Bible and teach so people will know God". These values and goals as captured in his prompted Object also feature similarly in his spontaneous account. His Sender was identified as "God and the Bible" and Receiver as "Family and friends". His conflict of his difficulties which then lead him to find meaning in his new faith in Christianity is captured by his prompted Helper, which he reported before was, "mum and dad in helping me get into university" but now, it is his Christian faith and "assistant pastor" at church. His prompted Opponent was identified as his "mum resisting (his) new found identity in God" and before, "his atheist group of friends at college". As can be seen, both his spontaneous and prompted self-narratives cohered and corresponded with each other.

The narrative examples shown above indicate that the actants found in spontaneous self-narratives were also identified in the prompted accounts using the Greimassian framework and this was the case in all the other individuals' self-narrative accounts. It was noted that more information seemed to be gathered through the prompted self-narratives compared with the spontaneous accounts and this would be explored further in the next study to confirm the preliminary findings here. The present results provide some preliminary evidence to suggest that the Greimassian framework is applicable to the analysis of spontaneous self-narratives.

Analyses based on the Actantial Model. This section reports the types of

actants that appeared in the European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. It is divided into three sections: axis of desire (Subject and Object), axis of conflict (Helper and Opponent), and axis of communication (Sender and Receiver).

Axis of desire. In the axis of desire, the Subject-Object relationship was found to be the axis that showed greatest emphasis on self-other orientation, that is, focus on either “Self” or “Other” between the cultural groups. Through the Greimassian framework, it can be shown that there was a trend where European-Australians had more frequent mention of the ‘Self’ while Singaporean Chinese had more emphasis on the ‘Other’, such as their parents, family, etc. The analysis of each of the actants will be reported in the following.

Subject. In both cultural groups’ spontaneous self-narratives, they had ‘I’ or ‘Self’ as the Subject, indicating that each individual referenced their life stories to themselves as individuals. However, in the prompted self-narrative when participants were asked, ‘Is there a main character in your life story? If so, who is it?’ There were clearly variations as shown in Table 3.5, with some participants reporting more than one main character as the Subject, e.g. ‘Mum and Self’. Westerners and Easterners shared similar amounts of Subjects, with *Self* as Subject being one of the most frequently mentioned. *Parents* and specifically *Mum* or *Dad* were important, as was *God*. Besides *Self*, both Western and Eastern self-narratives named “Mum” or “Mother” as a frequent main character. It is believed that when the participants were asked about the main character they answered in terms of who had influenced their life story profoundly. That “Mum” or “Mother” appears often after “Self” is not a surprise as it has been found in many cultures that a mother’s role in each individual life is an important and salient one

(Fivush et al., 2006; Keller, 2013, 2016; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007).

Table 3.5

Frequencies of Different Subjects in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Subject of Desire Contents | Frequencies | |
|--|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Me/I/Self | 4 | 2 |
| Dad | 1 | 0 |
| Mum | 4 | 2 |
| Parents | 0 | 1 |
| Babysitter | 0 | 1 |
| Significant others, e.g. Nelson, Mother Theresa, Gandhi, Corrie Ten Boom | 1 | 3 |
| God | 2 | 2 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>11</i> |

In the following are some narrative excerpts that exemplified the variations in the actant Subject for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese, with some participants sharing more than one Subject, that is a plurality of characters in their self-narrative.

“Apart from me, perhaps my mom (sic), yeah. You know, growing-up, naturally even though both mom and dad were present, dad being the breadwinner, mom is the one that would have spent the most time with me and we’ve always be close. She’s never ceased to be a main cheerleader and supporter and so on. So yeah, she’s definitely been in there throughout everything”.
32 year-old European-Australian female

“If I had to choose one character, I would have to say, God. I grew up in church, my whole life. My parents were Christians when I was born, they brought me to church, and the earliest memory of church is when I was about 4 or 5. I was in the kids’ playgroup in church. So I have been to church all of my life. I recognised as I grew older the influence of God in my life, in every area. In every aspect of my life, realising there is a greater meaning to my life, than what I am currently doing. And the purpose of doing what I am doing at the moment. I suppose, believing in something that is bigger than myself, puts my life in perspective so when I face trials or tribulations, I realise that there is a

reason behind, why I am going through all that. Hopefully to become a better person and hopefully to help others who may be experiencing the same thing in the future. That puts my life in perspective”.

25 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

“Yes, in the sense you could say that the main character is probably myself. Yes, my life experiences and all but I wouldn’t really say that there’s a main character because there are other people that comes into my life story. That would be my parents and also my babysitter”.

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

The following interview excerpts from a 29 year-old European-Australian male shows also how Subject(s) can change over time as the ‘Self’ develops, from ‘Mother’ initially to the ‘Self’ more recently.

Interviewer: *In your story that you’ve just shared, is there a main character, if so who is it?*

Respondent: *I guess the Freudian answer is my mother. It’s come through my own personal work to know that that’s a source of a lot of that drive the..., to please Mum, to have done well at school and to make that expectation felt, to get a good job, you know things perceived about who you are to be of value.... I think that’s a big change in myself over the last two years is the one question of myself becoming the main character in my life.... It’s really been the last two years becoming myself.*

Interviewer: *Do you then consider at this point in your life that you’re the main character in your story?*

Respondent: *Now I do, yes.*

In order to make comparisons of the qualitative data in Table 3.5 to understand how European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese varied in their responses of the actant Subject, the thematic broad categories based on ‘Self Only’, ‘Self & Other’ and ‘Other Only’ was tallied for each participant’s content and shown in Table 3.6. ‘Self Only’ referred only to the Self, such as ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘myself’. ‘Self and other’ referred to both the self and other’, for example, “*Apart from me, perhaps my mom*”, hence, ‘Self and Mum’ were both tallied. ‘Other Only’ referenced others only, for examples, “*God*”, “*Mother Theresa*”, etc. alone.

Table 3.6

Tally of Differentiated ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ Subjects in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Actant | Count | |
|----------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Subject of Desire Contents | | |
| Self Only | 1 | 0 |
| Self & Other | 11 | 6 |
| Other Only | 0 | 5 |

There was one European-Australian who reported ‘Self Only’ while no Singaporean Chinese reported ‘Self Only’ in their self-narratives, as shown in Table 3.6. The majority of individuals (5 European-Australian and 2 Singaporean Chinese) reported ‘Self and Other’ as the main characters in their self-narrative with five more ‘Self and Other’ contents for European-Australians than the Singaporean Chinese. Over half ($n = 4$) of the Singaporean Chinese indicated that the ‘Subject’ of their self-narrative was ‘Other Only’, which included God, Mum and significant people such as Mother Theresa, Gandhi and Corrie Ten Boom. Though making comparisons with such a small sample size is inconclusive, we can begin to observe that the emphasis on the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ appears to be different for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese for the actant Subject. Further investigation would require a larger sample.

Object. In the Object of desire, spontaneous and prompted Objects cohered and the following examples show what participants reported as Objects. The content analyses are summarized in Table 3.7.

“I think that further study has been the common denominator, actually. And marriage and having a family of my own, hopefully”.
32 year old European-Australian female

“Probably would be...what would it be? If I had to say it to you it would be family. So that being the desire to get married and to perhaps have kids. It’s not as strong now as perhaps it has been in the past. My major goal would be to draw close to God and to know God well. To know the Bible well. And to effectively teach the Bible to other people and see them come to know God well. That would be – yeah, that would probably be the second goal, the first goal would be myself to be close to God”.

23 year old European-Australian male

“I think one, is to be a better person for society and not just add to the statistics of being needy or being a bump or a slug, but just to be innovative, be creative, and be daring to do something different out of the context and I guess, just to make community life a bit better”.

30 year old Singaporean Chinese female

“I suppose going on mission trips is one of them. Doing well in my study, that has always, been something that I’ve tried to do throughout my life. Sports doing well in my sports, I enjoy sports; I have been playing badminton since primary school. I have been in a couple of competitions since then and I really enjoy sports basically. And also music has always been a passion in my life since I was a kid. I started learning piano when I was about 5 and then picked up a couple of instruments, just for the fun of it and started to play in church as well, that’s been a recurrent theme in my life. So sports, music, church and my studies. Keeping up, with family and friends as well”.

25 year old Singaporean Chinese female

The actant Object captures the goals that are pursued by the Subject. Table 3.7 shows the main contents for Object which consist of both abstract and concrete elements. It is interesting to note that faith and religion, excelling to improve each of themselves and family were important themes in both cultural groups. Only one European-Australian’s Object(s) of desires was related back to his parents while four of the Singaporean Chinese’s Object(s) of desires are tied back to their parents, either emulating, pleasing or spending time with parents. This suggests that the goals as Objects of desire for the Singaporean Chinese is very much linked to their significant others, such as their parents.

Table 3.7

Content Analysis Results of Objects in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Westerners | Easterners |
|--|---|
| “Pursuit of happiness, to travel” | “To be like my dad because he used to be a banker” |
| “Excel in the field I am in through education, catch up with friends often and family, growing in my faith” | “Excellence in what I do (in studies) to meet parents’ expectations, avoid disappointing them (parents)” |
| “Get scholarship to support myself in uni, to please my parents, to establish my own life”. | “Be a better person in society- contribute to the community” |
| “Become an excellent dancer/ singer” | “Become like mum, achieve in career, go on short-term missions, go into arts career” |
| “Get married and have a family, draw close to God, know Him well, know the Bible and teach so people will know God”. | “Be the best at what I do- do well in Med school, spend time with my parents” |
| “Continual education and having my own family” | “Doing well in my studies, going on missions trips, doing well in sports, play music and playing in church, keeping up with family and friends” |

It was important to understand for the actant Object what the focus of the goal was, that is, was the pursuit a ‘Self’ focused goal that only considered the Self? For example, “*Become an excellent dancer/ singer*” (was considered a ‘Self-oriented’ goal). Or was it ‘both Self and Other’ focused because there was a mixture of Self goals but goals that also considered or referenced other people besides the Self? For example, “*Be the best at what I do- do well in Med school, spend time with my parents*” (was considered both ‘Self and Other oriented’ goal). Or was it just a goal that focused on Others without any reference to the Self, such as ‘Other-oriented’ goals? After categorizing the actant Object from this perspective, there were two European-Australians who had ‘Self-oriented’ goals while the other 4 European-Australians had

both 'self and other oriented' goals. In contrast, all of the Singaporean Chinese had both 'Self and Other oriented' goals.

Overall, it was found that in European-Australian self-narratives, there were more 'abstract' concepts in the Object of desire. For examples, education, success in career, and happiness, etc. In contrast, the Singaporean self-narratives had more specific concrete concepts and half of them contained a desire to be like their parents or to meet their parent's expectations. For examples, 'to be like my dad (a banker)'; 'to become like my mother, go on short-term missions and go into an arts career', etc. However, with such a small sample size, it was difficult to make comparisons and hence, it would be important for later studies to investigate further with a larger sample size to ascertain whether there is a trend for more abstract Objects of desire between the two different cultural groups. This is important because previous research on self-descriptions have found abstract vs concrete/specific differences (Cousins, 1989; Kashima et al., 2006; Rhee et al., 1995). However, the actantial analyses allow us to understand which aspects of the self-narrative in terms of actants may have more abstract or concrete concepts, hence, providing a more nuanced understanding of previous research findings.

The results are inconclusive with such small differences in frequencies but they show an emerging trend consistent with previous findings that there are cultural differences between Western and Eastern autobiographical memory and self-narratives (Wang, 2001a, 2001b; Wang & Conway, 2004). While both Western and Eastern self-narratives have in their Objects of desire a theme of the importance of family, two of the Western self-narratives have family as a pursuit for having their 'own' family while only one of the Westerners wanted to catch up with family. This contrasts with five of the Eastern self-narratives where the 'current' family is their object of pursuit, to spend time with family, please parents or become like them (Dad or Mum).

Axis of conflict. In the Axis of Conflict, the actants Helper and Opponent reflect the tension involved in the pursuit of goals in self-narratives. Through the Greimassian framework, it can be shown that there was a trend for both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese to report Helpers but with Opponents, it was different. For Opponents, two of the Singaporean Chinese participants did not report any Opponent although all European-Australian participants mentioned some Opponent. The analysis of each of the actants will be reported in the following.

Helper. For the actant Helper, both Western and Eastern self-narratives featured influential figures or entities. As summarized in Table 3.8, in the Western self-narrative, ‘mother’ or ‘mum’ featured the most, along with significant others such as ‘boss’, ‘analyst’ (psychoanalytic therapist) and ‘social worker’. Other ‘family members’ and ‘friends’ also featured as well as ‘palliative care networks’ which was grouped under ‘Other’. There were some similar Helpers shared by Easterners in their self-narratives but with slightly less reports of different family members and mum was not mentioned as often. Both Western and Eastern self-narratives featured God, faith, and/or church also as Helpers. A point of difference was in the ‘Other’ category where one Easterner reported ‘the culture within my middle school’ and ‘his experiences at National Service’ as a Helper.

Some of the narrative examples below show the variations of the actant Helper:

“I think the social worker that I had during that period of my life; it was like I’d waited my whole life to meet her... she was just helpful in the transitions between us, at the different points of the disease with Mum”.

40 year-old European-Australian female

“Yeah, I definitely say my mum and dad. You know, they helped me with homework throughout school, they helped me reach university. They supported me by paying for my university costs. So, yeah, they’ve helped me achieve those goals I had...”

23 year-old European-Australian male

“I’d say my family have been a major part, they have been very supportive of me, all my life, they have never forced me to do things that I don’t want to do.... I remember my parents driving me to and from, music practice, when I had those in Singapore, so they have been very supportive and I thank them for that”.

25 year-old Singaporean Chinese female.

“Yes, I think just the culture within my middle school because I went to one of the better schools in Singapore... I went to the army and you meet other people... I formed pretty close friendships with a couple of people... I got to talk to them and we exchanged views on... after we retire from National Service”.

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male.

The contents for Helper were grouped together under broad categories such as ‘Significant Others’, including Teachers, Boss, Friends, etc., with a total of 5 counted for Westerners and 8 for Easterners. For the category of ‘Family’, there was a total of 6 for Westerners and 4 for Easterners. The ‘Unclassifiable’ category included ‘Culture within middle school’, ‘National Service’, etc., with a total of 3 for Westerners and 2 for Easterners. The ‘Religious’ category included God, faith, church, etc., with a total of 2 Westerners and 1 Easterners. Both Westerners and Easterners shared similarly.

Table 3.8

Frequencies of Different Helpers in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Actant | Frequencies | |
|---|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Helper Contents | | |
| Dad | 1 | 1 |
| Mum | 3 | 1 |
| Parents | 1 | 0 |
| Sister | 0 | 1 |
| Family | 1 | 1 |
| Friend(s) | 2 | 3 |
| Significant others, e.g. teachers, boss, analyst, manager, director, social worker | 3 | 5 |
| Unclassifiable, e.g. culture within middle school, palliative care networks, National Service | 1 | 2 |
| Religion, e.g. God, faith, church | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>15</i> |

Opponent. There was an interesting difference between Western and Eastern self-narratives in the actant Opponent. Eastern self-narratives had less Opponents compared to Western ones. Two Eastern participants did not report any Opponent. In contrast, Western self-narratives all reported having Opponents, having an emphasis on the 'Self'. Three Westerners reported 'myself' as the Opponent while there were two Easterners. The other participants had their 'mum', 'dad', 'family', 'sister', 'work colleagues', 'teachers', etc. as their opponents. Taken together, Westerners reported more opponents than Easterners, as shown in Table 3.9.

Some narrative examples of Opponent(s):

"Yeah, you know my mum has been quite resistant to me trying to find my identity in God. Obviously when I was at college I was living with an atheist group and so then becoming Christian, people there weren't too happy with that."

23 year-old Australian male

"Mainly myself I would say, like I certainly don't think consciously my family has ever held me back from anything but I think at times yes, probably their approach to life can affect that, especially the boys, they have a certain idea and I think for me the most freeing thing was when I was overseas that I could be whoever I wanted and whatever I wanted and could achieve without any limitations because no one had any expectations of me whereas here you fit a certain mold and if you deviate from that people kind of tell you, that's not the 'done' thing or that's not the norm, so I certainly don't think that there's been anything, anyone consciously who's tried to oppose."

32 year-old Australian female

"Opposed? I don't think there was anyone or anything that opposed my pursuits. As you can tell I'm very close to my family. My mum didn't really oppose it, she just wanted me to think about it properly. Can't think of anyone".

29 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

"At one stage, when I went to England to study law, mum and dad were very reluctant to send me, because one of the arguments was that, well, it's costly and the pound and the Singapore dollar is not exactly on par. And they sort of felt, why don't you just study in the local university and just do teaching or something like that. It's really difficult to get into the law school in Singapore... But I could have got into a general arts course and other courses as well, but I just felt that I wasn't interested in the other arts course. I just had this desire to study law. And they couldn't understand it. They felt that I should just stay at home".

39 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Table 3.9

Frequencies of Different Opponents in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Actant | Frequencies | |
|---|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Opponent Contents | | |
| Self | 3 | 2 |
| Mum & Dad | 0 | 2 |
| Mum | 2 | 1 |
| Sister | 1 | 0 |
| Family | 1 | 0 |
| Significant others, e.g. Teachers, Boss, Ex-husband, etc. | 2 | 1 |
| Others, e.g. atheist group at college, peers, work people | 3 | 0 |
| Unclear | 0 | 2 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>8</i> |

In order to better understand the differences between cultural groups in the distribution of Opponents in self-narratives, the tallies were grouped together under ‘Self’, ‘Family’, ‘Unclear’ and ‘Other’ which encompassed both ‘significant others’ and ‘others’ as shown in Table 3.10. For examples, each count of mum, dad, sister and family from Table 3.9 were summed as ‘Family’ in Table 3.10. ‘Unclear’ referred to no mention of Opponents by the participants. In this way, it was clearer to see in broad categories the differences between the European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese of what they considered as Opponents in their lives.

Table 3.10

Tally of Opponents in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Opponent Contents | | |
| Self | 3 | 2 |
| Family | 4 | 3 |
| Others | 5 | 1 |
| Unclear | 0 | 2 |

The presence of slightly more Opponents in European-Australians may indicate

a culture that is open to sharing about conflicts whilst the lack of Opponents reported by Singaporean Chinese suggests that the Singaporean Chinese may not be comfortable in talking about conflicts. East Asians were reported to be more likely to avoid conflict due to the influence of the Confucian value of harmony, which encourages people to endure interpersonal disagreement and transgression and to pursue harmony (e.g., Gabrenya & Hwang, 1996; Huang, 2016; Hwang, 1987). Hence, for the Singaporean Chinese they tend not to report Opponents perhaps because reporting may acknowledge conflicts, which goes against the harmony they value.

Axis of communication. The axis of communication seems to be the axis which defines most the moral framework, as Sender implies an authoritative or moral figure who the Subjects looks to, and who releases the Object of its desire to the Receiver. For both the actants Sender and Receiver in the axis of communication, there was a trend for both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese to share similarly.

Sender. In Western self-narratives, the Senders were mostly family members or spiritual/religious figures or concepts, such as ‘Spiritual Director’, ‘God’, ‘scriptures/word of God’, ‘the Bible’, etc. Frequently mentioned in both Western and Eastern self-narratives were ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’ and ‘Parents’. One Westerner reported ‘myself’ as the Sender but with Easterners, there was no mention of ‘Self’ at all. Table 3.11 summarizes the Senders and shows both Western and Eastern self-narratives featured the same amount of ‘Significant Other’ as Senders, which included Spiritual Director, Social Worker, Teachers, etc. The narrative examples in the following provide some understanding of the majority of Senders that were reported by both cultural groups.

“Oh, okay. I guess growing up it was always...I get my morals from mum and dad, I’d say, “Why should I give my Aunty a kiss?” And they’d say, “You

should do it... ” I just got those lessons from mum and dad growing up, but there was no like, over-arching authority level, at all. Whereas now I would say that I have an over-arching authority in God and in the Bible”.

23 year-old European-Australian male

“Yes, definitely my faith in God, say the word in God. I guess church as an institution, in terms of the preaching and some of it I listen to, and my parents have always been, I guess, an authority that I’ve sought wisdom from... I feel that now that I’m in my thirties, I have done a lot of sorting out of who I am and now I feel more comfortable with who I am, pursuing goals, pursuing life, and enjoying it really”.

32 year-old European-Australian female

“Pretty much it would be my mum and dad because I would always go back to them. I would tend to always go back to them for, to throw ideas in to, in terms of decision making. Because I value their input into major decisions in my life. So it’s pretty much them guiding me and asking me like, why do you want to do this. I think growing up in church really helped me, establish some values that I have now and also my parents giving me guidance as to what is right and wrong from a very early age, I think those principals have really stuck with me or been ingrained since I was a kid, so things like stealing is wrong or lying is wrong, the kind of values taught by my parents. Growing up in church I learnt those things, a great jolt to my mind”.

29 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

“I think it would be God again. And the Bible and I guess, Godly men and women in church”.

39 year-old Singaporean Chinese female.

Table 3.11

Frequencies of Different Senders in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Actant | Frequencies | |
|---|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Sender Contents | | |
| Self | 1 | 0 |
| Mum & Dad, parents | 2 | 3 |
| Mum | 2 | 1 |
| Sister | 0 | 1 |
| Aunt | 0 | 1 |
| Significant others, e.g. Spiritual Director, Social Worker, Older lady friend, Babysitter, Teachers, etc. | 3 | 3 |
| Religion, e.g. God, church, faith, Bible, etc. | 4 | 2 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>11</i> |

In order to better understand the differences, the tallies were grouped together under ‘Self’, ‘Family’, ‘Significant Other’ and ‘Religion’, as shown in Table 3.12. The reason why I did not classify religion as ‘Significant Other(s)’ is that religion is a unique element that can impact on cultural differences and needs to be considered in any cultural models of selfhood (Baumeister, 2002; Cohen, 2015; Cohen & Varnum, 2016; Cohen, Wu, & Miller, 2016; Kashima, 2016; Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). In this instance, we see religion features most in the actant Sender, in which it rightfully should, but as previously seen in the Axis of Conflict, it also features in the actant Helper, as well as in the Axis of Desire, populating both the actants Subject and Object. Religion seems to be embedded deeply in the self-narrative structure of some individual lives. It is even incorporated in almost all actantial roles of the self-narrative structure except Opponent, which suggests that it plays an assisting rather than an opposing role for these interviewees in their narrative identities. Due to the small size of largely practicing Christians, these preliminary findings require further investigation.

Table 3.12

Tally of Senders in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|--------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Sender Contents | | |
| Self | 1 | 0 |
| Family | 4 | 6 |
| Significant Others | 3 | 3 |
| Religion | 4 | 2 |

‘Parents’ were found to be the predominant moral agent and Sender in this small sample of Eastern self-narratives. Hence, what may be noteworthy is that the

interdependent self in collectivistic cultures may emphasize the axis of desire and axis of communication but de-emphasize the axis of conflict. This is also in line with Higgins's *Self-discrepancy theory* (1987) and Lee, Aaker and Gardner's (2000) findings (see Chapter 2) that the dominant interdependent self (Chinese in their sample) perceived prevention-focused information as more important, where the 'Ought self' is more evident and takes the role of 'Sender' as a moral agent. Therefore, current preliminary findings in this study are consistent with the findings in past research.

Receiver. The actant Receiver featured similar concepts in both Western and Eastern self-narratives, as shown in Table 3.13. In the Western self-narratives, four of them featured 'self' or 'myself' as the Receiver. Frequently reported also were family members like parents, mum and the generic term 'family', as well as 'Others' including 'my students', 'others' and 'people', which were not clearly defined. In this sense, the abstract concepts appeared frequently in the 'Others' category, which was similar to Eastern self-narratives. In addition, one Westerner had 'God's kingdom' while no Eastern self-narratives had religious concepts as Receiver. In the Eastern self-narratives, three participants reported 'myself' as the Receiver. Other frequently mentioned Receivers in Eastern self-narratives were 'family', including 'mum', and 'sister'. This was then followed by 'Others' including 'community', 'society', etc. These abstract terms like 'community' and 'society' were used also in Eastern self-narratives, implying an inclusion for all 'others' to benefit when one attains their goals.

The following shows narrative examples of Receiver:

"Well me, and I think my parents because they have helped me through it, so my achievements, they feel good in my achievements as well, probably anyone who has taught me. It's a reflection of their teaching I guess, if I achieve something. My students, passing that on, passing the knowledge on so they are benefiting from that as well and also when I use dancing and singing at church, I feel like I am benefiting, Gods Kingdom so through dance or through worshipping in a

song, others might come to know God so there's benefits there as well. I think that's it".

20 year-old European-Australian female

"I think, honestly, it would be myself and others".

32 year-old European-Australian female

"I guess just generally everyone at home, because since then, no more conflicts, no more big problems, everyone is just happy to have time together, it is easier for my mum now, my sister helps out at home".

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

"My family would benefit from it. And others, the community, would benefit from it. Because one of my goals was to go out and be involved in third world countries and missions and things like that. So I guess it's always been a sense of how to help them other than giving them money. It's a life skills things. Like you have to give them something that would enable them to get a job in the future, or yeah, just things like that. So for me, I guess it's family and friends as well and the community. When I say the community I mean wider – mainly third world countries. Those are the places I go to for missions and things like that".

29 year-old Singaporean Chinese female.

Table 3.13

Frequencies of Different Receivers in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Actant | Frequencies | |
|--|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Receiver Contents | | |
| Self | 4 | 3 |
| Mum & Dad, parents | 1 | 0 |
| Mum | 2 | 1 |
| Sister | 0 | 1 |
| Family | 2 | 2 |
| Others, e.g. Others, whoever in vicinity, community, my students, society, people, friends, etc. | 3 | 3 |
| Religion, e.g. God's Kingdom | 1 | 0 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>13</i> | <i>10</i> |

The tallies were grouped together under 'Self', 'Family', 'Other(s)' and 'Religion', as shown in Table 3.14. These categories were chosen as they had worked well for the other actants analyzed. In this tally table, it is apparent that for the actant 'Receiver', there were no clear differences between the two cultural groups.

Table 3.14

Tally of Receivers in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Receiver Contents | | |
| Self | 4 | 3 |
| Family | 5 | 4 |
| Others | 3 | 3 |
| Religion | 1 | 0 |

This section has demonstrated that through the Greimassian framework, self-narratives can be analyzed to reveal cross-cultural similarities and differences through the different axes and actants. In this study, there were some trends in cross-cultural differences, particularly for the actants Subject, Object and Opponent, which was consistent with previous research. Since some of the cross-cultural differences can be replicated with Greimas’s Actantial Model, there is preliminary evidence for its use for culture and self research.

Correspondence between spontaneous and prompted self-narratives (Section A) and life story account (Section B). The narrative structures of both Western and Eastern self-narratives (Section A) with their different actants- ‘Subject’, ‘Object’, ‘Helper’, ‘Opponent’, ‘Sender’ and ‘Receiver’ were found to be linked with the different components of the Life Story account (Section B). The Life Story account contains life chapters, key episodes, life challenge, main characters, future plot, personal ideology, and integrative life theme (McAdams, 2008). The following examples and tables illustrate how the Greimassian narrative structures are linked with the Life Story account in the self-narratives of European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese. The evidence for the utility of the present approach – spontaneous self-

narrative followed by prompts for further elaboration based on the Greimasian Actantial Model – as a method for obtaining self-narratives can provide information comparable to McAdams’s Life Story account.

Westerners’ accounts. Consider the first example of the 29 year-old European-Australian male who shared the following in his prompted self-narrative and also in his life story account:

“I’ve always been most self-disciplined and motivated, part of my moral framework... Myself is the main character. My Opponent is myself in a lot of ways, my mental health has been a big significant challenge. I think my worries. I think I consume enormous amounts of anxiety and worry energy...”

In engaging with therapeutic treatment, he reported that his Helper was his ‘Analyst’. He shared that his analyst had helped him rebuild himself and to grow, especially after his divorce. When asked who guided him (his ‘Sender’), he replied:

“I’ve always been most self-disciplined and motivated, part of my moral framework. Myself, to date, I’ve had to rely on myself. In my family of origin, I’ve played a parenting role which I am now trying to undo now.”

In terms of his life chapters in his life story account, he explained,

“So that’s a massive chapter and season of my life and I’ve grown mentally the last two years, since the end of that relationship (with ex-wife). I guess I feel like it’s a new chapter this year changing jobs; really systematically changing every part of my life, leaving house, leaving the relationship, changing job really sort of redefining sense of self...”

His key episodes of high and low points were explained in the following:

“The high point I guess that was my first relationship. I think the high point was living in halls, establishing new friendships, coming out of my shell, developing socially; low point I got really depressed when I was at uni as well... another important episode of that has been me establishing myself as an individual and you know developing my sense of self...”

When asked about his integrative life theme, he replied, *“To feel safe in myself. Yes and to continue to grow; to feel safe and continue to grow”*.

This prominence of the ‘Self’ as captured by the Greimassian approach to narrative analysis in this 29 year-old European-Australian male, provides us with an understanding of the narrative structure of his life, which is also reflected in his life story account. Table 3.15 shows how the actantial framework in the self-narrative structures the information also gleaned from the Life Story account (McAdams, 2008).

Table 3.15

Greimas’s Narrative Structure for 29 year-old Australian Male

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Examples</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|
| Desire | Subject | I (‘myself’ now) & Mum (before) | “I guess the Freudian answer is my mother.... I think that’s a big change in myself over the last two years is the one question of myself becoming the main character in my life.... It’s really been the last two years becoming myself... I’ve been a very self-motivated person, I’m self-disciplined in my studies... I think that motivation has certainly served a purpose through those seasons of my life.” |
| | Object | Self Pursuits (and Other before, to please parents) | “Get into a good university, scholarship to support myself, to please parents before, get a good job, succeed academically, move to Melbourne, establish my life and earn a good income and go to England” |
| Conflict | Helper | Analyst | “My current analyst” |
| | Opponent | Self | “I’d have to say myself in a lot of ways, yes, I think my worries, I think I consume enormous amounts of energy in my anxiety and worry energy” |
| Communication | Sender | Self | “I think I’d probably put myself”. |
| | Receiver | Others & Self | “I feel to date it’s been only others”, “I feel that it hasn’t, all of these things haven’t been to my benefit. I guess I’d say I’m pretty actively trying to change ... I think it’s also manifested in my ability to continue to be able to work and to continue to cope and survive I guess.” |

The emphasis on the independence of self, on mostly individualistic goals and pursuits is also evident in another narrative, that of a 32 year-old European-Australian female. This is her account of her integrative life theme, with the emphasis of her life revolving around her and not others (in bolded italics):

*“I’d say probably the thing that held it together and kept it going was just optimism and a hope in the future and I think I’ve always had that, you know as a kid that and really that one person can make a difference and that’s probably kept me going at times, but yes I don’t know if you can say that’s a theme throughout my life or my story. But I did do a list of core values and I was showing them to Mom and Dad and Brother one day and the family wasn’t in the top twenty, and he was so upset. He was like, “You know it would be in my top three,” and I was like, “**No, sorry, because it’s about me, it’s not about other people**”. So, I think you know yes, family obviously made a massive difference in my life and I’m very family orientated but **I’m also very independent** and at times and feel a lot freer without family and I think that’s part of my desire to go back overseas that you know **I can be who I want to be over there** and I just don’t feel the limitations that I feel here.”*

Even though the above account was mentioned in her review of her ‘integrative life themes’ using McAdams’s approach later in the interview (Section B), it is also featured in her spontaneous and prompted self-narratives as captured by the Actantial Model (in Section A). The narrative excerpt in her integrative life themes features herself and her family as main characters but has a ‘Self’ focus in that she is the prominent character, populating more of the Actants in her self-narrative structure. There is temporal, biographical, causal and thematic coherence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) in her self-narrative which the Actantial Model summarizes so clearly with the different actants and axes, as demonstrated in Table 3.16 of the same 32 year-old Australian female’s narrative. As can be seen, her self occupies the actants, Subject, Object, Opponent, and Sender but also her family feature along with her in some of the actants, which she stated, *“So, I think you know yes, family obviously made a massive difference in my life and I’m very family orientated but I’m also very independent and at times and feel a lot freer without family...”*

Table 3.16

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 32 year-old Australian Female

| <i>Axes</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Examples</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|
| Desire | Subject | I (me) & Mum later | "I have always wanted to travel, it's about me... I'd probably say my Mom would be the main one; probably not so much in my younger years and it probably took me to move out of home and go to college before she finally became a main player as far as I saw her..." |
| | Object | Happiness & travelling (Self pursuits) | "Happiness, the pursuit of happiness. Goals, probably for me it's always been about traveling." |
| Conflict | Helper | Brian (ex-boss) | "I would say for me the biggest influence in that respect was my boss in London, his name was Brian." |
| | Opponent | Self | "Mainly myself I would say... I certainly don't think that there's been anything, anyone consciously who's tried to oppose." |
| Communication | Sender | Self/ Mother | ".. my Mom has guided me the most but I definitely resisted her for the first two decades of my life. I was quite the rebellious little child, daughter but yes, probably Mom." |
| | Receiver | Immediate family and whoever in my vicinity | "I guess my immediate family at times and I guess whoever's in my vicinity really" |

Even in a life challenge, the focus on the self's pursuit in European-Australian self-narratives (my bolded italics emphasized the self's desire to best express herself) is

Table 3.17

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 20 year-old European-Australian Female

| <i>Axes</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Examples</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|--|
| Desire | Subject | I & Mum | "I best express myself through dancing... I am an artsy person... my mum I guess, I've always been with her". |
| | Object | Dancing & Singing (Self pursuits) | "Well when I was younger, when I was very little, I wanted to be a ballerina. I don't want to be a ballerina any more but I do want to pursue dance in some way. That has always been throughout. Also with singing..." |
| Conflict | Helper | Dad | "My parents definitely, my dad..." |
| | Opponent | Dance teachers & Self | "My dance teachers are stuck back in like the 90's.... I think it's more in your head as well, you are telling yourself, 'I can't be as good as that.'" |
| Communication | Sender | Self & God's word (the Scriptures) | "I just go into God's word. Lots of scriptures have helped me get by especially in Psalms." |
| | Receiver | Me, parents, anyone who has taught me, my students & God's kingdom in that others might come to know God through my worship in dance and song | "Well me, and I think my parents because they have helped me through it, ... probably anyone who has taught me. My students, passing that on, passing the knowledge on so they are benefiting from that as well and also when I use dancing and singing at church, I feel like I am benefiting Gods Kingdom, so through dance or through worshipping in a song, others might come to know God so there's benefits there as well." |

highlighted in another individual's life story account, as demonstrated in a 20 year-old female's narrative:

"I was terrible at dancing but I loved it so little things like having the right body type or injuring my knee, I've got a condition in my knee, things like that, they

*seem superficial to others but they are really big for me because then I can't be a dancer if these things affect me, and I try not to let them, like naturally, I don't have the ability, I try not to let that hold me back and just push through and get the ability. By working very hard for it, I think that is a big challenge that I had to get through, like in my teenage years... **When I'm dancing that's the way I best express myself.** I can probably tell someone something better through dancing than talking. It sounds very strange to some people but I am very artsy person so it's how I communicate best. Through singing, that is something that is on the side, it's not something that fully drives me into doing stuff; it's something I like doing."*

This excerpt from this young woman's narrative is also captured by the Greimassian narrative structure gleaned from the contents of her Object, Opponent and Receiver as shown in Table 3.17. It is obvious that her life story account of her passion of dancing is captured by her self-narrative structure with narrative excerpts in many of her actants.

Easterners' accounts. These Western narrative structures were in contrast to the Eastern ones, for example, as shared by a 23 year-old male Singaporean Chinese student who had his parents and family in the different axes and actants as Subject, Object, Helper, Sender and Receiver (see Table 3.18). However, the examples continue to show that there is correspondence between the Greimassian self-narrative structure and the Life story account:

"In fact the only thing I wanted was to be like my dad because he used to be a banker, to look up to him and I thought that's a job I could pursue... My mum has always been there for me, she is a homemaker so she is always at home. She does the chores, she'd be cooking and she would fetch me to school every day so I've been quite reliant on her really...., I really was very close to my mum, I wasn't that close to my dad during the earlier stage in my life because probably he was quite busy with work and there is a slight distance between us. My mum has always been there to tell me what I can or cannot do and stuff like that.... If I achieved my goals, my family would benefit."

This 23 year-old male Singaporean Chinese student not only featured his parents in most of his self-narrative structure but also when asked in the prompted interview about the main character in the story, he replied, "*I think it would have to be my mum.*" His

mother also features as the helper, consistent with the narrative excerpts in his life story account as indicated above and shown in Table 3.18.

Table 3.18

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese Male

| <i>Axes</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Examples</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|
| Desire | Subject | Mum | "I think it would have to be my mum. My mum has always been there for me, she is a homemaker so she is always at home. She does the chores, she'd be cooking and she would fetch me to school every day so I've been quite reliant on her really." |
| | Object | Be like my dad (he used to be a banker) | "In fact the only thing I wanted was to be like my dad because he used to be a banker, to look up to him and I thought that's a job I could pursue." |
| Conflict | Helper | Mum | "My mum". |
| | Opponent | None specified | "I don't think there is a real opposition." |
| Communication | Sender | Mum & Aunt | "My mum has always been there to tell me what I can or cannot do and stuff like that... I did have an aunt, my mums' sister who, she used to confide in whenever we had problems, she would confide in my aunt. I used to visit my aunt about every other week" |
| | Receiver | Family (everyone at home) | "I guess just generally everyone at home." |

As in the former example of the 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male and the following two narrative structure examples of the 39 year old and 29 year-old Singaporean Chinese females respectively, the common theme is their relationships with their parents which seem to have a profound impact as it features in the actants of

their narrative structures and also in their Life Story accounts.

The Key Episodes of the Life Story account are reported in the following example of a 39 year-old Singaporean Chinese female. Here, she summarizes her childhood in Singapore and her adult life. These key episodes were also captured in her actantial structures and both accounts reveals themes of emotional struggles related to agency vs communion (McAdams, 2001) which are played out early on in this 39 year old Singaporean Chinese female's family relationships. These are illustrated in the following narrative examples.

Childhood in Singapore:

"I remember dad bringing me and teaching me and I'm not even sure that was before or after eight years old. I remember dad would bring us to the Botanic Gardens and we would feed the ducks. I think that would be my earliest memory. I think there was a lot when I was a lot younger. We used to love to go to the parks to feed the ducks and to feed the fish and that sort of thing and mum and dad would bring me there... I think a lot of the high points in my life were all those school holidays and we would travel up to Malaysia, usually with mum and dad and then with our friends. Those would be the high points, but I can't remember which is significant. But that would be a high point. Low points, too much studying, I think. Too much studying and not enough playing and not enough socializing... I think one of the turning points would be moving from an all girls school and finishing my O levels and then moving into a sort of like an A level pre-university sort of environment. That would be a great turning point. I guess spent a lot of time studying and making sure that I get really good results and going to the right schools and getting into the right courses in school and even at university.... to meet their expectations (parents)".

Her high points were times with her parents but her low points were about studying too much. It is interesting that her turning point was about transitions in her schooling, and she links these key points in her life with her main objective and goal, that of pleasing her parents, which is captured also in her self-narrative structure under Object (see Table 3.19).

Adult Life:

“Before England, after England, then that part about working in the Defence Ministry would be a major aspect of my life, because of all the challenges during that time, and that would all be things which happened before I came to Australia.”

The challenges which she discussed in her Life Story account are captured in her self-narrative when she shared about her mum and dad as being Opponents because they seemed to oppose her and were reluctant to send her to England in her prompted self-narrative account (themes of agency vs communion). The contents of these two accounts cohered.

From her life experiences, she explained her integrative life theme in the following narrative excerpt:

“I think that God is good and his love is beyond comprehension. I can’t understand it. And the fact that he keeps me safe. And much of it, like keeps me safe, not just from external factors, but keeps me safe from my own self-destructive ways.”

In her Life Story account, she details her journey from Singapore to England for her studies, then returning to Singapore before coming to Melbourne, and through all the challenges, she has emphasized the importance ‘God’ in her life along with significant people. Her integrative theme illustrates her faith as central to her life, as illustrated in the narrative excerpt above and in her actants Subject, Sender and Receiver. In all the axes and most actants, key people and her Christian faith in God was what she reported as sustaining her life. Her narrative structure is highlighted in Table 3.19 which coheres well with her key episodes and integrative life theme, in that the key episodes provide the material for her to build her self-narrative. Further evidence for the relationship between key episodes and the self-narrative structure are illustrated in the Key Episodes section of this study.

Table 3.19

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 39 year-old Singaporean Chinese Female

| <i>Axes</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Examples</i> |
|---------------|----------------|--|--|
| Desire | Subject | Self & God | "I felt that, especially as I was the eldest child, I felt that responsibility also being a role model, because mum and dad always used to say, "Right. You should know better because you're older and your sister and brother will obviously follow your example. You should be a better role model. That's what I thought then... I guess right now, it would be God (the main character). Yes. I think he is the one that I truly desire. So, I would say it's God." |
| | Object | Pursue excellence to meet parental expectations | "I think I've been trying to pursue, I guess, excellence in a lot of things that I do.... I guess, trying to do my best so that my parents would not be disappointed in me and trying to meet their expectations.... It's like I was made responsible for someone else's feelings." |
| Conflict | Helper | Current boss, Ex-manager & professor at Latrobe University | "I think the people would be my current boss, Jo and an ex-manager of mine when I was working the energy and water ombudsman, and even my professor at university in Latrobe." |
| | Opponent | Mum & Dad | "When I went to England to study law, mum and dad were very reluctant to send me... When I told mum and dad that I really wanted to get out of Singapore and migrate to Australia... So they were quite doubtful. Either that or playing the devil's advocate sort of thing." |
| Communication | Sender | God, the Bible | "I think it would be God again. And the Bible." |
| | Receiver | God, people & self | "Well, I guess the Christian journey is it's not really about me, it's about him. So I would say that is about God.... people that God has put in my life. And I think I will also benefit, because if I walk according to His way and His will, then it's when you're most satisfied in Him." |

In another individual, the relationship with parents features again in the following 29 year-old Singaporean Chinese female's self-narrative. In this situation, this interviewee's desire is to emulate a parent's success or path, as outlined in the following narrative structure in Table 3.20. Also, the emphasis on relationships with others in her in-group, such as 'mum and dad' which is considered a trademark of the interdependent self-construal, is also illustrated in the future plot of this 29 year-old Singaporean Chinese female in her Life Story account. Both her self-narrative structure and her Life Story account correspond as they are following the same themes of 'wanting to be like mum', 'importance of family', 'obligation to her parents who are the authority figures in her life' and 'sense of duty to the community'. In the following Life Story account, she explains her fears and main goals, in addition to the burden of caring for her aging parents whilst in the middle of a career change from commerce to the arts field:

"I can give you my fears. Fears right now is, I might not go anywhere... Like, because you see, one of my earliest goals was to achieve a certain career and be similar to my mum. My fear now is like I just might not get there, so might not achieve the same standard. Yeah. The other fears also, is that, because my parents are not getting old – or younger, so what's going to happen – I've never really spent time with them. So if anything happens to my parents am I going to regret anything?... And because at this point in my life I'm in a career change, so I'm struggling to find what's my next career and would I be able to support them as well. I guess in Asian families we think in terms of financial terms. Yeah, so it's in that sense, would I be able to support them? ... And the other one is to still be able to do community stuff outside."

Her future plot in Life Story account is captured by her Greimassian self-narrative structure in Table 3.20.

Table 3.20

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 29 year-old Singaporean-Chinese Female

| <i>Axes</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Examples</i> |
|-------------|----------------|--|--|
| Desire | Subject | Mum | "I think my mum's my main character. Because she was very different from any other mums. Even in primary schools and things like that." |
| | Object | To achieve in career, similar to mum (achieve same goals she set up for herself) & go on missions trip | "I had always the sense of like wanting to achieve in career. I pursued ... business career to be similar to my mum and then to have that sort of success in her career and achievements... to achieve the same goals that she set up for herself, the certain lifestyle and things. And the other one was ... to go away for 6 months and do a mission trip, a long term mission trip, so go away and return to return to the community the things that I can do for them and things like that. So those are... the strongest goals that I've always strived to achieve for." |
| Conflict | Helper | Dad & Sister | "Alright if you consider my mum like opposition to my goal towards events management, then my dad helped me, because he was very encouraging and supportive in terms of what I wanted to do and my dad was more like you know, are you sure this is what you want then go for it, we'll support you no matter what you have to do. And he had a chat with my mum as well... my sister was also really supportive, like she was the person I went to for advice, like a sounding board, to sound out all my decisions and thinking". |
| | Opponent | None specified | "Opposed? I don't think there was anyone or anything that opposed my pursuits. As you can tell I'm very close to my family. My mum didn't really oppose it, she just wanted me to think about it properly. Can't think of anyone." |

| | | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------------------|--|
| Communication | Sender | Mum & Dad | “Pretty much it would be my mum and dad because I would always go back to them.” |
| | Receiver | Family, friends & community | “So for me, I guess it’s family and friends as well and the community. When I say the community, I mean wider – mainly third world countries.” |

The examples shown above illustrate how Greimas’s narrative structure is found in McAdam’s Life Story accounts. The Life Story accounts do provide a comprehensive detail of self-narratives, but as seen in the examples above, they demonstrate that for the purpose of investigating culture and self, the Greimassian framework provides sufficient information comparable to that obtained by McAdams’s (2008) Life Story account.

Key episodes. Key episodes or events as discussed in Chapter 2 can be regarded as self-defining autobiographical memories that significantly shape identity. All participants except one Singaporean Chinese male reported the eight key episodes, 1) High point, 2) Low point, 3) Turning point, 4) Earliest memory, 5) Important childhood episode, 6) Important adolescent episode, 7) Important adult episode, and 8) One other important episode. The Singaporean male who did not report all eight key episodes said he could not remember his childhood. European-Australians’ earliest memories were recalled at the mean age of 4 years old while Singaporean Chinese’s was at the age of 5 years old, consistent with previous research which showed that Westerners recalled earlier and more autobiographical memories than Easterners (Han et al., 1998; Wang, 2004).

The relationship between key episodes and self-narratives. Because key episodes are autobiographical memories, by examining the relationship between these

key episodes and self-narratives, I can address my third research question – ‘How’ autobiographical memories relate to self-narratives. One would expect that the key episodes of a person’s life are likely to be self-defining memories because of their particular salience connected to life transitions, choices, and turning points (Singer et al., 1993; cf. Bruner, 1990) and therefore, may be embedded into the deep narrative structures to define the self. Then, what relationship does self-narratives have to key episodes of a person’s life? For instance, the key events of ‘Travelling’ for ‘High points’ or ‘Divorce’ in *Low points* or ‘Becoming a Christian or joining church’ in *Turning points*, as seen in later examples from the participants. ‘How’ are these key events related to the actants of the Greimassian framework? It has been shown earlier that the different eight key episodes of Life Story accounts corresponded with the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, that indeed, Greimas’s narrative structure can be found in McAdam’s key episodes, but this section takes a closer look specifically at the relationship between self-narratives and autobiographical memory.

When we refer back to the actants analyzed for the participants, we can understand that the key events are often embedded in each individual’s self-narrative structure in that they appear in the actants. For example, for the 32 year-old Australian female, whose narrative structure is outlined in Table 3.16, her key event of ‘Travelling’ was her ‘Object of Desire’ and also her self-agentic *High point* key episode. As for the *Low point* example of ‘Divorce’, the other 32 year-old Australian female whose marriage ended considers her ‘ex-husband’ a main ‘Opponent’. Even in the *Turning points*, of ‘Becoming a Christian or joining church’, both the European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese then reported that the Church and God are both their Helper and Sender. Therefore, each key event seems to weave itself into the self-narrative structure as captured by the Greimassian framework.

Table 3.21

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese Male

| <i>Axes</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Example</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|--|
| Desire | Subject | Myself, Parents & Babysitter | “Yes, in the sense you could say that the main character is probably myself. Yes, my life experiences and all but I wouldn't really say that there's a main character because there are other people that comes into my life story. That would be my parents and also my babysitter.” |
| | Object | To be the best (culture in Singapore), do well in medical school, & spend time with parents | “I think it was a very strong, like cultural thing, in Singapore to be the best at whatever they do.... That was something that was pretty much throughout my life too... I want to do well in med school... also considering that my parents are back in Singapore, I want to spend some time with them.” |
| Conflict | Helper | Culture in middle school, National Service | “Yes I think just the culture just within my middle school, because I went to one of the better schools in Singapore.... I formed pretty close friendships with a couple of people in the army... we exchanged views on ...after we retire from National Service.” |
| | Opponent | None specified | “Not really, I wouldn't say there was anyone.” |
| Communication | Sender | Parents & babysitter | “I was thinking my parents.... always taught me that I should think of other people before I think of myself and they've taught me that on various occasions and my babysitter as well, so I think that.... guided me.” |
| | Receiver | Self, family & society | “The ideal situation is that everyone benefits... it's feeling good at the end of the day knowing you've done something and... also for the family... your family is quite proud of you and it will probably benefit them as well.... and if I do well as a medical practitioner it will benefit the society as well.” |

The relationship with key events and the actantial self-narrative structure is again clearly evident within the connections captured by the self-narrative structure (in Table 3.21) of a 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male medical student and the key episodes of his life that are outlined in the following. Key episodes of the medical student's life included high points in middle school because he 'did pretty well', as captured by his Object of desire. Low points were the time spent in exam preparations and missing parents when doing national service and being in Melbourne, and also captured in his Object of desire as wanting to spend more time with his parents. Experiences during school were emphasized in childhood and adolescent episodes and somewhat captured as a 'Helper' in his self-narrative structure. His desire to do well overshadows all his key episodes, and even in his adult episode of medical school with deciding a specialty. This desire shapes his goals and ultimately the drive to be independent with a comfortable life, but is also one that is deeply connected to having family, especially his mum and dad, be proud of him and giving back to society. The key episodes of his life and his self-narrative structure both are intimately intertwined to create his story and are further indicated in the key episodes.

Earliest memory: *"I remember coming to Australia with my parents when I was three, I remember being in a plane, I remember a kangaroo biting up, chewing up my entire paper bag, it was pretty amusing and I also remember, I remember my first asthma and after that I was in and out of hospital a couple of times when in Singapore, my parents were pretty worried, but yes that was hard and it all started on holiday. My parents got really worried after that though"*.

His parents feature in his life as Subject, Object, Sender and Receiver (as he is the only child, his family is his parents).

Important Childhood Episode: *"I'm not sure that there's one, but I guess just having playmates with my neighbours because that's pretty important because I've mentioned I've mentioned I wasn't really a sociable kid and that really helped me learn at a point in time, a little bit about friendship. I had a babysitter when I was a kid and once I got to, once I got through elementary school they figured out that I didn't really need a babysitter but even then I still went over for meals and stuff because they cooked for me"*

and provided a place for me to study afternoon lessons and stuff so yes, so even then, I pretty much spent most of my time there, than with my parents (sic)”.

His babysitter feature in his life as Subject and Sender.

Important Adolescent Episode: *“I guess just you know, being able to go through one of the best middle schools in Singapore and just having your huge egos crushed, I guess that’s really important, yes”.*

His Middle School was reported to be his Helper.

Important Adult Episode: *“Yes that would be like just right now, when I’m in my clinical years and I realize that I have to take responsibility and I have to fulfill certain goals, pretty much in the three years, three years is not too far away and being able to take care of your patient, even being able to juggle between work, family and your hobbies, even though you’re going to give up a few of your hobbies; being able to juggle everything and being responsible for your finances as well... for my family later on and as well as my parents.”*

His goals of ‘being the best’ translate to being the best doctor now and doing well in medical school so that he can benefit others in society (such as his patients) and have the finances, and to invest his time in his work, family (future family and his parents) and interests. All these goals in his adult years are all captured by his ‘Objects of Desire’ and ‘Receiver’ in the Greimassian framework.

The key episodes of an individual’s life as illustrated in the narrative examples in the 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male demonstrate how they not only define the self, but in many ways, are incorporated into the self-narrative structure as seen in the actantial framework in Table 3.21. These observations provide new insight into the existing literature on autobiographical memory as covered in Chapter 2. Self-defining memories like key episodes may be structured in an actantial narrative form, especially having the prominent Subject-Object Axis of desire so that the individual can meaningfully access these memories to build and maintain the long-term self (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Singer et al., 2013). This is an important insight, which will be further explored in later studies.

High point and low point key episodes. ‘High points’ and ‘Low points’ as described by McAdam and Guo (2014) were considered, “the greatest or happiest moment in the story’, and ‘the worst or unhappiest moment in the story” (p. 17) respectively. ‘High points’ and ‘Low points’ were content analyzed and summarized in Table 3.22. In the ‘High points’ category, both Eastern and Western self- narratives had ‘travelling or going overseas’, ‘spending time with family or friends’, ‘making decisions about directions’, etc., as high points in their lives. The Western self-narratives had ‘Getting awards’, ‘First date’ and ‘Singing in School Musical’, which were absent in the Eastern self-narratives. On the other hand, Eastern self-narratives had ‘Playing (with friends/other children)’, ‘Getting into a course such as medicine and enjoying that’ and ‘Representing the school in sports (such as badminton)’ which were missing in the Western self-narratives.

For the ‘High points’ category, there was a total of 24 contents identified by both cultural groups, with European-Australians reporting 10 high points and Singaporean Chinese reporting 14 high points. Then percentages were calculated as noted in Table 3.22, to show the proportions of High Points for each cultural group. Easterners reported 58.3% of ‘High points’ while Westerners reported 41.7%. After completing a thematic analysis of the High points, it was found that the theme of agency vs. communion emerged in the sense of High points that engaged self-agency vs. those that made reference to others. Hence, each of the contents fell into one or the other category of ‘self-agency’ or ‘self in relationship with others’. For examples, ‘Travelling- going overseas’ or ‘Getting good grades or academic results’ were considered under self-agency while ‘Meeting/ spending time with friends’ or ‘Participating in mission trips’ were considered under ‘self in relationship with others’. Where a high point did not seem as obvious like ‘Singing in School Musical’ or

Table 3.22

Key Episodes (High and Low points) in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Content & Thematic Analysis/ Frequency of Content and Themes reported | Western Self-Narratives | Eastern Self-Narratives |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| High Points | | |
| <i>Content analysis:</i> | | |
| Travelling- going overseas | 2 | 2 |
| Spending time with family | 1 | 1 |
| Meeting/ spending time with friends | 1 | 1 |
| Getting good grades or academic results | 1 | 2 |
| Getting awards | 1 | 0 |
| Participating in mission trips | 1 | 2 |
| Making decisions about direction | 1 | 1 |
| First date | 1 | 0 |
| Singing in School Musical | 1 | 0 |
| Playing | 0 | 2 |
| Getting into a course (e.g., Medicine) & enjoying it | 0 | 2 |
| Representing school (in sports, etc.) | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | 10 (41.7%) | 14 (58.3%) |
| <i>Thematic analysis:</i> | | |
| Self in relationship with others | 4 (16.7%) | 4 (16.7%) |
| Self-agency | 6 (25.0%) | 10 (41.7%) |
| <i>Total</i> | 10 (41.7%) | 14 (58.3%) |
| Low Points | | |
| <i>Content analysis:</i> | | |
| Relationship breakdowns | 6 | 1 |
| Divorce | 2 | 0 |
| Friendship issues | 2 | 1 |
| Parental illness | 1 | 0 |
| Parental death(s) | 1 | 0 |
| Parental unavailability | 0 | 1 |
| Death of significant person (babysitter, friend, etc.) | 0 | 1 |
| Friend's illness | 1 | 0 |
| Low academic results | 1 | 1 |
| Exam preparation | 0 | 2 |
| Loss of self- independence or freedom | 3 | 1 |
| Experience of bullying | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | 18 (66.7%) | 9 (33.3%) |
| <i>Thematic analysis:</i> | | |
| Self in relationship with others | 14 (51.9%) | 5 (18.5%) |
| Self-agency | 4 (14.8%) | 4 (14.8%) |
| <i>Total</i> | 18(66.7%) | 9(33.3%) |

'Playing', the entire contents of the High point were examined with the contextual information to confirm the High point was in the appropriate category. The majority of

these 'High Points' (41.7%) reported by Easterners engaged their self-agency. This is understood in the context of where they are at in their life stories, having left their home country to face new experiences, enjoying their courses, achieving, and so on, which perhaps enhanced self-agency. On the other hand, Westerners reported only slightly more self-agency themed 'High points' (25.0%) than 'Self in relationship with others' (16.7%) themed 'High points'.

The same procedure for calculating proportions used in High points were completed also for Low points for each cultural group. Easterners reported fewer 'Low points' (33.3%) than Westerners (66.7%), in many ways consistent with the trend of them reporting more 'High points' than Westerners. In the 'Low Points' category as seen in Table 3.22, both Eastern and Western Low points featured 'Relationship breakdowns', 'Friendship issues', 'Low academic results', 'Loss of self-independence or freedom' and 'Experience of bullying'. However, Western self-narratives featured more 'Relationship breakdowns' as the predominant 'Low point' followed by 'Loss of self-independence or freedom' and then 'Divorce' and 'Friendship issues'. One Western self-narrative featured 'parental illness' and 'parental death' as 'Low points'. This was in contrast with the Eastern self-narratives, which reported fewer 'Relationship breakdowns', 'Friendship issues' and 'Loss of self-independence or freedom' themes. Eastern Low points also featured 'Exam preparation', 'Parental unavailability' and 'Death of significant person other than primary carer (such as babysitter or friend's father)' as their 'Low points', which were not in the Western self-narratives.

Similar to the High points, after thematic analysis of the contents of Low points, two distinct themes in regards to the 'self-agency' or 'self in relationship with others' emerged. These themes were obvious because both Westerners and Easterners reported that in these events, either they had little control over the events or the events

empowered their self-agency. For the former, the relational events impacted on them, often times without their desire to engage in such experiences, for example, parental divorce or illness. This was in contrast to the theme of 'self-agency', where participants reported that they felt they had a sense of control over their lives to make decisions or choose the experiences that were the product of their own making, even the negative ones. Therefore, most participants reported Low points that had the themes of their 'Self in relationship with others' or their own sense of 'Self-agency', as seen in Table 3.22. For examples, 'Parental death/illness/unavailability' and 'Relationship breakdowns' were considered under the theme 'Self in relationship with others', whilst 'Exam preparations' and 'Low academic results' were considered under the theme 'Self-agency', even though it did not enhance self-agency.

The thematic categories show that overall, European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese reported equal 'Self in relationships with others' for the 'High Points' (16.7%) but for Self-agency, European-Australians reported less of these events (25%) than Singaporean Chinese (41.7%). For 'Low Points', European-Australians reported more 'Self in relationships with others' (51.9%) as they had more relationship breakdowns and divorce compared with the Singaporean Chinese (18.5%). In terms of Self-agency 'Low points', there were equal number of reports of these events for both cultural groups (both 14.8%).

For both Westerners and Easterners, of interest is the relationship between self-agency with 'High points' and 'Low points', in that 'High points' were associated with more sense of self-agency but 'Low points' seem to suggest less sense of self-agency. In fact, 'Low points' in their lives were often marked by issues of their 'self in relationship with others', such as relationship breakdowns, divorce, friendship issues, parental illness or death, etc., which they felt were beyond their own immediate control. The

sense of self-agency then seems to impact on how a person remembers and views their greatest/happiest moment or the worst/unhappiest moment in the self-narrative.

Consistent with McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield and Day's (1996) suggestion, the theme of agency and communion reflected in the High and Low points in this study seems to be the two general content dimensions in self-narratives also recognized by many other researchers.

Turning points and other important key episodes. There was also variation between the 'Turning points' reported by Westerners and Easterners, as seen in Table 3.23. Turning points are considered "a moment of significant change or transition in the story" (McAdams & Guo, 2014, p. 17). Western and Eastern self-narratives both featured relationship breakdowns, travelling or going overseas, religious themes and making choices or changes during their university life. Western self-narratives had 'low academic results', 'getting baptized into Christian faith', 'Pursuing self-interests', 'Started working', 'Getting driver's license at 18 years', 'Self-realization of the need to change and apply effort', and 'Parental illness' which were absent in Eastern self-narratives. In comparison, Eastern self-narratives contained, 'Grew close to friends and established friendships', 'Birth of brother', 'Moving from school to university' and 'Experiencing new cultures' which were absent in Western self-narratives. The same procedure of tallying, summing and calculating for the High and Low points were also applied to the Turning points. The number of key 'Turning point' episodes did not vary greatly between Westerners and Easterners, with Westerners reporting just two more 'Turning point' episodes (54.5%) than Easterners (45.5%). However, the attention to 'self-agency' as a proportion was more pronounced in Westerners (40.9%) than Easterners (22.7%).

Table 3.23

Key Episodes (Turning points and Other Important Episodes) in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Content & Thematic Analysis/ Frequency of Content and Themes mentioned | Western Self-Narratives | Eastern Self-Narratives |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Turning Points:</i> | | |
| <i>Content analysis:</i> | | |
| Relationship breakdowns | 1 | 2 |
| Low academic results | 1 | 0 |
| Travelling- going overseas | 1 | 2 |
| Becoming a Christian or joining church, youth group | 1 | 1 |
| Getting baptized into Christian faith | 1 | 0 |
| Pursuing self-interests | 1 | 0 |
| Started working | 2 | 0 |
| Getting driver's license – 18 years old | 1 | 0 |
| Self-realization of the need to change/apply effort | 1 | 0 |
| Parental illness | 1 | 0 |
| Making choices/changes in University | 1 | 1 |
| Grew closer to friends and/or establishing friendship: | 0 | 1 |
| Birth of brother | 0 | 1 |
| Moving from school to university | 0 | 1 |
| Experiencing new cultures | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | 12 (54.5%) | 10 (45.5%) |
| <i>Thematic analysis:</i> | | |
| Self in relationship with others | 3 (13.6%) | 5 (22.7%) |
| Self-agency | 9 (40.9%) | 5 (22.7%) |
| <i>Total</i> | 12(54.5%) | 10(45.5%) |
| <i>Other important episodes:</i> | | |
| <i>Content analysis:</i> | | |
| Migrating to or starting life in Australia | 0 | 4 |
| Army/ National Services experiences | 0 | 2 |
| Experience of eating disorder | 0 | 1 |
| Mental health issues (e.g., own depression) | 2 | 0 |
| Mental illness (mother's schizophrenia) | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | 2 (20.0%) | 8 (80.0%) |
| <i>Thematic analysis:</i> | | |
| Self in relationship with others | 0 (0%) | 1 (10.0%) |
| Self-agency | 2 (20.0%) | 7 (70.0%) |
| <i>Total</i> | 2(20.0%) | 8(80.0%) |

In the 'Other important episodes' section as seen in Table 3.23, both Western and Eastern self-narratives featured mental illness in the sense that they or a significant

person in their lives such as their mother had suffered from mental illness, and this has impacted them greatly. What was idiosyncratic to Eastern self-narratives which were absent in Western self-narratives are the episodes involving ‘Migrating to or starting life in Australia’, ‘Army or National Service’ and in one self-narrative, the experience of an ‘eating disorder’. Some of these experiences like migrating to Australia and national service are uniquely confined to the Singaporeans cultural context and seem to engage the participant’s self-agency. In making any cross-cultural comparisons, it is important to take into consideration the unique experiences of that cultural group.

What the findings of *High points*, *Low points*, *Turning points* and ‘*Other important episodes*’ highlighted is the importance of self-agency in these events. From the content and thematic analyses, it appears that self-agency seems to be directly associated with *High points*, *Turning points* and *Other important episodes* that are positive in participants’ lives but inversely associated with *Low points* in that *Low points* seem to suggest less sense of self-agency.

Religion. Religion, or a belief in God, especially the Christian religion were important personal ideologies for all of the Western self-narratives ($n = 6$) and half of the Eastern self-narratives ($n = 3$), which suggests that it is a meaningful factor to consider. This was a highly ‘Christianized’ sample which also is not representative of European-Australian and Singaporean cultures as both countries are increasingly secularized. Nonetheless, Vignoles et al. (2016) argued that religion is a significant variable that accounts for cross-cultural differences in large sample studies. In addition, scholars alerted to the spiritual dimension of the self as important in cross-cultural research and the role of religion as a cultural element needs to be investigated (Cohen, 2009; Cohen & Varnum, 2016; Kashima, 2008; Saroglou & Cohen, 2011; Tarakeshwar,

Stanton, & Pargament, 2003). In fact, Cohen et al. (2016) suggested that a narrative approach would be key to studying religions and cultures. With this in mind, religion was explored in the current study and as demonstrated in the actantial analyses, religion or religious concepts appeared in all the actants except Opponent. The notion of spiritual or religious values, beliefs and entities were most of the time featured in the actant Sender, in the Axis of Communication, which is rightfully considered the moral dimension of the Actantial Model.

Outside of the actantial framework, when asked directly about their personal ideology, the following examples from Western self-narratives are highlighted to show the importance of religion in each participant's lives.

40 year-old European-Australian female:

"Belief in Christ as my Savior, he died on the cross for my sins and have an ongoing relationship with God. My values are Christian values".

23 year-old European-Australian male:

"Agnostic from birth until 20 to 23 when I became a Christian, Christian values but not beliefs when growing up".

29 year-old European-Australian male:

"18 when I became a Christian. I have a very strong conscious, good versus bad".

23 year-old European-Australian female:

"I am a Pentecostal Christian. I believe in God, there's a devil and Jesus died for us so that we can be forgiven of our sins".

32 year-old European-Australian female:

"I value life as God created it. I value family, respect of others. A pursuit towards God".

The importance of religion and spirituality was also evident in the narratives of Easterners, as outlined in the following interview excerpts:

39 year-old Singaporean Chinese female:

"I'm a Christian, so I believe that salvation is by grace, that Christ died for my sins and that he died to reconcile me to him".

29 year old Singaporean female:

“Wasn't religious until 15 or 16. Prior to that was exposed to 2 religions- grandad was Christian and Grandma was Buddhist/Taoist. Being in a Christian environment, other values added onto it, my core value upon- like how to treat people. Never step on someone to get to somewhere”.

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male:

“I'm Buddhist and that would be from my parents pretty much because you cannot just follow them but I'm more... to think of other people before myself and always try to see how other people are feeling and try to walk in their shoes”.

For the majority of the participants (66.67%), personal ideology that is based on religious or spiritual values and beliefs indicate the significant role that religion plays in these individual lives in both West and East cultural contexts. They also play a key role in the integrative life themes. Political beliefs were not said to be as important as religious beliefs.

The following narrative examples taken from the integrative life themes (i.e., “the theme or motif that runs through the story of one’s life”: McAdams & Guo, 2014, p. 17) for three of the Westerners highlighted the importance of their faith, which not only endured but held them together. These life themes were clustered around their faith and God.

40 year-old European-Australian female:

“My faith... It has been the one thing that's endured... continue to be, everything in my life is integrated by my faith”.

23 year-old European-Australian female:

“I guess God holds my life together, that's what it is. Just doing what He says to do”.

32 year-old European-Australian female:

“My faith in God. I feel a little giddy in Sunday school, “Thanks Jesus,” the answer for everything. But it's true, to know and believe in God was something that was instilled in me at such a young age, and so despite the chapters, the high and low points, and despite varying levels of my submission to God throughout; he's definitely what has held my life the whole time”.

There were two Easterners whose integrative life themes also reflected their

religious beliefs in the following narrative examples highlighted.

39 year-old Singaporean female:

“I think that God is good and his love is beyond comprehension. I can’t understand it. And the fact that he keeps me safe.”

25 year-old Singaporean Chinese female:

“It is probably, my belief, my belief in God and things at the start of my life, it has always just been taught to me now, I have gradually started to realise for myself, that Christianity is my choice.”

In reflecting on their integrative life themes, all participants responded with particular themes except one Easterner who could not answer this question but said, *“I can’t really think of anything”*. He was the 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male whose self-narrative structure was outlined in Table 3.18, who aspired to be like his father the banker. He was also the only participant who reported no religious beliefs. Noting that his parents were very significant figures in his life and who populated many of the actants of his self-narrative structure, it is interesting that in his interview, he disclosed that he had just broken up with his male partner. He hadn’t yet disclosed his homosexuality to his parents nor come out about his sexuality. This aspect of his life remained silent and hidden, only confidentially disclosed to a select few as he had not reconciled how to work through this issue and to resolve this conflict as homosexuality is still a societal stigma (Teh et al., 2018) and as highlighted by Lee (2017), gay men are still systematically discriminated in modern Singapore. What this case study also suggests is that what has not yet been worked through in an individual’s life may not thus far be embedded into the self-narrative structure. It may also be due to cultural and societal norms in that what is shared in a self-narrative is only disclosed when it is consistent with that culture’s acceptable norms and practices, the master narrative (McLean & Syed, 2015; Thorne & McLean, 2003). This case study also clarifies that the lack of Opponent, especially for this Singaporean Chinese individual (who reported

‘none’ for Opponent) may not be due to a lack of conflict, but due to the self-narrative he was sharing being the master narrative of his culture. He chose to share a self-narrative that was deeply rooted in filial piety at the expense of his self-expression, thereby, conforming to what is acceptable and in line with the master narrative. These are issues that require further investigation as they impact on our study of culture and self; of how individuals in each culture want people to perceive them through the narratives they create of themselves and the cultural framework they reside in.

These narrative excerpts provide some understanding to answer the questions raised by Vignoles et al. (2016), “*In what way do individuals differ?*” In terms of religion as a significant variable, it has been shown with qualitative data in this small sample that it does play an important role in each individual’s life and may impact on cross-cultural differences. For example, Christian belief encourages self-denial and ‘putting others before self’. This teaching, if practiced, may reshape the Western Self to be not as ‘independent’ and ‘individualistic’ and to pursue more Other-oriented goals, which we see in this sample of Westerners: four participants reported that their Objects are mostly ‘self and other oriented’ goals. Therefore, individuals differ in what they believe and this belief shapes what they value and pursue as life goals. Religious and cultural frameworks provide overarching ideas of what we should pursue as individuals, and what endeavors are meaningful and purposeful. The impact of religion and cross-cultural differences needs to be further explored in Studies 2 and 3.

Participant feedback. Both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese generally reported that they had a positive experience being interviewed but some of the participants provided the following summary feedback:

- The integrative theme was confusing, e.g. “*It’s hard to think of a theme of your*

life".

- Difficulty understanding about "*the whole eight chapters of my life*", e.g. "*Hard to think of all those points*".
- Confusing and too long, in regards to, "*The chapters.... my life events*" (in McAdam's Life Story account).

To conclude, the participants provided valuable feedback that what they found most confusing was having to share about the chapters of their lives and the different key episodes. They also thought the key episodes section was too long and some of them commented that they preferred to share about any significant key events that have impacted them, rather than share in an order about their earliest memory, childhood memory, etc. Hence, there is a need for future studies to consider a more concise approach without compromising the research objective of capturing important information about self-narratives.

Discussion and Conclusion

This exploratory study investigated the use of Greimas's Actantial Model as a systematic approach for analyzing self-narratives. As an initial step, the interview procedure for eliciting self-narratives and the coding system developed have been documented above to demonstrate how Greimas's actantial method can be used to analyze self-narratives. The Coding Manual's usability was tested by two coders which provided good agreement according to Fleiss's (1981) criteria. To validate the use of Greimas's model for culture and self research, this study has provided preliminary evidence that spontaneous and prompted self-narratives of both Western (European-Australian) and Eastern (Singaporean Chinese) cultural groups can be analyzed by using

this actantial method. In addition, there is a good indication that a Greimassian systematic approach could be applied on self-narratives obtained by using McAdams's (2008) Life Story account. Actantial analyses with the different self-narratives captured different aspects of the Life Story account including Life Chapters, Key Episodes, Integrative Life Theme, Future Plot, etc. There seems to be a corresponding narrative coherence between the Life story account and the actants obtained from the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. Finally, cross-cultural differences such as self-other orientation in previous research were replicated to some extent with this actantial method. This was seen particularly in the actants Subject, Object and Opponent. Therefore, the use of Greimas's Actantial Model to analyze self-narratives cross-culturally seems to be feasible, and the preliminary indication of the validity of using Greimas's model in comparative research along with the current findings can now inform the online questionnaire for the main study.

The current interview method provided rich data that captured both the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, as well as the Life Story account. Narrative excerpts and narrative structures in table format of participants' life stories show that Greimas's Actantial Model can not only be applied on spontaneous self-narratives but also the different sections of McAdams's (2008) Life Story account. These validity checks provided initial evidence for the feasibility of the Greimassian framework as a systematic approach to analyze self-narratives, in accordance with Wang and Roberts (2005) who demonstrated from a sociological perspective the utility of Greimas's Actantial Model in analyzing narratives on identity construction. The current results and that of Wang and Roberts (2005) confirm that actantial analyses enables the researcher to characterize the narrator's (interviewees') worlds and their reality. Therefore, whether they share spontaneously or through prompted accounts, or even through the

method of McAdams's Life Story schedule, the narratives they constructed cohere and correlate to constitute their reality such that similar actants are shared throughout the different narrative accounts.

This qualitative study has shown the usefulness and validity of the Greimassian approach in analyzing self-narratives to explore cultural differences. The cultural differences observed in the Greimassian analysis of self-narratives are consistent with the cultural differences in self-construals in the Western and Eastern cultures discussed in the literature. In Westerners, the 'Self' is emphasized more in the narrative structure with the 'Self' populating more of the actants compared to Easterners. Indeed, researchers have consistently found the self-other orientation is different between Western and Eastern cultural groups (Han et al., 1998; Wang, 2001a, 2004, 2006; Wang & Conway, 2004; Wang & Ross, 2005). Actantial analysis of the self-narratives of Westerners and Easterners in the current study showed similar trends of differences on the emphasis on 'Self' or 'Other' in some actants. For example, in the Subject-Object Axis of Desire, there were slight tendencies for the Subject to have more 'Self Only' or 'Self and Other(s)' as the main character for Westerners but 'Other Only' for Easterners. These distributions were also reflected in the actant Object, in that two Westerners had 'Self-oriented' goals while the other four had both 'Self and Other oriented' goals. In contrast, all of the Easterners had both 'Self and Other oriented' goals. The slightly greater emphasis on the 'Self' is also seen in the actants Opponent, Sender and Receiver in the self-narrative structure of Westerners. Although, there are some trends emerging consistent with previous findings (Jobson & O'Kearney, 2008; Wang, 2013, 2016), there is no conclusive evidence due to the small sample size. Nonetheless, the qualitative narrative examples and tallies of each actant show a slightly more prominent 'Self' in Western self-narratives while Eastern ones give 'Other(s)'

prominence. It seems that in both cultures, narrative shapes human agency to engage an individual's actions that are linked to the collective cultural group (Kashima et al., 2008).

Culturally divergent pathways in conflict resolution approaches (Leung, Brew, Zhang & Zhang, 2011) with a tendency for East Asians to be more conflict avoidant than Westerners (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991; Morris et al., 1998) are seen in the actants Opponent and Object. Two Easterners did not report any Opponents compared to Westerners who all reported having Opponents but a closer examination of the two Easterners' self-narratives show that it is not because of an absence of conflicts or Opponents. As shown clearly in the example of the 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male (see Table 3.18) who had not disclosed his homosexuality to his parents, his conflict had not been resolved and hence, what has not been worked through may not yet be incorporated into the self-narrative structure. It is possible then that he chose to share a self-narrative that is the master narrative of his culture. Through the actantial analyses of the narrative structures, it is obvious also that the central theme for many of the Easterners is filial piety embedded in the Confucian philosophy, and seems to be the master narrative (McLean & Syed, 2015) of many Singaporean Chinese interviewees. These findings provide further support as well as extend the current theories of Fivush et al. (2011) and Wang et al. (2017) about culture's shaping of self-narratives, self-narration and autobiographical memories. They demonstrate that the self-narrating style of the Singaporean Chinese may have a preference of using the master narrative as Easterners tend to pursue harmony (Gabrenya & Hwang, 1996; Huang, 2016; Hwang, 1987) as an Object of desire and this is also evident through their choice of how they present themselves. They also indicate that cross-cultural differences found in research can be replicated using this actantial method, furthering the preliminary indication of

the validity of using Greimas's model for culture and self studies.

The study has also demonstrated, through each of the actants of self-narratives, that we can compare qualitatively and quantitatively the narrative accounts by using content and thematic analyses. Each self-narrative is unique to an individual within a sociocultural context. Analysis of each self-narrative through a qualitative approach such as this is important and perhaps vital in cross-cultural research because of the depth of data gathered, which is rich in meaning. To study meaning-making processes, we need to uncover the depths of meaning conveyed by each of the individuals' self-narratives within these cultural systems. Such data gathered through the 'combined emic-etic' approach that Hui and Triandis (1985) championed, and also, from a more *open-ended, bottom up* approach encouraged by Vignoles et al. (2016), allows us to use qualitative and quantitative methods simultaneously.

The actantial method provides further food for thought in research into culture and self as it unpacks the semantics of the self-narrative and how self-construal is formed through the accumulated experiences of events, particularly key episodes. The self-narrative may be intertwined with self-construal through the experiences reported in key episodes in individual lives to form self-identity. From the qualitative data gleaned in this study, the examples of the participants' lives show human drama of the self in relation to others. From individual participant case studies outlined in Tables 3.15 to 3.21, there is evidence of how self-construal develops and is embedded into the self-narrative accounts and structure over time. Parental influence, family, community and society are paramount in the shaping of the self and the development of socio-cultural contextual understanding within the self. Such insights from the actantial analyses offer a different perspective in studying self-construal in relation to autobiographical memory from an idiographic perspective.

As self-defining memories, key episodes were investigated in regard to their relationship to the self-narrative structure. Since researchers (McAdams et al., 1996) consistently find the themes of agency vs. communion to be salient content dimensions in the self-narratives, they were examined in regards to the key episodes. In this study, indeed the themes of agency vs. communion were found to be consistent themes in the key episodes in both Western and Eastern self-narratives. This highlights the need for individuals in both cultures to seek out relationships and social interactions to create a meaningful life. However, if these relationships break down, they were reported to have a profound impact on each individual who reported it as a 'Low point' in their lives, even precipitating mental illness such as depression. On the other hand, 'High points' seem to be associated with more reports of events that engaged self-agency as were 'Turning points' and 'Other important episodes'. This suggests that the experiences people have which seem to empower their 'Self' and provide them with more sense of agency tend to be viewed more favorably, consistent with previous findings (McAdams et al., 1996). The relational themes and various points in the key episodes of the individuals' lives were shown to be embedded in the narrative structure. Cross-cultural differences in human agency have been raised, and analysis of the narrative excerpts of the goals people pursue also support Hernandez and Iyengar's (2001) proposition that Westerners may be more personally agentic while Easterners may be more collectively agentic. An analysis of the key episodes and actants, especially Object does indicate that Westerners' motivation towards action is more perceived as self-initiated compared to the Easterners, who seemed to have their motivation towards behaviors perceived to originate from a collective (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001), predominantly their family.

The actantial method allows researchers to not only investigate key episodes but other important aspects of individuals' lives that contribute to the formation of the self-

narrative and identity, such as religious beliefs and spirituality. Religion was a dimension frequently talked about, and emerged as a salient cultural element - not only as an experience, value and belief, but also as a theme that integrates one's life. The link, that it is embedded into the self-narrative structure is indeed a finding that was highlighted by the actantial framework in that religious concepts and entities appeared in the actants Subject, Object, Helper, Sender and Receiver. Scholars (Baumeister, 2002; Cohen, 2015; Cohen & Varnum, 2016; Cohen et al., 2016; Kashima, 2013; Matsumoto, 1999; Saroglou & Cohen, 2011) have emphasized the need to further investigate the importance of religion's role in understanding the interplay between culture and self.

This exploratory study has provided a glimmer of hope in how to tackle this issue systematically because a way of researching religion through the actantial framework has now been demonstrated. The role of religion was reported as influencing an individual's self-narrative from an early age and as a variable that is embedded in the family structure. Many of the self-identified Christian participants shared about the importance it played in their family's lives and continue to emphasize its significance in their current adult life, including how it influences their cognition, emotion and motivation. The participants also shared about the meaning that religious entities, experiences, values and beliefs provide for them in their lives. God, faith, the Bible, etc., as Senders in their narrative structure guided the decisions they made and provided them with a moral framework by which to live their lives. These were unexpected insights from this study that will be further explored in Studies 2 and 3.

At the conclusion of the interviews, some participants reported being confused about sharing their Life Chapters and stated that the Key Episodes section was too lengthy. They also preferred the freedom to talk about any key episodes of their lives

rather than go through a developmental sequence of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, etc. In addition, they preferred briefer questions to keep engagement high. This was useful advice to plan for the subsequent studies.

The feedback from participants highlight two main limitations of this study. Firstly, the interview approach is lengthy, time consuming and presents difficulties for larger sample sizes. Though, it was used to inform how an online survey could be developed to more efficiently capture the data useful for cultural comparisons in self-narratives, this study does raise serious issues in terms of viability if only a few participants can be interviewed. This leads to the second limitation. Due to the small sample size, the findings of this research are not only inconclusive but they represent only a tiny proportion of individuals in each cultural group. Hence, generalizations cannot be made due to the constraints of urbanized locality, affluence and religion.

However, this exploratory study has accomplished its aims. Using a qualitative approach via the interview method and analyzing the data through Greimas's Actantial Model demonstrated that it is a useful systematic framework that could be applied in cross-cultural studies. The coding system was developed and utilized with high inter-rater reliability established. Hence, the coding method could be useful in proceeding with future studies. Finally, the data collected can now inform the development of an online survey questionnaire and data analysis for Study 2.

In conclusion, further work is required to establish whether the emerging themes and trends in this study, for example, the distribution of 'Self' and 'Other' in the different cultural groups which reveals '*What*' are the cultural differences in self-narrative contents, are supported with a larger sample. In addition, '*How*' individuals were found to narrate about themselves using their culture's master narratives and '*How*' self-narration makes use of the key episodes in autobiographical memory to

construct the self-narrative. Despite the limitations of a small sample size, the current qualitative findings provide some assurance that we can systematically study lives embedded in culture through the perspective of the Greimassian narrative structure.

Chapter 4. Study 2: Emerging Cultural Differences in an Online Pilot Study of Western and Eastern Self-narratives

Introduction

In this second study, European-Australians and Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese were recruited to provide their self-narratives via an online pilot questionnaire with a new format, which were then subjected to a mixed methods approach using Greimassian analyses. The primary objective of this study was threefold: firstly, to develop a new online questionnaire to capture self-narratives and key events of autobiographical memory more efficiently; secondly, to pilot and validate the questionnaire that would be refined for use in Study 3; and thirdly, to examine the cross-cultural differences that may arise from these self-narratives to address the research questions of *'What'* content and *'How'* people narrate about themselves in different cultures, as well as *'How'* self-narration relates to autobiographical memories. Some major questions in this current study are, whether the online tool could provide a valid and more efficient method of capturing self-narrative data, and if so, what are the findings in Study 1 that could be further explored and substantiated in this study.

To achieve the objectives of this research program, it was vital to create the online questionnaire with consideration of the feedback interviewees from Study 1 gave. Valuable feedback was obtained about the length of the Life Story schedule, which participants reported was too lengthy. They preferred briefer questions and would rather share about key events that they thought were important instead of the key episodes in a developmental sequence of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, etc. Their comments were incorporated when constructing the online questionnaire.

Online questionnaires or computer-assisted surveys are increasingly adopted in

contemporary research with the emergence of the internet in the mid-1990s (Vehover & Manfreda, 2008). In our contemporary societies where life and work seems to involve some form of computer interaction, “social scientists are increasingly reaching the conclusion that they can no longer adequately understand many of the most important facets of social and cultural life without incorporating the internet and computer-mediated communications into their studies” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 2). In this study, an online questionnaire has been adopted as it is the natural mode in which participants engage on a daily basis, whether that be writing assignments on their computers to uploading their mini-narratives on a range of social media platforms. Expressing self through a computer or mobile device is the norm. It was thus regarded as sensible to capture the natural mode in which individuals now self express.

There are certain advantages to using online questionnaires over the interview method utilized in Study 1. Firstly, the cost of research is significantly reduced without the need for an interviewer and transcription of the interview data from voice to text. Secondly, any errors arising from the transcription of interview data is addressed because the verbatim data is directly obtained from online questionnaires. Thirdly, Vehover and Manfreda (2008) highlighted that online questionnaires increase a sense of privacy in responses and the absence of interviewer-related biases. Despite the advantages nonetheless, it was important to derive the initial data from the interview approach in Study 1 as an exploratory study into self-narratives and self-construal.

From the findings of Study 1, this current study sought to further examine the cross-cultural differences using a mixed methods approach. Creswell (2009) pointed out that when exploring and understanding meaning, qualitative research is more suitable, but quantitative research is appropriate for examining the relationships between measurable variables. Hence, this current study has adopted both a qualitative and

quantitative research method.

As in Study 1, having developed the online questionnaire to elicit the self-narratives, it is important to establish the validity of the online method. This was completed by actantial analysis of both open-ended spontaneous self-narratives and prompted accounts related to the actants of Greimas's Actantial Model from the online tool, and determining whether the participants' responses in spontaneous self-narratives in fact corresponded to those given in response to prompts specifically asking about relevant actants. It was also vital to establish the correspondence of key events from their autobiographical recalls and actantial self-narrative structure as a further check on validity. Based on the findings of Study 1, I anticipated that 'Self' would populate more actants of Western self-narratives while 'Other' would populate more actants of the Eastern self-narratives. I explored whether this trend of findings can be replicated in this study in addition to other cross-cultural differences documented in Chapter 2. In this way, evidence can be provided that the current method is valid for use in cross-cultural comparative research. Lastly, the findings of the salience of religion captured in the self-narratives in Study 1 would need to be explored further in this study.

Method

Participants. In the current study, in addition to European-Australians and the Singaporean Chinese, Malaysian Chinese participants were included due to the difficulties of recruiting Singaporean Chinese participants found in Study 1. Since the Malaysian Chinese share a common history and language with the Singaporean Chinese, with British influences and Singapore only gaining its independence in 1965; the cultural differences between these two Asian groups were considered to be small in comparison to the cultural commonalities for these two cultural groups. Moreover,

Hofstede's (1980/2001) Individualism index (*IDV score*) of 26 for Malaysia is similar to Singapore's *IDV score* of 20, with both these countries in the group of 18 most collectivistic countries out of the 50 countries and 3 regions.

Participants were recruited through the Research Experience Program (REP) at the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne, except three who were recruited via word of mouth. The inclusion criteria applied in this study were identical to those of Study 1. The only difference was the inclusion of Malaysian

Table 4.1

Demographic Information of Research Participants

| Demographics | Westerner | Easterner |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Background | European-Australian <i>n</i> = 15 | Singaporean Chinese <i>n</i> = 9 Malaysian Chinese <i>n</i> = 6 |
| Age | 18 to 40 years (<i>M</i> = 24.07, <i>SD</i> = 7.70) | 18 to 22 years (<i>M</i> = 19.40, <i>SD</i> = 1.12) |
| Gender | 5 Males, 10 Females | 3 Males, 12 Females |
| Marital Status | 13 Single, 1 Married, 1 De Facto | 15 Single |
| Education Completed | 6 Secondary, 6 Undergraduate, 1 Postgraduate, 1 Tafe/Diploma | 12 Secondary, 1 Undergraduate, 2 Other |
| Religion | 8 Christian, 1 Buddhist, 1 Judaism, 3 Atheist, 2 Other | 4 Christian, 6 Buddhist, 2 Atheist, 3 other |
| Practicing Religion | (60% Yes, 40% No) | (80% Yes, 20% No) |
| Employment Status | 3 Professionals, 8 Casual/ Part-time/ Students, 4 Students | 15 Students |
| Time in Australia | 15 'Whole life' or since birth' | 9 'Less than or equal to 1 year' 4 'Less than or equal 2 years' 2 'Less than or equal 4 years' (<i>M</i> = 1.67, <i>SD</i> = 1.05) |

Chinese participants 'who lived in Malaysia for most of his/her life and has parents who are ethnic Chinese'. A total of thirty-six participants began the survey but two did not complete it fully and four were excluded because they were from Korea, Hong Kong, China and Brunei. Table 4.1 details the thirty (8 males and 22 females) participants with an age range from 18 to 40 years ($M = 21.7$, $SD = 5.90$) who met the criteria and completed the online questionnaire. There were 15 Westerners (European-Australians) and 15 Easterners (9 Singaporean Chinese and 6 Malaysian Chinese). None of the participants from Study 1 were involved in this study.

Procedure and materials. Participants who had volunteered to participate were invited to a survey session of approximately one hour duration in the lab, where they were each assigned a computer. In the Online Questionnaire, each participant first read the Plain Language Statement, and then if they wished to continue, indicated their consent to participate in the study and authorize researchers to use their data by clicking on the 'Continue' button (see Appendix G). This led to the next screen of the Consent form (see Appendix G) for persons participating in a research project. They understood that this research project was approved by the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). Once they clicked on the 'Continue' button to consent to participating in this research study, they were lead to complete two sections of the online questionnaire. After they finished the two sections, a debriefing form was displayed at conclusion of the online questionnaire. They were then asked by the researcher if they had any questions before the conclusion of the session. Each individual data was de-identified and then coded according to the Coding Manual (see Appendix B).

Online questionnaire. The online survey comprised of two sections, A and B (see Appendix G). Section A had three parts: 1) Spontaneous self-narrative; 2) Prompted self-narrative; and 3) Key Events. This format differed from that of Study 1 as it incorporated a new Key Events section based on participants' feedback, and Section B consisted of questions about participant's demographic information. In Section A of the spontaneous self-narrative segment, participants were asked to share about their story by the following sentences: *"This study is concerned about people's life story. Someone like you would have had some life experiences that have made you what you are today. You would have had some ups and downs, triumphs and disasters, and sweet memories and bitter episodes that you'd rather forget; your story would be populated by your family, friends, enemies, and others who have given you guidance and helped you along. We are interested in finding out what your life has been like if you are to tell it as a story. Can you please summarize your life story in several paragraphs (4 to 5 paragraphs)?"* They were to write their self-narratives in a box labelled 'Text Response' following the question. There was no limit to how much they could write.

In the prompted self-narrative segment, participants were asked to reflect on their life story and to answer the following questions which were informed by Greimas's Actantial Model: a) *Are there any goals, objectives or pursuits that have been pervasive in your life? If so, what are they?* This question was to elicit the information for the actant 'Object'; b) *Is there a main character (person or thing) in your life story, if so, who or what is it?* The answer would provide information for the actant 'Subject'; c) *What is the biggest challenge you (or the main character) have had to face in the pursuit in your (or the main character's) life? How did the challenge develop? What did you (or the main character) do to meet the challenge?* This question

was to prompt the participants to think of the ‘Axis of Conflict’; d) *Was there anyone or anything that opposed you (or the main character) in achieving your goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?* This question attempted to elicit the information for the actant ‘Opponent’; e) *Was there anyone or anything that helped you (or the main character) achieve the goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?* These questions aimed to elicit information for the actant ‘Helper’. Questions f) *Are there any character(s) with the most positive influence in the story? If so, who?* and g) *Are there any character(s) with the most negative influence in the story? If so, who?* These questions prompted the participants to reflect on the ‘Axis of Communication’.

Afterwards, they were asked question h) *Was there anyone or anything that guided you (or the main character) in your life story? For example, an authority figure or a moral value that provided you (or the main character) with guidance about what should be done? If so, who or what?* This was to elicit information about the actant ‘Sender’. To understand their responses in context for the actant ‘Sender’, they were asked the question: i) *What would you say are your fundamental values, religious and political beliefs? How did these values and beliefs develop over time?* Finally, to elicit the information for the actant ‘Receiver’, participants were asked the question: j) *Who or what are the beneficiaries of you achieving your (or the main character's) goal(s), if any? Is it only yourself, only others, or yourself AND others? If not only yourself, but some other people or things who are also receiving benefits, who are they or what are they?* The above questions comprised the prompted self-narrative section. After this section, to check for narrative coherence, participants were asked, 3) *What is your life all about? How would you describe it?* Again, there were boxes labelled ‘Text Response’ under each of the questions to capture the answers.

In the Key Events segment, participants were asked about their autobiographical

memories and to think through important events in their lives with the following question: 4) *What significant key events have happened in your life? That is, what events have occurred that have made a real impact in your life? Please list up to five that come to mind.* After writing up to five key events in the boxes labelled under each key event 1 to 5, they were to consider for each key event, whether the event was ‘positive’ or ‘negative by clicking on the appropriate button. In addition, for each key event, they were asked to ‘describe what happened in some detail’ and write in the ‘Text Response’ box. The boxes had no restrictions on how many characters to write.

Section B sought information about a participant’s demographic information, they had to answer questions about gender (by clicking on ‘Male’ or ‘Female’ button, age, background (by clicking on the button which applied: ‘European-Australian’, ‘Singaporean Chinese’, ‘Malaysian Chinese’, or ‘Other’), parent’s cultural and educational background as well as occupation. Questions were also asked about participants’ employment position, highest level of education completed, course of University study, marital status, how well they spoke English, their first language, religious background (by clicking on ‘Christian’, ‘Buddhist’, ‘Judaism’, ‘Islam’, ‘Atheist’ or ‘Other’), and whether they were currently practicing their religion (by clicking the ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ button).

Coding the narratives. Having developed the Coding Manual in Study 1 (see Chapter 3 and Appendix B for details of the Coding Manual), the same manual was used in this study to code the narrative accounts. Self-narratives were coded for the presence or absence of each of the axes and actants, with the contents specified for each actant. Then, the contents of the actants were coded for the level of abstraction, whether it was abstract or concrete (Hui & Triandis, 1985).

In making sense of the transcribed text data, code labels were assigned to a text passage (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Similar codes were grouped under broader categories of content and themes. As in Study 1, 33.33% (10 online responses in Study 2) of the 30 online narrative accounts were independently coded by two coders. One of the coders was again the main researcher and the other coder was the same research assistant in Study 1, who was naïve about the aims and hypotheses. An equal number ($n = 5$) were each selected randomly from the Western and Eastern self-narratives, with representation from both gender and also, for the Eastern self-narratives, three from Singaporean and two from Malaysian Chinese samples.

Using Cohen's Kappa, a measure of agreement, the two coders had a high level of agreement for identifying the actants of Greimas's narrative structure, $k = .79$, $p < .001$. Inter-rater reliability was also computed for coding each of the actants to specify the level of abstraction, whether it was considered abstract or concrete. High level of agreement for abstract or concrete concepts was also established, $k = .88$, $p < .001$. Disagreements between coders were resolved through discussion. In this study, the self-reported key events were considered either negative or positive by the participants. For coding of the key events, the two coders had a high level of agreement for the contents coded, $k = .91$, $p < .001$.

Results

The questions regarding the validity of the Greimassian approach with the use of this online method are addressed, and the findings are discussed. First, the spontaneous accounts obtained from the online tool seem to cohere and correspond with the prompted accounts. Second, actantial analyses with each of the axes and actants showed

that cross-cultural differences can continue to be replicated with this method to address the ‘*What*’ and ‘*How*’ of self-narratives and self-narration in different cultures. Third, evidence for the correspondence of key events and actantial self-narrative structure as a further check on validity also address ‘*How*’ self-narratives are related to autobiographical memory. Finally, the role of religion is explored within the self-narrative structure.

Spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. The structure of spontaneous self-narratives captured through the online questionnaire can be analyzed by Greimas’s Actantial Model. As in Study 1, spontaneous self-narratives often show a clear correspondence to the responses generated in prompted versions designed to elicit the actants. This is demonstrated in the following spontaneous self-narrative of a 19 year-old Malaysian Chinese female:

“I came from a Malaysian Chinese family of 5. I have 2 older brothers, and we fought a lot when we were younger but that gave me a lot of funny stories to tell now. Even though at that time it was hurtful but I’m just glad right now things panned out well as we all have grown up. I’m really close to my father and he has been the biggest influence and mentor in my life. I’ve led quite a challenging life and my parents have their issues, but it really did make me mature a lot earlier than my peers and gave me a different perspective of life. My best friend is one of the most patient person I know and I learn a lot about love and kindness from her.”

The above narrative captures the important themes and narrative structure of this interviewee, which cohere with her prompted account. She reported in her prompted account that her Object of desire was to ‘challenge herself daily and to love people with all her heart’, which she also mentions in her spontaneous self-narrative. She identified the Subjects in her prompted self-narrative as herself and her father, which she mentions in her spontaneous self-narrative when she reported, ‘I’m really close to my father’. Her father is again reported as her Helper and Sender, which in her spontaneous self-

narrative, she confirms that her father is the ‘biggest influence and mentor in my life’. Her best friend is also considered alongside her father as a Helper and this is captured in her spontaneous self-narrative. She noted leading a ‘challenging life’ and in her prompted self-narrative identifies herself as her own Opponent. She reports that her Receiver is ‘herself and others’. In her spontaneous narrative, her theme of relationships with others is important to her and features in prompted Receiver so that when she obtains her goals, both ‘self and others’ benefit.

The following example of a 20 year-old European-Australian female’s spontaneous self-narrative again shows correspondence with her prompted self-narrative:

“My family lives in Western Australia, where I grew up until I was six years old. My parents divorced when I was very young - I don't remember them being together at all. My mother and I moved to Victoria when she moved in with my step-father. We lived in a rental home for a year, which my mum hated because it was old and dusty compared to Perth houses which are generally larger and airy. We moved into a new town house after that. My sister was born November 1997, and is six years younger than me. My mum became a stay-at-home-mum after she was born, leaving her position at a bank. We both attended a local primary school, where she picked us both up from every day. The same continued when I started high school. We visited family in Perth regularly. My Grandmother on my mother's side passed away when I was 10 years old, from lung and bowel cancer bought on by heavy smoking. Mum was devastated, and from then on contemplated moving back to Perth to be with her family. Nothing ever eventuated, and we stayed in Melbourne. My mum and step-father began fighting when I was in high-school, and though I was never told the reason why it was plainly obvious that something was seriously wrong. They married later, which at the time seemed inexplicable, though it was supposedly to show that all was ok and forgiven. The marriage dissolved fairly quickly after that, though they both tried to work things out for the sake of my sister and I. He did eventually end up moving out, which had no detrimental effect on the household at first. I think mum was relieved. He'd been having an affair for years. A few months after he moved out and it became obvious mum wouldn't forgive him, they started the process of a formal divorce. He'd mortgaged against the house heavily. The house was sold, and my mum received a total of \$2000 from the divorce. Since she had been a stay at home mum, she had very little savings and soon was forced to legally declare bankruptcy. She struggled through 2009, waiting until I had finished year 12 to move back to Perth. I stayed with friends until moving out properly in 2010. I attended RMIT for two years, and am currently completing an additional qualification there, as well as at Melbourne University.”

Her spontaneous account showed coherence with her prompted account, though slight differences were noted. Figure 4.1 summarizes the above European-Australian female's spontaneous account on the left. She reports her story in the first person 'I' (Subject) with the goal of 'obtaining her qualifications' (object). In her quest, her story involves a theme of her mother's 'marriage breakdown and losses', which she considered as hindering her goals (Opponent) but she is helped by her 'friends' (Helper). Her 'mother' (Sender) waited until she had finished year 12 so that she could then go to university to complete her qualification and achieve her goal which would benefit herself (Receiver). When prompted, she seemed to supply more information for the different actants. She wanted to complete her university qualifications so that she could have a job to support herself and her family. More people were mentioned as Helper and Opponent when she was prompted, with the addition of *family* as Helper and *Stepfather* as Opponent. She reported that her *boyfriend* guided her as Sender. Finally, the people who would benefit if she obtained her goals was reported to be 'herself, her mother, sister and family' (Receiver). Figure 4.1 illustrates the spontaneous and prompted accounts with similar themes for her story to cohere.

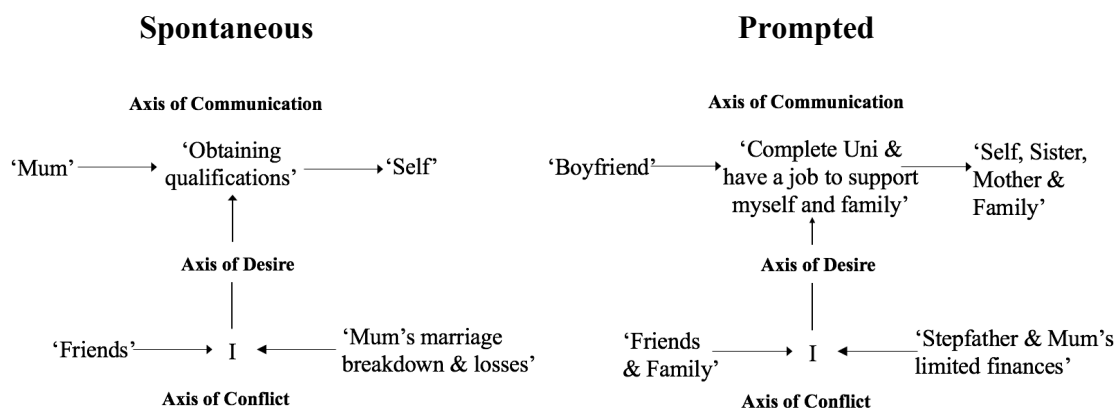


Figure 4.1. Greimassian analyses of self-narrative of 20 year old Australian female's spontaneous and prompted accounts.

The spontaneous self-narratives above provide a summary or skeletal sketch of a life, with further details captured through the other two parts of Section A, Greimas's narrative structure and the key events outlined in the subsequent segments. As can be seen in the above example and in subsequent examples of self-narratives, Greimas's Actantial Model has been applied to both the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, and both cohere as the main themes which form the self-narrative structure can be gleaned through the similar actants in both accounts. This approach also sheds light on the issues raised by Matsumoto and Yoo (2006) about measurement equivalence and different ways of responding. By using an open-ended approach to study individual self-narratives, rich data can be obtained from both spontaneous and prompted accounts. This could illustrate how changes in responses can occur with the way individuals are asked to respond spontaneously or through more considered prompts with forced answers, and how these different ways of asking show similarities and/or slight differences in responses. It also raises the issue that self-narrating style may change depending on how responses are elicited. These issues would need to be further investigated in Study 3. However, this section highlights that with the online tool, all the self-narratives collected showed that the major contents and themes of spontaneous accounts cohered with prompted accounts so that it was feasible to use actantial analyses with online spontaneous accounts.

Analyses based on the Actantial Model. Each spontaneous and prompted self-narrative was analyzed within the Greimassian framework to make comparisons between Westerners and Easterners in terms of the frequency, level of abstraction, and the content and themes of the actants. The findings are presented in three sections in terms of the different axes and actants in the following.

Axis of Desire. The actants ‘Subject’ and ‘Object’ which comprise the Axis of Desire were each analyzed. As found in Study 1, this axis emphasized the self-other orientation between the cultural groups and similar trends emerged with Subject and Object being more Self-focused for Westerners but Other-focused for Easterners. For example, with the actant Object, Westerners reported more frequencies for ‘travel’ and ‘self-oriented’ goals compared to Easterners. Easterners reported more frequency of ‘family’ goals than Westerners. The analysis of each of the actants will be reported in the following.

Subject. In the spontaneous self-narratives of Westerners and Easterners, the Subject was ‘I’ as each participant referenced their life stories to themselves as individuals. The following narrative examples as it appeared in their responses illustrate this point (with bolded italics added to highlight the ‘I’ as Subject).

Spontaneous: “***I** grew up in a large family consisting of three brothers and one sister. We lived on the fringes of the city, therefore, enjoyed a country type lifestyle where we continually spent time outdoors playing games and riding bikes. During **my** primary school years **I** spent a lot of time playing sports such as cricket and basketball. **I** attended a boys youth group each week where we played lots of games & did outdoor activities*”
35 year old European-Australian male

Spontaneous: “***I** grew up in a small country town, with only 800 people. **My** Mum and Dad had both grown up on farms around the town, and both sets of grandparents still lived there. **I** have two brothers, an older and younger. **I** am close with both of them, but there is only 16 months between **me** and **my** older brother, so we were close playmates....*”
29 year old European-Australian female

Spontaneous: “***My** mother is from Malaysia and **my** father is from Singapore. **I** have a sister as my sibling and **I** am a Singaporean. **My** childhood complicated and hectic. **I** have a troubled family as my father was not always faithful to my mother. **I** did not receive much love from **my** father and he is always absent from **my** early childhood...”
22 year old Singaporean Chinese male*

Spontaneous: “***I** think that **my** life has been pretty comfortable so far and that **I**’ve been really blessed in **my** life. Being a Christian has helped me a lot along*”

the way. I grew up in Singapore and have never lived abroad till now for university here in Melbourne....”

19 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

For prompted self-narratives, there were various Subjects reported when participants were asked directly who or what was the main character(s) of their life story. To investigate whether there were differences between the two cultural groups in the levels of abstraction of contents in prompted self-narratives for the actant Subject, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the reported frequencies of abstract and concrete contents. There were no significant differences between Westerners and Easterners in either abstract (e.g. friends) or concrete (e.g. mum) contents related to the actant Subject. However, paired-samples t-tests showed that Westerners reported more concrete Subjects ($M = 1.67, SD = 0.72$) than abstract Subjects ($M = 0.40, SD = 0.74$), $t(14) = -4.22, p = .001$, as did Easterners (concrete Subjects: $M = 1.13, SD = 0.74$, abstract Subjects: $M = 0.20, SD = 0.41$, $t(14) = -3.29, p = .005$). This finding illustrates how in both cultures, individuals can identify specifically who the main characters are in their life story.

The following examples from prompted Western and Eastern self-narratives show the actant Subject. These were the reported main character(s) in participants' stories. It is also possible that the same main characters can take on other actantial roles, which many of the self-narratives do indeed indicate.

Prompted: *“The main character would be me I guess, as it is the story of my life.”*

20 year old European-Australian male

Prompted: *“My mother and sister have been incredibly important, as we are all incredibly close. Mum in particular confided in my (sic) alot during the divorce, and many family members and friends have remarked on our close relationship.”*

20 year old European-Australian female

Prompted: “My brother.”
20 year old Singaporean Chinese male

Prompted: “God would be the main character. He is my main influence and I always seek to finding His will for my life.”
21 year old Singaporean Chinese female

The various responses illustrated above were then content analyzed and the frequencies of the different Subjects are shown in Table 4.2. As can be seen in the excerpts and Table 4.2, some Western and Eastern participants reported more than one Subject, as captured by the frequencies for each of the Subject contents.

Table 4.2

Frequencies of Different Subjects in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Subject Contents | Frequencies | |
|---|-------------|-----------|
| | Westerner | Easterner |
| Me/ I/ Self | 15 | 9 |
| Father/ Dad | 0 | 3 |
| Mother/ Mum | 1 | 3 |
| Parents | 2 | 0 |
| Family | 4 | 1 |
| Brother | 0 | 1 |
| Sister | 2 | 1 |
| Daughter | 1 | 0 |
| Significant others, e.g. Best friend Lizzie, Friends, Everyone, etc. | 2 | 2 |
| Religion, e.g. God, Jesus, etc. | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>28</i> | <i>21</i> |

As in Study 1, because participants may report more than one Subject with a combination of Self and Other, each of the contents of the Subject tally from Table 4.2 were then grouped together in terms of the categories of ‘Self Only’ (i.e., mention of self only), ‘Self and Other’ (i.e., mention of self with other(s), e.g. ‘self and mother’), or ‘Other Only’ (i.e., mention of other only, like mother or sister) in order to investigate

whether there are any cultural differences. This is shown in Table 4.3. These results follow a similar trend to Study 1 findings in that there is slightly more ‘Self Only’ for Westerners (by two count) than for Easterners, and over half more for ‘Self and Other’ for Westerners than Easterners. Similar to Study 1, there were none of ‘Other only’ for Westerners but six counts for Easterners. The findings of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that indeed the Subject, who are the reported ‘main character’ of the self-narrative, features more of ‘Self’ for Westerners but more of ‘Other’ for Easterners. For some Westerners ($n = 10$) and Easterners ($n = 6$), their story is about themselves with others, but for 6 Easterners, their self-narrative is not about themselves at all, it is about ‘Others Only’. These trends are worth exploring further with a larger sample.

Table 4.3

Tally of Differentiated ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ Subjects in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Actant | Count | |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Westerner | Easterner |
| Subject Contents | | |
| Self Only | 5 | 3 |
| Self & Other | 23 | 12 |
| Other Only | 0 | 6 |

Object. To investigate any cultural differences in the actant Object, a mixed-design ANOVA was conducted with culture (Westerners vs. Easterners) as the between-subjects factor, and narration type (Spontaneous vs. Prompted) and level of abstraction (Abstract vs. Concrete) as the within-subject factors. The dependent variable was the frequencies reported for the actant Object. The main effect of narration type was significant, $F(1, 28) = 9.75, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .26$, as participants expressed more Objects when prompted ($M = 1.18$) than spontaneously ($M = 0.72$). The main effect of

abstraction was also significant, $F(1, 28) = 64.76$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .70$. Generally, participants reported more abstract elements in their Objects of desire ($M = 1.78$) than concrete elements ($M = 0.12$). No cross-cultural differences were found.

Some narrative examples of ‘Object’ of Desires (in italics) reported by Westerners and Easterners in spontaneous and prompted self-narratives are presented in the following. These examples were selected because they exemplify the majority of participant reports in the content analyses of this actant, which are shown in Table 4.4.

Examples of the category ‘Travel’:

*“My goal has been never to sit around doing nothing- always to be active, busy and helpful. Moreover, **I want to travel**. As a result, I want a career that will allow me to **travel** and always be on the go.”*

19 year-old European-Australian female

*“**To travel** and see the world; to try everything and experience as much as I can.”*

Another 19 year-old European-Australian female

*“My goals are the usual run of the mill sort. They include **travelling the world...**”*

19 year-old Malaysian Chinese female

Examples of the category ‘Family’:

*“**To have a family** and share stories with them and teach them.”*

19 year-old European-Australian female

*“After my family's money troubles, a particular goal for me is to ensure that I go to uni and end up in a job with which I am able **to support myself and family**”.*

20 year-old European-Australian female

*“**To give my family** a better life in the future.”*

20 year-old Malaysian Chinese female

*“**Family is a key goal** in my life.”*

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Examples of the category ‘Self-oriented’ goals:

*“Learning, relationships, **growing into a person** that is not constrained by my childhood.”* 38 year-old European-Australian female

*“I want to learn something and **find myself.**”*

25 year old European-Australian female

*“Yes, I have always wanted **to be someone successful.**”*

19 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Examples of the category ‘Achievement goals’:

*“Yes, I continually set myself goals which **I diligently work towards to achieve.** Below is a list of some goals I’ve set in my life, **some I’ve achieved, some I haven’t: attend Melbourne university, play cricket for Australia, be a fantastic family man, seek and serve God and become an engineering manager.**”*

35 year-old European-Australian male.

Note that for this male, he also wanted to be a fantastic family man and hence, a count was also made under ‘family’ as some of the tallies included several Objects.

*“I want to **become a child psychologist or do social work, working with children of a disadvantaged background. I would also want to work for an NGO to help change the world in a positive way.**”*

19 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

As can be seen in Table 4.4, overall there were more counts for ‘travel’ and ‘self-oriented’ goals for Westerners compared to Easterners. There were more counts for ‘family’ goals for Easterners than Westerners and almost similar frequency of achievement goals for both cultural groups, with only one more mention of this for Easterners. The finding that family featured more in the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives of Easterners is also consistent with the findings of Study 1, with the emphasis on the Easterners’ ‘current family’ as the Object of pursuit. Similar to Study 1, there is a desire for the Easterner to please their parents and in this particular situation, by ‘making it up to them’. The theme of filial piety is again seen in Study 2.

This is captured in this self-narrative in the Object of Desire:

“My main objective is to make it up to my parents for those years that I wasted. I can’t stop the feeling of owing them something, that they deserve better.”

20 year-old Malaysian Chinese male.

Table 4.4

Frequencies of Different Objects in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Broad Categories for Object Contents | Westerners <i>n</i> = 15 | | Easterners <i>n</i> = 15 | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| | Spontaneous | Prompted | Spontaneous | Prompted |
| Travel | 5 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| Family | 1 | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| Self-oriented | 4 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| Achievement goals | 3 | 8 | 5 | 7 |
| Religious goals | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>22</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>16</i> |
| Unclear | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |

There were two Westerners and two Easterners who did not report any Object for their spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, suggesting they were not clear about their goals in life or found it hard to articulate them even though they had defined their prompted Subject. However, in these participants' self-narratives there was evidence of other axes and actants populated.

Axis of conflict. In the Axis of Conflict, both the actants Helper and Opponent were populated but with some differences between Western and Eastern self-narratives. To examine what cultural differences there were, a mixed design ANOVA was conducted. The cultural group (Westerners, Easterners) was the between-subjects factor, while narration type (Spontaneous vs. Prompted) and actants (Helper vs. Opponents) and abstraction (Abstract vs. Concrete) were the within-subject factors. The main effect of actants was significant, $F(1, 28) = 37.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .57$, showing that people generally shared more Helpers ($M = 0.84$) than Opponents ($M = 0.38$). However, this was superseded by a significant interaction between narration type, actants, and culture,

$F(1, 28) = 5.80, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .17$ (see Table 4.5). Although Easterners appear to report similar numbers of helpers spontaneously and when prompted; Westerners reported more Helpers when prompted than when they gave self-narratives spontaneously, providing evidence of an elaborative narrating style (Wang, 2001b). That is, a style of narrative discourse which produces more detailed description and lengthy narratives. Westerners provided more elaboration of the Helpers in their lives, offering more and new information when asked to. Nonetheless, Westerners and Easterners reported similar number of Opponents for both spontaneous and prompted narratives. This can be seen in Figure 4.2.

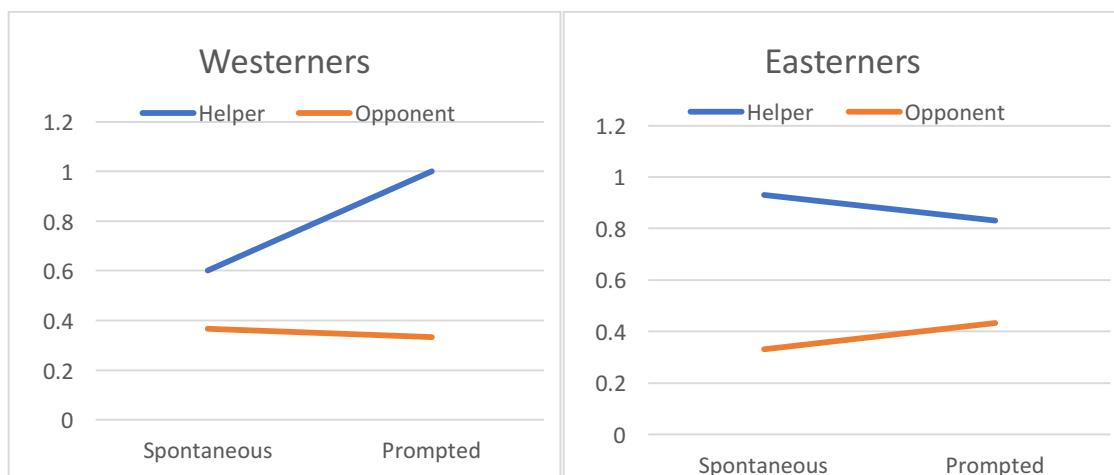


Figure 4.2. The interaction effect of narration type, actant and culture.

Table 4.5

The Means and Standard Error of Reported Frequencies of Helpers and Opponents Expressed Spontaneously and Prompted between Westerners and Easterners

| Actants | Westerners | | | | Easterners | | | |
|----------|-------------|------------|----------|------------|-------------|------------|----------|------------|
| | Spontaneous | | Prompted | | Spontaneous | | Prompted | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SEM</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SEM</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SEM</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SEM</i> |
| Helper | .60 | .09 | 1.00 | .13 | .93 | .09 | .83 | .13 |
| Opponent | .37 | .10 | .40 | .10 | .33 | .10 | .43 | .10 |

Helper. In the actant Helper, some of the narrative examples which exemplified the contents of Helper for both spontaneous and prompted Western and Eastern self-narratives are shown in the following.

“My family have been very supportive of me throughout my life.”

40 year-old European-Australian male

“My father was a constant support figure throughout the whole ordeal. He never stopped telling me how much he believed in me even when I failed to see my potential myself”.

23 year-old European-Australian female

“Yes, my mother.”

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

“Yes, my friends. We helped each other in solving problems in studies and also other aspects”.

20 year-old Malaysian Chinese female

Content Analysis was completed for the actant Helper, which yielded the categories of ‘parent(s)’, ‘friends’, ‘family’, ‘mother’, ‘father’, and ‘teacher’ as seen in Table 4.6. As noted in the above ANOVA results and content analysis, when prompted, Westerners mentioned more Helpers, but this was not so for Easterners. Easterners mention similar Helpers spontaneously and when prompted compared to Westerners. Fivush and Fromhoff (1988) explained that elaborative maternal style of discourse asks more questions to elicit additional information and this trend seems to be evident here, that when asked, Westerners may engage an elaborative self-narrating style and provide more information consistent with past research (Wang, 2001b).

Table 4.6

Frequencies of Different Helpers in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Content Analysis for Actant Helper | Westerners <i>n</i> = 15 | | Easterners <i>n</i> = 15 | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| | Spontaneous | Prompted | Spontaneous | Prompted |
| Self | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Parent | 3 | 4 | 6 | 1 |
| Mother | 1 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Father | 4 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Grandmother | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Sister | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Brother | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Family | 2 | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| Friends | 2 | 8 | 9 | 6 |
| Other, e.g., Teacher/ Studies, Mentors, etc. | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>27</i> | <i>22</i> | <i>18</i> |
| Unclear | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |

When each of the contents were grouped together under ‘Self’, ‘Family’, ‘Others’ and ‘Unclear’, there were similar Helpers in both cultural groups, as seen in Table 4.7. Hence, the findings here is overall similar to that of Study 1, except three Westerners did not report any Helpers compared with one Easterner.

Table 4.7

Tally of Helpers in the Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Helpers in Broad Categories | | |
| Self | 2 | 1 |
| Family | 24 | 27 |
| Others | 15 | 8 |
| Unclear | 3 | 1 |

Opponent. In the actant Opponent, there were more marriage or family breakdowns spontaneously mentioned by Westerners. This is similar to Study 1, as shown in Table 4.8. However, when prompted Westerners no longer mention this but refer to ‘Parents’ and other types of Opponents, such as ‘Self, girlfriends, etc.’. With Easterners, there were equal numbers of Opponents reported in spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. Of interest is the equal numbers of Westerners and Easterners who did not report any Opponents when spontaneous and prompted self-narratives are combined. Unlike in Study 1 where Easterners only reported no Opponent, the current study has both cultural groups reporting a lack of Opponents.

Table 4.8

Frequencies of Different Opponents in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Content Analysis for Actant Opponent | Westerners <i>n</i> = 15 | | Easterners <i>n</i> = 15 | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| | Spontaneous | Prompted | Spontaneous | Prompted |
| Self | 0 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Marriage/ Family Breakdown | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Parents | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Father/Dad | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Mother/Mum | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Sister | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Brother | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Stepfather | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Family | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Illness (e.g. self or others) | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Girlfriend | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Students at School/School | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Teacher | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Limited finance | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Death of family/friend | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Different Culture/Community | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Social life | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>11</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>10</i> | <i>13</i> |
| Unclear | 6 | 6 | 7 | 5 |

Some of the narrative examples which exemplified the contents of Opponent for both spontaneous and prompted Western and Eastern self-narratives are shown in the following.

“Nobody other than my girlfriend. She has been demanding and difficult, and has not let me leave the relationship when I wanted to, for which I feel some resentment and feel as though I am not getting the most of my life.”

19 year-old European-Australian male

“Shielded from so much as a child my world shattered as I learned of my parents’ divorce at age 12. Such a pivotal age for anyone I struggled over the next couple of years as I scrambled to adjust to adolescence and to my... alien family dynamic.”

23 year-old European-Australian female

“My parents often voiced their disapproval at what I did, fearing I would get hurt.”

20 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

“I think the main thing would be self doubt and lack of confidence”.

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Combining both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, the tallies were counted for each of the broad thematic categories that Opponents were grouped under, ‘Self’, ‘Family’, ‘Others’ and ‘Unclear’ as shown in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Tally of Opponents in the Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Opponent Contents | | |
| Self | 2 | 6 |
| Family | 10 | 8 |
| Others | 11 | 9 |
| Unclear | 12 | 12 |

Somewhat different from Study 1, 'Self' featured as an Opponent more in Eastern than Western Self-narratives, as shown in Table 4.9. In four instances where Self was an Opponent for the Easterner, the examples included, 'self-procrastination and tiredness', 'self-doubt and lack of confidence', 'self-procrastination and poor time management' and 'Self- can't remember information'. It is possible that the inner conflicts related to their desire to do well in their studies are disclosed in their prompted accounts because without their immediate family support (which activates the collective self) they would otherwise receive in their home countries, they are now alone in Australia (which activates the private self). Hence, context as suggested by Triandis (1989) which activates particular selves may enable us to understand some of the explanations for the cross-cultural differences. These findings would need to be further explored in Study 3 with a larger sample size.

Axis of communication. In the Axis of Communication, a mixed-design ANOVA was conducted to investigate if there were any cultural differences. The two cultures (Westerners vs. Easterners) were the between-subject factor. The frequency of narration type (Spontaneous vs. Prompted) of the actants (Sender vs. Receiver), coded in terms of level of abstraction (Abstract vs. Concrete) were the within-subject factors. There was no significant interaction between culture, narration type, actant and abstraction, $F(1, 28) = .007, p = .933$. However, there was a significant interaction effect of narration type and abstraction, $F(1, 28) = 7.15, p = .012, \eta_p^2 = .20$, suggesting that participants expressed much more abstract contents when prompted ($M = 0.93$) than when they spontaneously narrated about themselves ($M = 0.22$) as shown in Figure 4.3.

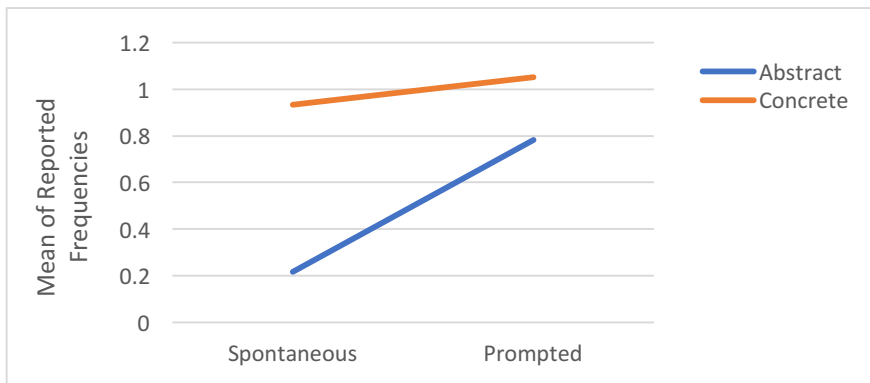


Figure 4.3. The interaction effect of narration type and abstraction

There was also an interaction effect of actant and abstraction, $F(1, 28) = 4.55$, $p = .042$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, as illustrated in Figure 4.4. Participants generally shared more concrete Receivers ($M = 1.05$) than they do concrete Senders ($M = 0.52$). For examples, in the spontaneous self-narratives, the actants Senders and Receivers featured more concrete contents like ‘Mother’, ‘Nietzsche’, ‘Self’, etc. but when prompted, especially in the actant Sender, participants reported more abstract contents like ‘Chinese culture’, ‘ideals’, ‘Buddhism values’, etc. Whereas with Receiver, even though there were some abstract contents like ‘Culture’, ‘Everyone’, etc., there were generally more concrete contents like ‘Self’, ‘Mother’, ‘Daughter’, etc.

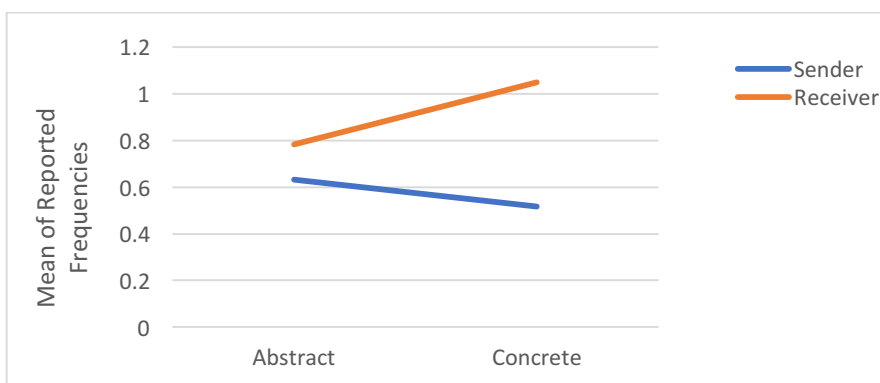


Figure 4.4. The interaction effect of actant and abstraction

Sender. For the actant Sender, both groups had frequently reported ‘parents’ as their Sender when they shared their self-narratives spontaneously and when prompted, with Easterners having slightly more mention of parents, as summarized in Table 4.10. The other common ‘Senders’ were ‘Mother’, ‘Family’ and ‘Christian beliefs and faith (such as faith in Jesus)’. Western self-narratives mentioned ‘Self’ also as ‘Sender’ but only one Eastern one did. Eastern self-narratives also had ‘Father’, ‘Buddhism values’ and ‘God’ as a ‘Sender’ which were not mentioned at all in Western self-narratives.

Table 4.10

Frequencies of Different Senders in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Content Analysis for Actant Sender | Westerners <i>n</i> = 15 | | Easterners <i>n</i> = 15 | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| | Spontaneous | Prompted | Spontaneous | Prompted |
| Self | 4 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Parents | 4 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| Mother/Mum | 2 | 1 | 4 | 2 |
| Father/Dad | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 |
| Sister | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Brother | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Family | 1 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Friends | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Boyfriend | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Religion, e.g., God, Christian beliefs/ faith, Church, Buddhism values, Minister | 1 | 2 | 1 | 8 |
| Other, e.g., Chinese Culture, Teacher, Coaches, film-maker, Nietzsche, Books, Ideals | 1 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>13</i> | <i>23</i> | <i>18</i> | <i>28</i> |
| Unclear | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |

Narrative examples of Sender in both the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives of both Westerners and Easterners are included in the following.

“Authoritative figures in my life have been my parents, followed by other family members. Ministers, teachers and sports coaches have also had a pronounced effect on my life.”

35 year-old European-Australian male

“Apart from my family and friends, I really guided myself based on the principles that I hold of what is right and what's wrong etc. I really believe that you should stand up for what you believe in, so I have always done that, if I saw something that I thought was wrong I would usually try and put a stop to it.”

18 year-old European-Australian female

“Yes, my mother. My mother helped me and guided me along the way. She taught me how to be humble and confident. She enforces patience into me.”

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

“My parents have been a big influence, their Christian perspectives have also molded and shaped who I am today.”

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

In tallying up the contents under the broad categories of ‘Self’, ‘Family’, ‘Others’ and ‘Unclear’ as shown in Table 4.11, ‘Self’ seems to be emphasized more by Westerners than Easterners. In contrast, ‘Family’ and ‘Religion’ seems to be emphasized more by Easterners than Westerners. There were 4 counts of ‘Unclear’ for Easterners and 3 for Westerners. Overall, the trends for ‘Self’, ‘Family’ and ‘Others’ were similar between Studies 1 and 2 except ‘Religion’, with Easterners reporting more than Westerners.

Table 4.11

Tally of Senders in the Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|----------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Self | 7 | 1 |
| Family | 16 | 26 |
| Religion | 3 | 9 |
| Others | 10 | 10 |
| Unclear | 3 | 4 |

Receiver. In terms of the actant ‘Receiver’, both Westerners and Easterners overwhelmingly had ‘Self’ as the ‘Receiver’ and then family next, followed by specific family members and ‘Others’, as shown in Table 4.12. Some narrative examples of Westerners and Easterners’ reported spontaneous and prompted self-narratives for the actant Receiver included the following.

“It is entirely myself. I don’t even think I would need a family to find life satisfaction (though I expect this to change) because I am so self-orientated.”

19 year-old European-Australian male

“Friends and family; I like to make them proud and I like to feel proud of me.”

19 year-old European-Australian female

“Personal satisfaction. Right now, my life is all about enjoyment. Currently it’s fairly hedonistic.”

20 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

“My mom, sister and I, as I will be able to provide them a better life, such as sponsoring my sister to university overseas (as I am the only one who has the privilege of being an Australian) and being able to bring my mom to travel around the world.”

21 year-old Malaysian Chinese female.

Table 4.12

Frequencies of Different Receivers in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Content Analysis for Actant Receiver | Westerners | | Easterners | |
|--|---------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| | <i>n</i> = 15 | | <i>n</i> = 15 | |
| | Spontaneous | Prompted | Spontaneous | Prompted |
| Self | 11 | 12 | 12 | 14 |
| Family | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Mother/Mum | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Parents | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Daughter | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Sister | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Friends | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Other(s), e.g. Other, Country, Culture, Everyone | 1 | 6 | 1 | 5 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>29</i> | <i>18</i> | <i>30</i> |
| Unclear | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 |

Again, the contents for Receiver were tallied up into broad categories, such as ‘Self’, ‘Family’, ‘Others’ and ‘Unclear’, as shown in Table 4.13. As in Study 1, there were similar contents of Self, Family, Others and Unclear for the two cultural groups.

Though a consistent trend has emerged in Studies 1 and 2, the sample sizes in both these studies are small, therefore, these results are inconclusive and need to be further explored in Study 3.

Table 4.13

Tally of Receivers in the Western and Eastern Self-Narratives Grouped Under Broad Categories

| Actant | Count | |
|-------------------|------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Receiver Contents | | |
| Self | 23 | 26 |
| Family | 11 | 13 |
| Others | 9 | 8 |
| Unclear | 5 | 3 |

The narrative structures of Westerners and Easterners. The Greimassian framework has been demonstrated to be useful in analyzing the self-narratives. The findings thus far from Studies 1 and 2 show an emerging trend of ‘Self’ populating more of the actants Subject, Object and Sender for Westerners. On the other hand, ‘Other(s)’ including family and significant others for Easterners in the actants Subject, Object and Sender. However, for the actants Helper, Opponent and Receiver, the findings were not as clear because Study 1 results differed from that of Study 2, and further investigation would be required with a larger sample size in Study 3 to consolidate the findings thus far.

The findings from actantial analyses show that ‘Self’ did populate in some

Western self-narratives more often than it did for Eastern self-narratives. These are illustrated in Tables 4.14 and 4.15 of an 18 year-old European-Australian female and 19 year-old European-Australian male respectively, which represent the Western self-narratives.

Table 4.14

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 18 year-old European-Australian Female

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|-------------|----------------|--|---|
| Desire | Subject | “I” | “I was born in Melbourne to two of the best parents I ever could have had... I was always motivated, though, and always had goals.” |
| | Object | Self-pursuits of travel, finances, doing well to get into law school to become a Human Rights Lawyer or International Diplomat. To remain happy and have time to do things I like, e.g. spending time with significant others. | “I want to return to Europe at the end of this year with my boyfriend, so I have been working towards that financially. I want to have enough money to either pay for a deposit on a house or to pay off my HECS fees ... which I'm working towards as well. I want to do well in my undergraduate course to give myself the best possible opportunity of getting into the University of Melbourne Law School. want to qualify as a Human Rights Lawyer or an International Diplomat... I also want to do all this while remaining happy and having the time to do the things that I like doing such as spending time with my boyfriend, family and friends.” |
| Conflict | Helper | Mum | “There was always my Mum giving me advice and listening to me whenever I felt really low about something, so I'd say that she has helped me achieve the goals that I wanted to achieve, either by helping me get the resources I needed to do them or simply by supporting me.” |
| | Opponent | None | “No, not really.” |

| | | | |
|---------------|----------|------------------------|---|
| Communication | Sender | Self, Family & Friends | “Apart from my family and friends, I really guided myself based on the principles that I hold of what is right and what's wrong etc. I really believe that you should stand up for what you believe in, so I have always done that, if I saw something that I thought was wrong I would usually try and put a stop to it.” |
| | Receiver | Self, Parents & Others | “Me achieving my career goals would obviously benefit myself financially and psychologically, but I think that my parents would be so proud of anything that I achieved that it would benefit them to some extent as well. I wish to become a lawyer/international diplomat because I want to do my small part in aiding others who need help and so I hope to consequently benefit those who need it as well...so they would be benefited by me achieving my goals I guess.” |

One of the distinguishing marks of the independent self-construal according to Markus and Kitayama (1991a) is the “inherent separateness of distinct persons” (p. 226). It can be demonstrated in both Tables 4.14 and 4.15 that both Westerners in their goals in the actant ‘Object’ of desire, they pursue and seek self fulfillment and self-expression as distinct persons. For examples, the telling lines (in italics) of the 18 year-old European-Australian female, “...*having the time to do the things that I like doing...*” and the 19 year-old European-Australian male, “*I want to continue being creative. Creativity is my top priority and I would like to write a novel one day.*” In addition, in their actant ‘Sender’, though they take guidance from family and others, ultimately, it still rests on their ‘Self’. For examples, the European-Australian female stated, “... *I really guided myself based on the principles that I hold of what is right and what's wrong.*” The European-Australian male reported, “... *The actual inspiring and motivating, however,*

Table 4.15

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 19 year-old European-Australian Male

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|
| Desire | Subject | "I" | "Myself. I always put myself first. I am aware of and thankful for the help others give but value my own life the most." |
| | Object | Self-pursuits of being creative, writing a novel, moving towards psychoanalysis and work in media (<i>self-expression</i>). | "I have many goals. I want to continue being creative. Creativity is my top priority and I would like to write a novel one day. I also have a vague goal of moving towards psychoanalysis, though I am currently studying arts. I would also like to work in media, though this goal has lessened since high school." |
| Conflict | Helper | Parents & Teachers | "My parents, though they gave me a good upbringing, never really inspired or encouraged me very much. Rather, teachers have had the biggest effect on encouraging me to pursue my goals and I still keep in touch with two teachers from my high school." |
| | Opponent | Girlfriend | "Nobody other than my girlfriend. She has been demanding and difficult. I feel some resentment and as though I am not getting the most of my life." |
| Communication | Sender | Parents, Self & Friend | "I look at my parents as the people who built my infrastructure. They gave me the best possible grounding. The actual inspiring and motivating, however, has been left to me.... I have one particularly close friend who I am able to turn to in times when I want to ask someone for advice with life." |
| | Receiver | Myself | "It is entirely myself. I don't even think I would need a family to find life satisfaction (though I expect this to change) because I am so self-orientated." |

has been left to me". Conversely, there is hardly any mention of 'Self' for the actant

Sender in Eastern self-narratives. These examples and the Greimassian self-narrative structures provide us with an understanding of how self-construal is expressed through the self-narrative and these cultural differences can be found in the actants.

The emphasis on the ‘Self’, the self pursuits and self-expression in these two self-narratives of Westerners exemplify the independent self-construal as captured through the Greimassian framework. This is in contrast to the interdependent self-construal where the emphasis is on interdependence with ‘Others’ such as family or parents, as captured in the self-narratives of the following two Easterners in Tables 4.16 and 4.17, of a 20 year-old Malaysian Chinese female and 22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male respectively.

In the narrative structure of the 20 year-old Malaysian Chinese female in Table 4.16, she reported in both her spontaneous and prompted self-narrative that her friends along with herself are the Subjects, the main characters of her life story. For a number of Easterners, they reported ‘Other Only’ in both Studies 1 and 2 for the actant Subject. It seems the main character in these Eastern self-narratives are devoid of ‘Self’ as a separate entity and for some, they are based solely on ‘Other Only’ so that the Self is not in the foreground at all.

These findings from the actantial structure provide further understanding of selfhood, that in our cultural models of selfhood proposed by researchers (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; Vignoles et al., 2016), self-narratives can be used to understand the important actantial roles that both self and others play in constructing the ‘Self’. This self-narrative structure captures perhaps what Markus and Kitayama (1991a) theorized, that for the interdependent self, “one’s opinion, abilities and characteristics are assigned only secondary roles’ but ‘others participate actively and continuously in the definition of the interdependent self’ (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p. 227). This is seen in Table

4.16, where the Malaysian Chinese female has ‘friends and family’ assigned to many actantial roles in her self-narrative structure.

Table 4.16

Greimas’s Narrative Structure for 20 year-old Malaysian Chinese Female

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|---------------|----------------|----------------------|---|
| Desire | Subject | “Friends and I” | “I’ve built up some true and lasting friendships in my high school years.” |
| | Object | Family | “To give my family a better life in the future.” |
| Conflict | Helper | Friends | “Yes, my friends. We help each other in solving problems in studies and also other aspects.” |
| | Opponent | No | “No.” |
| Communication | Sender | Family | “My family.” |
| | Receiver | Family (parents) & I | “My family and I, for example, my parents; burden of my education has been reduced after I got my scholarship.” |

Not all Easterners displayed the lack of Self as a separate entity in the actant Subject as shown in the following example of a 22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male’s self-narrative in Table 4.17, but it does show that his Mother occupies many of the actants of his self-narrative structure. His narrative provides another example of the interdependent self-construal’s focus on significant others from the family or kin-based in-group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). It is important to point out that in his life, he experienced mild domestic violence, with a father who he described as ‘violent’ and his parents divorced after he finished primary school. He seldom kept in contact with his father after the divorce. He was the only participant who viewed his parents’ divorce in

a positive light when he explained this in one of his significant key events.

In his self-narrative, it could be considered that he has an interdependent self-construal because he has assigned great importance to his mother, that in fact almost all his actantial roles within his self-narrative structure is related to his mother. Firstly, his relationship with his mother has defined his goals, needs and desires of wanting to please her, to be 'wealthy to support mother in a luxurious lifestyle'. Secondly, maintaining a connection with his mother as 'Helper' and 'Sender', has meant that he seeks help and guidance from her, making her the focus of his narrative identity. Lastly, even in the accomplishment of his goals, he views 'mother' as the one who benefits from him achieving his goals. This young man's inseparability from his mother and also the 20 year-old Malaysian Chinese female's attachment to friends and family are indeed examples of the hallmark of what is considered the interdependent self-construal. However, as seen through the different narrative excerpts and tables of content analyses, not all Easterners shared to the same extent this structure of interdependent self-construal, and as scholars have emphasized, both types of self-construals can exist in the same person (E. Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Y. Kashima et al., 1995; Uleman, Rhee, Bardoliwalla, Semin, & Toyama, 2000).

Table 4.17

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 22 year-old Singaporean Chinese Male

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|---------------|----------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Desire | Subject | "I" | "I have a troubled family as my father was not always faithful to my mother. I did not receive much love from my father and he is always absent from my early childhood." |
| | Object | To be wealthy, to support mother | "I would like to be fairly wealthy and be able to support my mother in a luxurious lifestyle." |
| Conflict | Helper | Mother | "Yes, my mother." |
| | Opponent | No | "No." |
| Communication | Sender | Mother | "My mother helped me and guided me along the way. She taught me how to be humble and confident. She enforces patience into me." |
| | Receiver | Mother | "Yes, my mother." |

Key Events. All Westerners and Easterners reported at least two of the five requested key events that have significantly impacted their lives. Similar numbers of key events (Westerners $n = 69$ and Easterners $n = 63$) were reported. Key events captured through the online questionnaire were examined to correspond with the actantial self-narrative structure. The contents of key events reported were analyzed to reveal some emerging themes of both cultural differences and similarities between Westerners and Easterners.

Correspondence between key events and Actantial self-narrative structure. As in Study 1, investigation of the correspondence between key events and the actantial self-narrative structure found that many of the contents reported for key events also

appeared in Greimas's narrative structure in both spontaneous and prompted accounts. For example, the 20 year-old European-Australian female's spontaneous and prompted self-narrative that was analyzed in Figures 4.1, showed correspondence to her series of negative key life events. In her disclosure of her key events, she had her 'grandmother's death' (Key Event one), 'mum's depression' (Key Event two), 'mum's bankruptcy' (Key Event three), 'family leaving' (to go back to Perth while she stayed in Melbourne to complete her qualifications for Key Event four), and 'developing an eating disorder' (Key Event five). Yet despite the negative events in her life, she was determined to complete her qualifications and get a job that would support herself and her family, so that they would all benefit. Most of the negative key events are captured by the Greimassian framework of her spontaneous and prompted self-narratives (see Figure 4.1), especially in the actant Opponent, such as mum's marriage breakdown, difficulties and financial losses. Her story has a redemptive theme because despite all her difficulties and negative key events, she has hope that her attainment of her Object of desire would provide a better outcome for herself and her family (Receivers). That is, good ultimately redeems the bad that precedes it (McAdams, 2006b). She is seeking to narrate her life in such a way to suggest that some form of redemption will ultimately prevail, as expressed by her Object of Desire and Receiver.

Another example of the correspondence between key events and the Greimassian framework that follows a redemptive theme is that of the 19 year-old Singaporean Chinese female. Her Greimassian narrative structure is detailed in Table 4.19, detailing her goal to be a psychologist (Object of Desire) where later, she would be able to benefit 'herself and to provide help for people in need' (Receiver). In her struggle to obtain her goal, her 'family' were first not in favor of her idea (Opponent) to leave home and study abroad, but she was helped by her brother (Helper) who

convinced them that it would be an enriching experience and benefit her future. Her parents (Sender) played a key role in her life since young and ultimately did agree to send her to Australia where she reports struggles of establishing an independent life in Melbourne. Her narrative structure corresponded to some extent with her reported negative key events ($n = 4$) and one positive key event. The first four negative events were 'going overseas alone', 'my grandmother passing away', 'admitted into hospital while I was overseas alone', and 'losing contact with my friends in Singapore'. Her goal of 'going overseas alone' (Object of Desire) to pursue her studies is captured in her first key event and the consequences of being overseas were captured in other key events. However, the fifth key event was reported to be a positive one because she reported, 'I met someone I really like in Melbourne'. Her story and the story of the 20 year-old European-Australian female follow a redemptive theme because at the heart of the narrative structure and despite their negative key events in life, there is redemption, what McAdams (2006b) generally described as "a deliverance from suffering to a better world" (p.7). They wanted to pursue their goals to make a contribution to not only benefit themselves but also 'Others', their family members or people in need (as captured in their actant Receiver), ultimately in the quest for a better world for themselves.

The examples above and in the key events to follow provide evidence that the current online method of eliciting self-narratives was successful in that the contents of key events elicited also featured in the self-narrative structure. As in Study 1, participants' self-narrative contents corresponded with their key events, indicating that key events were embedded into the self-narrative structure, irrespective of cultural groups.

Table 4.18

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 19 year-old Singaporean Chinese Female

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|--|
| Desire | Subject | "I" | "I am 19 years old, and have lived in Singapore for all of my life. I came over to Melbourne in July 2011 to further my studies. It was pretty difficult for me to make a decision to leave my family and friends behind and come here all by myself." |
| | Object | To be a psychologist. Pursue my studies in a foreign country. | "I want to be a psychologist that targets the field on social psychology. But it hasn't been very easy as my family was at first against the idea of me travelling to a foreign country alone to pursue my studies." |
| Conflict | Helper | Brother | "My brother helped to persuade my parents, convincing them that it would be an enriching experience and it would be beneficial to my future." |
| | Opponent | Family | "My family was against the idea at first." |
| Communication | Sender | Parents | "Since young, my parents have taught me to take up the responsibility of my own actions." |
| | Receiver | Self & Others | "Mainly myself, but after I graduate and become a psychologist, I would be able to provide help to other people in need." |

Summary of key events. To understand whether there were cultural differences in the contents of key events and any emerging themes, the key event contents were taken verbatim and then grouped into categories, for example, 'cousin's suicide', 'classmate's suicide', 'great-grandma's death' were all grouped under the category, 'death/loss of family or friend'. The summaries of each of the key events for Westerners and Easterners are detailed in Appendix I, where key events were again shown to correspond with actants (see Appendix I).

Overall, there is a trend for reporting ‘achievement’ themes in key events, as well as more positive than negative key events. Total numbers of positive and negative key events are summarized in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19

Frequencies of Reported Positive and Negative Key Events in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Category of Key Events/ Cultural Group | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 15) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 15) | |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| | <i>Positive</i> | <i>Negative</i> | <i>Positive</i> | <i>Negative</i> |
| Key Event One | 10 | 5 | 10 | 5 |
| Key Event Two | 10 | 5 | 11 | 4 |
| Key Event Three | 11 | 4 | 10 | 4 |
| Key Event Four | 13 | 1 | 9 | 2 |
| Key Event Five | 8 | 2 | 7 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>52</i> | <i>17</i> | <i>47</i> | <i>16</i> |

As shown in Table 4.19, participants seem to recall more positive interpretations of their life events than negative ones. To understand whether there were any cultural differences, a mixed design ANOVA was completed with the valence of key events (Positive vs. Negative) as the within-subject factors and culture (Westerners vs. Easterners) as the between-subject factors. The dependent variable was the reported frequencies of both positive and negative events. There was no interaction effect of culture and valence of key events, $F(1, 28) = .002$, $p = .968$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$. However, the main effect of valence of key events (Positive vs. Negative) was significant, $F(1, 28) = 11.75$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. In general, participants reported more positive key

events ($M = 0.55$) than negative ones ($M = 0.29$).

The key events show a similar theme of agency and communion found in Study 1, with self-agency emerging as significant in what people remember in their autobiographical memory. In all the 5 key events shared by participants, achievement themes were the most frequently recalled, some examples include achieving travel goals, university studies, winning a competition, being able to read, gaining scholarships, getting high marks, etc. Achievement engages self-agency, and so it is of no surprise that these agentic key events were featured most in the actant Object and is implicated in the goals people pursue. As a proportion of all key events reported in this study, Westerners had 35% and Easterners had 46% of self-defining memories with achievement themes, which were the most frequently reported key events. This may be due to what Conway (1990) found, that in all their three experiments conducted, only goal-derived categories instead of taxonomic categories reliably speed memory retrieval. People seem to retrieve faster goal-related key events over other key events and this would be further explored in Study 3.

Religion. The actant in which religion seems to be mentioned in the Greimassian framework is usually the Sender. However, as covered in Chapter 3 and outlined in the findings of Study 1, religion can also permeate the other actants in the Greimassian actantial structure, such as Subject, Object, Helper, and Receiver. This study's small sample of participants reported religions that do reflect the predominant cultural groups, for example, 53.3% of Westerners were Christians and 40% of Easterners were Buddhists. It is important to point out also that there were 26.7% of Easterners who reported being of the Christian faith and one (6.7%) Westerner who reported being a Buddhist. There were also reported Atheists in the Western group

($n = 3$) and Eastern group ($n = 2$). As outlined in Chapter 3, Greimas's Actantial Model can be useful to understand how religion is expressed through the narrative structure and the variations reflected in religious faiths in different cultural groups. In the following examples, the narrative structures of a Westerner who is a Christian practicing her faith (see Table 4.20) is contrasted with an Easterner who is a Buddhist practicing the Buddhist teachings (see Table 4.21).

The 29 year-old European-Australian female has reported quite a number of negative key events in her life, which included her 'cousin's suicide', 'classmate's suicide', 'Great Grandma's death' and 'Brother revealing his homosexuality'. The losses in her life were reported to be negative and difficult. However, she noted one significant key event of her 'four months in Uganda', which was positive. Despite her themes of death and loss in her past, since her reported conversion to Christianity in 2003 and trip to Uganda in 2004, these events have profoundly changed the course of her life and the way that she responds to circumstances in her life (Table 4.20). For example, she disclosed in the key event of finding out about her brother's homosexuality in 2008, that "*Initially it was a great shock to me, and my Mum and Dad took the news really bad ... It was a big challenge for my faith and in how I understand God and his character, especially in 2009. My brother and I are still close, although he lives interstate but it has caused a rupture between my brothers.*" Though her faith was challenged, she chose to continue a close relationship with her brother. Hers is a redemptive story of suffering loss, grief and challenges to her faith but what holds her life together and enables her to continue to love is summarized in her words:

"My life is about loving God and loving people. It is by staying close with God that I learn about real love, and that I have the grace to share this with other people. This is what I want to focus on during my life, but it's a work in progress."

Table 4.20

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 29 year-old European-Australian Female

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---|---|
| Desire | Subject | “I” | “I became a Christian in my third year of University, and this changed my objective in life. Rather than having career and financial goals, I desired to serve the poor and lead a more meaningful life. I was especially concerned about the AIDS crisis in Africa, and in 2004 arranged to live with a Ugandan family and volunteer in a local NGO for 4 months.” |
| | Object | Travel & helping people (especially since becoming a Christian) | “Travel is an important focus. My first degree was in Tourism and Advertising. The opportunity to travel brings with it excitement and enrichment of seeing how other people live and learning from their cultures. Helping people is an important objective of my life, especially since becoming a Christian.” |
| Conflict | Helper | Friend & Self | “I have a South African friend who was discipling me at the time, and although she had no interest in missions was also encouraging that I could do anything I set my mind to.” |
| | Opponent | Mum | “My Mum was not supportive of me going to Uganda right up until I was about to leave. She was obviously worried for me, but eventually came around with prayer and time.” |
| Communication | Sender | Faith in Jesus (gave perspective beyond myself) | “My faith in Jesus has led to quite an upheaval in my life, from wanting material wealth to being unconcerned about money and possessions. Realizing the privileged life that I have had growing up in the western world (although my family was low-middle class) and that anything I could do would make a small difference gave me a perspective beyond myself.” |

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| Receiver | Others (impacted by her work), Self & God (act of service to God) | “I hope that the work that I do supports those implementing development projects overseas. When I visit projects I get the chance to see where the money goes and the impact of efforts to change the stigma of disability is especially powerful. I feel quite fulfilled to be working in a meaningful career which is an achievement of my goal and also an act of service to others as well as to God.” |
|----------|---|--|

The redemptive theme found in self-narratives, especially in individuals who have walked through suffering but continue to embrace life with all its obstacles by turning to religion, is illustrated again in the Greimassian narrative structure of the 18 year-old Buddhist Malaysian Chinese female in Table 4.21. Here the redemptive sequence of a bad event due to loss is later redeemed by the good through turning to religion.

In this Malaysian Chinese female’s life, her father’s passing away on 13th February 2009 due to pancreatic cancer was a significant negative key event that has had a profound impact on her life. In her self-narrative structure, she reported that she felt responsible as the eldest in her family (as the Subject of her story) to lift her mother’s burden after her father’s death. His cancer was viewed as an Opponent in her life story. The only other significant key event she reported which was positive, was *‘living in Australia by myself’*, where she *‘started to think what to do by myself and learn some surviving skills’*. In her own words, *‘it was the biggest challenge for me to find who I am or rather, who I want to be.’* She turned to Buddhism and started reading books on Buddhist teachings and values (Sender). This, she reported had apparently guided her through her difficulties with the grief and loss of her father and her

Table 4.21

Greimas's Narrative Structure for 18 year-old Malaysian Chinese Female

| <i>Axis</i> | <i>Actants</i> | | <i>Narrative Excerpts</i> |
|---------------|----------------|--|--|
| Desire | Subject | “I” | “Being the eldest at home, I always feel that I am responsible in lifting my mother's burden, as my father had passed away three years ago.” |
| | Object | To be independent and take care of my family (mother & sister) | “I have set a goal for myself, which is to be independent and being able to take care of my family one day.” |
| Conflict | Helper | Housemate | “This year, I had met a housemate who was very helpful and mature. She helped me settled down into a new student rooming house, taught me how to cook and do uni stuff, which enabled me to live more independently now.” |
| | Opponent | Cancer (which took father's life) | “The thing is pancreatic cancer, or an imbalanced lifestyle and diet that has prevented us to live happily as a family.” |
| Communication | Sender | Buddhism value | “The Buddhism value which encourages us to live earnestly in life.” |
| | Receiver | Mother, Sister & Self | “My mom, sister and I as I will be able to provide them a better life, such as sponsoring my sister to university overseas (as I am the only one who has the privilege of being an Australian) and being able to bring my mom to travel around the world.” |

challenges in living alone in Australia. The Buddhist teaching has been adopted by many of the Chinese who also follow the Confucian philosophy of living, with its emphasis on the relation-centered selfhood as opposed to the individual-centered Western conception (Ho, 1995). For this Malaysian Chinese female, this relation-centered selfhood is summarized in her words of what her life is about, *‘Love. Family*

love in exact, as it is what that shapes who I am now.' Religion plays a central role as the Sender, where she derives her morality and guiding principles to overcome her loss.

These two lives and their narrative structures from different religions demonstrate how people seem to make meaning out of their suffering and losses by embracing their religion which enables them to develop redemptive themes to move forward in their lives. The Greimassian framework enables us to understand the place of religion as it impacts on the self-narrative and the actantial role it plays in narrative identities of people in different cultures. This actantial framework deepens our understanding of how religion is interwoven into the self-narrative structure and key events of autobiographical memory in each individual life.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study accomplished its overall objective of piloting an online study to examine cross-cultural differences using actantial analysis. The threefold objective was achieved in that firstly, the online questionnaire had been created to successfully elicit self-narratives and key events using a completely different format and medium to Study 1 (live interview). A refined set of questions, based on data obtained from Study 1, made it possible to obtain rich narrative data specifically targeted to the Actantial Model, allowing a degree of comparative analysis utilizing a mixed-method approach. Secondly, in piloting the online tool and validating it, it was found that generally the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives both corresponded such that similar themes and actants were found to provide narrative coherence between the two accounts. It was also demonstrated that the contents of key events elicited via the online tool emerged as actants in the self-narrative structure, further validating the use of the current method in

culture and self research. Thirdly, in analyzing each of the actants, with spontaneous and prompted accounts, there were some cultural differences found consistent with Study 1, but also some variations. These findings will be discussed and they indicate that the pathway to answering the main research questions of *'What'* and *'How'* of cultural differences in self-narratives, self-narration and autobiographical memory is promising.

As in Study 1, spontaneous and prompted narratives were found to cohere in that similar contents, such as actants in spontaneous accounts, were shared with prompted ones. The prompted part imposes the Greimassian structure, whereas the spontaneous part does not. The fact that both capture similar actants provides some support for the assertion that the Greimassian framework is not an imposed *etic*. This was also found in Study 1. However, there were slight variations in how much people narrated about similar actants in the spontaneous and prompted accounts. Generally, individuals can express less actants spontaneously though their word count is more for spontaneous account. However, when prompted they share more actants because the prompted accounts have targeted questions eliciting the actants.

Spontaneous and prompted accounts may also provide a way of examining self-narrating style. For example, Westerners expressed more Helpers when prompted compared to Easterners. This elaborative narrating style of giving more when asked was found only for Westerners when they were prompted for Helpers. Using spontaneous and prompted accounts may enable researchers to understand better how self-narrating style may operate due to the types of methods used and this poses the question of whether using only forced answer surveys capture fully all the different dimensions when studying culture and self.

In analyzing the contents of each of the actants, a similar trend to Study 1 was

found, that is, 'Self' featured more in the actants Subject and Object in Western self-narratives than in Eastern ones. However, 'Other Only' featured more in the actants Subject and Object in Eastern self-narratives than in Western ones. Also, wherever there is 'Self', even in 'Self and Other', it seemed to feature more in Western self-narratives than in Eastern ones. For example, in the actant Object, there were more 'self-oriented' goals for Westerners than Easterners. That 'Self' dominated more in Western self-narratives is clear, while Easterners had more family-oriented Objects compared to Westerners. The theme of filial piety again surfaced in this study as it has in Study 1. Reports of 'Family-related' goals for Easterners ($n = 10$) doubled that of Westerners ($n = 5$). Also, in the actant Sender, there was a consistent trend for 'Self' to feature more in Western self-narratives but 'Family' to feature more in Eastern self-narratives. The findings for both actants Opponent and Receiver were inconsistent between Studies 1 and 2. In Study 1, Westerners reported more Opponents than Easterners but in Study 2, both groups reported similar numbers of Opponents. For both Westerners and Easterners, they reported minimally more Family than Self as Receiver in Study 1, but in Study 2, both groups reported much more Self than Family as Receivers. These inconsistencies require further investigation in Study 3 with a larger sample size. However, overall the preliminary findings of 'Self' featuring more in Western self-narratives than Eastern ones is consistent with previous research (Wang, 2001a, 2004, 2006, 2013; Wang & Conway, 2004; Wang & Ross, 2005).

Separate analysis of each actant has also provided a nuanced understanding about the level of abstraction in self-descriptions as expressed in self-narratives, which was also found in Study 1. Some actants were more concrete than abstract, such as Subject and Receiver. In the actant Object, there were more abstract elements than concrete ones, for examples, pursuit of happiness and travelling. This will need to be

further explored in Study 3.

As in Study 1, the current study found that the key events reported by participants were in fact embedded into the self-narrative because these key event contents featured as actants in the self-narrative structure. Similar to Study 1 findings, the themes of agency and communion were again found in this study to be a major content dimension in key events. Many of the key events reported by both cultural groups had achievement themes which engaged self-agency. This consistent finding in Studies 1 and 2 support Conway's (1990) results, that goal-derived categories which engage self-agency reliably speed memory retrieval. It suggests that individuals seem to retrieve more quickly the goal-related key events compared with other key events as this may be due to autobiographical memory being motivated, that is, personal goals operate as control processes in the self-memory system (Conway, 2005). These key event findings will need to be further explored in Study 3.

Significant events that have occurred in people's lives influence their narrative identities and may lead them to turn to religion. For example, individuals who reported a spiritual or religious event such as a spiritual encounter also had in their self-narrative structure, 'God' as Sender and spiritual goals such as 'learn and teach the Bible' as Object of Desire. Through the key events of people's lives, the meaning and values people of various faiths derive from their religions, which are evidenced in the self-narratives, indicate the role that religion might play through the centuries in sustaining redemptive themes of hope and generativity. As shown in some of the self-narratives in these two studies thus far, faith and religion seem to play a role with redemptive themes in the lives of the individuals from different cultures, which raises the issue of religion as a variable accounting for cross-cultural differences (Vignoles et al., 2016). How this study and the previous one highlight religion's influence in people's lives is that it is

embedded, like key events, into the different actantial roles of the self-narrative structure, particularly the actant Sender. It seems ingrained in narrative identities. This is a new insight that has not been empirically demonstrated in psychological research until now. Religion as a cultural variable, and how it is ingrained in the narrative structure to impact lives, indeed warrants further research as highlighted by other scholars (Cohen et al., 2016; Kashima, 2016; Saroglou, 2016).

This study differed from Study 1 in that there were more ‘Unclear’ reports throughout the different actants. This could be explained by the fact that it adopted an online questionnaire where participants have the privacy to not disclose responses compared to an interview where they are expected by the interviewer to answer the questions. They may also have a choice to not take the task very seriously and hence, spend less time and effort to work on their responses. The actant that recorded the most ‘Unclear’ or lack of response was Opponent, with the same number reported by Westerners and Easterners. This raises the possibility that participants in this sample may either have experienced a more sheltered life without much opposition to attaining their goals, or due to social desirability bias, i.e., they prefer not to disclose anything negative, such as conflicts, so that they may be seen in a positive light. Nonetheless, social desirability bias may have different meanings in different cultures (Lalwani et al., 2006). For example, some of the Westerners might not have reported Opponents because they wanted their self-narrative to be seen as positive (self-deceptive enhancement: SDE) and some of the Easterners may have wanted their self-narrative to appear more normatively appropriate (impression management: IM). This was indeed found in Study 1 where one participant adopted the master narrative of his culture. The silence around Opponents could also mean different things (Fivush, 2004, 2010; Gudykunst et al., 1996), and Lebra (1987) suggested that “silence can be used to

indicate truthfulness, disapproval, embarrassment, and disagreement” (Lebra, 1987, p. 343). Li (2012) also indicated that silence for the Chinese and East Asians is regarded as a virtue, and valued for moral development. As seen also in Study 1, a lack of reporting Opponent may not be due to an absence of conflicts, but perhaps those conflicts, which have not been resolved, are yet to make it into the self-narrative. It is possible that there could be other explanations for the ‘Unclear’ results.

It is important to understand the limitations in the current study and that online questionnaires raise some methodological issues which need to be addressed. Whilst in Study 1, any ambiguity in participants’ responses could be clarified with the participant on the spot, with online questionnaires, such an occasion was not available. For example, when a participant reported, “No Opponents” in an interview, the interviewer could repeat the response to the interviewee to explore further. But in the online questionnaire, this was not possible and responses were sometimes very brief. Despite the limitation of not being able to clarify or capture as much data in the online questionnaire as compared to the interview approach, the participant has more freedom with privacy to express him or herself online and their responses are not influenced by the presence of the interviewer as interviews are co-constructions between interviewee and interviewer.

Another limitation to this current study, similar to Study 1, was that the Asian participants had already lived in Australia for a brief period. Priming research has shown that independent and interdependent self-construal could be primed by exposure to salient features in a given environment and context (e.g., Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999). Hence, it is possible that this sample of Asian participants might have already been primed to be more independent in their self-construal due to their exposure to the individualistic values of the Australian culture. Volet and Renshaw (1995) found that

international Asian students (the majority from Singapore) had initially divergent cultural and educational concepts of goals compared to local Australian students, but after one semester, Asian students had become more like the local Australian students. This may have accounted for the lack of clear cultural differences found in the actants Helper, Opponent and Receiver. This possibility is accentuated by the following 18 year-old Malaysian Chinese female's transparent disclosure.

"Last year was my first year to experience the "Australian-ness", and found it rather daunting, as I often felt confused of who am I supposed to be. Am I more "Malaysian", or should I try to be an "Aussie"? Before I arrived in Australia, these sorts of questions never occurred to me before as all of us (peer group) has similar background, ability to speak multiple language and family who doesn't speak English well.... Living in Australia has changed my beliefs, values and personalities drastically."

This limitation is rectified in the next study where Easterners are sampled from their own country so that the individualistic and collectivistic cultures studied are addressed more adequately.

At face value, Greimas's Actantial Model appears to take aspects of what is culturally important to individuals. The current research has provided some preliminary findings through piloting the online questionnaire. Although the study found some weaknesses of the method, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this method can be further improved to investigate cultural differences in self-narratives. Using actantial analyses of the different self-narratives derived from the online questionnaire, some trends were revealed in the narrative structures of Westerners and Easterners, which were shown to be linked with key events in autobiographical memory. These trends reveal that indeed there are some contents that are different in self-narratives between Westerners and Easterners, particularly with self-other orientation emphasis, and which lead to answering the research question of 'What' are the cultural differences in self-narrative contents. Emerging trends also reveal that Westerners and Easterners' self-

narrating style may differ, addressing the question of '*How*' self-narration may differ cross-culturally. The other '*How*' question in regards to autobiographical memory has been answered by evidence showing that key events in people's lives are directly associated with their self-narratives in that the contents of these key events are in fact embedded in the self-narrative structure. Whether or not these trends are replicated with a larger sample in the next study is a question with important implications for the psychological study of culture and self.

Chapter 5. Study 3: The Cultural Differences in Self-narratives and Self-narrating Styles of Westerners and Easterners

Introduction

I started with the main research questions of: “*What content do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultures? How do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultural contexts? How does self-narration relate to autobiographical memories in constructing a self-narrative in Western and Eastern cultures?*” Study 3 is the culmination of the efforts of Studies 1 and 2 to fully address these queries. In Study 1, the foundations were laid with a qualitative approach to study cross-cultural differences using interviews based on an adapted version of McAdam’s (1993, 1996, 2008) Life Story account, and by developing a systematic coding system. Preliminary results revealed some qualitative differences of self-narratives according to the actantial configurations between Westerners and Easterners. Similar trends in findings were also obtained in Study 2, which expanded on the groundwork of Study 1 but used an online questionnaire with a mixed methods approach. As Study 2 was a pilot study for refining the online method for this current study, it served its purposes: both the online survey and coding system were revised, validated and established, demonstrating the viability of Greimas’s Actantial Model in analyzing self-narratives.

To answer the research questions raised, the current study has three main objectives. Firstly, building on the outcomes from Study 2, Study 3 extends the qualitative and quantitative analyses using the actantial framework in exploring cross-cultural differences with a larger sample size. In contrast to Studies 1 and 2, the Singaporean Chinese were recruited from Singapore and hence, were less exposed to the Australian culture, which may have impacted the participants of Studies 1 and 2.

Secondly, I plan to demonstrate the utility of the Greimassian framework as a systematic approach in uncovering not only the cultural differences in self-narratives and self-narration style but also the relationships with autobiographical memories as observed through key events, and religion.

Thirdly, I aim to shed further light on the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in the context of current literature. Past research suggested that Westerners tend to be more self-focused when describing themselves and also, provide lengthy and elaborate self-focused autobiographical accounts compared to Easterners (Wang, 2001b, 2013; Wang & Ross, 2005). Whilst there were no cultural differences found for length of self-narratives in Studies 1 and 2 (see Appendices E and H), there were emerging trends which showed that, indeed, Western self-narratives featured more of ‘Self’ compared to Eastern ones, especially in the actants Subject and Object. This is explored to a greater extent in Study 3, where I anticipate consistent trends to Studies 1 and 2, which addresses the questions, are there differences found in the self-narrative structure for Westerners and Easterners? If so, what are the contents that display the differences? Answering these questions are the focus of this study, which would answer the first research question of the ‘*What*’ in the contents of self-narratives that people narrate about themselves in different cultures.

With regards to the second question of the ‘*How*’ of self-narration cross-culturally, Studies 1 and 2 found that spontaneous and prompted accounts may provide a window into understanding differences in self-narrating style. For example, Westerners used an elaborative self-narrating style of giving more information about the actant Helper when prompted, compared to Easterners who seem to share similar Helpers spontaneously and when prompted, showing a repetitive style of narrative discourse. I expect similar findings in this current study but also raise the question of

what other self-narrating styles might be operating for Westerners and Easterners? This question would be important to explore to understand the dynamics of how self-narratives and autobiographical memory are structured cross-culturally because self-narrating may be the ongoing process, the act, linking self-narratives and autobiographical memory bi-directionally. Also, previous spontaneous self-description studies found that Easterners were more specific than abstract in their responses (Kashima et al., 2006; Rhee et al., 1995). The current study extends previous findings by not only observing spontaneous but also prompted accounts to see whether there are differences in the level of abstraction between these two accounts and hence, providing a more nuanced way of understanding how individuals use *abstract vs. concrete* descriptions in each actants of the self-narrative structure. This type of analysis investigating the use of descriptive language in spontaneous and prompted self-narrative accounts may tap into the styles of self-narration cross-culturally that has not been explored to date.

Consistent findings of the correspondence between key events and self-narrative structure in Studies 1 and 2 have begun to answer the question of ‘*How*’ key events, which are autobiographical memories of each individual’s life, relate to their self-narrative? It was found that the contents of key events also featured in the actants that form the self-narrative structure so that key events seem to be embedded within the self-narrative to form identity. After content and thematic analyses were completed, the themes of agency and communion (McAdams et al., 2006) were consistently observed in both Western and Eastern key events. Self-agency particularly seems to play a role in many key events shared in self-narratives from both cultures. I would anticipate a consistent trend in the current study to confirm and generalize these findings with a larger sample to fully address ‘*How*’ self-narration relates to autobiographical memory

in its construction.

Another emergent trend was religion featuring in many self-narratives to occupy mainly the actantial role of Sender, although it did emerge as other actants except Opponent. Thus, consistent findings in Studies 1 and 2 pose the question to be investigated in this current study, i.e., what role(s) does religion play in the different self-narratives of Westerners and Easterners? The above questions set forth about the contents and styles of self narration and its relation to autobiographical memory and religion are the focus of this chapter. Finding the answers will enrich our knowledge and understanding of culture and self, and how they interplay to co-construct the worlds we live.

Method

Participants. One hundred and twenty students from the University of Melbourne (N=60: 18 Males, 42 Females) and Nanyang Technological University (N=60: 19 Males, 41 Females) participated in the current study. The students from Melbourne were all European-Australians with an average age of 19.5 years ($SD = 2.58$) who have lived in Australia most of their lives and grown up with parents who are also European-Australians. They were recruited voluntarily from the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences' Research Experience Program (REP), which was part of their course requirement. The sixty participants from Singapore with an average age of 22.8 years ($SD = 1.50$) had grown up in Singapore with Chinese ethnic parents. They were recruited via the Nanyang Technological University's SONA system (Experiment Management System for online research study participation). In Singapore, the age in which participants could provide consent in participating in

research studies has been set by their University's ethics board as 21 years of age. This explains the slightly older Singaporean Chinese participants in this study. Further details of the participants in each of the cultural groups are reported in Table 5.1. None of the participants have been involved in Study 1 or Study 2.

Table 5.1

Demographic Information of Research Participants

| Demographics | Westerner | Easterner |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Background | European-Australian N= 60 | Singaporean Chinese N=60 |
| Age | 18 to 30 years ($M = 19.50, SD = 2.58$) | 21 to 28 years ($M = 22.58, SD = 1.50$) |
| Gender | 18 Males, 42 Females | 19 Males, 41 Females |
| Marital Status | 57 Single, 1 Married, 2 De Facto | 59 Single 1 Married |
| Education Completed | 51 Secondary, 4 Undergraduate, 1 Postgraduate, 3 Tafe/Diploma 1 Other | 6 Secondary, 20 Undergraduate, 1 Postgraduate, 11 Tafe/Diploma 22 Other |
| Religion | 28 Christian, 1 Judaism, 19 Atheist, 11 Other | 14 Christian, 21 Buddhist, 6 Atheist, 19 other |
| Practicing Religion | (40% Yes, 58.3% No) | (56.7% Yes, 43.3% No) |

Procedure and materials. Participants were each assigned a computer and asked to complete an hour long online survey delivered through the web-based Qualtrics platform. The current project had ethics clearance from both the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee and Nanyang Technological University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix K). All instructions for participants and the online survey used English. Initially, each participant was asked to

read a plain language statement (see Appendix J) before they proceeded. By clicking on the 'Continue' button, the participants consented to participating in the research study and completed the different sections of the Qualtrics Online Questionnaire. After completion, they were asked to read the Debriefing Information online (see Appendix J) and offered a chance for question and answer time or to contact the researcher, before the session closed. Each of the Singaporean Chinese students were reimbursed SGD\$10 for their participation. The European-Australian students were provided with a signed form for them to obtain credits towards their REP requirements.

Online survey. As in Study 2, the online survey comprised two sections, A and B (see Appendix J). Section A had four parts: 1) Spontaneous self-narrative; 2) Prompted self-narrative; 3) Key Events; and 4) Affect scale. In the spontaneous self-narrative segment, participants were asked to share about their story by the following sentences: *“This study is concerned about people’s life story. Someone like you would have had some life experiences that have made you what you are today. You would have had some ups and downs, triumphs and disasters, and sweet memories and bitter episodes that you’d rather forget; your story would be populated by your family, friends, enemies, and others who have given you guidance and helped you along. We are interested in finding out what your life has been like if you are to tell it as a story. Can you please summarize your life story in several paragraphs (4 to 5 paragraphs)?”*

In the second, prompted self-narrative segment, participants were asked to reflect on their life story and to answer the following questions which were informed by Greimas’s Actantial Model: a) *Are there any goals, objectives or pursuits that have been pervasive in your life? If so, what are they?* This question was to elicit the information for the actant ‘Object’; b) *Is there a main character (person or thing) in*

your life story, if so, who or what is it? The answer would provide information for the actant ‘Subject’; c) *What is the biggest challenge you (or the main character) have had to face in the pursuit in your (or the main character's) life? How did the challenge develop? What did you (or the main character) do to meet the challenge?* This question was to prompt the participants to think of the ‘Axis of Conflict’; d) *Was there anyone or anything that opposed you (or the main character) in achieving your goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?* This question attempted to elicit the information for the actant ‘Opponent’; e) *Was there anyone or anything that helped you (or the main character) achieve the goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?* These questions aimed to elicit information for the actant ‘Helper’. Questions f) *Are there any character(s) with the most positive influence in the story? If so, who?* and g) *Are there any character(s) with the most negative influence in the story? If so, who?* These questions prompted the participants to reflect on the ‘Axis of Communication’. Afterwards, they were asked question h) *Was there anyone or anything that guided you (or the main character) in your life story? For example, an authority figure or a moral value that provided you (or the main character) with guidance about what should be done? If so, who or what?* This was to elicit information about the actant ‘Sender’. To obtain further insights for the actant ‘Sender’, they were asked the question: i) *What would you say are your fundamental values, religious and political beliefs? How did these values and beliefs develop over time?* The participants’ values and religious beliefs were found to be an important variable in Studies 1 and 2. Finally, to elicit the information for the actant ‘Receiver’, participants were asked question j) *Who or what are the beneficiaries of you achieving your (or the main character's) goal(s), if any? Is it only yourself, only others, or yourself AND others? If not only yourself, but some other people or things who are also receiving benefits, who*

are they or what are they? The above questions comprised the prompted self-narrative section. After this section, to check for narrative coherence, participants were asked, 3) *What is your life all about? How would you describe it?*

In the Key Events segment, participants were asked to think through important events in their lives with the following question: 4) *What significant key events have happened in your life? That is, what events have occurred that have made a real impact in your life. Please list up to five that come to mind.* After writing up to five, they were to consider for each key event whether the event was ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ by clicking on the appropriate button. In addition, for each key event, they were asked to ‘describe what happened in some detail’. In the last part of the Section A, they were asked to complete the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) by rating how much they felt on each different emotion item, from ‘Very slightly or not at all’ to ‘Extremely’.

Section B was very similar to Study 2, which sought information about participant’s demographic information. They had to answer questions about gender (by clicking on ‘Male’ or ‘Female’ button), age, background (by clicking on the button which applied: ‘European-Australian’, ‘Singaporean Chinese’, ‘Malaysian Chinese’, or ‘Other’), parent’s cultural and educational background as well as occupation. Questions were also asked about participants’ employment position, highest level of education completed, course of University study, marital status, how well they spoke English, their first language, religious background (by clicking on ‘Christian’, ‘Buddhist’, ‘Judaism’, ‘Islam’, ‘Atheist’ or ‘Other’), and whether they were currently practicing their religion (by clicking the ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ button).

Coding the narratives. Coding procedure was similar to Study 2, in that the

narrative texts written down by participants were independently coded by the main researcher and the research assistant who also completed the coding for Studies 1 and 2. The second coder again was blind to the aims and hypotheses of the study but not to the culture of the participants as the self-narrative data made reference to participants' culture, family, gender, marital status and employment position. In this current study, 30% of the 120 online narrative accounts were independently analyzed and coded. The 36 self-narratives were selected randomly from the Western and Eastern self-narratives, with representation from both genders. Using Cohen's Kappa measure of agreement, the two coders had an acceptable level of agreement for identifying the actants of Greimas' narrative structure, $\kappa = .75, p < .001$. Inter-rater reliability completed for coding actants as 'abstract' or 'concrete' also had a high level of agreement, $\kappa = .83, p < .001$. For the content analyses, each of the actants were coded separately, as the themes and categories varied across actants. Inter-coder agreement for the actant 'Subject' was high, $\kappa = .96, p < .001$, as also for the actants 'Object', $\kappa = .87, p < .001$, 'Helper', $\kappa = .95, p < .001$, 'Opponent', $\kappa = .81, p < .001$, 'Sender', $\kappa = .88, p < .001$, and 'Receiver', $\kappa = .92, p < .001$. Disagreements between coders were resolved through discussion.

As in Study 2, the key events were reported by participants as either negative or positive. Key events were taken as verbatim and matched in content to actants, in addition to being coded for broad thematic categories. Inter-coder agreement for the actants in key events was $\kappa = .93, p < .001$ and for broad thematic categories of key events was $\kappa = .97, p < .001$.

Measures. *The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)*

Participants' affect state was assessed using the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). The PANAS scale consists of two 10-item mood scales with affective adjective words for positive affect (PA; for examples, "interested", "strong", "inspired", etc.) and negative affect (NA; for examples, "guilty", "upset", "ashamed", etc.). Respondents in the current study were asked to rate the 'extent that they feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment OR indicate the extent they felt this way over the past week' on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "very slightly" to 5 = "extremely"). Excellent psychometric properties have been found in college samples (Watson et al., 1988), with Chinese participants (Huang, Yang, & Li, 2003) and with non-clinical samples (Crawford & Henry, 2004). In the current study, Cronbach alpha indices was high: PANAS-PA, $\alpha = .91$; and PANAS-NA, $\alpha = .90$ for European-Australians; and PANAS-PA, $\alpha = .85$; and PANAS-NA, $\alpha = .90$ for the Singaporean Chinese.

Results and Discussion

Spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. In sharing spontaneous self-narratives, males and females in both Western and Eastern cultures as represented by European-Australians and Singapore-Chinese respectively were explored. Western males ($M = 456.38$, $SD = 216.35$) and females ($M = 543.85$, $SD = 278.44$) tend to use more words in their self-narratives compared to Eastern males ($M = 282.05$, $SD = 148.65$) and females ($M = 354.29$, $SD = 226.85$) respectively. A two-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and culture on how much is shared in spontaneous self-narratives as measured by word count. The interaction effect between gender and cultural group (Westerners vs.

Easterners) was not significant, $F(1, 116) = .03, p = .87$. There was also no significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 116) = 2.94, p = .09$. However, there was a significant main effect for culture, $F(1, 116) = 15.27, p = .00$. Overall, Westerners used more words than Easterners when sharing their spontaneous self-narratives.

The same analysis with prompted self-narratives revealed similar results to spontaneous self-narratives. Western males ($M = 169.72, SD = 104.87$) and females ($M = 204.62, SD = 126.82$) tended to use more words in their prompted self-narratives compared to Eastern males ($M = 114.79, SD = 77.77$) and females ($M = 120.24, SD = 99.82$) respectively. However, the interaction effect between gender and cultural group (Westerners vs. Easterners) was not significant, $F(1, 116) = .46, p = .49$. There was also no significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 116) = .89, p = .35$. As with spontaneous self-narratives, there was a significant main effect for culture, $F(1, 116) = 10.63, p = .00$ with more words used for European-Australian prompted self-narratives. Overall, European-Australians used more words than Singaporean Chinese when sharing their spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. These findings are consistent with previous cross-cultural research (Bliss & McCabe, 2008; Han et al., 1998; Minami & McCabe, 1995; Wang, 2001a; Wang et al., 2000), where Westerners reported more elaboration about personally experienced events than Easterners. Hence, the cross-cultural differences in sharing a self-narrative may already be established in early childhood where Westerners may use comparatively long and complex units of expression than Easterners, suggesting a detailed, descriptive style of talking about the past with Western mothers who use high elaborative styles of communication (Leichtman et al., 2003). This finding contributes to the literature by indicating that differences in cultural self-narratives and self-narrating style may be learnt early in

child development, as the child is already embedded in their social-cultural contexts and absorbs the norms and rules of self-narration of how a life should be presented.

Analyses based on the Actantial Model. As in Study 2, the spontaneous and prompted self-narratives were subjected to actantial analysis, as well as content and thematic analyses to investigate any cross-cultural differences. The findings are presented in terms of the different axes and actants in the following.

Axis of desire. Consistent findings were found in the previous two studies that this axis of Subject-Object emphasized the self-other orientation the most between the cultural groups. The current results of Subject and Object reported in the following indeed confirm the consistent trend and are discussed.

Subject. In the spontaneous self-narratives of Westerners and Easterners, all participants used “I”; the self was the Subject in every self-narrative, as demonstrated in the following narrative examples. For this reason, as in Studies 1 and 2, no statistical analysis was undertaken for the Subject in spontaneous self-narratives. However, in the prompted self-narratives, participants were asked, “*Is there a main character (person or thing) in your life story, if so, who or what is it?*”. These answers were different to spontaneous accounts. Some of the participants reported that the main character wasn’t them, but it was their ‘Mum’ or a combination of ‘self and family’. This is also the reason why spontaneous and prompted versions were analyzed separately for each actant - to investigate any differences which may provide us with a better understanding of self-narrating style.

For prompted self-narratives, a mixed design ANOVA was undertaken with the level of abstraction (Abstract vs. Concrete) as the within-subject factors and culture

(Westerners vs. Easterners) as the between-subject factors. The dependent variable was the mean of reported frequency of Subject. The main effect of abstraction (Abstract vs. Concrete) was significant, $F(1, 118) = 113.72, p < .001$. In general, participants reported more concrete Subjects ($M = 1.01$) than abstract ones ($M = 0.16$). However, this was qualified by culture as there was an interaction effect between abstraction and cultural group (Westerners vs. Easterners) that was significant, $F(1, 118) = 4.37, p = .039$, as illustrated in Figure 5.1. Both Westerners and Easterners reported significantly more concrete Subjects (European-Australians $M = 1.18$, Singaporean Chinese $M = 0.83$) than abstract Subjects (European-Australians $M = 0.17$, Singaporean Chinese $M = 0.15$), $t(59) = -8.64, p < 001$ and $t(59) = -6.35, p < .001$ respectively. Nevertheless, Westerners significantly reported more concrete ‘Subjects’ ($M = 1.18$) than the Easterners ($M = 0.83$), $t(118) = 2.97, p = .004$. Further analyses investigating whether gender interacted with culture showed that the effects of gender was not significant and therefore, did not impact on the cultural differences found.

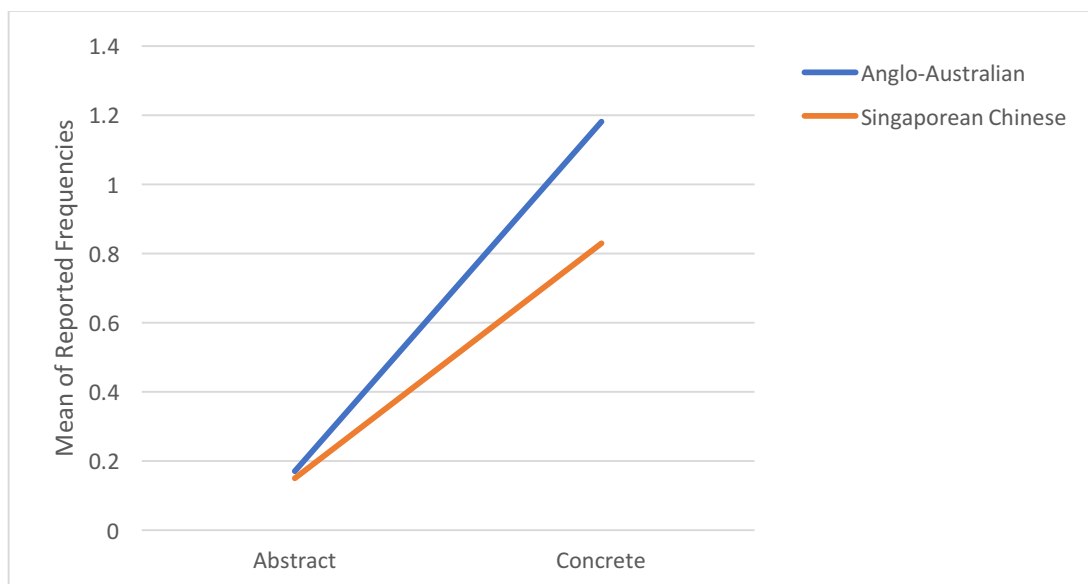


Figure 5.1. The interaction effect of abstraction and culture.

There was also a statistically significant main effect for culture, $F(1, 118) = 11.71$, $p = .001$. Overall, Westerners ($M = 0.68$) reported more Subjects than Easterners ($M = 0.49$). These findings provide further evidence that Western self-narratives are more elaborative than Eastern ones in that they provide more detail, as uncovered in the actant Subject.

Narrative examples of Subject (in bolded italics) are shown in the following for both cultural groups, highlighting how spontaneous accounts can change after being prompted but some are the same. These examples were selected because they exemplify the majority of participant reports.

Spontaneous: *“So **I** was born in the city, too little to remember but I do remember the time spent in my new home town of Cobram, a town located on the Murray river in Northern Victoria”.*

Prompted: *“Well it’s difficult to say just one person, I think it’s more the influence my entire **family** and extended **family** has had on **me** whilst growing up.”*

21 year-old European-Australian female

Spontaneous: *“**I** was born on the 9th of March 1993 in Essendon Hospital I’m pretty sure. For **all of my life** and still now **I** have lived in the country”*

Prompted: *“**Me. I** would probably be the main character in my story.”*

19 year-old European-Australian male

Spontaneous: *“**I** am from a Chinese speaking family. **I** worked very hard for my academic studies”.*

Prompted: *“**My mum.** She is the strongest person I ever seen. Since my father had passed away when I was young. She has been supporting us (with 2 of my siblings) with her bare hands.”*

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

Spontaneous: *“**I** grew up in a middle-low income family. **I am** the youngest and **I** have two elder sisters.”*

Prompted: *“Yes, **my mother.** She has always been around for me and I could not have been who I am without her care for me.”*

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

To see what kinds of ‘Subjects’ were reported in the prompted self-narrative, a content Analysis was completed and the results are displayed in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Frequencies of Different Subjects in Prompted Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Subject Contents | Frequencies | |
|------------------|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Me/I/Self | 40 | 19 |
| Truth | 1 | 0 |
| Brother | 2 | 1 |
| Sister | 6 | 2 |
| Father | 2 | 1 |
| Mum/Mother | 9 | 13 |
| Parents | 4 | 4 |
| Husband | 1 | 0 |
| Family | 7 | 8 |
| Grandma | 2 | 0 |
| Grandparents | 0 | 1 |
| God | 1 | 2 |
| Teacher | 1 | 1 |
| Boyfriend | 1 | 2 |
| Music | 1 | 0 |
| Fiancé | 0 | 1 |
| Friend(s) | 1 | 2 |
| Cousin(s) | 1 | 0 |
| None/Not clear | 1 | 9 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>81</i> | <i>66</i> |

After the content analysis, to better understand self-narratives in relation to the theory of self-construal, a variety of Subjects were reported. These were further grouped into broad thematic categories of whether these Subjects fulfilled the following:

- Self - any reference to self only “I”, “Myself”, “Me”
- Significant others - identified as the significant others in a person’s life, for examples, husband, partner, boyfriend, fiancé, friends, teacher, mentor, coach, etc.
- Family - any reference to the immediate family such as parents and children, siblings or relatives in the family such as grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, etc.
- Religion - any reference of a religious nature, for examples, God, faith, church, faith community, etc.
- Other - any reference to anything other than the categories outlined above, such as ideals, truth, music, etc.
- Unclear - the specified subject of desire was not clear and/or none were reported.

The frequency and percentage for each cultural group of the thematic categories of Subject is highlighted in Table 5.3, along with the completed Chi-Square tests of independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) to investigate the cross-cultural differences within each of the ‘Subject’ categories. In comparing the frequency of prompted reports of Self as ‘Subject’ in European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese, there was a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 13.34, p = .000$. European-Australians were more likely to have ‘Self’ as the Subject (66.7%) compared to the Singaporean Chinese (31.7%). The only other significant difference was found in the ‘Unclear’ category of ‘Subject’ in European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 6.41, p = .011, \text{phi} = -.260$. Singaporean Chinese were more likely to report unclear or no subjects (16.7%) compared to European-Australians (1.7%). Refer to Table 5.3

Table 5.3

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners in Broad Thematic Categories for Prompted Actant Subject

| Broad Thematic Categories for Subject | Westerners (n=60) | | Easterners (n=60) | | χ^2 –statistics | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|----------------------|-------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| Self | 40 | 66.7 | 19 | 31.7 | 13.34 | <.001 |
| Significant Others | 3 | 5.0 | 6 | 10.0 | .48 | .49 |
| Family | 28 | 49.1 | 29 | 50.9 | .00 ^a | 1.00 |
| Religion | 1 | 1.7 | 2 | 3.3 | .00 ^a | 1.00 |
| Other | 3 | 5.0 | 0 | 0 | 1.38 ^a | .24 |
| Unclear | 1 | 1.7 | 10 | 16.7 | 6.41 | .01 |

Note. ^a Violated assumptions of chi-square concerning the ‘minimum expected cell frequency’.

As in Studies 1 and 2, since participants would sometimes report more than one subject or a combination, for example, ‘Self, family and/or friend’, it was important to separate each of the categories to ‘Self Only’, ‘Self & Other’, ‘Other Only’ and

‘Unclear’ so that distinct categories without any overlaps were differentiated to understand Subject as represented in each of the self-narratives. The results are found in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners with Differentiated Actant Subject

| Broad Thematic Categories for Subject | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 60) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 60) | | χ^2 –statistics | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|------|----------------------|----------|
| | <i>Count</i> | % | <i>Count</i> | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | <i>p</i> |
| Self Only | 27 | 45.0 | 15 | 25.0 | 4.43 | .04 |
| Self & Other | 13 | 21.7 | 4 | 6.7 | 4.39 | .04 |
| Others Only | 19 | 31.7 | 31 | 51.7 | 4.15 | .04 |
| Unclear | 1 | 1.7 | 10 | 16.7 | 6.41 | .01 |

The results in Table 5.4, and illustrated in Figure 5.2, provide a clearer picture of the actant Subject. There were clear differentiation between ‘Self’ and ‘Others’, and no longer any overlaps as seen in Table 5.3. For example, ‘Subject’ was now clearly delineated in this recoding as ‘Self Only’ or ‘Self & Other’ for participants who reported ‘Self as the only’ Subject and those who reported both ‘Self and Mother’ respectively. In the reporting of ‘Self Only’ as Subject for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese, there was a significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 4.4, p = .035$, $\phi = -.21$. European-Australians (45.0%) reported more ‘Self’ as the Subject than the Singaporean Chinese (25.0%). This was also significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 4.4, p = .036$, $\phi = -.215$ for reported ‘Self and Other’ as the subject, with European-Australians (21.7%) reporting more ‘Self and Other’ as the Subject than the Singaporean Chinese (6.7%). It seems where ‘Self’ is implicated as the Subject, this is more evident in European-Australian self-narratives. Whilst this finding provides empirical support for

the independent self-construal proposed by Markus and Kitayama (1991a), it also suggests that the claim of Western ‘autonomous, bounded self’ needs to be somewhat tempered because the current results indicate that it may not be as ‘independent’ as we may think. A proportion of Westerners may also consider ‘self and other’ as the Subject in their narrative identity, which is more in line with a relational self and lends support to Vignoles et al.’s (2016) finding that Westerners also emphasized commitment to others along with self-direction.

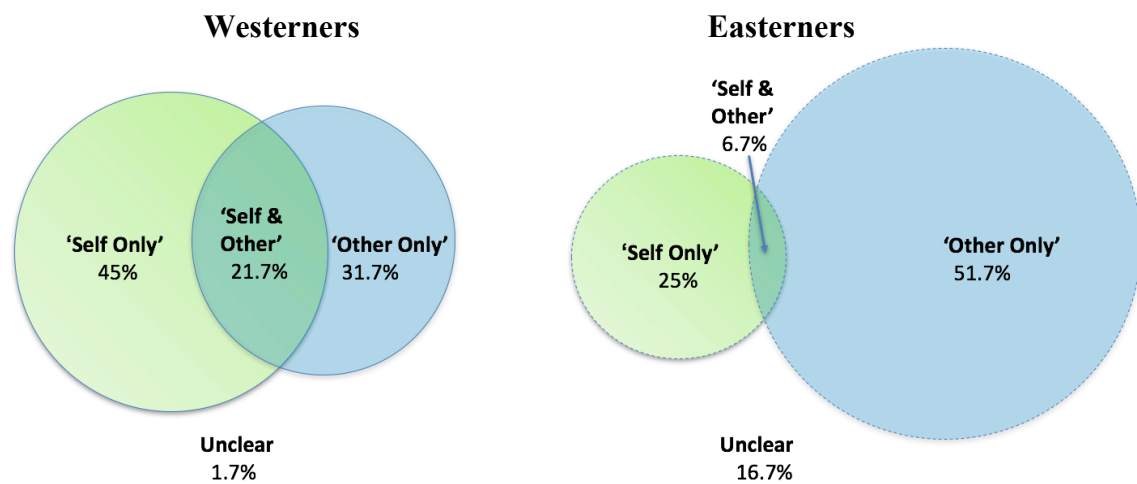


Figure 5.2. Differentiated categories of prompted Subject from Table 5.4, with the percentages representing significant differences between the cultural groups.

In line with the findings of Studies 1 and 2 on prompted Subject, there was a significant cultural difference for ‘Other Only’, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 4.15, p = .042, \phi = .20$. Easterners (51.7%) reported more ‘Other Only’ as the Subject than Westerners (31.7%). This result provides support for the interdependent self-construal consistent with previous studies (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Bochner, 1994; Lee, Aaker & Gardner, 2000). They suggest that the self-narratives of

Singaporean Chinese are not as clearly about the ‘Self’ or themselves as it is for European-Australians. More than half of the Eastern prompted self-narrative seemed to focus more about ‘Others’ as the Subject of their self-narrative than the self. A further 16.7% seem to lack a clear Subject. Unlike Studies 1 and 2, which consisted of all participants reporting at least one Subject, the current findings with a larger sample size have found that more Singaporean Chinese have ‘unclear’ self-narratives. This raises the possibility that talking about their self-narratives may not be something Singaporean Chinese are used to doing compared with European-Australians.

Object. A mixed-design ANOVA was conducted on frequency of mentioning the actant Object with cultural group (Westerners vs Easterners) and gender (Males vs. Females) as the between-subject factors, along with narration type (spontaneous vs. prompted) and level of abstraction (abstract vs. concrete) as the within-subject factors. The main effect of narration type was significant, $F(1, 116) = 52.73, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .31$, as participants shared more when prompted ($M = 0.96$) than spontaneously ($M = 0.53$). The main effect of abstraction was also significant, $F(1, 116) = 35.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$. Generally, participants reported more abstract elements ($M = 1.05$) than concrete elements ($M = 0.44$). There was an interaction effect for culture and level of abstraction, $F(1, 116) = 11.39, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$, with Westerners having a significant tendency to report more abstract contents ($M = 1.32$) than concrete contents ($M = 0.37$). There was also an interaction effect for gender and level of abstraction, $F(1, 116) = 13.24, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$, with males tending to report more abstract contents ($M = 1.34$) than concrete contents ($M = 0.36$). However, these were superseded by the significant interaction effect for culture, gender and level of abstraction,

$F(1, 116) = 9.66, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .08$. The pattern of the means is shown in Figure 5.3, that Western males reported significantly more abstract Objects ($M = 1.78$) than Western females ($M = 0.87$), $t(58) = 4.76, p < .001$; as well as more than the Eastern males ($M = 0.89$), $t(35) = 3.66, p = .001$ and females ($M = 0.66$). In addition, they also reported less concrete Objects than Western females ($M = 0.61$), $t(56.45) = -4.02, p < .001$, and Eastern males ($M = 0.58$), $t(23.32) = -2.94, p = .007$.

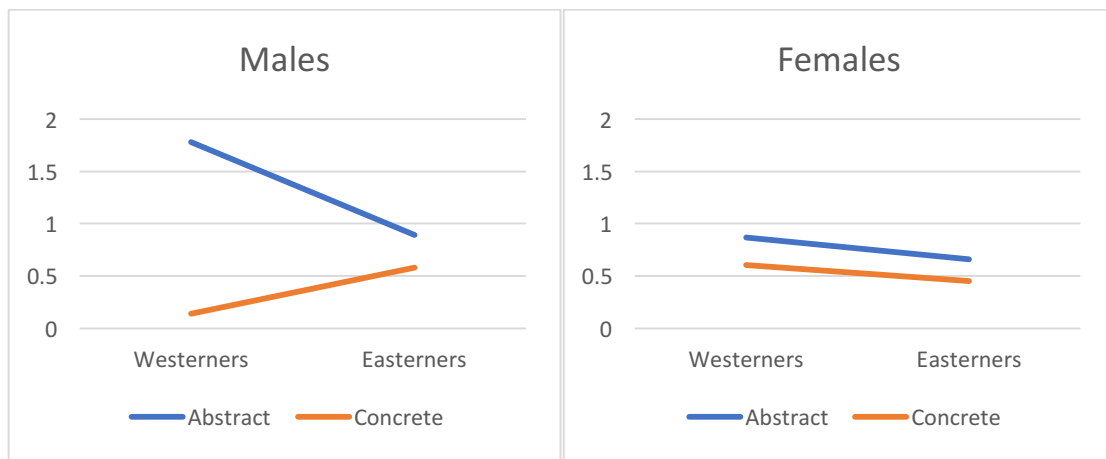


Figure 5.3. The interaction effect of culture, gender and abstraction.

Narrative examples of Object (in italics and bolded to indicate what was coded) show spontaneous accounts cohered with prompted ones in both cultural groups as highlighted in the following because they exemplify the majority of participant reports.

Spontaneous: “***I have always loved my sport***, notably cricket and footy, and from a young age I was encouraged to participate and try hard in all ***sporting endeavors***, something which I have maintained to this day.”

Prompted: “So far, ***academic pursuits*** have been the main goal, what with the need to get into Uni. Outside of that, ***I spent a large part of my life striving for success on the sporting field first as a cricketer, then a swimmer***”.

19 year-old European-Australian male

Spontaneous: “I have now moved out of home and am living at college which allows me to see the world completely differently and escape my old life. I now have an opportunity to make a completely new group of friends who **I can be myself** with, and I feel as though **I am finally free with my own life to discover.**”

Prompted: “I do not know what I would like to do as a career. Though one of my **main goals** throughout school and year 12 was **to receive high enough grades to be accepted into Melbourne University.** Whatever I do end up doing **I want to be happy with my life and live comfortable with no regrets.**”

18 year-old European-Australian female

Spontaneous: “I really love drawing and design.... **I think it make up a huge part of my life.** However.. I can't possibly just quit school and pursue what I love doing. Hence, I can summarize my life as full of dilemma and conflicts, yet **trying to make the best out of what I can do.**”

Prompted: “I want to be a **design-entrepreneur,** which is my goal”.

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

Spontaneous: “When I was in my teens, my Dad passed away.. The incident caused me to fear losing my mum and made me treasure her more... to cherish your loved ones and spend more time with them.... **There are many things that I want to do, like being a paediatrician. I am going to do some awesome things this year.**”

Prompted: “I have always wanted to **be a paediatrician.**”

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

The Objects of desire reported by participants were content analyzed according to similar themes or topics and the results of frequencies for both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese were highlighted in Tables 5.5 and 5.6 for spontaneous and prompted self-narratives respectively. There was a tendency for more abstract concepts reported by Westerners (e.g., ‘I want to be happy and live comfortable with no regrets’) than Easterners (e.g., ‘I want to be a design-entrepreneur’), as shown in the self-narrative examples. However, overall there seemed to be more abstract ‘Objects of desire’ than concrete ones.

Table 5.5

Frequencies of Object in Spontaneous Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Object Contents | Frequencies | |
|--|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Relationship/marriage | 2 | 5 |
| Feeling state goals. E.g. happiness | 5 | 1 |
| Helping people | 1 | 0 |
| Financial Goals | 0 | 1 |
| Please parents/ family | 0 | 3 |
| Life challenges, e.g. overcome life challenges, work-life balance | 2 | 0 |
| Leadership | 0 | 1 |
| Music | 3 | 0 |
| Being creative, artistic goals | 1 | 0 |
| Self goals, e.g. confidence, worth | 3 | 0 |
| Travel goals | 4 | 2 |
| Not clear | 8 | 19 |
| Career Goals | 7 | 4 |
| Sports goals | 8 | 3 |
| Academic goals | 32 | 23 |
| Better Society | 1 | 0 |
| Achievement goals | 4 | 5 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>81</i> | <i>67</i> |

After the content analysis, these were further grouped into thematic broad categories of whether these goals fulfilled the following (to better understand better self-narratives in relation to the theory of self-construal):

- Self-Oriented Goals - the specified objects of desire were solely self-oriented, e.g. “Be my own self and discover life”, “I want to excel academically”
- Other-oriented Goals - the specified objects of desire were solely other-oriented as opposed to self-oriented goals, e.g., “Helping others”, “To not fail parents”, etc.
- Both self and other oriented goals - specified objects of desire both had self and other oriented goals, for example, “To achieve academically and be successful, and to make it up to mother”.
- Unclear - the specified objects of desire were not clear and/or none reported.

The results of the broad thematic categories of both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives for the actant ‘Object’ are shown in Table 5.7.

Table 5.6

Frequencies of Objects in Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Object Contents | Frequencies | |
|--|-------------|------------|
| | Westerners | Easterners |
| Relationship/marriage | 7 | 11 |
| Feeling state goals. E.g. happiness | 7 | 9 |
| Helping people | 8 | 3 |
| Financial Goals | 4 | 17 |
| Please parents/ family | 2 | 7 |
| Life challenges, e.g. overcome life challenges, work-life balance | 1 | 0 |
| Leadership | 0 | 1 |
| Music | 3 | 0 |
| Self goals, e.g. confidence, worth | 5 | 7 |
| Travel goals | 9 | 5 |
| Health | 1 | 0 |
| Not clear | 4 | 4 |
| Career Goals | 18 | 23 |
| Sports goals | 14 | 3 |
| Academic goals | 27 | 17 |
| Knowledge, e.g. pursuit of knowledge | 2 | 0 |
| Better Society | 0 | 1 |
| Achievement goals | 10 | 12 |
| Living out beliefs/faith | 2 | 0 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>124</i> | <i>120</i> |

Table 5.7

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners in Broad Thematic Categories for Actant Object

| Broad Thematic Categories for Object | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 60) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 60) | | χ^2 -statistics | |
|---|--------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|------|----------------------|----------|
| | <i>Count</i> | % | <i>Count</i> | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | <i>p</i> |
| <i>Spontaneous</i> | | | | | | |
| Self-oriented goals | 49 | 61.3 | 31 | 38.8 | 10.84 | .00 |
| Other-oriented goals | 1 | 1.7 | 5 | 8.3 | 1.58 ^a | .21 |
| Both Self & Other | 3 | 5.0 | 6 | 10.0 | 1.97 ^a | .37 |
| Unclear | 8 | 13.3 | 19 | 31.7 | 4.78 | .03 |
| <i>Prompted</i> | | | | | | |
| Self-oriented goals | 38 | 52.1 | 35 | 47.9 | .14 | .58 |
| Other-oriented goals | 3 | 5.0 | 5 | 8.3 | .13 ^a | .71 |
| Both Self & Other | 15 | 25.0 | 16 | 26.7 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Unclear | 4 | 6.7 | 4 | 6.7 | .00 | 1.00 |

Note. ^a Violated assumptions of chi-square concerning the 'minimum expected cell frequency'.

In comparing the frequency of spontaneous 'Self-oriented goals' in European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese, a significant difference was found, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 10.84, p = .001, \phi = -.32$. European-Australians were more likely to have spontaneous self-oriented goals (40.8%) than the Singaporean Chinese (25.8%). However, when self-narratives were prompted and participants were asked to write about the goals, there were no significant differences between European-Australians (63.3%) and Singaporean Chinese (58.3%), $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 0.14, p = .71, \phi = -.05$. This may suggest that European-Australians may provide socially desirable responses of more goals with reference to others when they were asked directly than when they spontaneously self-narrated. However, they still do share 22.5% more self-oriented goals when prompted than spontaneously. In contrast, it seems that Singaporean Chinese do not initially share as much as the European-Australians about self-oriented goals spontaneously but when prompted they increased their report of self-oriented goals by 32.5% so that there is no longer a significant difference between the cultural groups when prompted. This may indicate that Westerners and Easterners have different styles of presenting themselves, depending on what they think is expected of them according to cultural norms, as also found in Lalwani et al.'s (2006) study. However, other possible explanations are discussed in the following section on the association between actants Subject and Object.

There were no other significant cultural differences except in the spontaneous self-narrative reports for 'Unclear' goals in European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese. A significant difference was found, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 4.78, p = .029, \phi = -.22$, indicating that Singaporean Chinese were more likely to report unclear or no goals (31.7%) than European-Australians (13.3%). However, in the prompted self-narratives, no significant cultural difference was found. This result may indicate that for

the Singaporean Chinese, talking about their goals spontaneously may not be something they are used to; however, when they are prompted to write about it, they can and will.

Clearly, it is evident that the Axis of Desire, which is the real bones and architecture of a self-narrative structure and perhaps narrative identity, is observable for Westerners; however, this is less clear among Easterners. These results raise some implications for research and measurement to be later discussed.

Axis of conflict. In the Axis of Conflict, both the actants Helper and Opponent were investigated for both Western and Eastern self-narratives. To examine whether there were any cultural and gender differences, a mixed design ANOVA was conducted with cultural group (Westerners vs. Easterners) and gender (males vs. females) as the between-subject factors, and narration type (Spontaneous vs. Prompted), actant (Helper vs. Opponents), and abstraction (Abstract vs. Concrete) as the within-subject factors. There was no significant interaction between cultural group, gender, narration type, actant and abstraction, $F(1, 116) = 0.00, p = .955, \eta_p^2 = .00$. However, there was an interaction effect for culture, gender and abstraction, $F(1, 116) = 4.39, p = .038, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Western males reported the most abstract elements ($M = 0.79$), which was significantly more than Western females ($M = 0.48$), $t(58) = 2.82, p = .007$, as well as Eastern males ($M = 0.40$) and females ($M = 0.38$). In contrast, Western females ($M = 0.64$) reported significantly more concrete elements than Western males only ($M = 0.39$), $t(58) = -2.78, p = .007$, as shown in Figure 5.4. A further mixed-design ANOVA was completed for females only exploring culture and level of abstraction, which found no significant interaction between cultural group and abstraction,

$F(1, 81) = 1.00, p = .769, \eta_p^2 = .001$. However, there was a significant main effect of abstraction, $F(1, 81) = .903, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .10$, indicating that there were more concrete elements than abstract ones for females only.

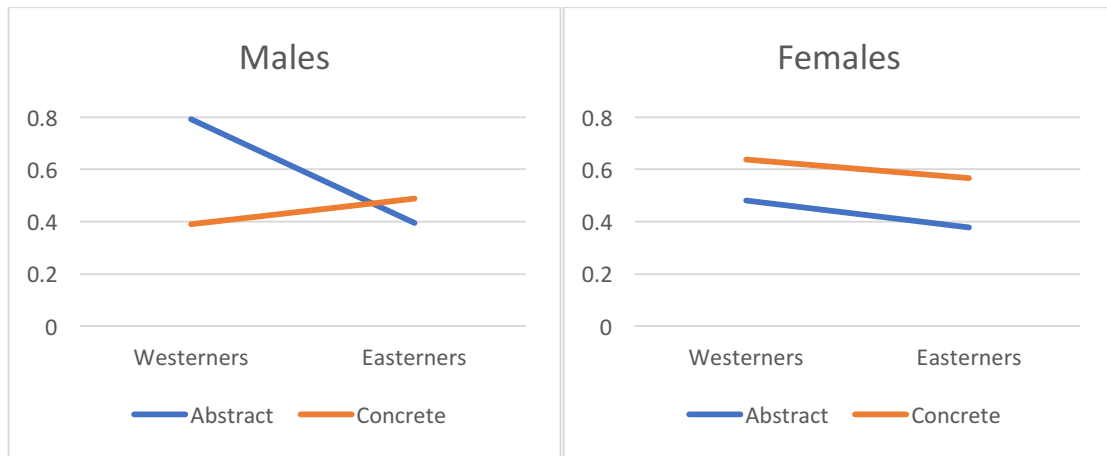


Figure 5.4. The interaction effect of culture, gender and abstraction.

There was also an interaction effect for narration type, abstraction and gender, $F(1, 116) = 4.85, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .04$, indicating that females shared spontaneously less abstract elements ($M = 0.29$) than concrete ones ($M = 0.62$) and males shared spontaneously less concrete elements ($M = 0.34$) than abstract ones ($M = 0.57$), as seen in Figure 5.5. However, when prompted males (Abstract, $M = 0.61$; Concrete, $M = 0.54$) and females (Abstract, $M = 0.57$; Concrete, $M = 0.59$) seem to share equally both abstract and concrete elements.

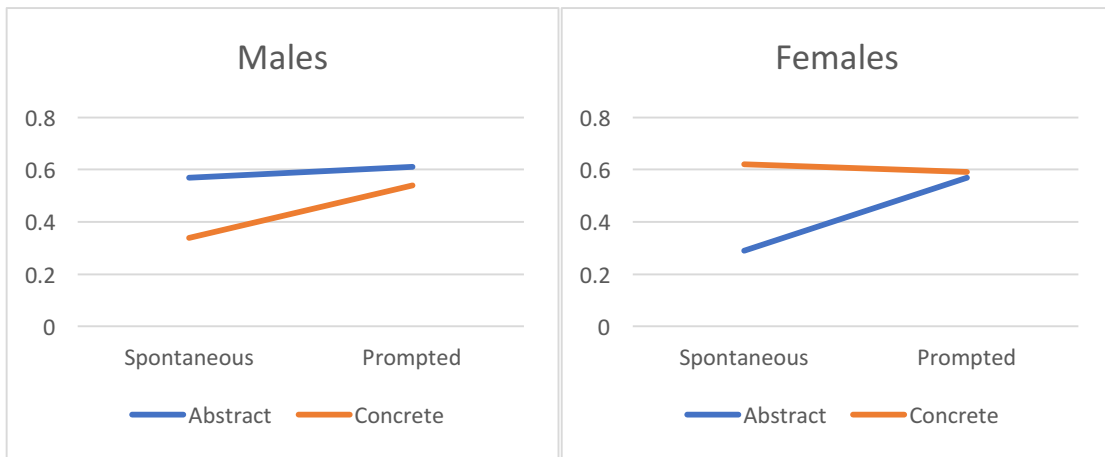


Figure 5.5. The interaction effect of narration type, abstraction and gender.

Another interaction effect for narration type, abstraction and actant was found, $F(1, 116) = 10.17, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .08$. When prompted (Abstract, $M = 0.90$; Concrete, $M = 0.65$), people reported more abstract Helpers than spontaneously (Abstract, $M = 0.53$; Concrete, $M = 0.65$), however, people reported more concrete Opponents when prompted (Abstract, $M = 0.28$; Concrete, $M = 0.48$) than spontaneously (Abstract, $M = 0.34$; Concrete, $M = 0.30$), as shown in Figure 5.6.

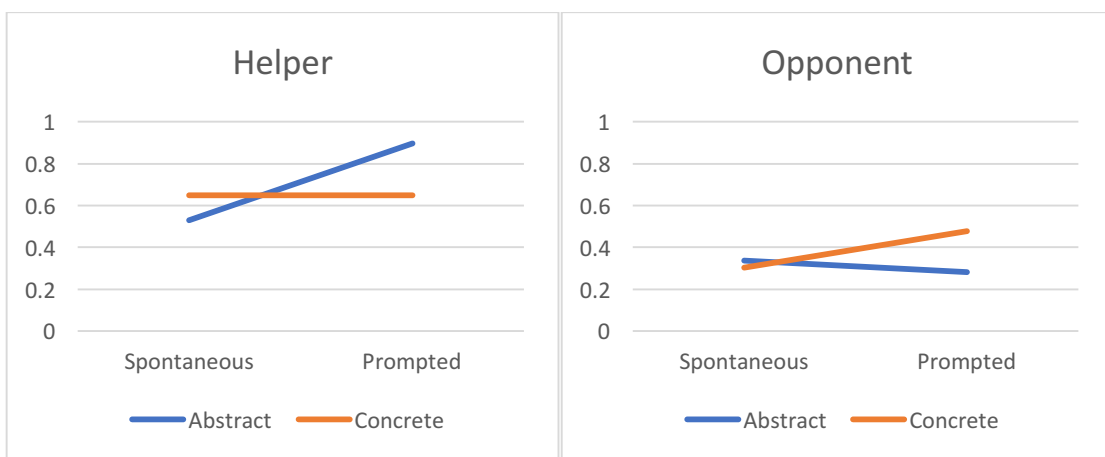


Figure 5.6. The interaction effect of narration type, abstraction and actant.

The main effect of culture was significant, $F(1, 118) = 8.54, p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, suggesting that European-Australians ($M = 0.57$) cite more Helpers and Opponents than the Singaporean Chinese ($M = 0.46$) overall. This cultural difference may be a reflection of the fact that Westerners say more than Easterners. It may also not only be because of their interdependent self-construal and their value of harmony in relationships, but as suggested by naïve dialecticism, they have been found to tolerate contradiction more than Westerners as their cognitive style reflects a dialectical self (see Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rogers et al., 2009). This cognitive style may also be explicitly expressed through their self-narrating style and contents of their self-narratives, which de-emphasizes the axis of conflict.

Helper. The ‘Helper’ in Axis of Communication reported by participants in the spontaneous self-narratives are highlighted in the following examples. These examples were selected because they exemplify the majority of participant reports.

Spontaneous: “I have a **twin brother**, who I am very close with and share much of my experience with. This provides me with someone to discuss issues and talk to who usually has similar interests and understands my experiences”.
18 year-old European-Australian male

Spontaneous: “My depression worsened, I attempted suicide on two occasions and engaged in self harm frequently. Throughout this, **my family** showed unconditional love and support.”
18 year-old European-Australian female

Spontaneous: “Although I have so many people in my life to help me out when things happen to me, in my experience, it is ultimately up to me to get **myself** out of a rut”.
19 year-old European-Australian female

Spontaneous: “Thanks to **supportive family**, I managed to make it to where I am today”.
28 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

Spontaneous: “I remembered when I was going through my O levels it’s the most stressful part of my life and through what I learnt in **church** it really helped me to persevere throughout. I would really be a totally different person

*should I not have been in church... So I really wanna thank **God** for all He had done in my life and about to do through me in the future”.*
23 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Spontaneous: “***My parents*** see me as a role model for my siblings. They took my words and advices seriously. The trust they gave me allow me to grow healthily mentally. They are always very supportive and they are always there no matter where I go.”
27 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

These excerpts from the spontaneous self-narratives illustrate the range of ‘Helpers’, with some containing abstract contents like ‘family’ and ‘friends’, which were frequently cited. These were also reflected in the prompted self-narrative examples as well, although participants also mentioned concrete ‘Helpers’ like particular family members. Some of the prompted ‘Helpers’ included ‘Self’ and religious concepts.

Prompted: *I've had a few **close friends** through school, and they have been a good influence. Having **friends** to rely on is a comforting thing.*
18 year-old European-Australian male

Prompted: “***My faith.***”
21 year-old European-Australian female

Prompted: “***Little bits of help*** came from everywhere around ***me***, it was the way ***I*** put it all together in ***my head*** that helped me achieve my goals.”
18 year-old European-Australian female

Prompted: “***Friends*** are the main support in my pursuit of my goals. They have provided me with opportunities which I otherwise would not have obtained and in school during projects and studies. I also have a mentor teaching me more about the financial industry which I believe will be useful in the future”
22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

Prompted: “***My sister and her boyfriend.*** They explained to me what life is about, how I should go about looking for clues of what I want and love.
23 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Prompted: “***My mentor and my friends.***”
22 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

The spontaneous and prompted ‘Helpers’ were content analyzed and the frequencies for both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese were reported in Table 5.8. The contents of ‘Helpers’ were further grouped into thematic broad categories similar to the ones defined for the actant Subject:

- Self - any reference to self only “I”, “Myself”, “Me”
- Significant others - identified as the significant others in a person’s life, for examples, girlfriend, boyfriend, fiancé, friends, teacher, mentor, counsellors, etc.
- Family - any reference to the immediate family such as parents and children, siblings or relatives in the family such as grandparents, cousins, aunties, uncles, etc.
- Religion - any reference to a religious nature, for examples, God, church values, etc.
- Other - any reference to anything other than the categories outlined above, such as community, music, experiences, etc.
- Unclear - the specified Helper was not clear and/or none were reported.

The results of the thematic broad categories for the actant Helper of both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese are displayed in Table 5.9, including the completed Chi-Square tests of independence (with Yates Continuity Correction). As shown, no significant associations between cultural groups for any of the different categories of ‘Helpers’ were found in both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. Generally, European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese reported similar contents of ‘Helpers’ spontaneously and when prompted.

Table 5.8

Frequencies of Helpers in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners and Easterners

| Helper Contents | Frequencies | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Westerners | | Easterners | |
| | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> |
| Me/I/Self | 4 | 7 | 5 | 6 |
| Brother(s) | 5 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Sister(s) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Siblings | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Friend(s) | 20 | 23 | 16 | 18 |
| Fiancé | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Experiences | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Father | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Mother | 7 | 11 | 9 | 5 |
| Boyfriend | 5 | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| Girlfriend | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Family | 10 | 12 | 7 | 13 |
| Cousins | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Parents | 13 | 16 | 13 | 4 |
| Aunt | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Uncle | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Grandparents | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Teachers/ Counsellors/Mentors | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 |
| Boss/Colleagues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| God/Church values | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Faith | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Community | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Music | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| TV Characters | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| People/Others | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Unclear | 4 | 3 | 8 | 9 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>82</i> | <i>97</i> | <i>70</i> | <i>77</i> |

Table 5.9

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners in Broad Thematic Categories for Actant Helper

| Broad Thematic Categories for Helper | Westerners (n=60) | | Easterners (n=60) | | χ^2 -statistics | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | P |
| <i>Spontaneous</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 4 | 6.7 | 5 | 8.3 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Significant Others | 26 | 43.3 | 19 | 31.7 | 1.28 | .26 |
| Family | 35 | 58.3 | 33 | 55.0 | .03 | .85 |
| Religion | 0 | 0.0 | 2 | 3.3 | .51 ^a | .48 |
| Other | 4 | 6.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 2.33 ^a | .13 |
| Unclear | 4 | 6.7 | 8 | 13.3 | .83 | .36 |
| <i>Prompted</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 6 | 10.0 | 6 | 10.0 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Significant Others | 34 | 56.7 | 29 | 48.3 | .54 | .47 |
| Family | 39 | 65.0 | 28 | 46.7 | 3.38 | .07 |
| Religion | 2 | 3.3 | 2 | 3.3 | .00 ^a | 1.00 |
| Other | 5 | 8.3 | 6 | 10.0 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Unclear | 3 | 5.0 | 9 | 15.0 | 2.32 | .13 |

Note. ^a Violated assumptions of chi-square concerning the ‘minimum expected cell frequency’.

Opponent. The Opponent in the Axis of Conflict was the least mentioned actant of the Greimassian model, with almost a half or a third of both European-Australian (30% to 40%) and Singaporean Chinese (36.7% to 48.3%) self-narratives containing ‘unclear’ Opponents in both spontaneous and prompted formats. The reported Opponent also varied between the two cultural groups. Some of Western and Eastern narrative excerpts which show a range of responses (coded ‘Opponents’ in italics and bolded) are indicated in the following for spontaneous and prompted self-narratives.

Spontaneous: “However, there was a period where I, or I thought I was at least, **bullied frequently**, and I think that’s really contributed to my shyness/general non-outgoingness (not sure if that’s a word), anyway it was pretty terrible and it scared me pretty badly I think.”

18 year-old European-Australian male

*Spontaneous: "It was towards the end of my time at high school where I had huge difficulties with an **abusive relationship with my first ever partner** which caused me to develop serious trust issues as well as lose my sense of extraversion which was one of my most prized personality characteristics.*

18 year-old European-Australian male

*Spontaneous: When I was 11 my **parents divorced**, which was really hard on me and my brother, I basically had to grow up fast and take care of my brother and mother when she was struggling herself with it all.*

19 year-old European-Australian female

*Spontaneous: "In secondary school, I was **bullied by my fellow classmates**. That made me more introvert and less willing to interact with others. As a result, I have fewer friends in my life, much less to say a clique or a lot of good friends.*

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Spontaneous: "Due to my **father's unfaithfulness**, he was chased out by my mum when my sister was only around 2-3 years old back then. At that time, I didn't really understand what was going on until 2 years later when I slowly got to understand the situation better. I then developed hatred towards my father for the next few years to come."*

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Spontaneous: "I was 18, when **I lost a friend** the first time. She met with a car accident and it took her away. It was also then when me and my class realized how much pain she was in and her obsession about being skinny. It was devastating and it took quite some time before we could move on. She was a good friend to me."*

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

The above excerpts of spontaneous self-narratives illustrate the different types of Opponent ranging from low self-esteem, school stress, loss, and being bullied to parental issues and family breakdown. Several of these were reflected in the prompted self-narrative examples as well, with both abstract and concrete contents. Some of these Opponents were events while others were actual people or themselves. For Westerners, the 'Self' was mentioned the most (38.3%) as an Opponent in their prompted self-narratives, as shown in the following.

*Prompted: "I found that in most cases, **I was my biggest enemy**."*

21 year-old European-Australian male

Prompted: “Only myself, really - I so desperately wanted to achieve high grades, yet at the same time I wanted to keep harming myself with the same level of motivation to achieve the grades.”

18 year-old European-Australian female

Prompted: “I think my ex-boyfriend has really been a force that tried to bring me down. He never liked the idea of me being smarter than he was and it made him very insecure. I think he liked me just to be sweet and nice and not question anything. When I did it was always met with nasty behavior. But, I let him go and his influence over me and proved him wrong.

20 year-old European-Australian female

Prompted: “Yes, my father, he didn't believe that I should pursue the arts and has stopped my from doing many things that are out of his comfort zone.”

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

Prompted: “My sister's mental condition. She would scream and shout and it affects the whole family' emotion.”

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Prompted: “I guess, ironically, the thing that opposed me in being happy was the system itself (Singaporean system). It created a materialistic world which just bred more jealousy and greed, which was rather tiresome for me.”

23 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

The reported Opponents were content analyzed in terms of similar themes and the results of frequencies for both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese are reported in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10

Frequencies of Opponents in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives for Westerners and Easterners

| Opponent Contents | Frequencies | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Westerners | | Easterners | |
| | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> |
| Me/I/Self | 6 | 21 | 8 | 12 |
| Bullies/Being bullied | 9 | 2 | 5 | 1 |
| Classmates | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Friend(s) | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Break up | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Past Partner | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Peer pressure | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Poor performance/Grades | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Boyfriend | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Girlfriend | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Stress | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Parents' divorce | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Brother leaving | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Brother | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Family mental illness | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Parents | 0 | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Father | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Mother | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Away from parents/ Homesickness | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Teacher(s) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Coaches | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Sports Injury | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Death | 5 | 0 | 7 | 2 |
| School | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Abusive relationship | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grandma | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Time | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Singaporean System/life | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Difficult People/Attitudes | 0 | 3 | 0 | 6 |
| Money Issues | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Computer games | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Lack of resources | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Fear | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Not Clear/None | 24 | 19 | 29 | 21 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>62</i> | <i>68</i> | <i>63</i> | <i>67</i> |

Again, the Opponents were further grouped to broad thematic categories of ‘Self’, ‘Significant others’, ‘Family’, ‘Other’ and ‘Unclear’. Similar to Studies 1 and 2, there were no mention of any religious referents as an Opponent, hence, this was dropped from the analyses.

The results of the thematic analysis are shown in Table 5.11, with the Chi-Square tests of independence (with Yates Continuity Correction). There were no significant differences between cultural groups in any of the different categories of Opponent in spontaneous self-narratives. In the prompted self-narratives, the only significant difference was for ‘Self’ as the Opponent, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 4.03, p = .045$, $\phi = -.20$. European-Australians were more likely to have ‘Self’ as the Opponent (38.3%) compared to the Singaporean Chinese (20.0%). No other significant cultural differences were found in prompted self-narratives. This finding seems to be similar to Study 1 with slightly more Westerners reporting Self as an Opponent but differs from Study 2 where slightly more Easterners reported Self as an Opponent. The divergent finding in Study 2 may have been due to context activating the private self as the Easterners no longer have family around them and were on their own in Australia. In this situation, they were attributing the difficulties they were facing to themselves perhaps using self-blaming (self-criticizing as found by past research, Kitayama et al., 1997) rather than other blaming (i.e., on external factors such as the Australian culture). In this study, the Singaporean Chinese do not have the same priming effects as those in Studies 1 and 2. Also, with a larger sample size in this study, Self was identified by Westerners as an Opponent. That is, after they’ve given more thought in their prompted accounts, Westerners expressed themselves as a hindrance to obtaining their own goals.

Table 5.11

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners in Broad Thematic Categories for Actant Opponent

| Broad Thematic Categories for Opponent | Westerners (n=60) | | Easterners (n=60) | | χ^2 -statistics | |
|--|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| <i>Spontaneous</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 6 | 10.0 | 8 | 13.3 | .08 | .77 |
| Significant Others | 3 | 5.0 | 4 | 6.7 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Family | 1 | 1.7 | 5 | 8.3 | 1.58 ^a | .21 |
| Other | 26 | 43.3 | 16 | 26.7 | 2.97 | .09 |
| Unclear | 24 | 40.0 | 29 | 48.3 | .54 | .46 |
| <i>Prompted</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 23 | 38.3 | 12 | 20.0 | 4.03 | <.05 |
| Significant Others | 2 | 3.3 | 1 | 1.7 | .00 ^a | 1.00 |
| Family | 4 | 6.7 | 11 | 18.3 | 2.74 | .10 |
| Other | 16 | 26.7 | 16 | 26.7 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Unclear | 18 | 30.0 | 22 | 36.7 | .34 | .56 |

Note. ^a Violated assumptions of chi-square concerning the ‘minimum expected cell frequency’.

Axis of communication. To investigate the cultural and gender differences in the Axis of Communication, a mixed-design ANOVA was conducted with cultural group (Westerners vs. Easterners) and gender (males v. females) as the between-subject factors, and narration type (spontaneous vs prompted), actant (Sender vs Receiver) and abstraction (abstract, concrete) as the within-subject factors. There was no significant interaction between cultural group, gender, narration type, actant and abstraction, $F(1, 116) = .211, p = .647, \eta_p^2 = .00$. However, there was an interaction effect for cultural group, gender, narration type and abstraction, $F(1, 116) = 8.20, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .07$, as shown in Westerners (Figures 5.7) and Easterners (Figures 5.8). There seems to be a similar pattern between Western males and Eastern females that is different to the similar patterns between Western females and Eastern males. Western males and Eastern females seem to report more concrete and much less abstract elements spontaneously but when prompted, Western males share slightly less concrete

elements, with Eastern females sharing much less concrete elements but both report more abstract elements. This was in contrast to the pattern of Western females and Eastern males who have a parallel trend of sharing more concrete than abstract elements spontaneously and when prompted, they also share more concrete and abstract elements simultaneously. Although this is an intriguing pattern, I would refrain from interpreting this further. This is because a high order interaction effect - a four way interaction in this case - is notoriously unreliable and hard to replicate (de González & Cox, 2007). This nonetheless suggests that a joint effect of culture and gender may be worth investigating further.

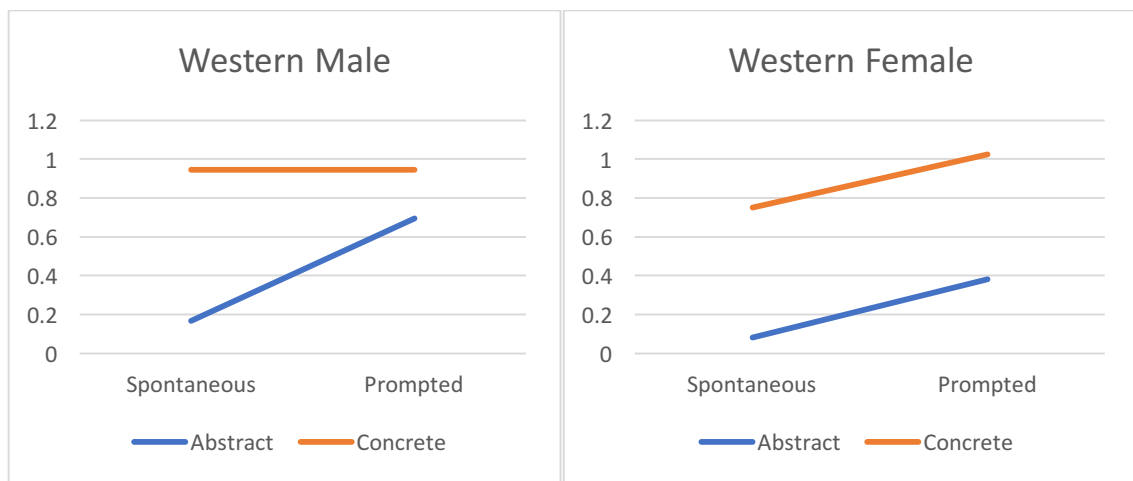


Figure 5.7. The interaction effect for culture, gender (Western male/female), narration type and abstraction.

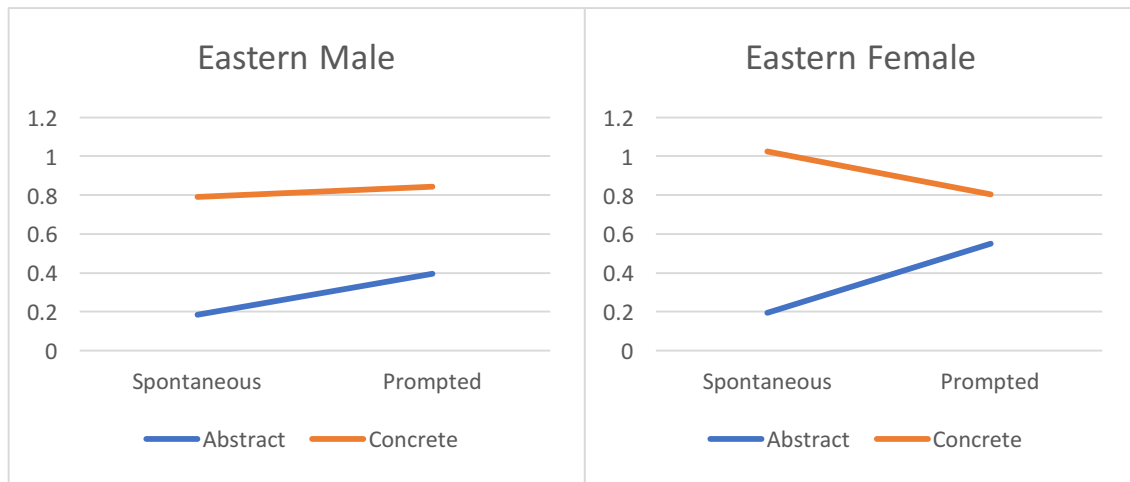


Figure 5.8. The interaction effect for culture, gender (Eastern male/female), narration type and abstraction.

There was a significant interaction effect of narration type, actant and abstraction, $F(1, 116) = 10.08, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .08$. See Figure 5.9 for the pattern of the means. Participants reported in spontaneous and prompted accounts significantly more concrete Senders ($M = 0.77$ for spontaneous, $M = 0.84$ for prompted) than abstract Senders ($M = 0.18$ for spontaneous, $M = 0.32$ for prompted), $t(119) = -8.91, p < .001$ and $t(119) = -6.42, p < .001$ respectively. There was also significantly more concrete Receivers ($M = 0.99$ for spontaneous, $M = 0.97$ for prompted) than abstract ones ($M = 0.14$ for spontaneous, $M = 0.69$ for prompted), $t(119) = -15.90, p < .001$ and $t(119) = -3.43, p = .001$ respectively. In addition, participants shared more abstract elements of Senders and Receivers when they are prompted ($M = 0.32$ for Senders, $M = 0.69$ for Receivers) than when they shared spontaneously ($M = 0.18$ for Senders, $M = 0.14$ for Receivers), $t(119) = -2.33, p = .022$ and $t(119) = -8.39, p < .001$ respectively.

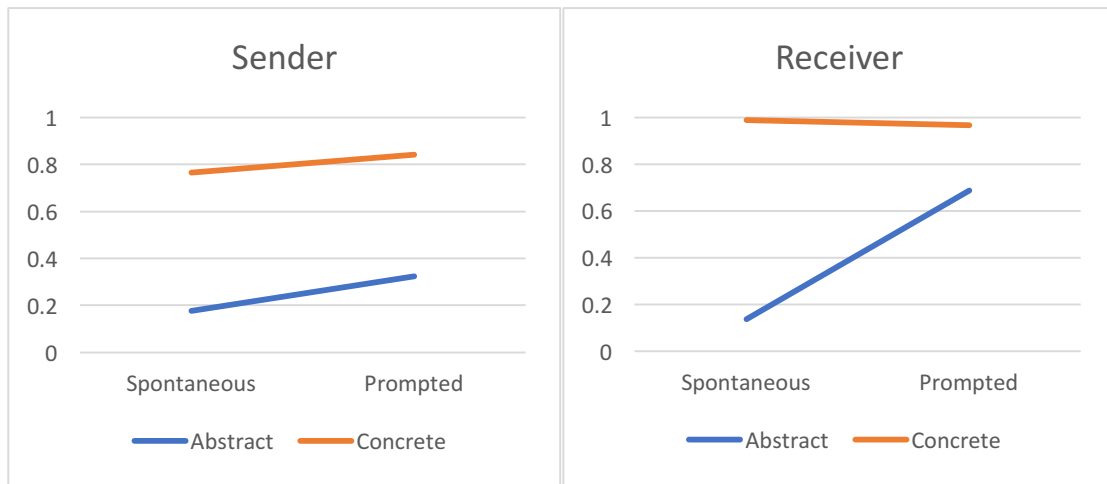


Figure 5.9. The interaction effect of narration type, actant and abstraction.

There was also a significant interaction effect between culture and gender, $F(1, 116) = 8.51, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .07$. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that Western males ($M = 0.69$) reported significantly more Senders and Receivers than Western females ($M = 0.56$), $t(58) = 2.48, p = .016$. This was not the case for Eastern males ($M = 0.55$) and Eastern females ($M = 0.64$), $t(58) = -1.95, p = .057$. These results (shown in Figure 5.10) suggest that for European Australians, the Axis of Communication which emphasizes the moral and authority relationships is more salient for males than it is for the females but for the Singaporean Chinese, gender is not an issue. This gender difference in cultures is also congruent with past research on culture and gender that showed with samples from five diverse countries, that men and women were similar in East Asian (Japan, Korean) and Hawaiian cultures but not in North-American and Australian ones (Kashima et al., 1995). The gender difference in European Australian males may possibly be due to differences in autobiographical narratives in Western cultures (Gilligan, 1982).

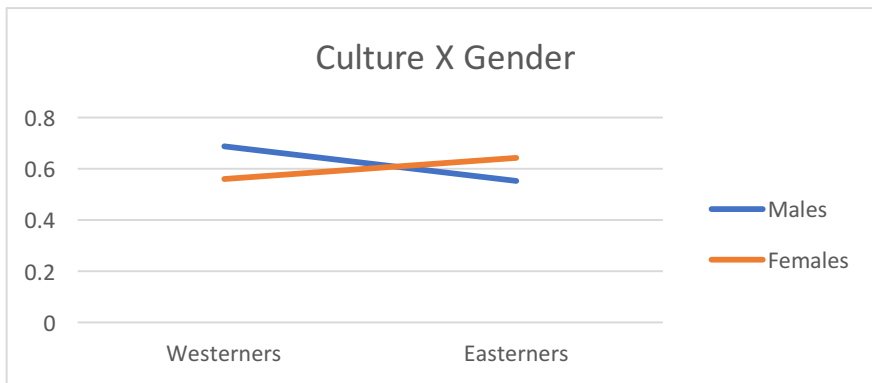


Figure 5.10. The interaction effect of culture and gender.

These ANOVA results suggest that there are cultural and gender differences with self-narrating style particularly in regards to sharing about the authoritative figures or moral entities and benefactors in individual's lives.

Sender. To understand better the data, some Western and Eastern examples of Sender (coded in italics and bolded) for spontaneous self-narratives are highlighted in the following. As can be seen, many of the Senders were generally family members, particularly family members like father or grandmother, and also faith, teacher, self, etc.

*Spontaneous: “**My father** was a fantastic influence in this area (sports), spending hours at a time throwing me a cricket ball or kicking me a football.”*
19 year-old European-Australian male

*Spontaneous: “The **teacher, Miss Julie**, proved to be a huge influence in my life, teaching me discipline, emotional strength and moral lessons.”*
18 year-old European-Australian female

*Spontaneous: “I wouldn't forgive **myself** if I let my relationships with others keep me from pursuing my own future.”*
18 year-old European-Australian female

*Spontaneous: “**My maternal grandparents** were key figures in my upbringing - I spent many a time under their care as my parents were often busy with work.”*
26 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Spontaneous: “**My family** has shaped me into who I am today.”*
22 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

Spontaneous: “My mum inculcated the values of studying since young, disciplines me in very strict manners. When I grew up, I began to appreciate the strict upbringing my mum imposed on me. It is through her that I got to where I am today.”

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

For prompted self-narratives, examples of responses are highlighted in the following, with some similar contents to spontaneous self-narratives.

Prompted: “My grandma has always taught me what is acceptable and what man I should endeavor to be.”

20 year-old European-Australian male

Prompted: “God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.”

21 year-old European-Australian female

*Prompted: “Probably a moral compass just to **trust myself** and only put my time in with people who will treat me with respect and be honest to me. Of course I strayed from that a few times, but it's always been a guiding force for me.”*

21 year-old European-Australian female

*Prompted: “I think it was **my uncle**. He often tells me about the dangers/evils of the real world and human behavior. In my opinion, that is because he often talks to many different people during his course of work, and hence he has gathered valuable experience.”*

24 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Prompted: “As mentioned above, **my faith** served to guide me over the years, especially in situations when I had to decide whether something should or should not be done, especially with regard to issues of morals.”*

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

Prompted: “My father. Although he is a person who doesn't outwardly express his love for both me and my brother, he shows that through his toiling through the years to support this family. Sometimes he would talk to us about values such as filial piety or current affairs and give us his take on these issues, although he wouldn't force us to conform to his stand.”

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

All the reported spontaneous and prompted Senders in the Axis of Communication were content analyzed (see Table 5.12).

Table 5.12

Frequencies of Senders in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives for Westerners and Easterners

| Sender Contents | Frequencies | | | |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Westerners | | Easterners | |
| | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> |
| Me/I/Self | 5 | 8 | 1 | 5 |
| Brother(s) | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Sister(s) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Friend(s) | 2 | 5 | 2 | 6 |
| Fiancé | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Partner | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Father | 4 | 6 | 1 | 6 |
| Mother | 6 | 9 | 11 | 6 |
| Boyfriend | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Girlfriend | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Family | 3 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Cousins | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Parents | 24 | 14 | 25 | 10 |
| Aunt | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Uncle | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Grandparents | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 |
| Teacher(s)/ Coaches/ Counsellors/Mentors | 1 | 10 | 3 | 9 |
| Boss/Colleagues | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| God/Church values | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Faith | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ideals/Education | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| School | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Karate club | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Specific People/Others | 0 | 6 | 0 | 3 |
| Not Clear | 12 | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>65</i> | <i>78</i> | <i>63</i> | <i>73</i> |

Again, after the content analysis was completed for Sender, it was further grouped into thematic broad categories of 'Self', 'Significant others', 'Family', 'Religion', 'Other' and 'Unclear'. The results of the thematic broad categories of both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese for Senders are shown in the following Table 5.13, along with the Chi-Square tests of

independence (with Yates Continuity Correction). No significant difference between cultural groups were found for any of the different categories of Senders in spontaneous narratives. This was also true for prompted self-narratives.

Table 5.13

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners in Broad Thematic Categories for Actant Sender

| Broad Thematic Categories for Sender | Westerners (n=60) | | Easterners (n=60) | | χ^2 -statistics | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| <i>Spontaneous</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 5 | 8.3 | 1 | 1.7 | 1.58 ^a | .21 |
| Significant Others | 4 | 6.7 | 6 | 10.0 | .11 | .74 |
| Family | 38 | 63.3 | 46 | 76.7 | 1.94 | .16 |
| Religion | 2 | 3.3 | 1 | 1.7 | .00 ^a | 1.00 |
| Other | 1 | 1.7 | 0 | 0.0 | .00 ^a | 1.00 |
| Unclear | 12 | 20.0 | 7 | 11.7 | 1.00 | .32 |
| <i>Prompted</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 9 | 15.0 | 5 | 8.3 | .73 | .39 |
| Significant Others | 13 | 21.7 | 14 | 23.4 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Family | 36 | 60.0 | 29 | 48.3 | 1.21 | .27 |
| Religion | 2 | 3.3 | 5 | 8.3 | .61 ^a | .44 |
| Other | 6 | 10.0 | 7 | 11.7 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Unclear | 5 | 8.3 | 9 | 15.0 | .73 | .39 |

Note. ^a Violated assumptions of chi-square concerning the ‘minimum expected cell frequency’.

Receiver. Some Western and Eastern examples of Receiver (coded in italics and bolded) in spontaneous self-narratives which exemplify the majority of participant reports are shown in the following:

Spontaneous: “It is this search for happiness in life, that will always keep **me** striving looking for the ultimate wave, a thrilling ride. only the ultimate ride is actually the ride of your life. to quote Hawaiian surfer Derrick Ho “If you want the ultimate, you have to be willing to pay the ultimate price.”
30 year-old European-Australian male

Spontaneous: “I completed the IB in year 12 and was happy with my results which got **me** into Melbourne Uni, and that’s where I’ve always wanted to go.”
18 year-old European-Australian female

*Spontaneous: “I feel I am compassionate, able to look after others, and though I chose to continue studying and pursue psychology, it really is my aim in life to help **others**. I am now happily doing psychology, in a relationship with an amazing person, I have a supportive family that I love living with and choose as my friends, and my friendships have been constant and stable.”*

22 year-old European-Australian female

*Spontaneous: “With my **family** and **friends** supporting me all the way, I have matured in my way of thinking and I will strive to do well in life and reciprocate the care and concern to my loved ones as well.”*

25 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Spontaneous: “This life experience made me treasure my **family** a lot thereafter; as I know nothing can compare to the depth of a mother's love. With her in mind (mother), I continued to pursue my studies in a mathematics-related field in university so that I could feel like I was nearer to her, as she undertook a flourishing finance career. Till date, I'm happy to say I grew a lot more independent, and I am capable of taking care of my **family**; just like how she did.”*

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

*Spontaneous: “**My mum** inculcated the values of studying since young, disciplines me in very strict manners.... When **I** grew up, I began to appreciate the strict upbringing my mum imposed on me. It is through her that I got to where **I** am today.”*

21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

In spontaneous accounts, many participants reported parents and specifically the mother as a Receiver. Family, friends, teachers, coaches, mentors, siblings, etc. were also mentioned. The majority of Receivers though in both cultural groups included the Self. Some (12 Westerners and 6 Easterners) in both cultural groups were unclear about who their Receivers were.

For prompted self-narratives, when asked specifically who the participants' Receiver were (coded in italics and bolded), the examples of responses are highlighted in the following, with similar contents to spontaneous self-narratives.

*Prompted: “While **I** am probably the biggest beneficiary, I also feel that my **parents** benefit from my successes. They are able to see their own hard work pay off in their three wonderful children, a feeling that I hope I will experience one day.”*

19 year-old European-Australian male

*Prompted: “My own ambitions are largely selfish in that they are designed to please myself. Even in helping others I understand that this is a means of making me feel better about **myself**. My goals are not greatly concerned with money or power but I still value the intrinsic satisfaction I gain from achievement.”*

19 year-old European-Australian male

*Prompted: “**Myself** would be benefitting from having a job that I have a passion for. Others would be benefitting because as a psychologist my aim is to help/guide/treat people.”*

18 year-old European-Australian female

*Prompted: “I believe that if I am successful, the one that will benefit most would be me but **others** like my **family** will also benefit from it as well.”*

24 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Prompted: “**Myself and my family**. If I am self-sufficient and happy, my family would neither have to provide nor worry for me.”*

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese male

*Prompted: “It is my **family** mainly. They would be proud to see the person I am today and they would have less things to worry about me if I could be independent and take care of myself.”*

22 year-old Singaporean Chinese female

The reported Receivers were content analyzed and the frequencies for both Westerners and Easterners were reported in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14

Frequencies of Senders in Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives for Westerners and Easterners

| Receiver Contents | Frequencies | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Westerners | | Easterners | |
| | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> | <i>Spontaneous</i> | <i>Prompted</i> |
| Me/I/Self | 53 | 53 | 56 | 41 |
| Mother | 0 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Siblings | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Friends | 0 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| Society/Community | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Parents | 1 | 8 | 6 | 6 |
| Family | 1 | 13 | 11 | 24 |
| Grandparents | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Uncle | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Fiancé | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Friends | 0 | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| Teacher(s)/ Coach | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Students | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| People/Others | 1 | 14 | 0 | 9 |
| Not Clear | 6 | 6 | 2 | 4 |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>63</i> | <i>110</i> | <i>83</i> | <i>99</i> |

Again, the Receivers were further grouped into thematic broad categories of ‘Self’, ‘Significant Others’, ‘Family’, ‘Other’ and ‘Unclear’. The results of the thematic broad categories of both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese for Receiver are shown in Table 5.15, including the Chi-Square tests of independence (with Yates Continuity Correction).

A significant difference was found between European-Australians and the Singaporean Chinese in the spontaneous reported frequency of ‘Family’ as the Receiver, $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 16.09, p < .001, \phi = -.39$. Singaporean Chinese were more likely to report ‘Family’ as the Receiver (33.3%) compared to the European-Australians

(3.3%). There were no other significant results for spontaneous self-narratives in terms of association between cultural groups and the different categories of Receiver.

Table 5.15

Summary of the Frequencies, Percentages and χ^2 -statistics for Westerners and Easterners in Broad Thematic Categories for Actant Receiver

| Broad Thematic Categories for Receiver | Westerners (n=60) | | Easterners (n=60) | | χ^2 -statistics | |
|--|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| | Count | % | Count | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| <i>Spontaneous</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 53 | 88.3 | 56 | 93.3 | .40 | .53 |
| Significant Others | 0 | 0.0 | 5 | 8.3 | 3.34 ^a | .07 |
| Family | 2 | 3.3 | 20 | 33.3 | 16.09 | <.00 |
| Other | 2 | 3.3 | 0 | 0.0 | .51 ^a | .48 |
| Unclear | 6 | 10.0 | 2 | 3.3 | 1.21 | .27 |
| <i>Prompted</i> | | | | | | |
| Self | 52 | 86.7 | 41 | 68.3 | 4.78 | .03 |
| Significant Others | 8 | 13.3 | 8 | 13.3 | .00 | 1.00 |
| Family | 21 | 35.0 | 31 | 51.7 | 2.75 | .10 |
| Other | 19 | 31.7 | 10 | 16.7 | 2.91 | .09 |
| Unclear | 4 | 6.7 | 4 | 6.7 | .00 | 1.00 |

Note. ^a Violated assumptions of chi-square concerning the ‘minimum expected cell frequency’.

In the prompted self-narratives, there was a significant difference for ‘Self’ as Receiver between European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese, $\chi^2(1, N=120) = 4.78, p = .029, \phi = -.22$. European-Australians tended to report ‘Self’ as Receiver (86.7%) more than the Singaporean Chinese (68.3%) when prompted. For all the other categories in the prompted self-narratives, there were no further significant associations between cultural groups and the different categories of Receiver.

The association between actants Subject, Object and Receiver. The findings in the content and thematic analyses of Receiver seem to indicate that for Westerners,

who benefits when the Subject obtains the Object of desire is Self, at least in prompted accounts; in contrast, for Easterners, it is the family in spontaneous accounts. The findings that Subject and Object are more self-oriented for Westerners than for Easterners (see Tables 5.4 and 5.7) is consistent with the previous research that Westerners with an independent self-construal have more self-oriented goals (Oishi & Diener, 2009; van Horen, Pöhlmann, Koeppen, & Hannover, 2008). However, the current findings bring another perspective: the Self benefits when these self-oriented goals are obtained for those with an independent self-construal when they are asked to elaborate. These results suggest different cultural pathways in which the Subject may be defined. It is not just the Object that defines the Subject, but possibly also in relation to the Receiver. Who or what benefits may tell a lot about the Subject. In other words, Receiver may also define the Subject.

To explore the relationships between Subject, Object and Receiver, I constructed a heat map (Figures 5.11) that cross-tabulates the types of Subject observed from prompted narratives (recall that all the Subject in spontaneous narratives was the Self, and therefore there was no variation) against the types of Object as observed in the spontaneous and prompted narratives for Westerners. A similar heat map was also constructed for Easterners (Figure 5.12). The heat maps use colors to code the frequencies and total percentages reported in each cell. Red is the most frequent, down to orange, yellow, and then dark green which is the least frequent. Thus, these heatmaps allow us to explore the cultural differences of the distribution of the ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in the actants Subject and Object as the participants’ self-narratives shift from the spontaneous mode to the prompted mode.

The left heat map in Figure 5.11 shows that 40% of Westerners usually have ‘Self Only’ Subject and ‘Self Only’ Objects of desire for spontaneous self-narratives, as

indicated by the deep red color. However, when prompted (i.e., heat map on the right), the distribution changes with the Subject no longer being mainly ‘Self Only’. There is more of ‘Self and Other’ and ‘Other Only’ (coded in red-orange color). Also, the ‘Self Only’ Object dissipates to ‘Self and Other’ Object too (coded in orange color) as well as ‘Other Only’ Object (coded in yellow and light green). That is, Westerners spontaneously put the Self in the foreground, but when they are prompted, they elaborate more of ‘Others’ in their responses. In contrast, in the Eastern self-narratives, there does not seem to be as many differences between spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. Slight changes were observed when prompted; there were more of ‘Other Only’ Subject and ‘Self and Other’ Object (coded in orange color) and less ‘Unclear’ (coded ‘0’ frequency in dark green) responses in the Eastern self-narratives.

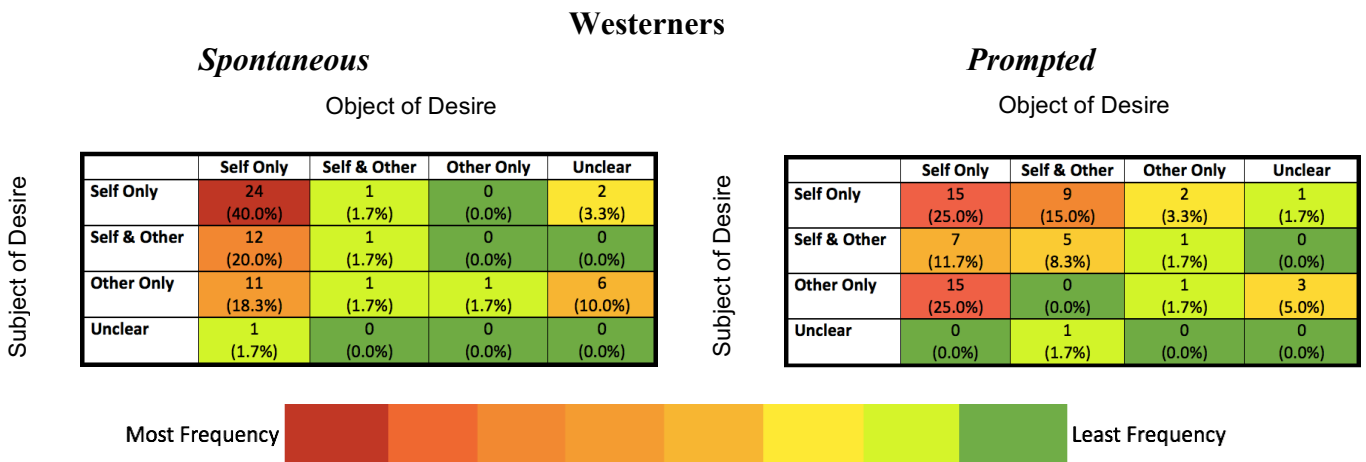


Figure 5.11. Heat maps of Western spontaneous and prompted self-narratives featuring actants Subject and Object with total percentages for each cell.

Easterners



Figure 5.12. Heat maps of Eastern spontaneous and prompted self-narratives featuring actants Subject and Object with total percentages for each cell.

This seems to suggest there is an inverse relationship between spontaneous and prompted accounts for European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese. In Figure 5.11, when left to speak spontaneously, European-Australians would overall foreground the Self and both Subject and Object emphasize a decontextualized self, i.e., Self without including any others. However, when prompted, the European-Australians then elaborate more about Others in their lives; that is, their self-narratives present more of a socially contextualized self, which includes Others. This is in contrast to the Singaporean Chinese in Figure 5.12, whose narration was more about ‘Others’ in their lives, even though their Object may be just as Self-focused as European-Australians when prompted. The Singaporean Chinese self-narratives do not seem to change as much when they narrate spontaneously and when they were prompted. However, when prompted, they seem to report more ‘Self and Other’ Object and may engage more their individual self-agency. That is, it may be acceptable to have combined goals for themselves and others. They also seem to clarify their Subject and Object when asked

directly as the ‘Unclear’ also disappeared. These results suggest that the style of self-narrating differs cross-culturally and may engage the self in decontextualized or contextualized ways (see Kashima et al., 2006). These findings illustrate how European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese may have divergent pathways in how they self-narrate in social context.

These divergent cultural narrative pathways can also be seen in the relationships between ‘Subject’ and ‘Receiver’ in Figures 5.13 and 5.14 for Westerners and Easterners. The heat maps illustrate that Western self-narratives usually have ‘Self Only’ Subjects, and also, ‘Self Only’ Receivers (coded deep red color) for spontaneous self-narratives. Similar to the relationship between Subject and Object in the heat map captured in Figure 5.11. When prompted, the distribution changes slightly with more cases of ‘Self and Other’ (coded in red and orange colors) in the Receiver column. That is, Westerners spontaneously put the Self in the foreground, but when they are prompted, they then elaborate to include more ‘Self and Others’ as Receivers.

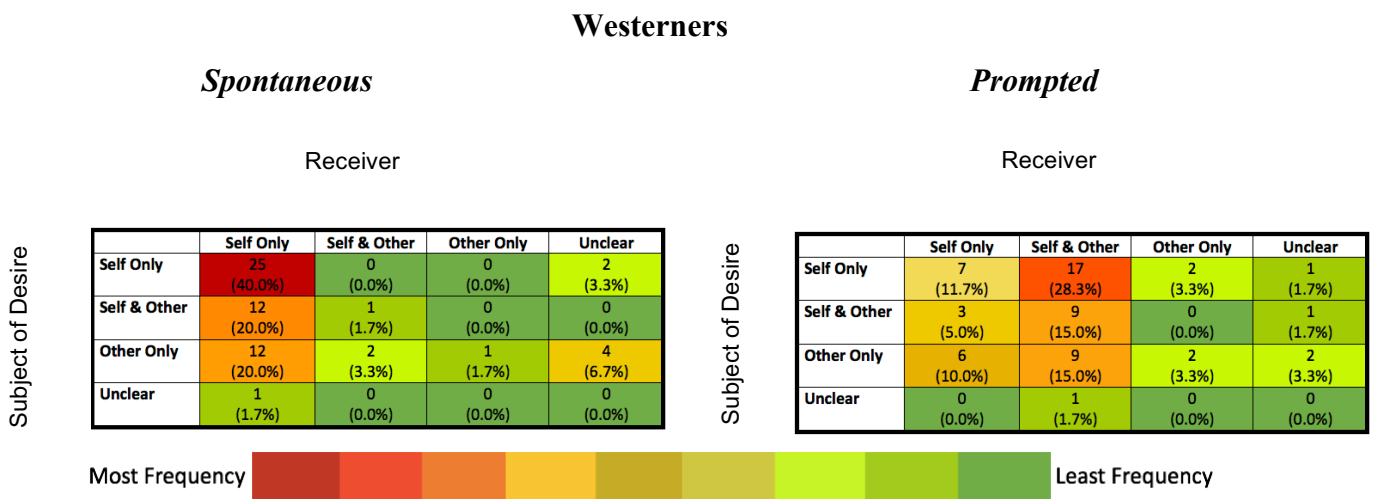


Figure 5.13. Heat maps of Western spontaneous and prompted self-narratives featuring actants Subject and Receiver with total percentages for each cell.

Easterners

Spontaneous

Prompted

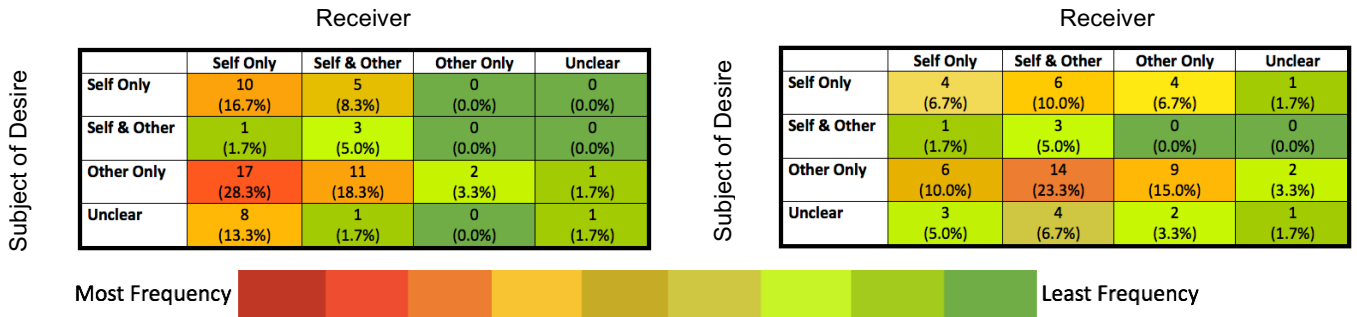


Figure 5.14. Heat maps of Eastern spontaneous and prompted self-narratives featuring actants Subject and Receiver with total percentages for each cell.

In contrast, in the Eastern spontaneous self-narratives, the Subject is mostly about ‘Other Only’ as pointed out earlier. Though there are some ‘Self Only’ Subject and Receiver (coded in yellow color), these are not as prominent. When prompted, Easterners consider even more of ‘Others’ in terms of both ‘Self & Other’ and ‘Other Only’ Subjects and Receivers overall in their self-narratives as highlighted by the different shades of orange color cells. The Singaporean Chinese seem to present a more contextualized self as indicated in Figure 5.14, compared to the European Australians in Figure 5.13.

A similar pattern in the heatmaps for spontaneous and prompted accounts with the actants Subject and Receiver were also found for Object and Receiver in Western self-narratives. For example, the Object consisted mostly of ‘Self Only’ goals which benefited mostly ‘Self Only’ as Receiver for spontaneous accounts. Again, in prompted accounts, European-Australians then elaborate more of ‘Self and Other’ as benefactors in Receiver but the majority of Objects are still self-oriented goals as shown in Figure 5.15.

To sum up, this consistent way of self-narrating for European Australians emphasizes a decontextualized self (Kashima et al., 2006), where Self is presented in the foreground and pervades through their Subject, Object and Receiver. I call this Western self-narrating style the *decontextualized self-narrating style* because the Self is cast in the foreground as a self-contained entity without much recognition of the social context that includes Others. In Easterners, although there is some ‘Self Only’ for both Objects of Desire and Receiver, there is more reported ‘Self and Other’ for Receivers in spontaneous accounts. When they are prompted, Easterners report even more ‘Others’ and in some cases, ‘Other Only’ in their self-narratives, as shown in Figure 5.16. This consistent Eastern self-narrating style of embedding the Self in the context with Others is termed the *contextualized self-narrating style* because the Self is connected with others in its context. This way of self-narrating is in line with cultural neuroscience findings that in Asians with a more contextualized self-concept, the neural structure of the Chinese self appears to be more closely connected with others (Ng et al., 2010; Zhu et al., 2007).

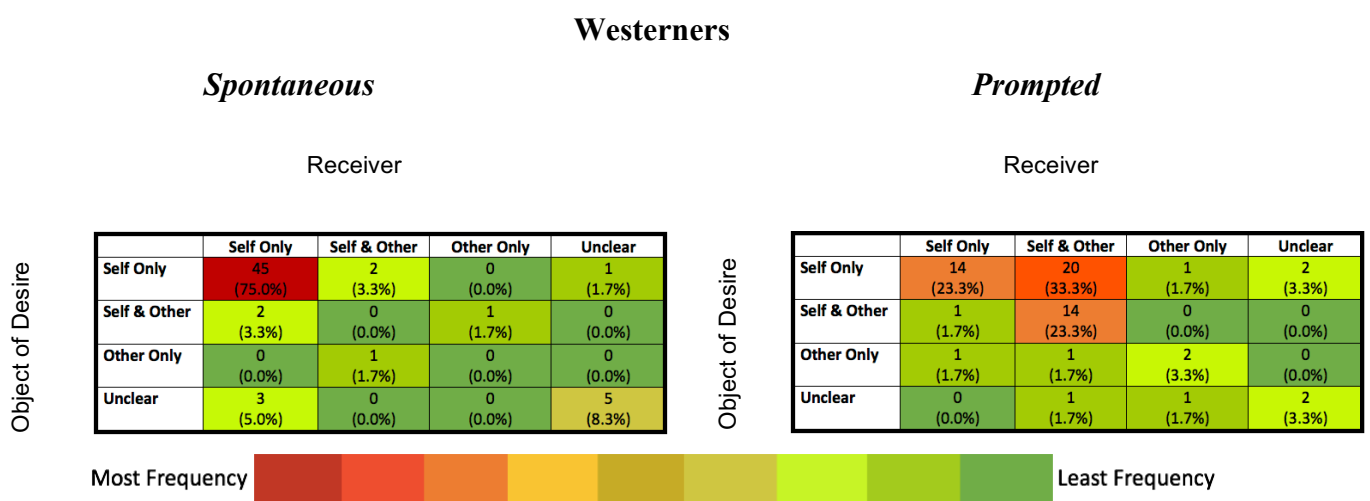


Figure 5.15. Heat maps of Western spontaneous and prompted self-narratives featuring actants Object and Receiver with total percentages for each cell.

Easterners

Spontaneous

Prompted

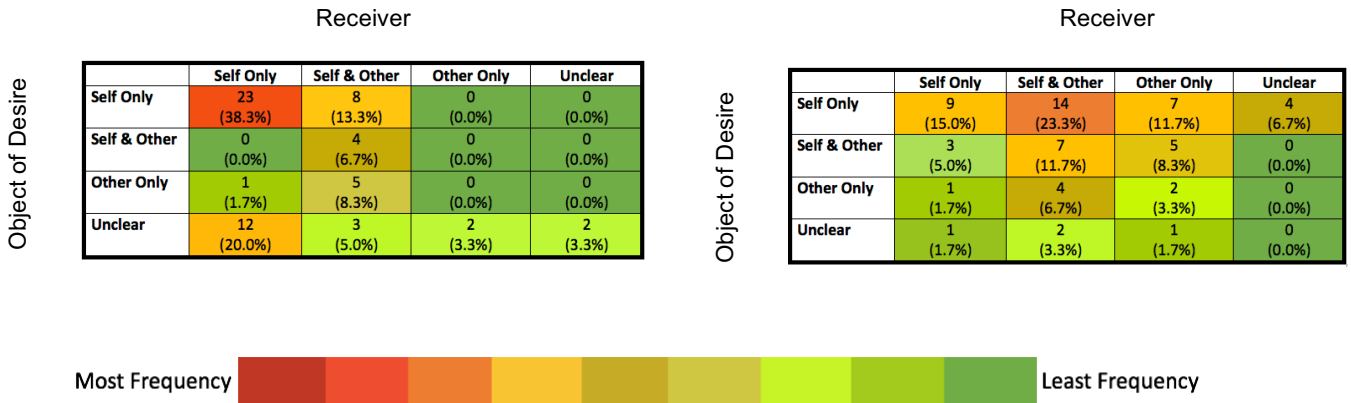


Figure 5.16. Heat maps of Eastern spontaneous and prompted self-narratives featuring actants Object and Receiver with total percentages for each cell.

I conducted additional exploratory analyses to investigate the differences in cultural self-narrating styles observed in the heat maps. In particular, I recoded the Self-Only, and Self and Other types of Subject into Self-oriented Subject, and the Other-Only and Self and Other types of Subject into Other-oriented Subject. Object and Receiver were recoded in a similar way. Note that the recoding was done for prompted Subject, and both spontaneous and prompted Object and Receiver. I then computed correlations between these recoded variables for Westerners and Easterners. The Self-oriented and Other-oriented results are shown separately in Tables 5.16 and 5.17 respectively, with Westerners' intercorrelations presented above the diagonal and Easterners' intercorrelations presented below the diagonal.

In the Self-oriented intercorrelations of Westerners, it can be seen in Table 5.16 that Prompted Subject is significantly correlated with Spontaneous Object and Receiver, $r(60) = .31, p = .018$ and $r(60) = .29, p = .023$ respectively, suggesting that 'Self' as Subject tends to be related to spontaneous self-oriented goals (Object) and self as

benefactor (Receiver). This relationship is illustrated in the heat maps where, when prompted, there is no longer a relationship between prompted Subject and prompted Object/Receiver because of the move from a decontextualized self-narrating style to a more contextualized self-narrating style for Westerners. There are also significant correlations for spontaneous Object with prompted Object ($r(60) = .41, p = .001$), spontaneous Receiver ($r(60) = .41, p = .001$) and near significant correlation with prompted Receiver ($r(60) = .25, p = .059$), indicating that spontaneous self-oriented goals tend to be related to self as benefactor, especially when it is spontaneously shared. This relationship is still significant when prompted (between prompted Object and prompted Receiver, $r(60) = .47, p = .000$). Lastly, spontaneous and prompted Receiver is significantly correlated $r(60) = .32, p = .014$. The results suggest that for Westerners, they have a sense of individual agency, a strong Self that pursues more self-oriented goals to benefit their Self mostly.

Table 5.16

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on the 'Self-oriented' Spontaneous and Prompted Actants Subject, Object and Receiver in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|----------|-----------|
| 1.Sub(Pr.) | — | .31* | .07 | .29* | .14 | 0.67 | 0.48 |
| 2.Obj(Sp.) | .02 | — | .41** | .41** | .25 | 0.87 | 0.39 |
| 3.Obj(Pr.) | .09 | .05 | — | .19 | .47** | 0.88 | 0.32 |
| 4.Rec(Sp.) | .18 | .32* | -.11 | — | .32* | 0.88 | 0.32 |
| 5.Rec(Pr.) | .08 | .12 | -.09 | .11 | — | 0.87 | 0.34 |
| <i>M</i> | 0.31 | 0.62 | 0.85 | 0.93 | 0.68 | | |
| <i>SD</i> | 0.47 | 0.52 | 0.36 | 0.25 | 0.47 | | |

Note. Intercorrelations for European-Australian participants ($n = 60$) are presented above the diagonal, and intercorrelations for Singaporean Chinese participants ($n = 60$) are presented below the diagonal. Means and standard deviations for European-Australians are presented in the vertical columns, while for the

Singaporean Chinese, it presented in the horizontal rows. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$.

As illustrated in the heat maps and in Table 5.16, it is a different picture for Easterners. The only significant correlation found is between spontaneous 'Object' and 'Receiver', $r(60) = .32$, $p = .013$. However, when prompted, the correlation for Singaporean Chinese is no longer significant. The results show that for Easterners, individual self-agency is not clearly presented when they self-narrate.

The Other-oriented intercorrelations for Subject, Object and Receiver show the associations of whether a Self that is more Other-focused tends to be related to more other-oriented goals to benefit Others mostly. For Westerners, the results presented above the diagonal in Table 5.17 indicated that both spontaneous Object and Receiver is significantly correlated, $r(60) = .46$, $p < .001$ and both prompted Object with Receiver also, $r(60) = .31$, $p = .016$, suggesting that Other-oriented goals tends to benefit Others mostly as Receivers. Similarly, this was also found for both spontaneous Object and Receiver in Easterners, $r(60) = .44$, $p < .001$, but the only difference was that when prompted, this was no longer significant (see Table 5.17). These results highlight that for Easterners, when asked to present a self-narrative, would do so - but it may not be what they usually do or are accustomed to. This is in line with Li's (2012) assertions that East Asian speaking style emphasized paucity in speaking, ambiguity, indirectness and listenership. The current results seem to capture this Eastern self-narrating style.

Taken together, the findings suggest that European-Australians' self-narrating style is to first foreground the individual self in a decontextualized way, but then contextualize it in the social context when prompted. In other words, there is an elaboration from decontextualized to contextualized. Therefore, European-Australians use a *decontextualized-elaborative self-narrating style*. On the other hand, the Singaporean Chinese use a *contextualized-repetitive self-narrating style* because the

Self stays contextualized from spontaneous to prompted accounts. These self-narrating styles are by no means an exhaustive list and other researchers (Fivush et al., 2019; Li, 2012) have suggested additional possible dimensions of styles that may be considered in future research.

Table 5.17

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Scores on the 'Other-oriented' Spontaneous and Prompted Actants Subject, Object and Receiver in Westerners and Easterners

| Measure | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|----------|-----------|
| 1.Sub(Pr.) | — | .12 | -.19 | .25 | -.09 | 0.53 | 0.50 |
| 2.Obj(Sp.) | .23 | — | -.03 | .46** | .05 | 0.07 | 0.25 |
| 3.Obj(Pr.) | .05 | .10 | — | .12 | .31* | 0.30 | 0.46 |
| 4.Rec(Sp.) | .22 | .44** | -.12 | — | .19 | 0.07 | 0.25 |
| 5.Rec(Pr.) | .08 | .14 | -.12 | -.00 | — | 0.67 | 0.48 |
| <i>M</i> | 0.58 | 0.18 | 0.35 | 0.37 | 0.68 | | |
| <i>SD</i> | 0.50 | 0.39 | 0.48 | 0.49 | 0.47 | | |

Note. Intercorrelations for European-Australian participants ($n = 60$) are presented above the diagonal, and intercorrelations for Singaporean Chinese participants ($n = 60$) are presented below the diagonal. Means and standard deviations for European-Australians are presented in the vertical columns, while for the Singaporean Chinese, it presented in the horizontal rows. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Summary of the analyses based on the Actantial Model. From the results of each of the actantial analyses, some conclusions can be drawn in regards to cross-cultural differences, as illustrated in Figure 5.17. For a summary of the results of similarities in actantial structure cross-culturally, please refer to Table L1 (Appendix L).

To summarize, the main points are that in comparison to Easterners, Westerners provided more elaborative spontaneous and prompted self-narrative accounts which consisted of more concrete Subjects, Helpers, Opponents, along with some gender

differences, such as more Western males report abstract Objects than Western females and Easterners. In the content analyses, Westerners reported more ‘Self Only’ and ‘Self and Other’ Subjects in addition to ‘Self-oriented’ goals as Objects and Self as prompted Receiver. They tend to foreground the individual self in a decontextualized way, but then contextualize it in the social context when prompted, using a *decontextualized-elaborative self-narrating style*. They are also more likely to report Self as an Opponent in the Axis of Conflict.

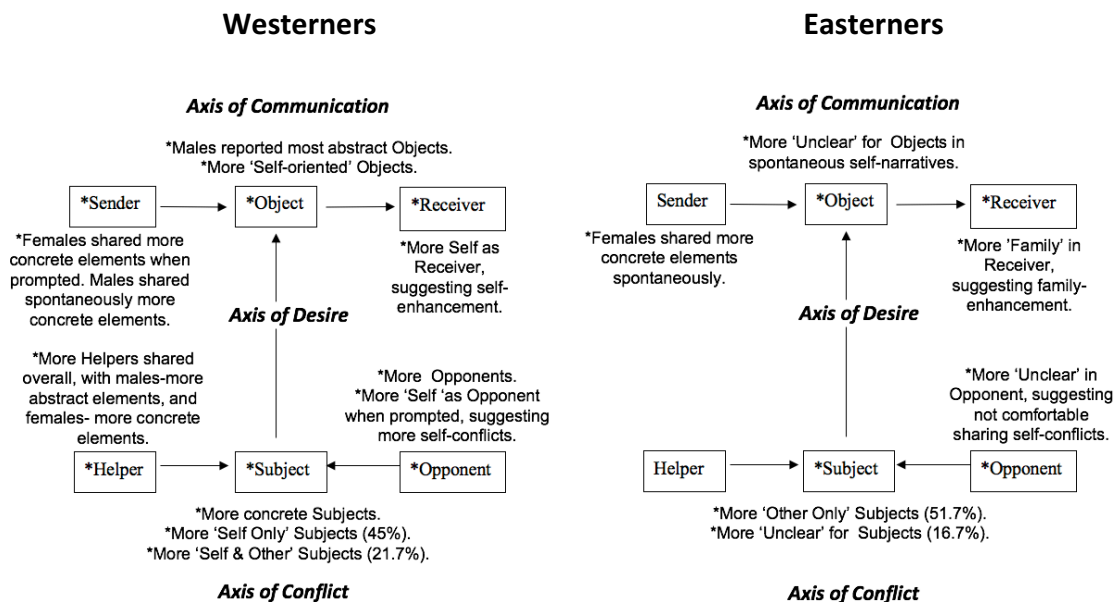


Figure 5.17. Summary of significant differences in actantial analyses results between Westerners and Easterners.

In contrast, Easterners may not be as comfortable compared to Westerners in sharing their self-narratives as they report more unclear responses for Subject, Object and Opponent. The main character or Subject of their self-narratives is more frequently about ‘Other Only’, usually their family members. When they obtain their goals, family was reported as the benefactor, their Receiver. The emphasis on the ‘Other’ and

foregrounding the context of self embedded with others in both spontaneous and prompted narration suggests that Easterners tend to use a *contextualized-repetitive self-narrating style*. These different structures of culture-specific selves in actantial narrative structure for Westerners and Easterners have been derived from the current condensed results and answer our questions of ‘*What*’ and ‘*How*’ self-narrative contents and self-narrating style differs across cultures. Now, we turn to our third question of how self-narration makes use of autobiographical memory.

Key events. All Westerners and Easterners shared at least one key event with a total of 473 key events shared. Westerners shared slightly more ($n = 241$) key events than Easterners ($n = 232$). The frequency of each key events that were reported to be positive and negative by each cultural group are summarized in Table 5.18. Overall, there were more positive key events reported (71.5%) than negative key events (28.3%).

To investigate any cross-cultural and gender differences in positive and negative key events, a mixed-design ANOVA was conducted with cultural group (Westerners vs Easterners) and gender (Male vs Female) as the between-subject factors, and the key event valence (Positive Key Events vs Negative Key Events) as the within-subject factors. There was no significant interaction between cultural group, gender and valence, $F(1, 116) = 0.20, p = .654, \eta_p^2 = .00$, nor were there any cultural differences in reports of positive and negative key events between Westerners and Easterners, $F(1, 116) = 2.08, p = .152, \eta_p^2 = .02$. The main effect of valence was significant, $F(1, 116) = 26.23, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$, suggesting that participants generally shared more positive ($M = 0.41$) than negative ($M = 0.26$) key events in their self-narratives.

Table 5.18

Frequencies of Each of the Five Key Events that were Reported to be Positive or Negative in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Culture/Key Events | Key Event 1 | | Key Event 2 | | Key Event 3 | | Key Event 4 | | Key Event 5 | | Total | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg |
| Westerners | <i>n</i> = 60 | | <i>n</i> = 58 | | <i>n</i> = 51 | | <i>n</i> = 42 | | <i>n</i> = 30 | | <i>n</i> = 241 | |
| | 44 | 16 | 41 | 17 | 35 | 16 | 30 | 12 | 28 | 2 | 178 | 63 |
| Easterners | <i>n</i> = 60 | | <i>n</i> = 56 | | <i>n</i> = 48 | | <i>n</i> = 38 | | <i>n</i> = 30 | | <i>n</i> = 232 | |
| | 35 | 25 | 38 | 18 | 38 | 10 | 27 | 10 | 22 | 8 | 160 | 71 |
| Total of the Key Events | <i>n</i> = 120 | | <i>n</i> = 114 | | <i>n</i> = 99 | | <i>n</i> = 80 | | <i>n</i> = 60 | | <i>N</i> = 473 | |
| | 79 | 41 | 79 | 35 | 73 | 26 | 57 | 22 | 50 | 10 | 338 | 134 |

Note. Pos = Positive, Neg = Negative.

In each of the key events, content and thematic analyses were conducted as in Study 2 (see Appendix I). The broad themes that emerged in Study 3 were ‘Transitions’, ‘Meeting or Knowing of Others’, ‘Travel Experiences’, ‘Learning Experiences’, ‘Achievements’, ‘Self Negative Experiences’, ‘Other Negative Experiences’, ‘Hardship associated with things’, ‘Hardship associated with people’, ‘Self-agency’, and ‘Self with others’. Table 5.19 shows examples of these broad categories reported by the two cultural groups with examples of each theme. The results indicate that the majority of key events featured the consistent themes of agency (Westerners *n* = 133, Easterners *n* = 116) and communion (Westerners *n* = 111, Easterners *n* = 118) also seen in Studies 1 and 2.

Table 5.19

Number of Reported Key Events with Examples in their Broad Thematic Categories

| Themes for each Culture | <i>n</i> | Examples |
|--|----------|--|
| <i>Transitions</i> | | |
| Westerners | 65 | <i>“Went to live in New Zealand.”</i> <i>“Moving to Melbourne to commence uni.”</i> |
| Easterners | 34 | <i>“Entering University.”</i> <i>“I moved house as we were too poor to pay the rent of the previous house.”</i> |
| <i>Meeting or Knowing of Others</i> | | |
| Westerners | 40 | <i>“Meeting Kelly Slater, champion surfer and idol.”</i> <i>“Growing up with the best sister.”</i> |
| Easterners | 42 | <i>“Met my tutor.”</i> <i>“Knowing my boyfriend.”</i> |
| <i>Travel Experiences</i> | | |
| Westerners | 23 | <i>“Travelling to Canada in 2004.”</i> <i>“Darwin Trip.”</i> |
| Easterners | 16 | <i>“Going to the US at a young age.”</i> <i>“Norway Exchange and memories in Europe.”</i> |
| <i>Learning Experiences</i> | | |
| Westerners | 27 | <i>“Finally learning to read.”</i> <i>“Mouse dissection and realisation of following medical career.”</i> |
| Easterners | 24 | <i>“Going to secondary school, learnt about self and others.”</i> <i>“Started learning Taekwondo at 16.”</i> |
| <i>Achievements</i> | | |
| Westerners | 36 | <i>“Completing high school and achieving DUX of school.”</i> <i>“Winning academic prizes.”</i> |
| Easterners | 56 | <i>“Graduating from secondary school with good grades.”</i> <i>“Soccer accomplishments.”</i> |
| <i>Self Negative Experiences</i> | | |
| Westerners | 12 | <i>“Tearing ligaments in my shoulder playing footy.”</i> <i>“Eating disorder.”</i> |
| Easterners | 21 | <i>“Failure in A Levels.”</i> <i>“Me falling into depression and anorexia.”</i> |
| <i>Other Negative Experiences</i> | | |
| Westerners | 40 | <i>“Death of childhood friend.”</i> <i>“Parents being divorced.”</i> |
| Easterners | 39 | <i>“Broken family.”</i> <i>“Father's death.”</i> |
| <i>Hardship associated with materialistic objects</i> | | |
| Westerners | 4 | <i>“House burned down.”</i> <i>“Parents' finances.”</i> |
| Easterners | 0 | <i>None reported</i> |

| | | |
|---|-----|--|
| <i>Hardship associated with people</i> | | |
| Westerners | 6 | <i>“Being in an abusive relationship.”</i> <i>“Being bullied.”</i> |
| Easterners | 12 | <i>“Bullied in secondary school.”</i> <i>“Primary 5 and 6 form teacher was a tyrant.”</i> |
| <i>Self-agency</i> | | |
| Westerners | 133 | <i>“Year 9 musical where had lead role and was stretched.”</i> <i>“Dealing with my sexuality.”</i> |
| Easterners | 116 | <i>“Being nominated as graduation speaker (in K2) for English and Chinese.”</i> <i>“Joining a national Chinese music competition.”</i> |
| <i>Self with others</i> | | |
| Westerners | 111 | <i>“My best friend moving away.”</i> <i>“Unknown event that made me afraid of men.”</i> |
| Easterners | 118 | <i>“Relationship with a girl for 3 years, which lead me to be single for almost 8 years.”</i> <i>“Staying in dorms and not my home for my undergrad life. It made me lose connection with my siblings.”</i> |

To examine whether there were cultural differences in the various broad themes for each category, a series of independent samples t-tests were completed and the results are displayed in Table 5.20. European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese seem to experience similar key events, except with ‘Transitions’. Significantly more European-Australians ($M = 1.08, SD = 0.96$) reported ‘Transitions’ than Singaporean Chinese, $t(118) = 3.12, p < .01$. This could be because a large number of the cohort of European-Australians were mostly first year university students who had moved to the University of Melbourne to begin their studies and had also lived in different countries or cities. In comparison, the Singaporean Chinese seemed to be more locally situated and experienced less transitions in their lives. They were also slightly older due to the minimum age of research participation being 21 years old. Hence, they may have already transitioned into University life earlier than the European-Australian sample.

Table 5.20

Summary of the Means, Standard Deviations and t-statistics of the Key Events in Broad Thematic Categories

| Broad Thematic Categories of all Key Events | Westerners (<i>n</i> =60) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> =60) | | <i>t</i> -statistics | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> (118) | <i>p</i> |
| Transitions | 1.08 | 0.96 | 0.57 | 0.85 | 3.12 | <.01 |
| Meeting or Knowing Others | 0.67 | 0.80 | 0.70 | 0.85 | -.22 | .83 |
| Travel Experiences | 0.38 | 0.56 | 0.27 | 0.55 | 1.16 | .25 |
| Learning Experiences | 0.45 | 0.65 | 0.40 | 0.69 | .41 | .68 |
| Achievements | 0.60 | 0.96 | 0.93 | 1.13 | -1.74 | .09 |
| Self Negative Experiences | 0.20 | 0.40 | 0.35 | 0.52 | <i>t</i> (111.59)=-1.78 ^a | .08 |
| Other Negative Experiences | 0.67 | 0.80 | 0.65 | 1.01 | .10 | .92 |
| Hardship with Things | 0.07 | 0.25 | 0.00 | 0.00 | <i>t</i> (59)=2.05 ^b | <.05 |
| Hardship with People | 0.10 | 0.30 | 0.20 | 0.55 | <i>t</i> (92.10)=-1.24 ^c | .22 |
| Self-agency | 2.22 | 1.33 | 1.93 | 1.47 | 1.11 | .27 |
| Self with Others | 1.85 | 1.18 | 1.97 | 1.25 | -.53 | .60 |

Note. ^a Levene's Test showed the equality of variance assumption was violated, $F = 12.61$, $p < .05$. ^b Levene's Test: the equality of variance assumption was violated, $F = 19.55$, $p < .001$. ^c Levene's Test: the equality of variance assumption was violated, $F = 6.42$, $p < .05$.

The association between key events and actants. Having shown in Studies 1 and 2 that key events corresponded with the actantial self-narrative structure, the current study explored further the association between key events and the Greimassian self-narrative structure. Each key event in this study was coded for any reference to an actant mentioned within either the participants' spontaneous or prompted self-narrative. The results of the coded frequencies of actants in each self-narrative for both Westerners and Easterners are shown in Table 5.21. As demonstrated, the actant Object was the most referred to in key events in both spontaneous ($n = 89$) and prompted self-narratives ($n = 102$). This was followed by Opponent in spontaneous self-narratives ($n = 36$) and Helper in prompted self-narratives ($n = 32$). The valence of the key events was also related to the actants mentioned in these key events. For example, the actant

Opponent was mentioned most in the negative key events, such as loss or relationship breakdown.

Table 5.21

Frequencies of Each of the Five Key Events that Emerged as Actants in the Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Westerners (W) and Easterners (E)

| Key events | Culture/ Actants | 1 SO | 2 PO | 3 PS | 4 SH | 5 PH | 6 SOp | 7 POp | 8 SS | 9 PS | 10 SR | 11 PR | Unclear |
|------------|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|---------|
| KE1 | W | 12 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| | E | 18 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| KE2 | W | 11 | 12 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| | E | 7 | 16 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 12 |
| KE3 | W | 8 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 13 |
| | E | 11 | 15 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 7 |
| KE4 | W | 5 | 13 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 8 |
| | E | 5 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 12 |
| KE5 | W | 6 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| | E | 6 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| Total | | 89 | 102 | 23 | 30 | 32 | 36 | 13 | 9 | 16 | 3 | 6 | 114 |

Note. 1SO= Spontaneous Object, 2PO=Prompted Object, 3PS=Prompted Subject, 4SH=Spontaneous Helper, 5PH=Prompted Helper, 6SOp=Spontaneous Opponent, 7POp=Prompted Opponent, 8SS=Spontaneous Sender, 9PS=Prompted Sender, 10SR=Spontaneous Receiver, 11PR=Prompted Receiver.

A summary of all the five key events in Table 5.22 clearly demonstrate that the majority of significant events were associated with the contents of ‘actants’ in the self-narrative structure (74.7% for European-Australians and 77.2% for Singaporean Chinese). The most referred to of the actants in individuals’ key events was Object (40.4%) and suggests that key events are significant because the experiences people have may largely shape the goals they pursue in life. This was also seen in the content and thematic analyses in Table 5.19 where a large proportion of key events involved the theme of self-agency for both cultural groups. The other common theme of self with others (communion) also indicate that people or events in a person’s life can become the ‘Helper’ or the ‘Opponent’ in their self-narrative. Likewise, it can reinforce the narrative as Self and/or Other as ‘Subject’, or it may provide moral authoritative

influence as ‘Sender’. The findings suggest the importance of key events in an individual’s life because key events seem to structure a life and the narrative identity of an individual. They are indeed self-defining memories and the autobiographical memory source for individuals to construct a self-narrative.

Table 5.22

Summary of Overall Key Events that Emerged as Actants in the Self-Narratives of Westerners (W) and Easterners (E)

| Culture/ Actant | Object | Subject | Helper | Oppon. | Sender | Receiver | Total Actants | Unclear |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|---------|----------|------------------|-----------|
| W | 95(52.7) | 10(5.6) | 37(20.6) | 26(14.4) | 9(5.0) | 3(1.7) | 180(74.7) | 61(25.3) |
| E | 96(53.6) | 13(7.3) | 25(14.0) | 23(8.9) | 16(8.9) | 6(3.4) | 179(77.2) | 53(22.8) |
| <i>Total</i> | 191(53.2) | 23(6.4) | 62(17.3) | 49(13.6) | 25(6.9) | 9(2.5) | 359(75.9) | 114(24.1) |

Note. N = 473. Percentages (%) in the brackets. Oppon. = Opponent.

Thematic examples of key events as actants in peoples’ lives. To illustrate how the key events are related to the self-narrative structure as actants, the following examples show how the significant events in the lives of these individuals have profoundly impacted their life stories. For example, with the actant Subject, it was interesting to note that the absence of ‘Father’ in reported self-narratives then impacted the Subject to include more ‘Mother’. Mother subsequently featured as the Subject but also as other actants. This is seen in the next examples. For an 18 year-old European-Australian female, her parents maintained a long-distance relationship and lived in separate states for the first five years of her life. She lived in NSW with her mother whilst her father lived in Victoria for work. In her reported Subject, she stated that her self-narrative was about ‘*my mum, she is always there no matter what happens, she is my rock.*’ Her mother then also featured as Sender, and along with two best friends was also considered Helper. Her father did not feature in any of the actants.

Likewise, for another 18 year-old European-Australian female, her parents separated when she was in Grade 6 or 7 and she lived with her mother and reported being close to her sister. She reported that the Subject(s) of her self-narrative were her ‘mum and sister’, who both also featured as Helper, with her mother again as Sender. This was not only observed in European-Australians but in Singaporean Chinese self-narratives too. For the 23 year-old Singaporean Chinese male, his father’s unfaithfulness caused a disruption of relationship and emotional connection with his father and his Subject was reported as ‘*My beloved mother*’. Even without family breakdown, several ($n = 9$) Singaporean Chinese reported mother as both the Subject and Helper in their spontaneous and prompted self-narratives simply because mother was present and seemed to be the backbone of support in their lives.

The ‘absent father’ is probably a cliché, but this absence/presence of primary caregiver(s) is interesting in the actantial story of life. It was also found that when mother was absent, the actantial configuration was also sensitive in detailing the self-narrative. For example, in the narrative of another 18 year-old European-Australian female, she spontaneously shared the following (an excerpt of her spontaneous self-narrative):

“When I was seven my little brother was born so my sister and I had to share a room, which at first we didn't like very much and we argued a lot. Around this time my Mum got a new job which required her to travel around the country for up to 5 days a week meaning my Dad did most of the parenting and I did the best I could to help him even though I was only young”. (She also mentioned earlier that her grandparents were regularly in her life).

Interestingly, in her prompted narrative, she had her ‘little sister’ as the main character in her life story, the Subject. Her ‘Dad and Grandma’ featured as the Sender while her Helper was her ‘Dad’. The absence of mother is very much felt in her self-narrative structure. This example raises the possibility that key events, like the absence of a

significant figure in one's life, might change the distribution of actants and that an actantial analysis might possibly be sensitive to revealing these changes in self-narrative structure by redistributing the contents of actantial configuration. This would be important to explore for future research with a longitudinal design on how change impacts on the construction of self and identity.

Examples of other actants as key events included 'meeting new friends', the friends then became 'Helpers'; 'knowing Jesus as my Lord and Savior', then Jesus became the 'Sender'; 'experiencing death or loss in the family', this then became an 'Opponent' in either spontaneous and/or prompted self-narratives, etc. It was notable that individuals who mentioned 'learning' or 'achievements' in their 'Objects' of desires had more key events involving starting school or mention of some educational endeavors. Clearly, the actants and key events in peoples' lives are intricately connected.

Culture and gender differences in key events as actants. To investigate any culture and gender differences in the reported key events as actants, further analyses examined what proportion of these key events were actually related to spontaneous or prompted actants in their self-narratives. For example, if they reported that three of the key events were actants out of the total four, then this was expressed as the fraction $3/4$ in the proportion. As highlighted in Table 5.21, not all participants reported more than one key event and by the fifth key event, only 50% of participants reported a key event.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with cultural group (Westerners vs Easterners) and gender (Male vs Female) as the between-subject factors, with the reported mean of proportions of actants in key events as the dependent variable. The interaction effect between gender and cultural group was statistically significant,

$F(1, 116) = 5.59, p = .02$, as illustrated in Figure 5.16. Western males ($M = 0.87$) reported more proportions of actants in their key events than Western females ($M = 0.70$), $t(58) = 2.54, p = .01$. However, this was not so for the Easterners who reported similar proportions of actants in their key events for both males ($M = 0.72$) and females ($M = 0.78$), $t(58) = -.86, p = .40$. The Western males' report of more proportions of actants, especially goal-oriented ones like Object, which the majority of key event actants were composed of, is in line with Gilligan's (1982) gender identity theory, which postulates that there are differences in autobiographical narratives where men are socialized into constructing identities revolving around the autonomy and achievement aspects of their experiences in Western cultures while women construct their identities with emotional and relational themes. Such gender differences were supported by current results indeed for Westerners but not for Easterners.

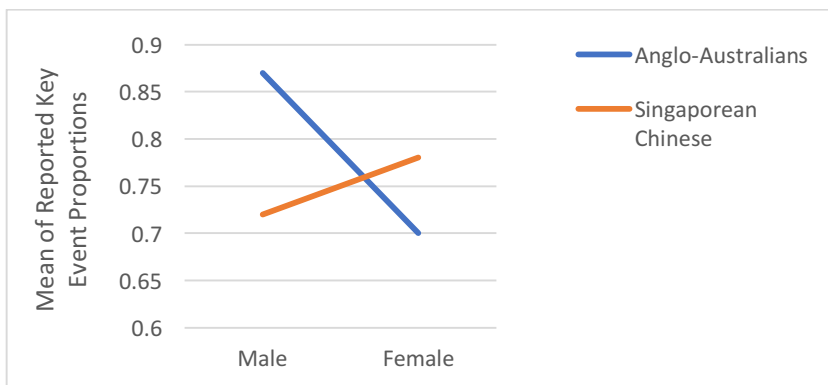


Figure 5.18. The interaction effect of gender and culture.

Religion. Religion was found to be an important variable in the lives of participants in both Studies 1 and 2. In this current study too, a sizable number nominated a religious affiliation ($n = 64$ participants, not including the 'Other' category where the Chinese religion Taoist was also reported), with 35.3 % of the 119

participants who responded (one European-Australian made no response), reporting that they were Christians ($n = 28$ European-Australians, $n = 14$ Singaporean Chinese). There were 17.6% who reported being Buddhists ($n = 21$ Singaporean Chinese). Nonetheless, 21% were Atheists ($n = 19$ European-Australians, $n = 4$ Singaporean Chinese) and 25.2% reported 'Other', such as 'Agnostic', 'Free Thinker', 'Taoist', 'Myself' and 'None' ($n = 11$ European-Australians, $n = 19$ Singaporean Chinese). Only one (European-Australian) reported Judaism as their religion. Christianity and Buddhism were the most represented religions of Westerners and Easterners in this study. Therefore, analyses were completed to study the role of religion in the self-narrative structure to show how the Greimassian framework can now be used to explore both cultural and religious differences, see Appendix M for a detailed account.

Conclusion

Just as Vignoles and colleagues (2016) argued for a multifaceted approach to self-construal and a rethink of the literature on culture and self, the present study in the same vein extends the argument for enlarging the boundaries of our methods and knowledge by employing a semiotic narrative approach like Greimas's Actantial Model. This current study preserved the coding methodology of Studies 1 and 2, and demonstrated the potential and feasibility of an online method based on the Actantial Model. This framework can be used systematically to analyze cross-cultural differences found in spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. The cultural differences in 'What' is shared in terms of the contents of self-narratives, 'How' it is shared in terms of self-narrating style, and 'How' it is associated with autobiographical memory through key events were revealed. While in line with previous research, the current findings also bring a nuanced understanding and, furthermore, show another way of investigating

spirituality and religion within the self-narrative structure to see if it impacted on cultural differences found.

Within the structure of self-narratives, this present study with a larger sample size than Studies 1 and 2 found that Westerners like European-Australians and Easterners like the Singaporean Chinese share some similarities but also significant differences in their self-narrative contents, from the length to the actantial configuration of their self-narrative structures. Westerners have been found to provide more elaborative accounts about personal events (Bliss & McCabe, 2008; Han et al., 1998; Minami & McCabe, 1995; Wang, 2001b; Wang et al., 2000). Consistent with this, for both spontaneous and prompted accounts, European-Australians' word count was indeed greater than the Singaporean Chinese. In addition, European-Australians reported more actants in Object, Subject, Helper, Opponent, Receiver and Sender than the Singaporean Chinese.

The current study confirmed the emergent trends in Studies 1 and 2 of different actantial distributions, which is the contents of the self-narratives in Westerners and Easterners. Mixed design ANOVAs and content/thematic analyses revealed that the divergent independent and interdependent self-construals were clearly associated with cultural orientation. Indeed, European-Australians had a greater Self focus in terms of the actantial roles of Subject, Object, Receiver and Opponent. In comparison, the Singaporean Chinese's Other focus in the actants Subject and Receiver provides support that in Asian personal narratives, "the ego often withdraws to the background to spotlight on significant others, the narrators' personal relationships to them, and the social context" (Röttger-Rössler, 1993, as cited in Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p. 48). That over half of the Singaporean Chinese (51.7%) considered their life stories not to be about themselves at all but about the significant Other(s) in their lives, such as their

family, father, mother, sister, grandmother, etc. is consistent with the interdependent and collectivistic self that may then be expressed through self-narration. Moreover, the other proportion of Singaporean Chinese (16.7%) who were 'unclear' about the Subject of their own self-narrative, reiterate that the Singaporean Chinese may not be used to talking about themselves as Subject or spontaneously about their Objects of Desire, but they may be more comfortable talking about 'Others' as Subject or their family as Receivers. This has implications on McAdams's (2001) *Psychology of Life Stories*, which McAdams has himself acknowledged, that identity as an ever evolving life story has contextual cultural factors to be considered. That is, self-narrative identity may be expressed in different ways where the individual Self is emphasized in Western cultures but de-emphasized in Eastern cultures.

The level of abstraction in terms of abstract vs. concrete in self-narratives also differed depending on culture, gender and the actants. For example, Subject, Opponent, Receiver and Sender were more concrete but Object and Helper were more abstract, and more Eastern females shared concrete Senders spontaneously like Western males. These results provide a nuanced understanding on self-description studies which found Westerners to be more abstract and Easterners to be more concrete but current results show that it depends on which aspect of the self-narrative people of different cultures and genders are describing. Westerners were only found to be more abstract than Easterners when they express their goals. For example, Western males reported more abstract Objects than Western females and Easterners but this cultural difference in abstraction was not found in all the actants.

Cultures and selves have an intimate relationship. It was found in this study that when prompted, European-Australians reported more 'Self' in the actant 'Opponent' and more Helpers than the Singaporean Chinese. They seem to regard themselves as

their biggest enemy in achieving their goals but seek help more. This finding is hardly surprising in that European-Australians not only seem to express more but they may be culturally trained to feel comfortable in sharing about the inner conflicts of their lives with others and because they are more self-focused, Self can become an enemy when their own self gets in the way of accomplishing their pursuits. The current finding that European-Australians have more *Helpers* lends support from a qualitative perspective to what Vignoles et al.'s (2016) found, that individualists like Westerners scored high on *commitment to others*, along with difference, self-direction, self-expression and self-containment. For the Singaporean Chinese in Singapore, acknowledging conflicts such as identifying Opponents (almost half of Singaporean Chinese participants) may go against what their culture values and pursues. However, it may also be due to a holistic cognitive style that tolerates contradiction or perhaps conflict for the Easterner but not for Westerners.

The differences between what each individual in each culture presents can be highlighted by the findings in the actants Subject, Object and Receiver. That is, for European-Australians, a strong Self as Subject was associated with more self-oriented goals in Object to benefit mostly the Self in Receiver. These findings suggest that while Singaporean Chinese present a *contextualized* Self that is embedded with others, the European-Australians present a *decontextualized* Self, a separate self-contained entity. Object and Receiver considered together may define the Self in what they pursue and why, in terms of who/what benefits from the outcome of goal attainment. This enriches the current literature on culture and self by showing that the endpoint of goal achievement is expressed as a function to serve the Self or the Other depending on the culture. As Markus and Kitayama (1991a, p. 229) highlighted in the interdependent self, “relationships, rather than being means for realizing various goals, will often be ends in

and of themselves". For the Singaporean Chinese, this may ring true as they seek to benefit their significant others collectively in their lives, that is, their family. The above results all address 'What' is different in self-narrative contents cross-culturally, which in many ways relates to 'How' individuals in their respective cultures self-narrate.

The current findings indicate differences between spontaneous and prompted accounts, which touch on self-narrating style, of 'How' self-narration differs cross-culturally. Generally, the findings indicate that when prompted, as expected, people tend to share more than when they share spontaneously. European-Australians had a tendency to provide even more information than the Singaporean Chinese, consistent with previous research that Westerners use an elaborative style (Wang, 2001). However, the heat maps uncovered further self-narrating styles! An inverse relationship or divergent mechanisms was found in that European-Australians spontaneously foreground the Self so that the Self stands alone in the foreground without the context of Others. This Western self-narrating style is termed *decontextualized self-narrating style*, borrowed from Kashima et al.'s (2006) suggestion that Western English speakers have a decontextualized self and use objectifying language. This is in contrast to the Eastern self-narrating style of embedding the Self in the context with Others, which is termed, *contextualized self-narrating style* because the Self does not stand alone, it stands with others in its context. These two styles of self-narration may also account for the cross-cultural differences in self presentations evident in self-narratives and autobiographical memory. In addition, the Westerners' self narrating style is to first foreground the individual self in a decontextualized way, but then contextualize it in the social context when prompted. In other words, there is an elaboration from decontextualized to contextualized. In contrast, Eastern self-narrating style is to stay with contextualized self from spontaneous to prompted. Therefore, European-Australians use both an

decontextualized-elaborative self-narrating style. On the other hand, the Singaporean Chinese use *contextualized-repetitive self-narrating style*.

The current findings raise important issues about the sorts of measures used to better understand culture and self. Researchers may only be capturing one style of self-narration when prompted versions are employed and the answers elicited may be different to spontaneous accounts. Any future cultural studies on self may need to consider both spontaneous and prompted accounts to fully understand how self-narrating style can change and impact on results. These have implications on our findings because self-narrating style may be the influential link between self-narratives and autobiographical memory. It is in the ongoing process of self-narrating that both our self-narratives and autobiographical memory develops, and this reciprocal relationship of self-narrative and autobiographical memory continues throughout life.

Actants in the self-narrative structure were found to correspond with the key events in an individual's life. The positive and negative key events in an individuals' life that are remembered are stored as autobiographical memory (Conway et al., 2004; Gryzman & Hudson, 2011). The current results provide important insights into how individuals' self-narratives are associated with key events in autobiographical memory. Firstly, consistent with research findings that people are less likely to disclose socially negative events (Pasupathi et al., 2007), in the current study, it was found that in both cultural groups, participants shared more positive key events than negative ones. Secondly, perhaps why more positive key events are shared is because most participants in both cultures had the actant Object as the most featured in key events. This indicates that key events are significant because the experiences people have may largely shape the goals they pursue in life - which may inadvertently define themselves as the Subject. This further suggests that key events that engage goal-directed experience may be the

majority of those remembered or retrieved, as found by Conway (1990, 1996) because they are self-defining. Thirdly, the themes of agency and communion were consistently found throughout the three studies in many of key events recalled, and they seem to suggest that Westerners and Easterners have experienced similar key events in their lives, such as achievements, travel experiences, loss or breakdown of relationships, hardship, etc. The only cross-cultural differences in contents of key events in the current study were that European-Australians reported more 'Transition' key events than Singaporean Chinese because they were mostly first year university students who had transitioned to university life and/or had to move and settle into new places. The Singaporean Chinese were slightly older due to research participation requirements in their university and, hence, the issue of transition was not as prominent in their lives. This raises an important issue that in any comparative cultural study, the unique experiences, social, political and historical contexts need to be taken into account for any confounding variables.

What the key event findings also show is that these significant personal memory accounts can dynamically change narrative structure and may be easily retrieved because they are semantically laden and are weaved into the narrative form of a life story. What has meaning for each person's life and their cultural context is remembered and stored in autobiographical memory and has implications for defining the individual's narrative identity. Furthermore, the current findings also provide empirical support for McLean et al.'s (2007) *Process Model of Self-Development* explained in Chapter two. According to their model, situated stories which are narrative accounts of personal memory created in specific situations are very similar to the key events (also a narrative account of significant personal memory). Both are used to develop and maintain the self. This self-development "process is situated in a larger cultural milieu

that holds expectations of what makes a healthy narrative and a healthy self” (McLean et al., 2007, p. 262). The current results support this by demonstrating that these situated stories or key events, which build the self-narrative and narrative identity, may be arranged in actantial organization and are differently distributed according to the various cultural milieu participants come from. Understandably, it is a process because each key event in a person’s life brings change and may introduce the emergence of new actants or instigate the fading of a current actant, and/or a change of actantial roles. For examples, in the narratives of individuals with family breakdown, the absence of father alters the Subject’s story to include the main character of ‘mother’ only or ‘mother and siblings’. Conversely, in the absence of mother in early key events, the individual has reported that ‘Father’ and ‘Grandmother’ then take the roles of ‘Subject’, ‘Sender’ and ‘Receiver’. For others, an initial key event had boy/girlfriend considered a ‘Sender’ or ‘Helper’ but in a later key event, when the relationship broke down, the boy/girlfriend was then considered an ‘Opponent’. The situated stories and key events both show how individuals develop and weave together their Self from the stories they create of their lives in particular situations or circumstances stored in personal memory. Hence, the functions of key events in the way that it impacts on the self varies intra-individually depending on the meaning made of the event or situation - something which a semiotic tool like Greimas’s actantial model can unpack.

These key event findings provide further understanding of how people recollect the significant events in their lives which form the self-narrative and may be part of the autobiographical memory that accumulates over time to form a narrative identity. As Conway (2005, p. 594) contended, that “memory is motivated” and so is narrative because both are goal-directed. Current results with actants as key events provide this needed empirical evidence. Grysman and Hudson (2011) provided support that the

mechanisms in which narratives are extracted from an event and an episode recalled from long-term memory are much the same. Accordingly, autobiographical memory in the 'episodic and semantic' sense of key events may take on an actantial arrangement, then weaves itself into the self-narrative. This would be worthy of further investigation as it can provide us with insight as to how the self is formed over time in its cultural milieu through stored memories of key events and how self-narrating style and self-narrative which leads to narrative identity may shape what is remembered through the actants which play out in each individual's actantial organization and distribution of their self-narrative structure. This would also provide understanding of how, together, individual's memories and self-narratives may contribute to the collective memory and narratives of cultural systems that perpetuate culture's influence over the individual and vice versa.

McLean et al. (2007) in agreement with Wang and Brockmeier (2002) suggested that future research efforts ought to examine if the arrangement of experience and the purpose of narratives is similar across cultures. In some way, this study introduced an approach of determining the configuration and purpose of life stories in an actantial framework across cultures and found that it is not the same. However, further research is still required, especially for accounting for those key events which were not captured in the actantial arrangement of self-narrative structure.

The untold and fragmented stories were addressed in McLean et al.'s (2007) study and the same sentiments are shared that there is still much work to be completed in this area. In this study, 'What of the other 'unclear' key events? Are they not relevant as a part of the store of autobiographical memory? Some possibilities may arise here. Jerome Bruner aptly pointed out that "self depiction varies as a function of the interlocutor to whom the account is given" (Bruner 1994, p. 43). That is, the version of

self-narrative provided here may not utilize these key events, but they may still be instore for another audience in which a slightly varied self-narrative expression may incorporate on another occasion. In a similar vein, McLean et al. (2007) put forth:

... stories may be situated in one's mind (such as when one plans to tell a story), but the actual storying involves social processes that are absent or less strong in the imagined scenario. Nevertheless, private storying should also shape the self in social ways because of cultural expectations of stories or imagined audiences, for example, but these differences are contingent on how people imagine their social worlds, not how they actually are. (p. 274).

Hence, story-telling has different functions according to which self is sampled. As Triandis (1989) theorized, the private, public and/or collective selves, and also, whether it is told explicitly to an audience or imagined implicitly.

A similar aspect of cultural systems is religion. To make sense of the experiences people have in life, some people seek meaning through their religious and cultural practices and beliefs. Analyses were completed comparing the two major religions Christianity and Buddhism reported by Western and Eastern participants respectively (see Appendix M). Significant differences between European-Australian Christian and Singaporean Chinese Buddhists' reported abstract Objects of desires suggests that 'Object' may be an important actant that impacts on the valence of life experiences as goals have been linked with long-term levels of well-being (Emmons, 2003; Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998; Diener, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). The significant correlation between positive affect and spontaneous abstract Objects of desire was observed for Christians but not for Buddhists. These findings suggest that the Christians had more goals. Even if these were abstract, their goals were related to higher levels of positive affect compared with the Buddhists. However, these comparisons may

have been influenced largely by culture. When culture was factored out, no significant differences in positive and negative events were found for Christians and Buddhists, as well as the difference of negative affect towards key events. Therefore, with this sample, culture and religion seem so closely intertwined that it is difficult to separate them. This finding though is limited by the small sample size of the Chinese Christian group and also, possibly because only half of the participants in each sample were practicing their religion. As neuroplasticity research has found, what you don't practice, you may not retain (Doidge, 2007; Kurland, Liu, & Stokes, 2018). However, what these analyses show is that it is now possible to study religion within the self-narrative structure and explore its impact on culture and self.

The limitations include, firstly, less information and clarification of contextual factors were obtained from online questionnaires compared to the interview method, since the participants had privacy and chose to not respond to some of the questions. However, despite this, much valuable data was extracted to make cultural comparative studies possible, and online tools provide an efficient and cost-effective way of conducting both qualitative and quantitative approaches in culture and self studies.

Secondly, the self-narratives were derived from relatively 'young' samples in that most participants were barely adults, with limited experiences compared to someone who has lived a full-life at 60 or 80 years of age. It would be important for future work to investigate self-narratives of older participants. Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes and Morling (2008) noted that with their study of mid-life participants, cultural variation extended to nonstudent adults and thus, it would be important to further this claim for cross-cultural self-narrative research. It would also be highly desirable to adopt longitudinal designs to investigate how age impacts on the self-narrative with its more varied and colorful experiences. Culture and history are further

deepened and the marks it leaves on the Self, not only with autobiographical memory but the life story and its intersection.

Another important confounding factor is the fact that both groups of participants were taken from English speaking universities. Although this was purposefully done to eliminate language as a variable, it raises the issue of whether the Singaporean Chinese are truly representative of the Eastern group and whether they would differ significantly to the mainland Chinese. It is likely that the Eastern participants in this study would have read similar novels (including many of the classic books of English literature), and may have identified with what they have read, including fictional narratives. Could it be that actants, where there weren't any significant results found, be due to participants expressing themselves in English and/or already primed by Western cultural influences? Despite this, cross-cultural differences were observed, which indicates that using the semiotic narrative framework, we can still reap rich data to investigate culture's effect on the individual self.

Lastly, using narratives as the source of analysis as highlighted by Gryzman and Hudson (2011) does present issues regarding various writing styles and representations. This highlights another level of individual differences that have not been examined in this study. Replication then with a large sample may be necessary to understand the individual differences, like use of language (e.g., pronoun drop, objectifying language, etc.) and whether there are variations between speaking and writing style when it comes to relying self-narrative discourse. Future research may consider adding validated measures like Vignoles et al.'s (2016) Seven-Dimensional Model of Self-construal to investigate how it corresponds with self-reported narratives to provide a better understanding of cross-cultural differences from both an emic and etic approach. The Self-construal scale may indicate how cultures differ, but the Greimassian self-narrative

approach would reveal much more information regarding what, how and perhaps why selves differ cross-culturally, as well as introduce other possible dimensions of self-construal to be considered from a 'bottom up approach'.

In conclusion, the current study sheds important insights on the self-narrative structures, contents and self-narrating styles of Westerners and Easterners. Actantial analysis offers new perspectives on culture, self and memory, how these differences are configured actantially and how autobiographical memory is linked through the key events as actants. Narrative is an ever changing and ongoing process because new key events emerge as different actants to reconfigure the contents of actantial arrangement in self-narrative structure in any given life. Similarly, the state of self is in a constant dynamic process of development. Hence, self-construal may also not be fixed, and may be better examined through a semiotic narrative framework. Examining narrative data to investigate self-construal in a systematic way through Greimas's actantial framework has furthered our knowledge of how individuals in distinct cultures narrate about themselves in '*What*' and '*How*' they share, what they pursue, who/what they value and how all this is intricately linked to their autobiographical memory.

Chapter 6. General Discussion and Conclusion

The current research program aimed to investigate cross-cultural differences in self-narratives and it addressed three main research questions: First, *what content do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultures?* Second, *how do they narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultural contexts?* Third, *how does self-narration relate to autobiographical memory in constructing a self-narrative in Western and Eastern cultures?* These questions concern not only ‘*What*’ content varies but also ‘*How*’ self-narration style varies cross-culturally, in addition to the intimate relationship between self-narrative and autobiographical memory. These pivotal questions were investigated in the first exploratory and second pilot studies using the Greimassian narrative framework. It was initially important to establish the feasibility and validity of Greimas’s Actantial Model to analyze self-narratives and then as a systematic approach to study these self-narratives online in cultural comparative research. Studies 1 and 2 provided sufficient evidence for the viability of the Greimassian approach as a semiotic tool, and Study 3, with a mixed method design, addressed the main research questions and other important insights that could be gained from using a semiotic tool like Greimas’s approach. In the following sections, I will answer these questions and discuss in more detail the main findings and contributions of this research. Furthermore, the implications of the findings, limitations and future directions for research will be covered.

Summary of Findings & Contributions

The current research with its three studies is among the first to have laid the foundations of how to use Greimas’s Actantial Model as a systematic semiotic narrative

approach in comparative cross-cultural research. The Actantial Model unpacks the meaning-making structures in stories realized as actantial roles which construct the self-narrative to form narrative identity. Understanding the actants and the actantial roles in the self-narrative structure in each life narrative and as a collection of narratives offers both qualitative and quantitative evidence, which is beyond that which could be derived from Likert-scales or twenty statement tests. By capturing spontaneous and prompted accounts, we not only capture how the self or 'I' as Subject is defined spontaneously and when prompted, but also how it is presented in terms of the content and self-narrating style. After all, self-narration is a discursive act which also impacts on autobiographical memory. Each of the research questions and their answers are discussed.

Research Question 1: What content do people narrate in Western and Eastern cultures?

A central question in this research program is *what cross-cultural differences could be revealed by Greimas's Actantial Model as a semiotic and comparative tool?* Answering this question would also address what contents are in self-narratives in different cultures. Before a discussion of the differences found through the Greimassian approach, it needs to be pointed out that similarities were also uncovered in all the three studies (see Table L1, Appendix L), particularly that Westerners and Easterners share similar helpers and senders. These findings emphasize the very fact that actants are discernible in each of the different cultures, in line with Greimas's claim that his model is universal. These three studies provide preliminary evidence that the similarities, for example, of conflict and moral structure through the Greimassian framework is found across cultures like the European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese. This implies

that the similarity in self-narrative structure is actually the basis on which the analysis is justified. The Greimassian approach not only revealed similarities but it importantly uncovered the differences in the configuration of the actants as a function of culture. Qualitative examples in Study 1 started to emerge but it was not until Study 2 and more clearly in Study 3 of both qualitative and quantitative results, that it was clear European-Australians provided more elaborative spontaneous and prompted self-narrative accounts both in word count and content. There were more reported actants in Object, Subject, Helper, Opponent, Receiver and Sender than the Singaporean Chinese. In the contents of the European-Australians' self-narratives, Self populated the actants Subject, Object, Receiver and Opponent, which emphasizes the bounded and self-contained entity of Westerners. In comparison, the Singaporean Chinese were more other-focused in the actant of Subject and had significantly more family featured as the Receiver. A small, but sizeable number of Singaporean Chinese felt 'unclear' about the Subject of their own self-narrative, the 'Object' of their desires and also, the 'Opponent' in the axis of conflict in their self-narratives. This suggests that Singaporean Chinese may not be as comfortable talking about themselves as the Subject of their life story, about the goals they have, or the conflicts they face.

Western self-narratives were about the Self predominantly as Subject, which correlated significantly with Object and Receiver, in that they had more 'self-focused' goals which benefited the Self primarily, providing further empirical support to existing research that European-Australians with an Independent self-construal present a decontextualized Self (Kashima et al., 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). For example, the following 20 year old European-Australian female's narrative excerpt sums up the decontextualized Self of many Western self-narratives:

"Learning about myself, what kind of person I want to be, who I want to be friends with, how I want to live my life, what I want to do tomorrow to make

myself better.”

However, in the Singaporean-Chinese, there was a significant correlation between spontaneous Object and Receiver – ‘*who*’ benefits when the Object is obtained - is what defines the Subject. Interestingly, the Subject is not predominantly ‘Self’ in the Easterner but more of ‘Others’, such as mum, dad, family, friends, etc. The foci in the Receiver for the Easterner features self but more so, it’s about the family. For example, the following 21 year-old Singaporean Chinese female’s narrative excerpt sums up the contextualized Self of many Eastern self-narratives:

‘It would be about me and my family mainly. I would strive to achieve success because I want my family to live a better life’.

These findings, encoded in the self-narrative structure, brings fresh empirical perspective of how the self is constructed narratively by what it pursues and why. It is of no surprise that the family is who/what defines the self primarily in Easterners who are embedded in their context but to see it written into the self-narrative content and structure shows how the self-narrative structure mirrors both the social and cultural structures that hold our worlds together. For example, in collectivistic cultures the extended family is the structural family held together by individuals with more an interdependent self-construal orientation, whereas in individualistic cultures the nuclear family structure dominates with individuals focusing on developing a more dominant independent self construal. It also may be true that the self-narrative reflects the master narrative, that is, the culture’s script of acceptable norms and practices (McAdams, 2006b; McLean & Syed, 2015; Thorne & McLean, 2003) and vice-versa, as illustrated in the case studies of Study 1. This finding is also consistent with previous research that for the Easterner who holds an interdependent self-construal, their personal goals focus on their social relations, particularly on the family, and they seek to improve their

interconnectedness with their family (van Horen et al., 2008). These results were reflected in the self-narrative content and this has been shown to vary cross-culturally.

The Singaporean Chinese in their prompted self-narratives in Study 3 had 16.7% reporting no Subjects at all, implying that they are not as comfortable talking about this when asked directly about it. After all, Easterners do not usually focus on the ‘Self’ and they may not engage in self-narrative practices like those in the West. This raises many questions. Cross-culturally, does each actant exist across different cultural self-narratives, and if so, why is it not articulated in other cultures? Does it have to be? Is Greimas’s model also a Western model in its articulation of a narrative structure? It was obvious in the interviews of Study 1 that conflict exists in terms of the presence of the actant Opponents but sometimes they were not reported in Studies 2 and 3 – was this because there was no interviewer to prompt for more elaboration? However, the Easterners’ de-emphasizing of the Axis of Conflict may also point to a dialectical Self with holistic cognitive style. Another possibility, which was illustrated in the Study 1 case study of the Singaporean Chinese male who had not disclosed his homosexuality to his parents, is that in the presence of an unresolved conflict, the experience may not yet make it into the self-narrative and individuals may readily adopt a master narrative because it is easier to avoid conflict, especially for an Easterner. After all, narrators are sensitive to their audience and may adopt a self-narrative that presents themselves more congruent with what they think their cultural script ought to be like, as also highlighted in spontaneous and prompted accounts. The intimate relationship between self-narratives and master narratives then is important to research further.

There are not only cultural but also gender differences, with Western males reporting more abstract Objects, as well as Helpers, Opponents, Senders and Receivers. Accompanied with the results of Western males sharing more proportion of key events

that consist mostly of Objects, the current findings provide empirical support for Gilligan's (1982) gender identity theory: Western males construct narrative identities revolving around the autonomy and achievement aspects of their experiences. This was not the case for Eastern men.

Research Question 2: How do people narrate about themselves in Western and Eastern cultures?

Why look at spontaneous and prompted accounts? It provides a way of understanding self-narrating style, of how people express themselves spontaneously and afterward, being asked to elaborate on some specific aspects of their spontaneous self-narratives. Generally, the findings of Studies 1, 2 and 3 suggest that Westerners shared more when prompted, whereas this difference between spontaneous and prompted accounts was not as significant for Easterners. This self-narrating style of elaborating more when asked was qualitatively seen in Study 1 and quantitatively demonstrated in Study 2. For example, mixed ANOVA results showed that Westerners when prompted, reported more Helpers than when they shared spontaneously while Easterners shared similarly in spontaneous and prompted accounts. This self-narrating style was also seen in Study 3, where Westerners, and in some cases Western males, reported more contents of the actants Object, Subject, Helper, Opponent, Sender and Receiver when prompted. These results add to previous research showing that Westerners use an elaborative style of discourse (Li, 2012; Wang, 2001b) by demonstrating these results through actantial analyses. That is, a semiotic tool is useful to understanding meaning in culture and self studies.

The associations between Subject, Object and Receiver again illustrate the inverse relationship between Westerners and Easterners in that Westerners present the

Self in the foreground, which pervades through the Self as Subject, the Self-oriented goals they pursue as Objects of Desire to benefit their Self as Receivers when they have obtained their goals. Only when asked to consider further in prompted accounts, do they consider more of ‘others’ in their self-narratives. This spontaneous Western self-narrating style of foregrounding the Self as a self-contained entity without emphasis on the context of Others is referred to as a *decontextualized self-narrating style*. Therefore, the movement seen in the heat maps of Westerners from a decontextualized to a more contextualized self-narrating provides evidence of a *decontextualized-elaborative self-narrating style*. In contrast, Eastern self-narration does not change as much between spontaneous and prompted accounts, and mostly, Easterners consider more of ‘Self’ with ‘Other(s)’ or the ‘Other’ takes prominence. Easterners seem to demonstrate a contextualized Self in both spontaneous and prompted accounts and this Eastern self-narrating style of embedding the Self in the social context is referred to as *contextualized self-narrating style* because the Self is connected with others in its context. Such a contextualized self in East Asians has been corroborated by cultural neuroscience evidence (see Ng et al., 2010; Zhu et al., 2007). Therefore, Easterners engage in *contextualized-repetitive self-narrating style*. These culturally divergent self-narrating styles are by no means an exhaustive list as other discourse styles have been reported (Fivush, 2019; Li, 2012) and require further research.

The current results highlight that communicating about the self is indeed culturally distinct between Westerners and Easterners. There were various pathways of how the self-representations were communicated. That is, the self-narrating style as a discursive act varied cross-culturally, somewhat in line with cultural self-construal. The notions of *decontextualized-elaborative* and *contextualized-repetitive self-narrating styles* may shed further light on why there are differences found in Western and Eastern

self-narratives and autobiographical memory (Wang & Ross, 2005), because the act of self-narration may link the two. As each individual employs different self-narrative styles, they may develop not only their self-narratives but also their autobiographical memories as they are mutually constitutive.

This is an important contribution because there is no empirical research on this topic which has demonstrated these divergent ways of self-narrating style in spontaneous and prompted accounts in the self-narrative structure across cultures. The act of self-narration is in itself goal-directed and influenced by the researcher's questions, that is, when the researcher allows the participant to share spontaneously or when they ask them to answer specific questions. It also shows that the sorts of research answers we elicit is sensitive to how it is asked. This raises important issues for researchers in regards to their methods. More importantly, the finding enriches our understanding of self-narrating style as a discursive act by highlighting the important role that culture plays in these processes. In addition, this finding adds to culture and self research by substantiating the importance of a self-narrative approach which considers both spontaneous and prompted accounts in bringing together the corpus of knowledge about perceiving, thinking, remembering and articulating ourselves across cultures. How individuals construct their selves and their responses in research varies when they are given the freedom to share more openly in spontaneous accounts or when they are forced to answer within the parameters of specific research questions.

Mishler (1986) has contended that the narratives from interviews are a co-construction of interviewer and participant but it is further illustrated here that the narratives are social and cultural co-constructions, providing significant insights into the ways we think and communicate about ourselves cross-culturally. That the Self is made up of what it takes in through the senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing and seeing has

influenced the ways of perceiving, thinking, remembering and telling through cultural practices. These self-ways (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997) implicates every aspect of our being so that when individuals present themselves, the cultural orientation comes to the forefront. Greimas's multidimensional framework allows an analysis of both structure and content once discourse and/or text is present, to examine both the discursive style, the *'How'* of self-narrating style and *'What'* is said in terms of self-narrative content. How the Self presents itself is perhaps reflected in the way it defines itself and makes narrative meaning through actantial configuration, which is further revealed by the actantial narrative structure.

Past research described how the independent and interdependent self-construal differed and how it influenced cognition, emotion, and motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a; Cross et al., 2011). The current findings add to how self-construal may be glimpsed through the meaning structures. How it is configured in the actantial arrangement varies cross-culturally in accordance with the independent and interdependent self-construal in Western and Eastern self-narratives. The self-narrative and self-narrating style findings provide another nuanced way of looking at self-construal. Through analyzing Subject-Object relationship, it is interesting to note how the mechanisms of self-narrating style may bi-directionally influence self-construal, self-narratives and autobiographical memory. For example, articulating your goals has an impact on how you define yourself and how you define yourself also influences your goals, both of which may then structure autobiographical memory. The results of this project demonstrate that self-construal is embedded into the self-narrative structure and both are intertwined in an intimate mutually reciprocal relationship in one's lifetime, housed in autobiographical memory.

Research Question 3: How does self-narration relate to autobiographical memory in constructing a self-narrative in Western and Eastern cultures?

The intimate link between self-narratives and autobiographical memory was shown in Chapter 1 and the question was raised after the empirical chapters about whether a semiotic tool like Greimas's Actantial Model could unravel further insights into the relationship between self-narration, self-narrative and autobiographical memory. What was found in Study 1 was that the contents of key events in individuals' lives corresponded with that of the actantial self-narrative structure. In Studies 2 and 3, it became even clearer that key events emerged as actants of an individual's life and this link between actants and key events perhaps enable the 'remembering and meaning-making' that form and transform autobiographical memory (Wang et al., 2017) which contribute to the formation of self-narrative and narrative identity. The majority of key events or episodes in an individual's life were occasions which were also significant actants in the self-narrative structure. As key events are regarded as self-defining memories (Singer et al., 2013), the actants linked to self-defining memories which are the material of autobiographical memory, may be used to generate narrative scripts for situated stories (McLean et al., 2007). These are employed to construct the self-narrative. A self-narrative with self-continuity across changes over time leads to narrative identity (McAdams, 2013).

Study 3 results found that the majority of key events were comprised of the actant Object, which appears to be in line with Conway and colleagues' empirical findings on the *Self Memory System*. They found that a working self generates personal goals for memory encoding and retrieval to integrate into the *long-term self* and that goal-derived memories reliably accelerate memory recall (Conway, 1990, 2005; Conway and Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). It is not surprising then that the theme of agency

continually emerged in Studies 1 to 3 to indicate that most key events remembered by both cultural groups were tied to their sense of self-agency. In Study 3, this was confirmed that the actant Object, which comprises the goals or desires of individuals and engages self-agency, is the most easily and reliably retrieved of all actants in key events for both European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese. However, for the Singaporean Chinese, though they may report many self-agentic key events that were related to their Objects of desire, they may not necessarily present this in their self-narrative, perhaps due to value of modesty and practice of self-effacement (Kurman, 2003).

Themes also emerged in the actantial configurations found in self-narratives and key events, for example, filial piety in Eastern self-narratives that mirror the master narrative. Greimas's Actantial Model not only proposes that the actants operate in a self-narrative but the semantic universe, which may give us insights not only to the microstructure at an individual level but the macrostructure of the cultural level. Hence, self and culture are not mutually exclusive but intertwine to form our semantic universe, which holds our worlds together. It may be that both have an actantial organization, and in understanding this in a deeper way the various actantial distributions, we can understand cultures and individuals better as we investigate how they intertwine in a co-constructive manner. After all, autobiographical remembering is conceived of as a cultural practice, both "autobiographical memory and self are inter-connected constructions of meaning, two dynamic aspects of the same overarching cultural system" (Wang & Brockmeier, 2002, p. 50). Because self-defining memories, self-narratives and master narratives can be understood and analyzed by the Actantial model as shown in the three empirical studies of this research project, it raises the possibility that autobiographical memory may be structured narratively as proposed by Habermas

and Bluck (2000) because it synthesizes both culture and self-narratives. Wang (in press) also theorized about the organization of autobiographical memory from a cultural dynamic framework and proposed that it was likely that autobiographical memory was organized in narrative form as suggested by Habermas and Bluck's (2000) life story framework. Wang (in press) further highlighted how cultural variables impact autobiographical memory organization and thus structure our memories according to our cultural expectations.

The current findings further enrich Wang's (in press) cultural dynamic theory on autobiographical organization and Habermas and Bluck's (2000) life story framework as well as Singer et al.'s (2013) self-defining memories by providing empirical support and a new perspective that actantial configuration in the self-narrative connected to key events undergoes a dynamic process through self-narration - just as both culture and self are dynamic in its constitution in one's lifetime. This is because new experiences invite the emergence of new actants and new contents of actantial configurations to form as a result of making sense of one's experiences in every key event. The process of remembering and meaning-making (Wang et al., 2017) is perhaps intimately tied to the structuring and restructuring of the contents of actantial configurations through self-narration in one's lifetime. Employing different types of self-narrating styles (such as, decontextualized-elaborative and contextualized-repetitive), in narrative discourse for the process of remembering and meaning-making may form divergent self-construals. Both these processes also help to maintain a sense of unity and coherence within the self's actantial configuration and hence, self-narrative and autobiographical memory. This is also in line with how memory encoding and retrieval directed by the *working self* integrates into the *long-term self* (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Thus, the self-narrative and long-term self in autobiographical memory give rise to narrative identity.

With narrative identity established, it is possible that some neural pathways have too, and certain neural wiring groundwork has been laid as found in cultural neuroscience research (Kitayama & Uskul, 2011; Kaplan et al., 2016). Despite the structuring and restructuring of the contents of actantial configurations, there are cultural templates in which most of the skeletal components of the actantial configuration remains. That is, what defines the self in the actant Subject is perhaps very Self-focused in the actants Object and Receiver in Westerners but for the Easterners, it is Other-focused such as family in the actant Receiver from our current findings. This self-definition in actantial configuration in self-narrative structure and autobiographical memory reveals self-construal. An actantial analysis has illuminated some aspects of the linkage between self and autobiographical memory that is seen as a truism in psychology (Fivush & Haden, 2003).

What other insights using the Greimassian approach were found?

Lastly, religion has been recognized as a variable that may impact on cross-cultural differences (Saroglou & Cohen, 2011; Vignoles et al., 2016) and may be important for psychological studies (Baumeister, 2002; Cohen, 2009; Kashima et al., 2011; Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006; Matsumoto & Juang, 2008). In the current research, religion played some role in participants' self-narratives. The role of religion in self-narratives is an important dimension that a number of individuals reported, occupying mostly the actant 'Sender', but also featured in some self-narratives as Subject, Helper, Receiver and Object. In some self-narratives, stories of religious conversions and subsequent goals developed were what defined the self and life orientation. In all three studies, religion was reported by participants to be instrumental to who they are; it was practiced in their daily lives and seemed to shape their motivation and goals. The

significance of religion raises the possibility that the moral or authority framework in people's life, understood here as the Sender in the actantial structure, may be a variable that needs to be considered in multi-dimensional models of 'Culture and Self'. A possible way of analyzing religion in the self-narrative structure and investigating whether it impacted on cultural differences has been explored in Study 3 because it emerged in Studies 1 and 2 that religion was important in individual's self-narratives (see Appendix M). Culture in many ways encompasses religious beliefs and heritage, but the current small sample lacked power to derive findings conclusively. Nonetheless the fact remains that religion and spirituality are important in many of these participants' self-narratives.

Religion and spirituality has been explored in terms of its linkage to psychological well-being and the positive role played in nurturing a sense of identity (see Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, & Prashar, 2013). In the current research project, it has been shown how religion can be studied within the self-narrative structure to form narrative identity. Seen from this viewpoint, religion can be studied by analyzing the different actants in which participants report religion or religious concepts as having an influential actantial role. For example, research has focused on how religion provides a way of assisting people to apply self-regulation and self-control (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009), which taps into the Subject-Object- Sender-Receiver Greimassian relationships. Or in the case of religion as a coping mechanism (Cotton, Zebracki, Rosenthal, Tsevat, & Drotar, 2006; Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988; Seybold & Hill, 2001), it could be understood in the Greimassian framework as the Subject-Object-Helper relationship. Besides its internal influences on self-processes, researchers are realizing the dual function of religion as both a social identity and belief system for individuals and groups throughout the world (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010).

Indeed, as highlighted in the current studies, religion serves different functions for individuals, that of sociocultural manifestations and/or psychological dimensions (Buitelaar & Zock, 2013), and is interwoven into self-narratives. From a self-narrative perspective, the contribution of the current research findings is to introduce a way of studying religion in psychology, especially in cross-cultural comparative research, as a variable that may impact significantly on self-processes. This could provide us with a better understanding about “basic human behavioral processes by studying how people practice their religion, maintain their faith, and are shaped by it” (Baumeister, 2002, p. 167) from their self-narrative accounts.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

There are five implications in the current research. Firstly, the use of the Actantial Model as a systematic approach in future self-narrative study would be important in other cultures, for examples, in different Western cultures (like US, Germany, UK, etc.) and East Asian cultures (like China, Japan, Taiwan, etc.) to determine whether the actantial configurations found in these European-Australian and Singapore Chinese groups as representative of Western and Eastern cultures are similar or different. Do the patterns of self or family enhancement replicate in other groups of Western and Eastern self-narratives? Or the decontextualized and contextualized self-narrating styles? What other actants define the Subject in other cultures? Cultures beyond the West and East Asian ones would be interesting as less research has focused on these cultures. This may further our understanding of selfhood across cultures and of the ‘culture and self’ knowledge base. It would enable us to understand whether a self-narrative approach is viable in different cultures where the self is less emphasized. Despite this, discursive acts are ubiquitous across cultures but in what manner they

encompass the self and/or others would be telling of how other cultures build a narrative for personal identity. In addition, in a fast globalizing world where many people are now moving abroad for new opportunities, the Actantial Model has glimpsed the changes in actantial configuration after different significant key events. For example, moving abroad was identified as one of the key events in both European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese self-narratives. The Actantial Model is atemporal but not static in that it can capture dynamic aspects of self-narratives as demonstrated in a life where key events have altered contents of the actantial configuration.

The Greimassian approach may be very useful for not only studying how culture defines the self in terms of the actantial configuration, but it can also be used to study acculturation and how identities can change. Future research could use the Actantial Model to analyze the self-narratives of new migrants or the different generations of multicultural individuals to understand how that may be different or the same in terms of actantial configuration in individuals who have not had lived overseas experiences. This may prove fruitful in understanding processes of change and acculturation, when and how people become acculturated in their host country and what aspects of the ‘new reconstructed self’ varies from their original culture’s counterparts.

Along these lines, future research could consider a global project of mapping and creating a taxonomy of selves and self-narrating styles across cultures. That is, the use of the Actantial Model to map out a taxonomy of Selves across cultures based on the categories of characteristics of actantial configuration and use of the various self-narrating styles across the globe. Of what benefit might this provide us? I believe a taxonomy helps us to better understand the different selves cross culturally so as to develop a psychological science that is indeed universal. It could also shed light on how these selves can change in sensitivity to changing global events and mobility of the

world's populations due to the mobility of our modern times. How we study culture and self as well as the changes that occur due to global influences may be investigated and captured through the Actantial Model. The actantial analyses give us a portal to understanding the global variation in self-construal by answering 'why' individuals have a particular pattern of self-construal based on the narrative social and cultural constructions of their lives. They also extend Vignoles et al.'s (2016) findings of how the different dimensions can correlate with particular actantial configurations and echo their rightful emphasis on the "reliance on empirical data, rather than geographical location or ethnicity, to determine the cultural norms of any given sample" (p. 992). The inclusion of a measure of interdependent and/or independent orientation in this study would have given better support for our conclusions. However, it is important that the quantitative approach espoused by Vignoles et al. (2016) is augmented by qualitative approach such as the one illustrated here with the Actantial Model to provide a better account of culture and self, from an emic and etic approach.

Secondly, the implications of spontaneous and prompted accounts in self-reports is pivotal for research, as studies in the past have typically used a structured questionnaire. There is much that can be missed with categorical or Likert scale research methods only, especially when investigating culture and self, which are replete with meaning. The way that individuals from different cultures present themselves has been investigated especially in terms of socially desirable responding - whether it may be self-deceptive enhancement in individualistic cultures or impression management in collectivistic cultures (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009; Lalwani et al., 2006). The current findings provide another angle to look at self-presentation across cultures because self-reports incorporate a discursive style that may be ingrained by narrative practices from early socialization. Whether these discursive styles could be likened to self-deceptive

enhancement for the European-Australians or impression management in the Singaporean Chinese, or whether they are just different culturally oriented discursive acts, research would require both spontaneous and prompted accounts using emic and etic approaches as shown here with validated scales, such as those used by Lalwani and colleagues, or others to explore further. In any conclusions drawn about socially desirable responding across cultures, cultural self-narrating style needs to be considered in the equation, as self-presentation may be sensitive to how individuals are asked and the sorts of questions posed.

Thirdly, the feasibility of the Actantial Model has been demonstrated for self-narratives but not yet for master narratives which are vital to further our knowledge of self-narratives. For example, it was illustrated in one of the case studies that in the presence of an unresolved self-narrative, individuals can readily adopt a master narrative to maintain goals that are congruent with their self-construal. This was highlighted by the Singaporean Chinese male who had not come out to his parents about his homosexuality, perhaps because his inner conflict could disturb the harmony of his relationship with his parents and interconnectedness with his family because his sexual orientation is taboo in his culture. Master narratives, whether they are concocted by researchers to explain abstract variables of culture and/or mere stereotypical cultural scripts of what a life ought to look like, are very similar to self-narratives: they are both social and cultural constructions - vehicles to make sense of one's behavior and experiences in the unfolding events of life within cultures. Therefore, the Actantial Model may also be applied to master narratives, which might prove useful for correlational studies of the linkage between self and master narratives, of how self and culture co-create. How research may go about this is to adopt the same qualitative and quantitative approaches outlined here with allowing participants to talk about what they

think their culture's ideal narrative is (not what they want as their desired ideal self) and then invite them to share their own self-narrative. Like Thorne and McLean's (2003) study on master narrative, the cultural master narrative was identified by majority vote - what was accepted by a large majority was considered to be the culture's master narrative. It is possible to also simultaneously collect data from older adults and students to see how master narratives can change over different generations. Or, similar to McLean et al.'s (2019) second study procedure, have mother and adolescent/young adult dyads share conversationally (from a discursive approach) on what they believe are their culture's master narrative and how their own self-narrative corresponds with or deviates from it. In this way, both a master narrative and self-narrative could be tapped to understand through different analyses how the master and self-narratives relate or differ across cultures and time. This may generate a fruitful line of research to understand how culture guides an individual in personal identity construction and how individuals' narratives shape their cultures.

Fourthly, more empirical research using the actantial approach in self-narratives to understand autobiographical memory are needed to consolidate the findings in the current study of the intricate link between actants and key events. Extending this research to test whether autobiographical memory is structured narratively may give us deeper insights into the role of how we interpret and make meaning of key events and how these are stored in our autobiographical knowledge base. It might be that the actantial structure brings together the making of self-narrative and cultural scripts of the master narrative from the pool of autobiographical memory, vicarious memory and episodic memory when cued by the current environmental stimuli. For example, whether we recall a personal memory of a time and place from observing an aesthetically beautiful building, or engage in a deep conversation with another, our

environments keep shaping what we recall and how we make sense of what we see, hear, touch, smell and feel. Our ways of perceiving, remembering and articulating are all interwoven by the meanings we make of what we experience, hence a semiotic understanding is important in unpacking how our selves are constituted through the transactions with our cultural environments. This is in line with what Markus and Kitayama (2010) proposed, that “selves are dynamic in that they change as the various cultural contexts they engage in change” (Markus & Kitayama, 2010, p. 423).

In considering the various theories which propose that the autobiographical memory system is hierarchical and multi-dimensional involving narratives and meaning-making (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Conway et al., 2004; Singer & Conway, 2011; Habermas and Bluck, 2000; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Singer et al., 2013, Wang, 2017, in press), I would like to propose a hypothesis that in the formation of a self-narrative, in some hierarchical dimension of autobiographical memory, these memories may be structured in actantial arrangement already. This is in line with what Conway and Bekerian (1987) found that personal primes such as events in one’s life were found to facilitate memory retrieval suggesting that autobiographical memories may take the form of a hierarchically structured abstracted personal history. In addition, Conway (1990) ran three experiments to study the associations between autobiographical memories and different types of concepts and discovered that only goal-derived categories were found to reliably hasten memory retrieval. This implies that goal-directed narrative structure like the actantial arrangement and especially, the Axis of Desire involving the Subject and Object may already have this arrangement in autobiographical memory. Hence, it may be that the organization of autobiographical memory may take on an actantial configuration which is sensitive to its cultural and social influences. This is in line with what Wang (in press) suggested in her cultural

dynamic theory and memory organization. It is also supported by cultural neuroscience findings, that the neural networks of the posterior medial cortices (PMC) and medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) which engages in the psychological operations related to social cognition, mental time travel, autobiography, values and self-related processes, also either involve the processing of narratives or rely on a narrative organization of information (Kaplan et al., 2016).

Finally, a systematic approach to studying religion using both qualitative and quantitative methods as it is implicated in the self-narrative structure can provide rich understanding of the role religion plays in the construction of selfhood across cultures. From a semiotic perspective, we may unpack the different dimensions and functions of religion not only on the social-cultural, but psychological levels through people's self-narratives. This would enable the psychological study of religion and culture to expand our understanding of religion not as an external variable impacting the person but also as an intrinsic variable, which is a universal part of human nature (Chai, 2017), perhaps touching the deepest part of what it means to be human, that is, the quest for meaning and expression. William James (1890) expounded in his *Principles of Psychology* to include the 'spiritual Self' as one of the constituents and in fact the core of the 'Me-Self' in his treatise on 'The Consciousness of Self'. It is now possible through the Actantial Model to explore the 'spiritual Self' within the self-narrative structure, of the different actantial roles it can take, which leads to identity. Culture and religion can be complex to study cross-culturally and so, unsurprisingly in Vignoles et al.'s (2016) study, religious heritage was used to investigate religion's effects on self-concept. Whilst this is an important step to studying religion cross-culturally, it treats religion more as a cultural variable without teasing out whether a religious heritage is one that is actually practiced so that it is at the core of the participants' lives. The current research

has found that many participants report that religion is not just a cultural variable but it is indeed the core of their self along the lines of what James (1890) theorized, and it is what holds them together or integrates their life. Religion is also what provides the moral fiber of their being as many report a moral and authoritative element that religion brings for guidance and direction in life, as well as what helps and is their actual goal, such as 'knowing God' or 'being close to Him'. The actantial framework may also be used as a feasible tool to analyze the tenets of different religions and therefore, understand differences or similarities across religions. In fact, Greimas's Actantial Model has been applied to religious texts (Hobyane, 2015; Jensen, 2007) and hence, its usability in studying religion, especially in the self-narrative structure which can spur on much needed cross-cultural studies on the role of religion in culture and self research.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current research has its limitations. Firstly, only two cultures have been investigated here, although much care has been taken in consideration of these cultures to be comparable in language, heritage in terms of British colonization, and affluence to discount other variables impacting on the cross-cultural differences found. Nonetheless, comparative research into culture and self have reached a new standard where multiple cultures need to be studied to represent comprehensive cultural models of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016). It is possible that the results of the European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese cannot generalize to all Westerners and Easterners. Given the intensive nature of this type of research, perhaps studying multiple cultures may not seem initially reasonable due to time and resources available, but this type of mixed-methods design is crucial to investigating culture and self because of the depth of meaning that can be derived and understood. As research methods improve with

technology, the handling of narrative scripts, for example, the development of tools like the Content Analysis of Verbatim Explanations (CAVE) technique for assessing explanatory style (Peterson & Seligman, 1984) or PC-ACE, Program for Computer-Assisted Coding of Events, and various CAQDAS programs, Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software: ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, and NVivo (see Franzosi, Doyle, McClelland, Rankin & Vicari, 2013) may offer efficient ways of analyzing open-ended qualitative accounts. In addition, the online Greimassian questionnaire already designed in this research to capture data can be easily used as a platform from anywhere around the world with easy access to the internet. With both the tools and mechanisms available, cross-cultural research using both qualitative and quantitative methods may perhaps then become the new norm in standard research practice. This may be the evolution of mixed-methods in gaining a more comprehensive psychological understanding in cross-cultural research. Therefore, although only two cultures were studied in this research, an avenue has now been opened to study multiple cultures.

Given the potential for multiple cultures to be studied, another limitation in this current research is that cultures as ethnic groups are treated as independent variables. Hence, results can only represent these ethnic groups as there can be great variation between Westerners and Easterners, in addition to within-group differences among the ethnic groups in this research. Another approach which might be considered in future studies could be to incorporate validated measures of self-construal (for example, the 7-dimensional model) to first establish whether the ethnic groups have consistent self-construal and to use the different self-construal as the independent variable rather than the assumed ethnic groups. Including self-construal measures offer a diversity of research methods that may demonstrate how Self-Construal Likert scales may correlate with the actantial approach to bring enrichment and understanding of how both a

bottom-up and top-down approach correspond or even interact. This may be what Hui and Triandis (1985) envisaged as the appropriate way to study culture and self, with a combined emic-etic approach.

Another sampling limitation of this study is that participants were young adults who are University students. In any self-narrative study, age is an important variable because it means the difference of what a self has been exposed to purely as a fact of lived experience. There is, so to speak, less of self in terms of its maturity to be shared say for an 18 year-old than for an 80 year-old because they have differing amounts of experience and historical exposure. This also means less fund of autobiographical memory to draw up on for self-construction. For example, an 80 year-old has more years of gain (educational, career, financial, relationships, children, etc.) and loss (health, grief, pain, etc.) in terms of key events than an 18 year-old. How does an 18 year-old self differ from that of an 80 year-old within the same person? Can a young adult's self-construal or self-narrative completely change by the time they are 80 years? As we have understood from this current research, priming and key events, especially the self-defining ones like moving to another country to live or experience of trauma or loss may alter actantial configuration and hence, the self-construal, self-narrative and the content and its structure.

There are stories from participants in the three studies of how key events like spiritual or religious experiences or living in Australia have transformed the self, its way of construing the world, its goals and its narrative structure. These are important questions because globalization with the free flow of information, values, etc., as well as the mobility of people relocating for employment, the self-narrative is likely to alter just as self-construal may alter. Arnett (2015) raised the possibility of different identities emerging for the self to adjust to the changes of globalization, such as people retaining

their local identity of their country of origin and developing a global identity to participate in a global marketplace with a hybrid of values. It is the very reason why researchers propose that in our modern world, a self-narrative functions to define the self because it is no longer defined by family or a stable geographical place locating people such as peoples' country of origin (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Future research may look to a longitudinal design to study self-narrative and autobiographical memory, so that changes in the self with key events that naturally happens with age could be better investigated. This would enable the questions raised about the stability or changes of self-construal and self-narrative as one ages, to be addressed. In addition, many shortfalls of comparative studies have focused on university students who reside in a subculture that may not be representative of that culture at large. Many scholars have raised issues about the differences in rural and urban subcultures (Kashima et al., 2004) and also with globalization, countries like the United States, Australia, Canada and other societies are becoming increasingly more diverse and different subcultures may emerge to present increasing difficulties in cross-cultural studies that need to be considered (Oyserman, 2017). Therefore, future studies would need to sample from the wider public population in both urban and regional areas to capture the culture at large.

A great deal of literature has suggested that emotions play a key role in what is remembered and what is communicated in the self-narrative (Cox & McAdams, 2014; Fivush, 1994; Laible & Thompson, 2000; Rimé, 2009; Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998; Wang & Fivush, 2005). For example, self-defining memories are said to be vivid and affectively intense (Singer et al., 2013). Hence, it would be important to investigate if Greimas's Actantial Model can capture the affect dimension in the self-narrative structure. Preliminary findings in Study 3 have suggested that

disruptions to the Subject-Object relationship may signal negative affect or be related to anhedonia, as evidenced in some of qualitative examples of the self-narratives. Valence in terms of positive or negative affect has only been explored in the study, which is a limitation because investigating arousal also in combination with valence provides a more comprehensive picture of how emotions guide the retrieval of memory in the construction of self-narratives, maintain it and even influence its sharing with others to consolidate narrative identity. This would certainly enhance the current literature on how the empirical structure of narrative identity is related to and predicts psychological wellbeing (McLean et al., in press). Hence, pursuing this line of inquiry into affect and the self-narrative which then forms narrative identity may provide productive future research that unravels how the self-narrative is also shaped by emotions.

Autobiographical memory is triggered by emotions and emotive events are more likely to be stored and retrieved (Buchanan, 2007; Reisberg & Hertel, 2004).

It was found in the current research that although time and resource intensive, an interview approach in Study 1 enabled more salient and rich data to be gathered. Though it was a small sample, Study 1 provided rich data in both quality and quantity compared with Studies 2 and 3 because clarifications were possible with research participants. The issue raised by Mishler (1986) that interviews are co-constructions resonates because during Study 1, much clarifying of what was shared could be accomplished and the interviewee was able to provide more information to make their point and/or the interviewer was able to draw it out. However, our main findings were from the online approach in Study 3 where clarification was not always provided and participants were not in an active co-construction with a reciprocal conversational interviewer. Hence, different information, perhaps more skeletal information was gathered from the online approach than the interview approach as evidenced by the

greater word count in interviews than online transcripts. A researcher then is always limited by the data provided in drawing their conclusions. Face to face exchanges are perhaps the natural way in which self-narratives are communicated but then again, with the rise of social media and the technological platform, much self-narrating may now be shared equally through both modalities. What is of interest is whether with larger and equal samples of both cultural groups through the interview approach, possibly more data and clarification might have been attained to crystallize the results found in Study 3.

Interviews as co-constructions between the interviewer and interviewee raises a broader question of ‘who elicits a person’s self-narrative’ or ‘what self-narratives are told and to whom?’, and whether to whom one self-narrates to influences the data collected. For example, people usually tell their life stories to those they have an ongoing mutual relationship with, not to strangers, like researchers. Hence, the research setting is an unusual situation. People also do not tell the same stories indiscriminately to anyone, which poses a methodological conundrum. Some possible ways to address this methodological challenge for future studies might involve having the participants tell their grandparents (who may not have witnessed their development as their parents did) versus a classmate at the university. Or have participants share their self-narratives to their co-ethnics (European-Australians to European-Australians and Singaporean Chinese to Singaporean Chinese) and cross-ethnics. This may then allow researchers to gain deeper insights into the issue of ‘to whom one self-narrates’ and whether this has a bearing on the data collected. A further point is made in terms of the validity via ‘prompting’ a self-narrative in that it raises an issue about whether self-narratives prompted by someone else (that is, guided and structured self-narrating elicited by another) is truly by the self? As seen in this research, there was consistency between

spontaneous and prompted accounts through Greimassian analysis but further discussion may be warranted in terms of understanding self-narratives as created in a social interaction, and therefore, a co-construction between involved parties and not merely a monologue confined to just self.

Lastly, current samples showed that religion was narrated in positive ways, manifesting in the actantial roles of Sender, Receiver, Object and Helper. It may be interesting with larger samples, to investigate whether there may also be negative impacts of religion; whether religion may take on the role of the actant Opponent and what meaning is assigned to religion to gain better perspective on its functions and how each individual attributes the role of religion and its meanings in one's life. In many ways, the current research attempted to explore how religion could be studied within the self-narrative structure in comparative research. With such a small religious sample size in this study, the conclusions between Christians and Buddhists in Study 3 lacked statistical power and cannot be generalized. Moreover, a proper study of religion and culture may consider those who practice their religion and those who don't in comparison with atheists, and/or both sets of religions in the different cultures. For example, it would be important to not only compare Singaporean Christians and Buddhists but also European-Australian Christians and Buddhists despite the latter group perhaps being rare to recruit. Future studies which consider the interplay of culture and religion would require similar religions to be compared in the same cultural groups to study whether differences are merely due to religion alone. As aforementioned, teasing out what is culture and what is religion may seem impossible as both are so ingrained that it is difficult to make any distinction, but this is a task that may be worthy of pursuing. Doing so may shed further light on how religion is entangled in cross-cultural conflicts (Kashima, 2016) and perhaps misinterpreted in

different cultures. It would also shine a light onto how religion in cultures can inspire and maybe engage individuals onto constructing self-narratives that promote peace and wellbeing.

Conclusion

The significance and nature of self-narratives is only just beginning to emerge. This research project has advanced our understanding of the self-narrative structure, in both self-narrating style and self-narrative content, and how self-narrative can be utilized through Greimas's Actantial Model to reveal cross-cultural differences. An initial investigation has been conducted on how combining the use of a semiotic tool in psychology can assist in understanding narrative meaning cross-culturally as it is implicated in the self-narrative structure and in autobiographical memory. It has demonstrated how Greimas's Actantial Model can be used as a systematic semiotic narrative approach in comparative research, guiding future research into culture and self.

Understanding ourselves cross-culturally is not only a topic of interest in psychology, but individual selves exists also in the spheres of medicine, law, history, philosophy, business, marketing, politics, education, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, theology and in the wider field of a globalized world. Hence, besides its obvious use in psychology with narrative self theories and therapies and in politics, a well-crafted self-narrative to appeal to voters, self-narratives may provide solutions to fundamental issues, such as how to promote health and healing, which is at the core of narrative medicine that uses personal narratives in clinical practice, research and education (Charon, 2008; Mattingly & Garro, 2000). Or the use of narratives for sound judgments, fact-finding and decision-making in law, which has utilized the Greimassian

framework (Jackson, 1985, 2005). These are just to name a few of the possibilities of the narrative approach utilizing Greimas's Actantial Model.

Through the lens of a semiotic self-narrative approach, we may gain a clearer understanding of autobiographical memory, cognition, affect and motivation. This helps us to not only better comprehend how we come to think or feel and believe in certain ways but how our very own self-identity hangs together over time as we remember and narrate who we are and what has transpired in key events of our lives. We also come to grasp that what defines us is different in our distinct cultures, and with this understanding, it is hoped that we gain greater knowledge and respect for each other as global citizens.

In the end, our self-narrative as a social and cultural construction may be the defining legacy of ourselves. It is what we offer to our cultures as part of our familial and societal history, or to put in Bruner's (1987) words, we leave a 'canonical form' for others to identify with and even emulate, thus perpetuating the constitution and co-construction of culture and self.

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Appendices

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Appendix A: Plain Language Statement, Consent and Demographics forms, and
Debriefing Statement (Study 1)

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT
PROJECT: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Department of Psychology

Chief investigator: Professor Yoshi Kashima Rm: 914 Ph: 8344 6321

Other Investigators: Lidia Lae Rm: 1105 Ph: 8344 4297

Thank you for your interest in this PhD research study supervised by Professor Yoshi Kashima. So as not to bias your responses, information about the study and its aims will be provided at the end of the session. In the unlikely case that you experienced discomfort or distress of any kind during the session, please alert the investigator. In such cases, Lidia Lae or Professor Kashima will be available to discuss any concerns you may have.

The purpose of the study is to examine in depth how self-narratives play a crucial role in understanding the interplay between culture and psychology. In this study, you will complete a demographic form first and then, you will be asked to share your life story in an interview. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions about the different chapters of your life. This should take about 120 minutes. This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Your life story will be analysed and the results will be used to develop an online tool that will be used to capture people's life stories.

There are no known risks related to the participation in this experiment. Please note that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to refuse participation and withdraw from the experiment at any time and request any unprocessed data to be withdrawn, without being penalised. All information you provide will be confidential, subject to any legal limitations, and any identifying information will be replaced by a code, so that those handling the data will only be using the code. The data will be stored on computers to which only the named investigators will have access. Data will be destroyed after a minimum of five years. This project has HREC ethics clearance.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this research please contact Lidia Lae, on 8344 4297, or by email at l.lae@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au. You can also contact Lidia Lae if you would like a report of the results of this study. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project you can contact the **Executive Officer, Human Research Committee, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739.**

CONSENT FORM FOR PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Name of Participant: _____

Project Title: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Names of Investigators: Prof. Yoshi Kashima, Lidia Lae

1. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of tests or procedures - have been explained to me in the Plain Language Statement and I have been given a copy of that explanation to keep.
2. I authorize the investigator in the above project, or his or her assistant, to use with me the tests and/or procedures referred to under (1) above.
3. I acknowledge that:
 - (a) Lidia Lae can be contacted (on 8344 4297) if I have any questions about this research.
 - (b) In the event of a research-related injury, The University of Melbourne Health Service (Address: 138-146 Cardigan Street, Carlton; Telephone: +61 (3) 8344 6904 or +61 (3) 8344 6905), Prof. Kashima can be contacted (on 8344-6312) or Lidia Lae (on 8344 4297).
 - (c) I have been informed that participation in this study is voluntary, that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty of loss of benefits, and that I can participate in another comparable task should I choose to.
 - (d) I have been informed that the research may benefit me by giving me insights into the typical process of a scientific psychological study, and may also contribute to enrichment of the scientific knowledge about human social and cultural differences.
 - (e) I have been informed of the risks of the study and acknowledge that this study poses no risks to the participants or researchers.
 - (f) I have been informed that the study will take about 120 minutes.
 - (g) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded by the separate storage of my consent form and data, so that it will never be possible to match any participant with any data set, and that the data will be kept in locked facilities in the Psychology Department.
 - (h) Confidentiality is subject to legal requirements (subpoena, freedom of information, mandated reporting).
 - (i) Once signed and returned, a copy of this consent form will be retained by the principal researcher.
 - (j) The possible effects of the tests or procedures have been explained to me to my satisfaction.
 - (k) The project is for the purpose of research and not for treatment.
 - (l) I have been informed that I will be audio-taped during the interview session and consent to this.

Participant signature:

Date:

Demographics Form

ID Code:

Please complete the following questions:

Age:

Gender: Male Female

Background: Anglo-Australian Singaporean Chinese

Parent's cultural background: Mother: Father:

Parent's Educational background: Mother:..... Father:

Parent's Occupation: Mother:..... Father:

Employment Position:

Education (Please tick which is most appropriate):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Primary School Completion | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School Completion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TAFE/Diploma | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Marital Status (Please tick which is most appropriate):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single | <input type="checkbox"/> Married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced | <input type="checkbox"/> De Facto |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Re-married | |

How well do you speak English?

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Very well | <input type="checkbox"/> Well |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not very well | <input type="checkbox"/> Not well |

Thank you.

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

PROJECT: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Chief investigator: Professor Yoshi Kashima Rm: 914 Ph: 8344 6321
Other Investigator: Lidia Lae Rm: 1105 Ph: 8344 4297

Thank you for your participation in this study which is part of a PhD research project supervised by Professor Yoshi Kashima. In the unlikely case that you experienced discomfort or distress of any kind during the session, please alert the investigator. In such cases, Lidia Lae or Prof Kashima will be available to discuss any concerns you may have.

Self-narratives or life stories are important in the way that it informs us of our identity and self, as well as impacts on our culture. This project explores the cultural differences in structure of self-narrative using a theoretical framework. Such a framework may prove useful in understanding studies of culture and self-narratives.

In this study you were interviewed about your life story using a structured approach. This interview has been recorded and transcribed. Your life story will be analysed and the results will be used to develop an online tool that will be used to capture people's life stories. It is expected that from the interview and online data, cultural differences found in previous studies on affect and self-regulation would be reflected in the differences between Anglo-Australians and Singaporean Chinese self-narratives. It is hoped that this study will further contribute to our understanding of cultural differences in self-narratives and a structured approach to analysing the structure of self-narratives within different cultural contexts would be developed.

If you have any questions to ask or comments to make about the study, please feel free to do so. You can also contact the investigator, Lidia Lae, on 8344 4297, or by email at l.lae@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au to obtain a report of the results. If you have any concerns about the conduct of the research project you can contact the **Executive Officer, Human Research Committee, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073, fax: 9347 6739.**

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Coding Manual- Using Greimas’s Framework in Self-Narratives

Greimas’s Actantial Model

In Greimas's scheme, the basic plot tells the story of a quest, which begins with a Subject wanting to acquire the Object. This initial quest that tells the story of the Subject’s thoughts and deeds that are directed to obtaining the desired goal or Object is known as the ‘axis of desire’. However, in any story of drama, the attainment of goals is not a direct and easy feat. There are challenges, hence in the ‘axis of conflict,’ the Subject has both allies and foes, those who are Helper(s) or Opponent(s). Lastly, the ‘axis of communication’ reveals the Sender who releases the Object to the Receiver, who in many cases is the Subject. For example, in the story which Greimas highlighted, the prince ‘hero’, in the actantial role of Subject, accepts a contract that wins him a Helper in a struggle against an Opponent. ‘The struggle is resolved in the attainment of the Object, allowing the hero to fulfill a second actantial role, that of Receiver. By succeeding in the tests that provide the events of the plot, the hero remedies the lack which precipitated the quest, defeats a villain, and wins a princess bride’ (Katilius-Boydstun, 1990). The King, who acts as Sender is usually depicted as the moral agent in Greimas’s scheme, and he releases the approval for the princess (Object) to the Receiver (Subject), the prince. This is described in Figure B1.

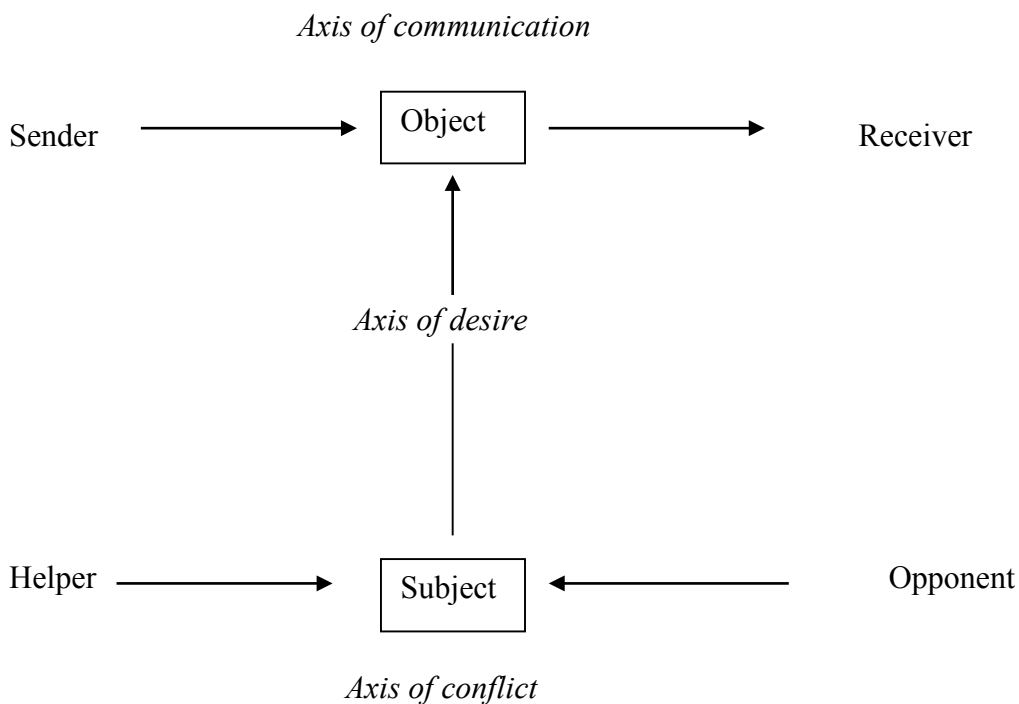


Figure B1. Greimas’s Actantial model of narrative structure

See Table B1 for summary of definitions in Greimas’s Actantial Model.

Table B1

Definitions of Greimas's Actantial Model as outlined in the Coding Manual

| Greimas's Actantial Concepts | Definitions |
|------------------------------|---|
| Axis of Communication | This axis involves the sender and the receiver. The sender is the element who requests the establishment of the junction between the subject and the object, and the receiver is the one who benefits from achieving the junction. |
| Axis of Desire | This axis is the relationship established between the subject and the object in which the subject desires to obtain the object. The relationship between the subject and the object is called a junction. |
| Axis of Conflict | This axis outlines the challenge in which the subject has the helper that assists in achieving the desired object as well as the opponent that hinders the subject from obtaining the object. Hence, the helper assists in achieving the desired junction, and the opponent tries to hinder the same. |
| Sender | Someone or something that motivates the subject to undertake a concrete action and/or releases the object to the subject. For example, "King" (in the above example, issues a reward of the princess as a bride and releases the princess to the Prince-Hero), "God", "Parents", "Moral Principals", etc. |
| Receiver | Someone or an element for which the quest is being undertaken and who/that benefits from achieving the junction between the subject and object. For example, "Prince", "Princess", "King", "Kingdom", "Self", "Community", etc. |
| Subject | The main character(s) of the story who desires an object. For example, "Prince" (in the above example), "I", "we" etc. |
| Object | A desired outcome, person or thing the Subject wants to obtain. For example, "Princess" (in the above example), "Happiness", "Success", etc. |
| Helper | Helper: Someone or something that assists the subject to obtain the object. For example, "Friends", "Faith", "School", etc. |
| Opponent | Someone or something that hinders the subject from obtaining the desired object. For example, "Villain" (in the above example), "Boss", etc. |

Summary of Greimas's Actantial Model

Axis of Desire is the relationship established between the subject and the object in which the subject desires to obtain the object. The relationship between the subject and the object is called a junction.

Axis of Conflict outlines the challenge in which the subject has the helper that assists in achieving the desired object as well as the opponent that hinders the from obtaining the object. Hence, the helper assists in achieving the desired junction, and the opponent tries to hinder the same.

Axis of Communication involves the sender and the receiver. The sender is the element who requests the establishment of the junction between the subject and the object, and the receiver is the one who benefits from achieving the junction.

The different Actants:

- a) Subject: The main character(s) of the story who desires an object. For example, "Prince" (in the above example), "I", "we" etc.
- b) Object: A desired outcome, person or thing the Subject wants to obtain. For example, "Princess" (in the above example), "Happiness", "Success", etc.
- c) Helper: Someone or something that assists the subject to obtain the object. For example, "Friends", "Faith", "School", etc.
- d) Opponent: Someone or something that hinders the subject from obtaining the desired object. For example, "Villain" (in the above example), "Boss", etc.
- e) Sender: Someone or something that motivates the subject to undertake a concrete action and/or releases the object to the subject. For example, "King" (in the above example, issues a reward of the princess as a bride and releases the princess to the Prince-Hero), "God", "Parents", "Moral Principals", etc.
- f) Receiver: Someone or an element for which the quest is being undertaken and who/that benefits from achieving the junction between the subject and object. For example, "Prince", "Princess", "King", "Kingdom", "Self", "Community", etc.

In this coding manual, Greimas's framework will be used in the following ways;

- 1) Coding for Absence and Presence of Certain Axes & Actants
- 2) Coding for Abstract vs. Concrete/ Implicit vs. Explicit

What are the contents and themes in different self-narratives?

Coding for Absence and Presence of Certain Axes & Actants

a) PART 1 – Coding for Absence and Presence of Certain Axes & Actants

Read through the transcripts:

- b) Read the (question/ answer) transcript in Section A.
- c) Identify who is/ are the Subject(s) and what is the Object in the Axis of Desire. Once this is identified, write it down under each Actant columns.
- d) Identify the Helper and Opponent in the Axis of Conflict for Section A and complete in the relevant columns.
- e) Identify the Sender and Receiver in the Axis of Communication for Section A, and complete in the relevant columns.
- f) Read the different episodes of the transcript in Section B, categorized into different chronological stages of life.
- g) For each of the episodes, identify who is/ are the subject(s) and what is the object. Once this is identified, complete Section B Part 1/ Column 1 of Table B3.
- h) Identify the Helper and Opponent in the Axis of Conflict for Section B and complete Column 1 of Table B3.
- i) Identify the Sender and Receiver in the Axis of Communication for Section B, and complete Column 1 of Table B3.

1) PART 2 – Coding for Abstract vs. Concrete/ Implicit vs. Explicit

What is Abstract vs. Concrete?

Abstract (general) is existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence. For example, abstract concepts such as love or beauty. Something that is dealing with ideas rather than events, not based on a particular instance but is theoretical. Something denoting an idea, quality, or state rather than a concrete object, for example, abstract words like “truth” or “equality”.

Concrete (specific) is existing in a material or physical form; real or solid; not abstract, for example concrete objects like specific people, it exists as a physically concrete form. It is specific, definite, denoting a material object as opposed to an abstract quality, state, or action.

What is Implicit vs. Explicit?

Implicit is implied though not plainly expressed. For example, comments here and there that suggest a theme but not obviously stated, such as “I felt a bit uncomfortable with my grandmother”.

Explicit is stated clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt. For example, something obviously stated, such as “I really dislike my grandmother because she didn’t treat me well as a child”. See Table B2 for a summary of the definitions.

Table B2

Definitions of Abstract, Concrete, Implicit and Explicit in the Coding Manual

| Concepts coded for | Definitions |
|---------------------|--|
| Abstract (General) | Existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence. For example, abstract concepts such as love or beauty. Something that is dealing with ideas rather than events, not based on a particular instance but is theoretical. Something denoting an idea, quality, or state rather than a concrete object, for example, abstract words like “truth”, “equality”, “happiness”, etc. |
| Concrete (Specific) | Existing in a material or physical form; real or solid; not abstract, for example concrete objects like specific people, it exists as a physically concrete form. It is specific, definite, denoting a material object as opposed to an abstract quality, state, or action. |
| Implicit | Concepts implied though not plainly expressed. For example, comments here and there that suggest a theme but not obviously stated, such as “I felt a bit uncomfortable with my grandmother”. |
| Explicit | Concepts stated clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt. For example, something obviously stated, such as “I really dislike my grandmother because she didn’t treat me well as a child”. |

Read through the transcripts and the identified Acants:

- d) For the identified Subject and Object in the Axis of Desire, are the Subject and Object Abstract or Concrete? Are they Implicit or Explicit? Please complete in the relevant columns under the specified headings in the excel spreadsheet.
- e) Go through the different episodes from the transcript, which are categorized into different chronological stages of life in Section B.
- f) For each of the episodes, is the identified Subject and Object abstract or concrete? Please complete Column 2 of Table B3.
- g) For the identified Helper and Opponent in the Axis of Conflict for Sections A and B, are the Helper and Opponent abstract or concrete? Please complete Column 2 of Table B3.
- h) For the identified Sender and Receiver in the Axis of Communication for Sections A and B, are the Sender and Receiver explicit or implicit? Please complete Column 3 of Table B3.
- i) For the identified Subject and Object in the Axis of Desire, is the Subject and Object Explicit or Implicit? Please complete Column 3 of Table B3.
- j) Go through the different episodes from the transcript, which are categorized into different chronological stages of life in Section B.
- k) For each of the episodes, is the identified Subject and Object explicit or implicit? Please complete Column 2 of Table B3.
- l) For the identified Helper and Opponent in the Axis of Conflict for Sections A and B, are the Helper and Opponent explicit or implicit? Please complete Column 2 of Table B3.

- m) For the identified Sender and Receiver in the Axis of Communication for Sections A and B, are the Sender and Receiver explicit or implicit? Please complete Column 2 of Table B3.

Table B3

Coding of the data table as an example in Excel

| Section-Actants/ Part-Columns | Part 1/ Column 1 In your opinion, who/ what are the...? (Please note there could be more than one answer.) | (n) | Part 2/ Column 2 Abstract Vs. Concrete | (n) | Part 3/ Column 3 Implicit Vs. Explicit | (n) | Coder A (n) | Coder B (n) |
|---|--|-----|--|-----|--|-----|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Section A | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Axis of Desire</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Subject | | | | | | | | |
| Object | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Axis of Conflict</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Helper | | | | | | | | |
| Opponent | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Axis of Communication</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Sender</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Receiver</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Section B | | | | | | | | |
| Episode 1 | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Axis of Desire</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Subject | | | | | | | | |
| Object | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Axis of Conflict</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Helper | | | | | | | | |
| Opponent | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Axis of Communication</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Sender</i> | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Receiver</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Episode 2-repeated with other episodes coded | | | | | | | | |

Why Semi-structured Interview Method was chosen for Study 1

Interviews can be structured or semi-structured. In structured interviews, the aim is to formulate the questions that can obtain answers commensurable with the predetermined categories to be analyzed numerically (Smith, 2008). To ensure reliability, the interviewer stays close to the interview schedule. In contrast, in semi-structured interviews, the interview is guided by the schedule but not dictated by it because the focus is on establishing rapport with the respondent, with the ordering of the questions less important and the interviewer has the liberty of probing interesting areas that arise, such as following the respondent's interests or concerns (Smith, 2008). In this approach, the interviewer has the desire to enter, as much as feasible, the psychological and social world of the respondent (Smith, 2008). Narratives are interpretative and therefore, require interpretation (Riessman, 1993). In interpreting narratives' content, we engage in coding and narrative analysis to derive meaning. The coding of narratives would be covered in the *Method Section*.

I have decided to use a semi-structured interview to gather rich qualitative data in this first study for a number of reasons. Firstly, being able to converse with and complete a face-to-face meeting with the participants allow for opportunities for observation and a valuable means of gathering first-hand impressions of their thoughts and feelings about their life experiences. This provides advantages to understanding the tone and mood of the participants when they relate their stories and to check whether their expressions match the contents of what they share to verify their stories by entering into the psychological and social world of the participant (Smith, 2008).

Secondly, through the process of probing and exploring participant responses, interviews provide a way of exploring nuances of life narratives, while simultaneously

generating data. It also provides occasions to think hermeneutically about the interview process and the interpretation of participants' responses. These experiences and reflections feed directly back in a related way into the interview process, and provide a point of reference for later analysis and interpretation. Feelings and observations about the interview process provide an additional resource for interpreting the phenomena of self-narrative formation. For example, the encouragement of the interviewer as a willing audience in wanting to know more about an event memory enables the participant to bring more details into their story and perhaps to feel more valued.

Lastly, interviews would provide information relevant to the development of the survey instrument. Talking with the research participants provide useful information for selecting the style of the online survey, capturing the language used and how to target questions that may be effective in engaging the participants in retelling their self-narrative in order to ascertain the feasibility of using Greimas's Actantial Model for narrative analysis. Hence, the interviews provide methodological information relevant to development of the survey instrument in Studies 2 and 3. Identifying target questions to formulate an effective online survey instrument is important to engage participants to share their stories. Developing an instrument without speaking with participants means making a range of assumptions about the subjective relevance of what is studied. This is important because the participants' feedback and findings from the qualitative interviews directly inform the development of the online survey research instrument.

Study 1 Semi-structured Interview Format

In this interview, I will be asking you a number of questions about your life. I will be recording this session and later transcribing it. Are you ready to begin?

Section A:

1. Can you please summarise your life story in several minutes, of anything that comes to mind?

2. a) In your life story, can you please reflect and tell me:

b) Are there any goals or pursuits that have been pervasive in your life? If so, what are the goals?

c) Is there a main character, if so, who is it?

d) What is the biggest challenge you (or the main character) have had to face in the pursuit in your (or the main character's) life? How did the challenge develop? What did you (or the main character) do (or did) to meet the challenge?

e) Was there anyone or anything that opposed you (or the main character) in achieving your goal(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?

f) Was there anyone or anything that helped you (or the main character) achieve the goal(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?

g) Are there any character(s) with the most positive influence in the story? If so, who?

h) Are there any character(s) with the most negative influence in the story? If so, who?

i) Was there anyone or anything that guided you (or the main character) in your life story? For example, an authority figure or a moral principle that provided you (or the main character) with guidance about what should be done? If so, who or what?

j) What would you say are your fundamental values, religious and political beliefs? How were these values and beliefs developed over time?

k) Who or what are the beneficiaries of your achieving your (or the main character's) goal(s), if any? Is it only yourself, only others, or yourself AND others? If not only yourself, but some other people or things who are also receiving benefits, who are they or what are they?

Section B:

Now I would like to ask you in more detail what you have shared with me.

1. Life chapters- If you were to summarise your life into main chapters, can you please provide a plot summary for each of those chapters? For example, early years, teenage years or adult years, or whatever chapters you have in mind.

2. Eight key episodes - In each of the chapters you shared, can you think of the eight episodes? They are:

1. High point
2. Low point
3. Turning point
4. Earliest memory
5. Important childhood episode
6. Important adolescent episode
7. Important adult episode
8. One other important episode

For each of eight episodes, could you please describe what happened? Who was involved? What he or she was thinking and feeling in the scene? What he or she thinks the scene says about who he or she was? Is? Or might be?

3. Future plot- Could you please give me an account of where the story is going, what will happen next, what the future chapters will look like, including main goals, dreams, and fears for the future?

4. Life theme – What is the single most integrative (or holding) theme in your life story?

Section C:

1. What questions were confusing?
2. Were there any difficult questions?
3. If you had to do this interview again, a) what would you add?
b) what would you omit/leave?

Thank you very much for your participation.

Appendix E: Ethics Approval (Studies 1 and 2)



17 October 2011

Prof Yoshi Kashima
Psychological Sciences
The University of Melbourne

Dear Yoshi

The Department Human Ethics Advisory Group has approved the following Minimal Risk project application:

HREC No. 1136561

Title of Project: *Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives*

Other Researcher/s: Lidia Lae

The Minimal Risk project has been approved for the period of 17/10/11 to 31/12/12. It is potentially renewable annually for a maximum of 5 years.

Please note that the following conditions apply to the approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

- a. **Limit of approval:** Approval is limited strictly to the research project as submitted in your application.
- b. **Variation to the expedited review application:** Any subsequent variation or modifications you might wish to make to your project must be notified formally to the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group for further consideration and approval before the modified study is commenced. If the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised project.
- c. **Incidents or adverse affects:** Researchers must report immediately to the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group and the HREC Sub-Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptance of the protocol including adverse effects on subjects or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.
- d. **Monitoring:** Projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the ethics committee.
- e. **Annual report:** An annual report is to be completed at the end of each year, or at the conclusion of the project if it continues for less than a year. Requests for annual reports are sent out by the Human Research Ethics Office in November/December of each year. Failure to submit a progress report at the end of the year will mean approval for the project will lapse.

Your project will also be registered with the University's HREC and you will receive advice of this shortly.

On behalf of the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David Castle'.

David Castle
Research Programs Officer

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unimelb.edu.au

Appendix F: Study 1 Word Count

To investigate any cultural differences consistent with previous research in the amount shared through self-narratives, the word count of interview transcripts with both spontaneous and prompted accounts were analyzed with consideration of culture and gender. European-Australian ($M = 6,447.25$, $SD = 1,796.13$) and Singaporean Chinese females ($M = 7,455.75$, $SD = 2,003.27$) seemed to use more words than European-Australian ($M = 5,652.00$, $SD = 319.61$) and Singaporean Chinese ($M = 5,840.50$, $SD = 647.00$) males in their interview transcripts. However, it is important to note that there was more variation with the lengths of interview transcripts for Singaporean Chinese females, particularly for one participant who shared proportionately much more than all the other participants with an interview transcript of 9,881 words while the average was 6,550 words. When spontaneous self-narratives are only considered, indicating how people naturally share spontaneously, European-Australians seem to share more in word count ($M = 287.33$, $SD = 237.58$) than the Singaporean Chinese ($M = 105$, $SD = 35.16$). However, with such a small sample size, these numbers are not conclusive of each of the cultural groups. Both European-Australian and Singaporean Chinese as evidenced in their narrative excerpts provided more details in their prompted accounts and perhaps the interview method is one that enables elaboration as interviews are seen as co-constructions between interviewer and interviewee (Mishler, 1986). Therefore, the differences in elaborative detail as obtained through the interview method between cultures may not be as obvious.

Appendix G: Plain Language Statement, Online Questionnaire and Debriefing Statement (Study 2)

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

PROJECT: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Department of Psychological Sciences

You are invited to participate in our research on cultural differences in self-narratives, conducted as part of Lidia Lae's PhD research. The project has been approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee and will be supervised by the Principal Investigator, Professor Yoshihisa Kashima of the Department of Psychological Sciences.

We are interested in how self-narratives play a crucial role in understanding the interplay between culture and psychology. The aim of the project is to develop a structured approach to analysing the structure of self-narratives within different cultural contexts. For this study, you will be asked to share your life story and then respond to a series of questions about your life story and about yourself. Note that the data collection will take about 30 to 45 minutes.

Your individual responses will remain completely confidential, subject to legal requirements. As the survey will be conducted online, there will be no way in which you could be identified from your data. We will report only group trends; no individual will or can be identified in any reports resulting from this work. Data will be destroyed five years after any publications based on the data. There are no known risks related to participation in this study. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary; you are free to withdraw from the study at any time by simply closing the web-page with the questionnaire or pressing the Escape button. Should you withdraw during the questionnaire, your data will be classified as incomplete. Though this data will remain on the questionnaire website until data collection is complete (after which time it will be permanently deleted), it will not be identifiable nor will it be used in the analyses. Our study is for research purposes only, and the researcher will be pleased to answer any queries.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this research please contact Lidia Lae, on 0431 080 322, or by email at llae@student.unimelb.edu.au. You can also contact Lidia if you would like a report of the results of this study by email. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project you may contact the **Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics at The University of Melbourne (Ph: 83442073; fax: 93476739)**.

If you are willing to participate, start the questionnaire by clicking on the **Continue** button below.

By continuing you indicate your consent to participate in the study and authorise the researchers to use your data.

Thank you.

Professor Yoshihisa Kashima (Responsible Researcher)
ykashima@unimelb.edu.au (Ph: 83446312)

Lidia Lae (Student Researcher)
llae@student.unimelb.edu.au (Ph: 0431 080 322)

Continue

Discontinue

Block 1

CONSENT FORM FOR PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Project Title: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Names of Investigators: Prof. Yoshi Kashima, Lidia Lae

1. By clicking on the "continue" button, I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of tests or procedures - have been explained to me in the Plain Language Statement.

2. I authorize the investigator in the above project, or his or her assistant, to use with me the questionnaires referred to in the Plain Language Statement.

3. I have been informed and acknowledge that:

(a) The possible effects of the tests or procedures have been explained to me to my satisfaction

(b) The project is for research purposes only

(c) Involvement in the project is voluntary

(d) I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any identifiable unprocessed data previously supplied. I have been informed that I can do so by pressing the Escape button or by closing the survey window

(d) The information I provide will remain anonymous and only the researchers will have access to the data which will be password-protected on the supervising investigator's computer in the Psychology Department at the University of Melbourne

(e) Confidentiality is subject to legal requirements (subpoena, freedom of information, mandated reporting)

Continue



Discontinue



Block 7

Section A:

1. Can you please summarise your life story in several paragraphs (4 to 5 paragraphs), of anything that comes to mind?

Block 2

2. The following questions require you to reflect on your life story, then please answer the following questions:

a) Are there any goals, objectives or pursuits that have been pervasive in your life? If so, what are they?

b) Is there a main character (person or thing) in your life story, if so, who or what is it?

c) What is the biggest challenge you (or the main character) has had to face in the pursuit in your (or the main character's) life? How did the challenge develop? What did you (or the main character) do (or did) to meet the challenge?

d) Was there anyone or anything that opposed you (or the main character) in achieving your goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?

e) Was there anyone or anything that helped you (or the main character) achieve the goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?

f) Are there any character(s) with the most positive influence in the story? If so, who?

g) Are there any character(s) with the most negative influence in the story? If so, who?

h) Was there anyone or anything that guided you (or the main character) in your life story? For example, an authority figure or a moral value that provided you (or the main character) with guidance about what should be done? If so, who or what?

i) What would you say are your fundamental values, religious and political beliefs? How did these values and beliefs develop over time?

j) Who or what are the beneficiaries of you achieving your (or the main character's) goal(s), if any? Is it only yourself, only others, or yourself AND others? If not only yourself, but some other people or things who are also receiving benefits, who are they or what are they?

Block 8

3) What is your life all about? How would you describe it?

Block 9

4) What significant key events have happened in your life? That is, what events have occurred that has made a real impact in your life. Please list up to five or you can list less than five that come to mind.

- Key event 1
- Key event 2
- Key event 3
- Key event 4
- Key event 5

Block 10

For Key Event 1, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 2, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 3, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 4, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 5, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

Section B:

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

1) What is your gender

- Male
- Female

2) What is your age?

3) What is your background?

- Anglo-Australian
- Singaporean Chinese
- Malaysian Chinese

4) What are your parent's cultural backgrounds?

- Mother
- Father

5) What are your parent's educational backgrounds?

- Mother

Father

6) What are your parent's occupation?

Mother

Father

7) What is your employment position?

8) What is your highest level of education completed?

Primary School Completion

Secondary School Completion

Undergraduate Degree

Postgraduate Degree

TAFE/ Diploma

Other

Are you currently studying at University? If so, what year are you studying?

Yes

No

9) What is your marital status?

Single

Married

Divorced

Remarried

De Facto

10) How well do you speak English?

Very well

Well

Not well

11) What is your first language?

11) What is your religious background?

Christian

Buddhist

Judaism

Islam

Atheist

Other

12) Are you currently practising the religion specified in Q11?

Yes

No

13) How long have you lived in Australia?

Block 5

Congratulations!
You have reached the end of the survey!

Block 6

DEBRIEFING INFORMATION

In this study you were asked about your life story using a structured approach. Your life story will be analysed and the results will be used to develop an online tool that will be used to capture people's life stories. It is expected that from the questionnaire and online data, cultural differences found in previous studies on affect and self-regulation would be reflected in the differences between Anglo-Australians and Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese self-narratives. It is hoped that this study will further contribute to our understanding of cultural differences in self-narratives. The aim of the project is to develop a structured approach to analysing the structure of self-narratives within different cultural contexts.

A summary of the general findings of the study will be made available once all of the data has been collected and analysed. You can email the student researcher at lae@student.unimelb.edu.au if you are interested in learning about the conclusions of the study. If you have any questions in the meantime relating to the study you have participated in, please do not hesitate to contact one of the investigators whose details were displayed at the beginning of the session.

Thank you for your involvement in the study.

Appendix H: Study 2 Word Count

To determine whether there are cultural and gender differences in the length of spontaneous and prompted self-narratives consistent with research showing more elaboration for Westerners, a mixed design ANOVA was completed with the narrative type, whether it was spontaneously expressed or prompted (Spontaneous vs. Prompted) as the within-subject factor. Both gender (Male vs. Female) and culture (Westerners vs. Easterners consisting of both Singaporean Chinese and Malaysian Chinese combined) were the between-subject factors. The dependent variable was the word count for spontaneous and prompted self-narratives. The main effect of narrative type was significant, $F(1, 26) = 49.93, p < .001$. In general, participants used more words for spontaneous self-narratives ($M = 447.85$) than prompted self-narratives ($M = 168.60$). There were no significant differences between male or female Westerners and Easterners on the length of the self-narrative as measured by the word count, perhaps due to the small sample size. The descriptive statistics for each of the cultural groups and gender is shown in Table H1.

Table H1

The Means and Standard Deviations of Spontaneous and Prompted Word Count for Westerners (European-Australians) and Easterners (Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese)

| Word Count | Westerner | | | | Easterner | | | |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|
| | Male <i>n</i> = 5 | | Female <i>n</i> = 10 | | Male <i>n</i> = 3 | | Female <i>n</i> = 12 | |
| | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Spontaneous | 441.00 | 257.17 | 563.00 | 214.81 | 420.67 | 358.21 | 366.75 | 185.47 |
| Prompted | 206.20 | 132.78 | 212.20 | 131.06 | 93.00 | 39.61 | 163.00 | 99.81 |

Appendix I: Study 2 Summary of Key Events Analyses

The summaries of key events are presented in Tables I1 (key event 1), I2 (key event 2), I3 (key event 3), I4 (key event 4), and I5 (key event 5). For the first key event, more Easterners shared about achievements like ‘living in different countries’, ‘completing story telling competitions in primary school’, ‘going to university’, etc. There were some key events that were exclusive to the Westerner or Easterner, for examples, ‘being bullied’, ‘getting lost in the mall’ and ‘self-realization’ for the Easterner, and developing ‘interest in music’ for the Westerner. These are displayed in Table I1.

Each participant rated their key event as either positive or negative. There were different perspectives in the way participants viewed an event. For examples, four participants (2 Westerners, 2 Easterners) reported that parental divorce was a key event in their lives but out of the four participants, one Easterner (see Table 4.17) viewed this key event as positive while the other three viewed it as negative. Overall, Westerners and Easterners reported equal numbers of positive and negative (10 positive and 5 negative) first key events each. These key events were also captured in the different actants, as an example, parental divorce featured as ‘Opponent’ for some of the Westerners.

Table I1

Frequencies and Percentages of Reported First Key Events in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Category of Key Events/ Cultural Group | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 15) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 15) | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| Achievement, e.g. in art, travel, competition, going to university, studied high school in home town | 2 | 13.4% | 6 | 40.2% |
| Birth moment existence | 1 | 6.7% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Religious/Spiritual experiences, e.g., Buddhist retreat, spiritual encounter, knowing Christ as Lord and Savior | 2 | 13.4% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Gained something, e.g., hobby like art, friend(s) or helper | 3 | 20.1% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Being bullied | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Learning to love | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Death/loss of family or friend | 3 | 20.1% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Parents' divorce | 2 | 13.4% | 2 | 13.4% |
| Getting lost in the mall | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Self realization- not living in brother's shadows | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Interest in Music | 1 | 6.7% | | |

In the second key event, as summarized in Table I2, there were similar experiences of 'achievements', 'gaining something' (though some gains were positive, others negative), 'illness with family members' and 'death or loss of family or friend'. What was unique to some of the Westerners were 'finding out about an older brother in the family' and 'growing up in country Victoria'. For the Easterner, what was unique

for a few of the self-narratives were ‘joining church youth group’ and having ‘sister left to study in US’.

Table I2

Frequencies and Percentages of Reported Second Key Events in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Category of Key Events/ Cultural Group | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 15) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 15) | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| Achievements, e.g. in school, reading, travel, scholarship, leadership, high marks, etc. | 7 | 46.9% | 7 | 46.9% |
| Family- finding out I had an older brother | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Religious/Spiritual experiences, e.g., joining church youth group | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Gained something, e.g., friend(s) (helper), boyfriend (helper), girlfriend (later opponent) | 2 | 13.4% | 2 | 13.4% |
| Illness, e.g., mum’s depression, dad becoming ill, etc. | 2 | 13.4% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Growing up in country Victoria | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Death/loss of family or friend | 2 | 13.4% | 3 | 20.1% |
| Sister left to study in US | | | 1 | 6.7% |

In the rating of the key event being either positive or negative, there were again different perspectives in the way participants viewed an event. For examples, one Westerner reported that gaining a girlfriend was a negative event because the relationship did not turn out well; but for an Easterner, she reported that getting a boyfriend was a positive event. The same Westerner reported his girlfriend as an

Opponent in his spontaneous and prompted self-narratives, whereas the Easterner reported her boyfriend as Sender in her prompted self-narrative. As in Study 1, it was found that both positive and negative key events were embedded into the self-narrative structure and featured in different actants.

Similar themes in positive or negative experiences in the third key event of ‘achievements’, ‘gaining something’ (friendships or bond with brother), ‘illness with family members or self’ and ‘death or loss of family or friend’, were again shared by both Westerners and Easterners. The events that were only reported by Westerners included: ‘going to Rainbow Serpent Festival’; ‘involved with Atlantis cult’; ‘Mum’s bankruptcy’; ‘comfortable and caring upbringing’; ‘learning music- fell in love at 12 with music’; and ‘changing lifestyle with dad living further away from home’. For the Easterner, what was unique for a few of the self-narratives were ‘getting my first crush’, ‘time spent in national service’ and ‘deciding that my parents deserve better’. The third key events are summarized in Table I3. Similar numbers of the valence in key events were reported for Westerners ($n = 4$ negative and $n = 11$ positive) and Easterners ($n = 4$ negative and $n = 10$ positive).

Again, in analyzing these key events, some of the key events were found embedded as actants. For example, the key event of ‘deciding that my parents deserve better’ for an Easterner was related to his Object of improving the life of his parents and later having them as the beneficiaries when he accomplished his goals (Receiver). In some Western self-narratives, ‘Illnesses’ and ‘Mum’s bankruptcy’ were found in the actant Opponent. The taste of ‘Achievements’ often spurs more desire to achieve and hence, many of them feature again in the actant Object of both Western and Eastern self-narratives. ‘Gaining something’ like friends for example was found to feature in the actant Helper in the different key events in both Western and Eastern self-narratives.

Table I3

Frequencies and Percentages of Reported Third Key Events in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Category of Key Events/ Cultural Group | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 15) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 14) | |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| Achievements, e.g. in school, travel, scholarships, etc. | 4 | 26.8% | 7 | 46.9% |
| Going to Rainbow Serpent Festival | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Moving in with pastors | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Gained something, e.g., friend(s) (helper), bond with brother, etc. | 2 | 13.4% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Illness, e.g., mum falling ill, admission into hospital overseas, etc. | 1 | 6.7% | 1 | 6.7% |
| Involved with Atlantis cult | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Death/loss of family or friend | 1 | 6.7% | 2 | 13.4% |
| Mum's bankruptcy | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Comfortable and caring upbringing | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Learning music- fell in love at 12 with music | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Changing lifestyle with dad living further away from home | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Getting my first crush | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Time spent in national service | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Deciding that my parents deserve better | | | 1 | 6.7% |

Not all participants reported a fourth key event. Of those who did, Westerners (*n* = 14) and Easterners (*n* = 11) reported similar experiences of 'achievements' and 'gaining friends', as summarized in Table I4. A similar relationship was observed again

in some of the key events reappearing in the actants of the Greimassian self-narrative structure. For example, the key event of ‘living in a large family’ was reported as a Helper by the European-Australian male. The frequency of achievement key events like travel and academic accomplishment has been captured in the actant Object.

Table I4

Frequencies and Percentages of Reported Fourth Key Events in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Category of Key Events/ Cultural Group | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 14) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 11) | |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| Achievements, e.g. in school, travel, university, etc. | 5 | 33.5% | 6 | 40.2% |
| Family moving, e.g. mum leaving for another state, siblings moved out of home | 2 | 13.4% | | |
| Gained something, e.g., friend(s) | 2 | 13.4% | 2 | 13.4% |
| Going to arts camp | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Living in a large family | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Meeting my wife | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Realizing Egon Schiele (artist) is a person | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Relationship with boyfriend | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| My brother’s wedding | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Being single whole life - not good enough | | | 1 | 6.7% |

In the fifth and final key event reported by participants, only eighteen key events

were recorded. The frequent key events reported both by Westerners and Easterners were again ‘achievements’, such as moving out of home and starting university, ‘meeting a partner and starting a relationship’, etc. The key events that were unique to a few of the Western self-narratives were ‘brother revealing his homosexuality’ and ‘having a child daughter in 2007’. For the Eastern self-narratives, the key events that were unique were, ‘sister setting up her own business’, ‘being apart from family while in university’ and ‘coping with financial problems’, see Table I5.

Table I5

Frequencies and Percentages of Reported Fifth Key Events in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Category of Key Events/ Cultural Group | Westerners (<i>n</i> = 10) | | Easterners (<i>n</i> = 8) | |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
| Achievements, e.g. in moving out of home, continuing study, travel, university, etc. | 6 | 40.2% | 3 | 20.1% |
| Meeting a partner/ new relationship | 1 | 6.7% | 2 | 13.4% |
| Brother revealing his homosexuality | 2 | 13.4% | | |
| Having a child- daughter in 2007 | 1 | 6.7% | | |
| Sister setting up her own business | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Being apart from family while in university | | | 1 | 6.7% |
| Coping with financial problems | | | 1 | 6.7% |

For the fifth key event, Westerners reported two negative and eight positive key events while Easterners reported one negative and seven positive key events.

Appendix J: Plain Language Statement, Online Questionnaire and Debriefing Statement
(Study 3)

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT

PROJECT: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Department of Psychological Sciences

You are invited to participate in our research on cultural differences in self-narratives, conducted as part of Lidia Lae's PhD research. The project has been approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee and will be supervised by the Principal Investigator, Professor Yoshihisa Kashima of the Department of Psychological Sciences.

We are interested in how self-narratives play a crucial role in understanding the interplay between culture and psychology. The aim of this project is to develop an online survey approach to investigate the differences between Western and Eastern cultural groups in the structure of self-narratives. The structured online survey will ask participants to share their life stories and to reflect on elements of their story, for examples, what the goal is in their life story, whether anyone helped them to achieve their goal, whether anyone opposed them, etc. The main research question is what cultural differences might emerge within the self-narrative structure?

Note that the data collection will take about an hour to complete.

Your individual responses will remain completely confidential, subject to legal requirements. We will report only group trends; no individual will or can be identified in any reports resulting from this work.

Data will be destroyed five years after any publications based on the data.

There are no known risks related to participation in this study.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary; you are free to withdraw from the study at any time by simply closing the web-page with the questionnaire or pressing the Escape button. Should you withdraw during the questionnaire, your data will be classified as incomplete. Though this data will remain on the questionnaire website until data collection is complete (after which time it will be permanently deleted), it will not be identifiable nor will it be used in the analyses.

Our study is for research purposes only, and the researcher will be pleased to answer any queries.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this research please contact Lidia Lae, on 0431 080 322, or by email at l.lae@student.unimelb.edu.au. You can also contact Lidia if you would like a report of the results of this study by email. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project you may contact the **Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics at The University of Melbourne (Ph: 83442073; fax: 93476739)**.

If you are willing to participate, start the questionnaire by clicking on the **Continue** button below.

By continuing you indicate your consent to participate in the study and authorise the researchers to use your data.

Thank you.

Professor Yoshihisa Kashima (Responsible Researcher)

ykashima@unimelb.edu.au (Ph: 83446312)

Lidia Lae (Student Researcher)

l.lae@student.unimelb.edu.au (Ph: 0431 080 322)

ContinueDiscontinue

Block 1

CONSENT FORM FOR PERSONS PARTICIPATING IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Project Title: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

Names of Investigators: Prof. Yoshi Kashima, Lidia Lae

1. By clicking on the "continue" button, I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of tests or procedures - have been explained to me in the Plain Language Statement.

2. I authorize the investigator in the above project, or his or her assistant, to administer the questionnaires referred to in the Plain Language Statement.

3. I have been informed and acknowledge that:

(a) The possible effects of the tests or procedures have been explained to me to my satisfaction

(b) The project is for research purposes only

(c) Involvement in the project is voluntary

(d) I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any identifiable unprocessed data previously supplied. I have been informed that I can do so by pressing the Escape button or by closing the survey window

(d) The information I provide will remain anonymous and only the researchers will have access to the data which will be password-protected on the supervising investigator's computer in the Psychology Department at the University of Melbourne

(e) Confidentiality is subject to legal requirements (subpoena, freedom of information, mandated reporting)

ContinueDiscontinue

Block 7

Section A:

1. Can you please summarise your life story in several paragraphs (4 to 5 paragraphs), of anything that comes to mind?

Block 2

2. *The following questions require you to reflect on your life story, then please answer the following questions:*

a) Are there any goals, objectives or pursuits that have been pervasive in your life? If so, what are they?

b) Is there a main character (person or thing) in your life story, if so, who or what is it?

c) What is the biggest challenge you (or the main character) have had to face in the pursuit in your (or the main character's) life? How did the challenge develop? What did you (or the main character) do to meet the challenge?

d) Was there anyone or anything that opposed you (or the main character) in achieving your goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?

e) Was there anyone or anything that helped you (or the main character) achieve the goal(s)/ objective(s) or pursuit(s)? If so, who or what?

f) Are there any character(s) with the most positive influence in the story? If so, who?

g) Are there any character(s) with the most negative influence in the story? If so, who?

h) Was there anyone or anything that guided you (or the main character) in your life story? For example, an authority figure or a moral value that provided you (or the main character) with guidance about what should be done? if so, who or what?

i) What would you say are your fundamental values, religious and political beliefs? How did these values and beliefs develop over time?

j) Who or what are the beneficiaries of you achieving your (or the main character's) goal(s), if any? Is it only yourself, only others, or yourself AND others? If not only yourself, but some other people or things who are also receiving benefits, who are they or what are they?

Block 8

3) What is your life all about? How would you describe it?

Block 9

4) What significant key events have happened in your life? That is, what events have occurred that have made a real impact in your life. Please list up to five that come to mind.

- Key event 1
- Key event 2
- Key event 3
- Key event 4
- Key event 5

Block 10

For Key Event 1, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 2, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 3, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 4, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

For Key Event 5, please describe what happened in some detail:

Was it a positive or negative key event?

- Positive
- Negative

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then list the number from the scale below next to each word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now, that is, at the present moment OR indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week (circle the instructions you followed when taking this measure)

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Very Slightly or Not at All | A Little | Moderately | Quite a Bit | Extremely |
| <input type="radio"/> Interested | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Irritable | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Distressed | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Alert | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Excited | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Ashamed | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Upset | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Inspired | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Strong | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Nervous | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Guilty | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Determined | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Scared | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Attentive | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Hostile | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Jittery | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Active | <input type="text"/> |
| <input type="radio"/> Proud | <input type="text"/> | | <input type="radio"/> Afraid | <input type="text"/> |

Section B:

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

1) What is your gender

- Male
- Female

2) What is your age?

3) What is your background?

- Anglo-Australian
- Singaporean Chinese
- Malaysian Chinese
- Other

4) What are your parent's cultural backgrounds?

- Mother
- Father

5) What are your parent's educational backgrounds?

- Mother
- Father

6) What are your parent's occupation?

- Mother
- Father

7) What is your employment position?

8) What is your highest level of education completed?

- Primary School Completion

- Secondary School Completion
- Undergraduate Degree
- Postgraduate Degree
- TAFE/ Diploma
- Other

Are you currently studying at University? If so, what year are you studying?

- Yes
- No

9) What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Remarried
- De Facto

10) How well do you speak English?

- Very well
- Well
- Not well

11) What is your first language?

11) What is your religious background?

- Christian
- Buddhist
- Judaism
- Islam
- Atheist
- Other

12) Are you currently practising the religion specified in Q11?

- Yes
- No

13) How long have you lived in Australia?

Congratulations!
You have reached the end of the survey!

DEBRIEFING INFORMATION

In this study you were asked about your life story using a structured approach. Your life story will be analysed and the results will be used to develop an online tool that will be used to capture people's life stories. It is expected that from the questionnaire and online data, cultural differences found in previous studies on affect and self-regulation would be reflected in the differences between Anglo-Australians and Singaporean/Malaysian Chinese self-narratives. It is hoped that this study will further contribute to our understanding of cultural differences in self-narratives. The aim of the project is to develop a structured approach to analysing the structure of self-narratives within different cultural contexts.

A summary of the general findings of the study will be made available once all of the data has been collected and analysed. You can email the student researcher at llae@student.unimelb.edu.au if you are interested in learning about the conclusions of the study. If you have any questions in the meantime relating to the study you have participated in, please do not hesitate to contact one of the investigators whose details were displayed at the beginning of the session.

Thank you for your involvement in the study.

Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)

Appendix K: Ethics Approval (Study 3)

12 July 2012

Prof Yoshi Kashima
Psychological Sciences
The University of Melbourne

Dear Yoshi

The Department Human Ethics Advisory Group has approved the following Minimal Risk project application:

HREC No. 1137155.1

Title of Project: *Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives Study 3*

Other investigators: Lidia Lae

The Minimal Risk project has been approved for the period of 12.07.2012 to 31/12/2012. It is potentially renewable annually for a maximum of 5 years.

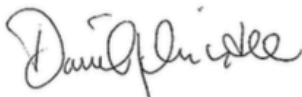
Please note that the following conditions apply to the approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of approval and/or disciplinary action.

- a. **Limit of approval:** Approval is limited strictly to the research project as submitted in your application.
- b. **Variation to the expedited review application:** Any subsequent variation or modifications you might wish to make to your project must be notified formally to the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group for further consideration and approval before the modified study is commenced. If the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group considers that the proposed changes are significant, you may be required to submit a new application for approval of the revised project.
- c. **Incidents or adverse affects:** Researchers must report immediately to the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group and the HREC Sub-Committee anything which might affect the ethical acceptance of the protocol including adverse effects on subjects or unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. Failure to do so may result in suspension or cancellation of approval.
- d. **Monitoring:** Projects are subject to monitoring at any time by the ethics committee.
- e. **Annual report:** An annual report is to be completed at the end of each year, or at the conclusion of the project if it continues for less than a year. Requests for annual reports are sent out by the Human Research Ethics Office in November/December of each year. Failure to submit a progress report at the end of the year will mean approval for the project will lapse.

Your project will also be registered with the University's HREC and you will receive advice of this shortly.

On behalf of the Department Human Ethics Advisory Group I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely



David Castle
Research Programs Officer

Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences
The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010 Australia
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Research Support Office

Reg. No. 200604393R

IRB-2012-11-020

25 January 2013

Professor Hong Ying-Yi
Nanyang Business School

NTU INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Project Title: Understanding Cultural Differences in Self-Narratives

I refer to your application for ethics approval with respect to the above project.

The Board has deliberated on your application and noted from your application that your research involves collecting behavioral data from participants using online questionnaires.

You have also confirmed that informed consent will be obtained from the participants and you have guaranteed the confidentiality of your participants' biodata obtained from them.

The documents reviewed are:

- a) NTU IRB application form dated **19 November 2012**
- b) Participant information sheet and consent form: version 2 dated **16 January 2013**
- c) Data collection form: version 1 dated **16 January 2013**

The Board is therefore satisfied with the bioethical consideration for the project and approves the ethics application under **Expedited** review. The approval period is from **25 January 2013 to 30 August 2013**. The NTU IRB reference number for this study is **IRB-2012-11-020**. Please use this reference number for all future correspondence.

The following protocol and compliances are to be observed upon NTU IRB approval

1. All research involving procedures greater than minimal risk on minors (individuals who are less than the legal age of 21 years old) requires IRB approved written Parental Consent and assent from the participant to be obtained before any research protocols can be administered. Minimal risk refers to an anticipated level of harm and discomfort that is no greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life, or during the performance of routine educational, physical, or psychological examination.
2. Only the approved Participants Information Sheet and Consent Form should be used. It must be signed by each subject prior to initiation of any protocol procedures. In addition, each subject should be given a copy of the signed consent form.

Blok N2.1, B4-01, 76 Nanyang Drive, Singapore 637331 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
Tel : +65 6791 9857, Fax: 6793 2019
www.ntu.edu.sg



Research Support Office

3. No deviation from, or changes of, the protocol should be initiated without prior written NTU IRB approval of an appropriate amendment.
4. The Principal Investigator should report promptly to NTU IRB regarding:
 - a. Deviation from, or changes to the protocol.
 - b. Changes increasing the risk to the subjects and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the trial
 - c. All serious adverse events (SAEs) which are both serious and unexpected.
 - d. New information that may affect adversely the safety of the subjects of the conduct of the trial.
 - e. Completion of the study.
5. Continuing Review Request/ Notice of Study completion form should be submitted to NTU IRB for the following:
 - a. Annual review: Status of the study should be reported to the NTU IRB at least annually using the Continuing Review Request/ Notice of Study completion form.
 - b. Study completion or termination: Continuing Review Request/ Notice of Study completion form is to be submitted within 4 to 6 weeks of study completion or termination.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Lee".

Prof Lee Sing Kong,
Chair, NTU Institutional Review Board
encl.

cc Chair, Nanyang Business School
Members, NTU Institutional Review Board

Appendix L: Study 3 Summary of Similarities in Actantial Structure Cross-culturally

The following Table L1 shows the similar findings of actants in both Western and Eastern self-narratives.

Table L1

Summary of the Similarities in Actants found in Western and Eastern Self-Narratives

| Axes/Actants | Similarities Cross-culturally |
|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Axis of Desire</i> | |
| Subject | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants used “I”, the Self as Subject in spontaneous self-narratives • In prompted self-narratives, both Westerners and Easterners reported significantly more concrete Subjects than abstract ones |
| Object | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westerners and Easterners shared more when prompted than spontaneously • In spontaneous self-narratives, both Westerners and Easterners shared similar contents in the broad thematic categories of ‘Other-oriented’ and ‘Both Self & Other’ goals • In prompted self-narratives, there were no significant differences with Western and Eastern contents in Object, that is, similar ‘Self-oriented’, ‘Other-oriented’, ‘Both Self & Other’ goals, as well as ‘Unclear’ were reported |
| <i>Axis of Conflict</i> | |
| Helper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westerners and Easterners reported more abstract Helpers when prompted than spontaneously • Westerners and Easterners reported similar contents in the actant Helper for spontaneous and prompted self-narratives |
| Opponent | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Westerners and Easterners reported more concrete Opponents when prompted than spontaneously • Westerners and Easterners reported similar contents in the actant Opponent for spontaneous self-narratives • In prompted self-narratives, similar ‘Significant Others’, ‘Family’, ‘Other’ and ‘Unclear’ were reported for Western and Eastern contents in the actant Opponent |

Axis of Communication

Sender

- Westerners and Easterners reported more concrete Senders than abstract ones in both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives
- Westerners and Easterners reported similar contents in the actant Sender for both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives

Receiver

- Westerners and Easterners reported more concrete Receivers than abstract ones in both spontaneous and prompted self-narratives
 - Westerners and Easterners reported similar contents in the actant Receiver for spontaneous self-narratives in the broad thematic categories of 'Self', 'Significant Others', 'Other' and 'Unclear
 - In prompted self-narratives, similar 'Significant Others', 'Family', 'Other' and 'Unclear' were reported for Western and Eastern contents in the actant Receiver.
-

Appendix M: Analyses of Religious Differences

For Christians (females $n = 28$, males $n = 14$), there were more practicing their religion ($n = 23$) than those who were not ($n = 19$). There were similar numbers of practicing Buddhists (females $n = 18$, males $n = 3$) than not ($n = 10$ practicing, $n = 11$ not practicing). The following analyses show that it is possible to study religion in the self-narrative structure. Just as Vignoles et al. (2016) investigated religion as an important variable impacting on selves across cultures, it was important to understand in this research whether religion was a confounding variable impacting on the cultural differences.

In making comparisons between Australian Christians and Singaporean Buddhists, the Christians who were Singaporean Chinese ($n = 14$) were removed from the analyses so that comparisons could be made initially between religions with culture included (Australian Christians and Singaporean Buddhists) and then later with culture factored out (Singaporean Christians vs. Buddhists). Of the 28 Australian Christians ($n = 20$ females, $n = 8$ males), slightly fewer were practicing Christians ($n = 13$ practicing, $n = 15$ not practicing). To investigate whether Christians and Buddhists evaluated whether the key events in their lives were positive or negative, a total of 43.2% of Christians reported positive events and 12.4% negative events while the Buddhists reported 26.5% positive and 17.3% negative events, as show in Table M1. Independent samples t-tests were employed to evaluate any religious and cross-cultural differences. Christians ($M = 2.92$, $SD = 2.33$) did not differ to Buddhists ($M = 1.08$, $SD = 0.96$) in the sum of positive events, $t(47) = 1.41$, $p = .165$, but did in the sum of negative events (Christians: $M = 1.08$, $SD = 0.96$; Buddhists: $M = 0.75$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(28.82) = -2.65$, $p = .013$. Comparatively, Buddhists reported fewer negative key events in their lives but these results are confounded with culture.

Table M1

Frequencies of Each of the Five Key Events that were Reported to be Positive or Negative in the Self-Narratives of Western Christians and Eastern Buddhists

| Religion/Key Events | Key Event 1 | | Key Event 2 | | Key Event 3 | | Key Event 4 | | Key Event 5 | | Total | |
|-------------------------|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|---------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg | Pos | Neg |
| Christian | <i>n</i> = 28 | | <i>n</i> = 27 | | <i>n</i> = 21 | | <i>n</i> = 18 | | <i>n</i> = 9 | | <i>n</i> = 103 | |
| | 18 | 10 | 21 | 6 | 18 | 3 | 14 | 4 | 9 | 0 | 80 | 23 |
| Buddhist | <i>n</i> = 21 | | <i>n</i> = 20 | | <i>n</i> = 16 | | <i>n</i> = 14 | | <i>n</i> = 11 | | <i>n</i> = 82 | |
| | 11 | 10 | 12 | 8 | 10 | 6 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 49 | 32 |
| Total of the Key Events | <i>n</i> = 49 | | <i>n</i> = 47 | | <i>n</i> = 37 | | <i>n</i> = 32 | | <i>n</i> = 20 | | <i>N</i> = 185 | |
| | 29 | 20 | 33 | 14 | 28 | 9 | 24 | 8 | 15 | 4 | 129 | 55 |

Note. Pos = Positive, Neg = Negative.

One of the salient aspects of self-defining memories, like key events is that it is emotionally laden (Singer & Blagov, 2004; Singer et al., 2013). Therefore, religious/cultural differences in affective states as measured by the PANAS scale with the key events for Christians and Buddhists were investigated. There were no religious/cultural differences (Christians, $M = 29.12$, $SD = 8.34$; Buddhists, $M = 27.95$, $SD = 7.48$) for the positive affect towards key events, $t(43) = 0.49$, $p = .627$. However, the Buddhists reported more negative affect towards the key events in their lives ($M = 21.45$, $SD = 8.38$) than the Christians ($M = 16.19$, $SD = 7.25$), $t(44) = -2.28$, $p = .028$. It is possible that these results may be confounded by culture and further analyses in the sections to follow will clarify this.

To investigate any religious/cross-cultural and gender differences in positive and negative key events, a mixed-design ANOVA was conducted with the religious cultural groups (Western Christians vs Eastern Buddhists) and gender (Male vs Female) as the between-subjects factors, and the key event valence (Positive vs Negative) as the within-subject factors. The dependent variable was the number of reported positive or

negative key events. There was no significant interaction between religious cultural group, gender and key events (Positive vs Negative), $F(1, 45) = 0.10, p = .857$, nor were there any cultural differences in reports of positive and negative key events between Western Christians and Eastern Buddhists, $F(1, 45) = 0.95, p = .112$, and between males and females, $F(1, 45) = 0.95, p = .123$. However, the main effect of key event valence was significant, $F(1, 45) = 0.78, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .22$, suggesting that participants generally shared more positive ($M = 0.42$) than negative ($M = 0.24$) key events in their self-narratives.

To understand better these key events as they relate to the self-narrative structure, Table M2 shows for each key event the actants and the summary of these for European-Australian Christians and Singaporean Chinese Buddhists. A summary of the overall key events for Christians and Buddhists were tallied in Table M3 with the percentages for each actant.

Table M2

Frequencies of Each of the Five Key Events that emerged as Actants in the Spontaneous and Prompted Self-Narratives of Western Christians (C) and Eastern Buddhists (B)

| Key events | Religion | 1 SO | 2 PO | 3 PS | 4 SH | 5 PH | 6 SOp | 7 POp | 8 SS | 9 PS | 10 SR | 11 PR | Unclear |
|--------------|----------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|-------|-------|---------|
| KE1 | C | 7 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| | B | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| KE2 | C | 5 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| | B | 4 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| KE3 | C | 4 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 7 |
| | B | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| KE4 | C | 3 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| | B | 0 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| KE5 | C | 1 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | B | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Total</i> | | 33 | 45 | 8 | 16 | 9 | 12 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 41 |

Note. 1S0= Spontaneous Object, 2PO=Prompted Object, 3PS=Prompted Subject, 4SH=Spontaneous Helper, 5PH=Prompted Helper, 6SOp=Spontaneous Opponent, 7POp=Prompted Opponent, 8SS=Spontaneous Sender, 9PS=Prompted Sender, 10SR=Spontaneous Receiver, 11PR=Prompted Receiver. C=Christian & B=Buddhist.

Out of the 185 key events recoded, the majority (77.8%) of Christians and Buddhists had key events as actants in their self-narratives, as shown in Table M3. Buddhists had slightly fewer actants (35.1%) as key events than Christians (42.7%), with more Christians having unclear key events (13%) that did not relate to their spontaneous or prompted Greimassian narrative structures compared to Buddhists (7.2%). Although Buddhists reported more negative affect in key events, their report of the actant ‘Opponent’ in their key events did not vary greatly from the Christians. Proportionate to the total actants as key events reported, Buddhists had 8.2% ‘Opponents’ while Christians had 11.3%. It seems likely that the negative affect towards the key events they are experiencing is not due to the ‘Opponents’ in their lives but possibly other ‘actants’. For example, the lack of ‘Helper’ is evident in the actantial arrangement of Buddhists (9.3% of ‘Helper’ present) compared to European-Australians (20.3% of ‘Helper’ present).

Table M3

Summary of Overall Key Events that Emerged as Actants in the Self-Narratives of Western Christians and Eastern Buddhists

| Culture/ Actant | Object | Subject | Helper | Oppon. | Sender | Receiver | Total Actants | Unclear |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Christians | 46(58.2) | 3(3.8) | 16(20.3) | 9(11.3) | 3(3.8) | 2(2.5) | 79(42.7) | 24(13) |
| Buddhists | 32(33.0) | 5(5.2) | 9(9.3) | 8(8.2) | 9(9.3) | 2(2.1) | 65(35.1) | 17(7.2) |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>78(54.2)</i> | <i>8(5.6)</i> | <i>25(17.4)</i> | <i>17(11.8)</i> | <i>12(8.3)</i> | <i>4(2.8)</i> | <i>144(77.8)</i> | <i>41(22.2)</i> |

Note. N = 185. Percentages (%) in the brackets. Oppon. = Opponent.

What is most striking is that Christians have proportionately more Objects of Desire (58.2%) than the Buddhists (33%). Independent samples t-test with the two religious/cultural groups found that indeed, there were significant differences between Christians and Buddhists’ reported Objects of desires. Christians had significantly more

abstract Objects of desires in their spontaneous ($M = 0.86$, $SD = 0.80$) and prompted self-narratives ($M = 1.54$, $SD = 0.90$) than Buddhists' spontaneous ($M = 0.38$, $SD = 0.50$) and prompted self-narratives ($M = 0.90$, $SD = 0.77$), $t(47) = 2.39$, $p = .021$ and $t(44.27) = 2.07$, $p = .044$, respectively. This was not found for concrete Objects of desire. These findings highlight that 'Object' may be an important actant that impacts on the valence of life experiences between the two religious and cultural groups.

To determine the relationship between Object and Affect in the different religious samples, Pearson correlations were computed. The results in Table M4 indicate for Christians, that Spontaneous Object Abstract contents was significantly correlated with Positive Affect, $r(25) = .40$, $p < .05$, suggesting that Christians' spontaneous sharing of abstract Objects of Desire (abstract goals) was related to their feeling of positive affect. The difference in the correlations observed for the Christians and Buddhists was statistically significant, $z = 2.58$, $p = .01$. There was a statistically significant difference in the strength of the correlation between spontaneous abstract goals and positive affect for Christians and Buddhists for abstract goals, in that abstract goals explains significantly more of the variance in positive affect for Christians and Buddhists. In contrast, Buddhists spontaneous sharing of concrete Objects of Desire (concrete goals) was inversely related to positive affect, $r(20) = -.47$, $p < .05$. The difference in the correlations observed for the Christians and Buddhists was not statistically significant, $z = 2.58$, $p = .01$. Concrete goals did not explain significantly more of the variance in positive affect for Christians and Buddhists. Taken together, with Western Christians, there is a direct positive relationship between sharing abstract Objects like, pursuing joy in God, and feeling positive affect because from self-description studies (Cousins, 1989; Kashima et al., 2006; Rhee et al., 1995), Westerners tend to be viewed as autonomous beings with abstract qualities and having more

positive self-enhancing bias (Heine et al., 1999), which then seems natural to them. However, for the Eastern Buddhists, the valence of affect and goals is more ambivalent. Religious/cultural norms for them may advocate contextualized concrete goals but this is associated with decreased positive affect. This may be due to a more complex dialectical self-esteem for the East Asian where negative self-evaluations and emotions are tolerated and reported (Kim, Peng, & Chiu, 2008; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2004). It is possible that this finding is also not related to religion alone but may be due to cultural influences.

Table M4

Correlations Between Object of Desire and Affect in Christians (below diagonal) and Buddhists (above diagonal)

| Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|---------|---------|-------|------|
| (1) Spontaneous Object Abstract | 1.00 | -.29 | -.03 | .03 | -.06 | -.13 |
| (2) Spontaneous Object Concrete | -.42* | 1.00 | -.34 | .34 | -.47* | -.15 |
| (3) Prompted Object Abstract | .42* | .17 | 1.00 | -1.00** | .22 | .04 |
| (4) Prompted Object Concrete | -.42* | -.17 | -1.00** | 1.00 | -.22 | -.04 |
| (5) Positive Affect | .40* | -.13 | .29 | -.29 | 1.00 | -.09 |
| (6) Negative Affect | -.10 | -.02 | .15 | -.15 | -.25 | 1.00 |

Note. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed). For Christians, Positive Affect ($n = 25$), Negative Affect ($n = 26$); For Buddhists, Positive Affect and Negative Affect (each $n = 20$).

In order to investigate whether it was just religion and not culture influencing the differences in correlations, the European-Australians were excluded from the analyses of Christian and Buddhist groups and only Singaporean Chinese Christians ($n = 14$) and Buddhists ($n = 21$) were considered. This was also to ascertain whether religion was a confounding variable impacting on the cultural/religious differences observed in the actual analyses. When culture was factored out and only religion was considered within the Singaporean Chinese only, there were no significant differences in positive and negative events as well as the difference of negative affect towards key events that was found when culture was considered. Hence, it may be in this sample that

culture is the significant factor that has a stronger influence on affect towards the key events in the participants' lives. However, religion and culture are so interlinked that they are confounded, making it difficult to work out whether the cultural differences found are due mainly to religion differences or vice versa. Whether these same results presented can be replicated with European-Australian Christians and Buddhists is another question. Also, a limitation of these results was that the Chinese Christian group was a small sample size compared to the Chinese Buddhist group, which decreased statistical power. Thus, in this study the evidence is inconclusive due to the small sample size. However, these analyses show a way of investigating religion within the self-narrative structure.

To investigate whether Singaporean Chinese Christians ($n = 14$) and Buddhists ($n = 21$) evaluated whether the key events in their lives were positive or negative, independent samples t-tests were completed to evaluate any religious and cross-cultural differences. Christians ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.49$) did not differ to Buddhists ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.49$) in the sum of positive events, $t(33) = 0.74$, $p = .165$, but did in the sum of negative events (Christians: $M = 1.08$, $SD = 0.96$; Buddhists: $M = 0.75$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(28.82) = -2.65$, $p = .013$. Comparatively, Buddhists reported fewer negative key events in their lives but these results are confounded with culture.

Further t-tests were completed to investigate religious differences in affective states as measured by the PANAS scale with the key events for Christians and Buddhists. There were no religious/cultural differences (Christians, $M = 29.12$, $SD = 8.34$; Buddhists, $M = 27.95$, $SD = 7.48$) for the positive affect towards key events, $t(43) = 0.49$, $p = .627$. However, the Buddhists reported more negative affect towards the key events in their lives ($M = 21.45$, $SD = 8.38$) than the Christians ($M = 16.19$,

$SD = 7.25$), $t(44) = -2.28$, $p = .028$. It is possible that these results may be confounded by culture and further analyses in the sections to follow would clarify this.

Table M5 shows that indeed, the correlations are no longer significant when the Australian Christians are removed from the analyses and Singaporean Chinese Christians only are compared with Singaporean Chinese Buddhist (see Table M4 for comparison with Table M5).

Table M5

Correlations Between of Object of Desire and Affect in Singaporean Chinese Christians (below diagonal) and Buddhists (above diagonal)

| Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---------------------------------|-------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| (1) Spontaneous Object Abstract | 1.00 | -.29 | -.03 | .01 | -.06 | -.13 |
| (2) Spontaneous Object Concrete | -.59* | 1.00 | -.24 | .40 | -.47* | -.15 |
| (3) Prompted Object Abstract | .30 | .12 | 1.00 | -.55 | .37 | -.04 |
| (4) Prompted Object Concrete | .19 | -.32 | -.44 | 1.00 | -.32 | .14 |
| (5) Positive Affect | -.10 | .00 | -.50 | .11 | 1.00 | -.09 |
| (6) Negative Affect | -.20 | .10 | .24 | -.06 | -.13 | 1.00 |

Note. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (2-tailed). For Christians, Positive and Negative Affect ($n = 14$); For Buddhists, Positive Affect and Negative Affect (each $n = 21$).