Dan McAdams

Director of The Foley Center for the Study of Lives
Professor of Psychology
Professor of Human Development and Social Policy

Dan McAdams received his BS degree from Valparaiso University in 1976 and his PhD in psychology and social relations from Harvard University in 1979. Honored as a Charles Deering McCormick Professor of Teaching Excellence at Northwestern, Professor McAdams teaches courses in Personality Psychology, Adult Development and Aging, Theories of Personality and Development, and the Literatures of Identity and Generativity. He is the author of the award-winning book “The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live by,” and “George Bush and the Redemptive Dream.”

Rayane Alamuddin

Doctoral Student
Human Development and Social Policy

My general interests lie in exploring narratives of youth going through transitions, especially immigrant youth. I am currently working on a project exploring the intergenerational transmission of virtue, with a focus on the narratives of emerging adults. I am also beginning to develop a longitudinal project in which I will look at the life stories of Arab American youth in Chicago who are transitioning out of high school, and how the stories relate to their positive development.

Selected publications
Michelle Albaugh

Doctoral Student
Human Development and Social Policy

Michelle Albaugh received a bachelor’s degree, magna cum laude, from DePaul University in music in 1994 and a master’s degree in Human Development & Social Policy from Northwestern University in 2007. Her research thus far has centered on the intersection of personal faith and political ideology. She collaborated with Professor Dan McAdams, using his narrative theory of personality and associated methodologies to study how committed Christians, politically liberal and conservative, differ from each other. Michelle’s dissertation work examines differences among 4 groups of Christians’ (mainline Protestants, evangelical Protestants, black Protestants, and Catholics) low point narratives. Preliminary results indicate that both religious and nonreligious coping in the narratives are related differentially to well-being outcomes, based on group membership. Narratives are being explored further to discover how religious and nonreligious coping stories differ among the 4 groups. In addition, quantitative analyses will test the hypothesis that religious and nonreligious coping styles partially mediate the robust relationship between personality traits and well-being.

Keith Cox

Doctoral Student
Clinical and Personality Psychology

Keith Cox received his bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia. He earned a master's degree in religious studies from the University of Virginia, where he studied the intersection of religion and psychology, especially positive psychology. His current research in the Foley lab has two main foci: self-narratives and positive psychology.
I’m a third year doctoral student in the Human Development and Social Policy program at Northwestern. Right now, I’m pursuing two different but related research topics. First, I’m working on a paper on how people (like family members, teachers, mentors, and role models) and institutions (like schools, clubs, religious organizations, etc.) might, over the life course, socialize individuals to become generative. Second, I have an education policy interest in teachers in primary and secondary US schools – why they choose to go into teaching, why they stay, and what makes them satisfied with their jobs. This second line of research relates more broadly to what motivates people to work for idealistic reasons rather than for financial rewards and what kinds of cultural narratives keep them in low-paying but psychologically fulfilling careers.

My broad research interests include narrative psychology, adult development, family relationships, infertility, adoption, and foster care. I am currently analyzing the narratives of 38 parents who adopted children after experiencing infertility. My talk will focus on the tension between themes of agency and fate in the narratives of adoptive parents.

Conference presentations
- 'Meant to Be Ours': The Uses of Fate in the Narratives of Adoptive Parents." 2nd International Conference on Adoption and Culture, Pittsburgh, PA, October 11-14, 2007.
- Resolving Race in the Narratives of Adoptive Parents.” 3rd International Conference on Adoption Research, Leiden, the Netherlands, July 11-15.
Erika Manczak
Doctoral Student
Clinical psychology

I have just completed my first year in the clinical psychology program. My research primarily focuses on the use of narratives to explore parent-child relationships across the lifespan. Within this, I am especially interested in investigating the mechanisms that facilitate intergenerational transmission of psychopathology. Recently, I’ve also begun examining regulatory focus theory as it relates to personality and developmental psychology.

Selected publications:

Ben Schalet
Doctoral Student
Clinical and Personality Psychology

Ben Schalet received his BA in Fundamentals: Issues and Texts from the University of Chicago in 1995. His general research interests center on the relationship between enduring traits and the development of psychopathology. He has reported on the structure and correlates of hypomanic personality, using a multi-method approach.

He is currently working with Professors Emily Durbin, William Revelle, and Dan McAdams to investigate the relationship among Openness to Experience, Intellect, Absorption, peculiar experiences, and psychopathology. His interests further include observational research methods, personality theory and psychotherapy outcome.
My primary research interest lies in examining how cognitive risk factors confer liability to psychopathology. Over the past five years at Northwestern, I have cultivated this interest by examining how the specificity of autobiographical memory recall relates to depression. I have studied how reduced specificity and greater overgenerality in autobiographical memory confers vulnerability to depression, as a predictor of the recurrence of depression and of a worse course of depressive disorder. I have also been interested in studying the ways in which we assess specificity in autobiographical memory. Most research to date has used a cue word paradigm to measure memory specificity, and I have been interested in extending this work by examining specificity in autobiographical memory narratives. My talk will present results from a recent study on specificity in autobiographical memory narratives and how it relates to depression.

Selected publications:
Josh Wilt

Doctoral Student
Clinical and Personality Psychology

Joshua Wilt received a bachelor’s degree, magna cum laude, from The Ohio State University in psychology with a biochemistry minor in 2005. He received a master’s degree from Wake Forest University in psychology in 2007. He has collaborated with Professor Dan McAdams, using his narrative theory of personality and associated methodologies to study how individual scenes in life-stories are linked together, the relations between personality traits and characteristics of life-stories, and how people narrate authentic and inauthentic experiences. His current research interests include personality theory, psychometrics and the functions of life-storytelling and autobiographical memories.

Keegan Walden

Doctoral Student
Clinical and Personality Psychology

I am broadly interested in emotion and in the ways in which emotion manifests in life narratives. I am specifically interested in how people express different kinds of negative emotion in their life stories, and in the extent to which emotion regulation strategies narrated in life stories are related to various measures of well-being. Another line of research I am currently involved in utilizes neuroimaging techniques to differentiate healthy individuals from those with unipolar depression and bipolar depression on the basis of electrical activity in frontal brain regions.
I am interested broadly in the development of narrative identity of first and second generation Latinos. Specifically, I am interested in the effects of school policies and family practices on the identity development of students. Currently, I am working on a project examining minority students’ perceptions of college. I am also working on a project examining the motivations revealed in the life stories of midlife adults.