

Family Metaphors and Moral Intuitions: How Conservatives and Liberals Narrate Their Lives

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This research examines life-narrative interviews obtained from 128 highly religious and politically active adults to test differences between political conservatives and liberals on (a) implicit family metaphors (G. Lakoff, 2002) and (b) moral intuitions (J. Haidt & C. Joseph, 2004). Content analysis of 12 key scenes in life stories showed that conservatives, as predicted, tended to depict authority figures as strict enforcers of moral rules and to identify lessons in self-discipline. By contrast, liberals were more likely to identify lessons learned regarding empathy and openness, even though (contrary to prediction) they were no more likely than conservatives to describe nurturant authority figures. Analysis of extended discourse on the development of religious faith and personal morality showed that conservatives emphasized moral intuitions regarding respect for social hierarchy, allegiance to in-groups, and the purity or sanctity of the self, whereas liberals invested more significance in moral intuitions regarding harm and fairness. The results are discussed in terms of the recent upsurge of interest among psychologists in political ideology and the value of using life-narrative methods and concepts to explore how politically active adults attempt to construct meaningful lives.

Keywords: conservatives, liberals, life stories, political psychology, morality

Psychologists have long been interested in the personalities of politicians (e.g., Winter, 2003), but they have only recently turned their attention back to how the personalities of the people who vote for them influence and are influenced by political beliefs and values. Declaring the “end of the end of ideology,” Jost (2006, p. 651) observed that after decades of downplaying the social and psychological significance of political ideology, social and behavioral scientists have returned to a range of questions that last intrigued them around the time of World War II: How do values, needs, and emotions influence political behavior? What are the psychological roots of political ideologies? How do political ideas animate human lives? The renewed interest in personality and politics is evident in psychologically informed popular books and articles (e.g., Dean, 2006; O’Donnell, 2006; Westen, 2007) and in recent empirical studies linking people’s political beliefs and behaviors to psychological needs (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003), personality traits (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004; McCrae, 1996), emotional states (de St. Aubin, 1996; Marcus,

Sullivan, Theiss-Morse, & Stevens, 2005), childhood temperaments (Block & Block, 2006), and genetic predispositions (Alford, Funk, & Hibbing, 2005). Of central concern in the scientific literature are those psychological factors that may underlie the political dichotomy of right versus left.

Ever since the first French National Assembly of 1789 seated the nobles to the right of the presiding officer and the representatives of the common people to the left, the distinction between right and left has proven to be an efficient and useful way to classify political viewpoints. In the United States, the distinction maps onto that between political conservatives and liberals, respectively. Jost et al. (2003) argued that conservatives and liberals differ most fundamentally on two broad dimensions: (a) attitudes toward inequality and (b) attitudes toward social change and tradition. Put simply, conservatives are more accepting of inequality and more resistant to social change than are liberals. Psychological research has shown that those who strongly endorse politically conservative viewpoints tend also to score low on openness to experience and integrative complexity and relatively high on measures of death anxiety, dogmatism, and needs for order and closure compared with politically more liberal individuals (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996; Tetlock, 1984; Trapnell, 1994; Van Hiel & Mervielde, 2004; Wilson, 1973). Adopting conservative values and beliefs may help people to feel safe in the face of danger, grounded in the face of uncertainty, and more or less comfortable, self-assured, and connected to like-minded others (Landau et al., 2004).

The emerging message from recent research is that political ideology is, for many people at least, deeply implicated in what people want in life (motivation) and who they are (identity). A parallel line of emerging theory and research in contemporary psychology suggests that among the most revealing ways people

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convey what they want (motivation) and who they are (identity) is through the telling of stories (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1985, 2001). The past decade has witnessed an upsurge of empirical research in personality, developmental, social, and cognitive psychology into the autobiographical stories that people construct to express their needs and make sense of their lives (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; McAdams, in press; McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Singer, 2004; Thorne & Nam, in press; Woike, 2007). Following this trend, the current investigation considers the different kinds of stories that politically conservative and liberal American adults tell about their lives.

Only a handful of studies have examined the life narratives of political conservatives and liberals. The authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) drew up narrative case studies to illustrate their psychodynamic conception of political attitudes. In another classic report from the 1950s, *Opinions and Personality*, Smith, Bruner, and White (1956) analyzed 10 case studies to trace the development of political beliefs over time and their associations with interpersonal relationships and psychological defenses. In recent years, psychologically probing case studies of politically active adults have been written by Andrews (1991), Gregg (1991), Colby and Damon (1992), and de St. Aubin, Wandrei, Skerven, and Coppolillo (2006). In all of these, the authors examined psychological themes expressed in the extended life stories told by their participants. In her study of 15 liberal social activists, for example, Andrews noted their lifelong commitment to a well-articulated belief system, the total confidence that their causes would ultimately be realized, and the near absence of any expressed moral conflicts. In de St. Aubin et al., the authors contrasted conservatives' fantasies of romantic escape and their endorsement of a strict hierarchy of worth on one hand to liberals' fascination with spirituality and their quest to explore and expand the self on the other. In their interpretations of the case studies, de St. Aubin et al. drew heavily on Tomkins's (1987) conception of life scripts associated with normative (right) and humanistic (left) ideologies. Tomkins argued that different personal ideologies are based on correspondingly different emotional scenes in life, which in turn become psychologically organized into correspondingly different autobiographical narratives.

The scientific value of case-based research into the life scripts and autobiographical stories of politically active adults may be seen from two different perspectives. First, participants' idiographic accounts of how they came to assume their political beliefs and commitments may yield clues regarding the developmental origins of ideology. In this regard, Smith et al. (1956) and Andrews (1991) suggested that different socialization settings and childhood experiences might ultimately lead to different political orientations in adulthood, ranging from conservatism to communism. From a second perspective, however, the retrospective narrative accounts of life constructed by politically active adults may speak to how adults explain and justify who they are today.

In Gregg (1991) and de St. Aubin et al. (2006), for example, the investigators focused on adults' current narrative identity—the internalized and evolving story of the self that adults construct to provide their lives with unity, purpose, and meaning (McAdams, 1985, 2001). From the perspective of narrative identity, then, retrospective accounts of one's personal past are selective and self-defining myths rather than veridical historical accounts. Nar-

ative identity speaks less to what really happened in the past and more to how people currently understand who they were, are, and will be. Narrative understandings of the self are strongly influenced by culture—that is, by the images, metaphors, symbols, and stories that gain currency and affirmation in a given social and historical milieu (McAdams, 2006). Life stories, therefore, present the culturally informed, self-defining narrative frameworks within which people's political beliefs are given meaning, value, and autobiographical justification. From this perspective, then, the scientific payoff for studying the relation between life narratives and politics is a deeper understanding of what politics means in real people's lives, as people understand their lives and the culture within which their lives are understood.

Like the case-based explorations launched by Gregg (1991) and de St. Aubin et al. (2006), in the current investigation we examine how people make meaning of their political values through life narratives. By analyzing a relatively large number of life stories told by politically active adults, however, we are able in the two studies reported below to test a priori hypotheses regarding the relations between values and narrative identity. The inspiration for the hypotheses to be tested comes from two theoretical approaches that heretofore have not enjoyed direct scrutiny in personality and social psychological research. The first argues that political ideology is rooted in different metaphors that people internalize regarding family life (Lakoff, 2002). The second contends that political ideology reflects deeply ingrained moral intuitions (Haidt, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Although both approaches contend that political orientations connect to issues of deep emotional and moral significance in the life story, the two theories focus on very different aspects of narrative identity, requiring very different modes of assessment. In Study 1, evidence for politically relevant family metaphors is garnered from content analysis of significant autobiographical scenes in narrative identity. Vivid, self-defining scenes in episodic memory often involve interpersonal interactions that capture, resemble, or imply family dynamics (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000; Singer, 2004). In Study 2, by contrast, evidence of moral intuitions is gleaned from moral discourse itself. To assess the relative salience of different moral intuitions, we examine open-ended responses to a series of questions asking people to describe the nature of their religious and moral beliefs.

Study 1: Family Metaphors

Adopting a perspective from cognitive linguistics, Lakoff (2002) argued that people implicitly understand and relate to politics in terms of family metaphors. For many voters, political leaders represent parents, and their policies are akin to how parents raise their children. Political orientations, then, reflect what a person believes a good parent should be and how a good family should be organized. For conservatives, the good political leader is like the strict father, and the good family is organized in terms of a strict-father morality. According to Lakoff, the strict father has "primary responsibility for supporting and protecting the family as well as the authority to set overall policy, to set strict rules for the behavior of children, and to enforce the rules" (p. 33). In the conservative view, "children must respect and obey their parents; by doing so they build character, that is, self-discipline and self-reliance" (p. 33). Conservatives value love and nurturance, but these "can never outweigh parental authority, which is itself an

expression of love and nurturance—tough love” (p. 33). By extension, a good society is one in which strong leaders set clear guidelines and enforce strict rules, which encourages the development of self-discipline among the citizenry, who are then able to assume personal responsibility for their own lives.

By contrast, liberals implicitly believe that good parents are nurturant parents and that good families are organized in terms of a nurturant-parent morality. In the nurturant-parent model, “love, empathy, and nurturance are primary,” and children grow up to be happy and fulfilled adults by “being cared for, respected, and caring for others, both in their family and in their community” (Lakoff, 2002, pp. 33–34). Of course, parents must set rules and provide clear guidelines. But their authority to do so is rooted in their commitment to nurturing the potential within their children. The goal of nurturant parenting is the development and formation of children who are themselves empathic and caring and who are able to fulfill their inner potential. By extension, the good society is one in which nurturant leaders model care, empathy, inclusiveness, and understanding and enable citizens to lead happy and fulfilling lives.

Lakoff’s (2002) distinction between strict-father and nurturant-parent metaphors is reminiscent of Tomkins’s (1987) distinction between normative and humanistic ideological scripts. Although the two theories make a wide range of claims and differ from each other in important ways, both connect the concepts of rules and discipline with conservatism, and they connect the concepts of nurturance and empathy with liberalism. Therefore, two psychological themes commonly associated with political conservatism—normativism are (a) the adherence to strict rules and reinforcement patterns (people are rewarded for obeying the rules and punished when they break them—what Lakoff [2002, p. 67] calls conservatism’s “folk behaviorism”) and (b) the cultivation of self-discipline and personal responsibility. In Lakoff’s strict-father model, parents (and political leaders) should set strict rules so that children (and the citizenry) will ultimately lead disciplined and responsible lives. In a parallel fashion, two key psychological themes associated with political liberalism—humanism for both Lakoff and Tomkins are (a) nurturing and caring for those in need and (b) the cultivation of empathy and broader understanding and openness with respect to self and others. In Lakoff’s nurturant-parent model, then, parents (and political leaders) should exhibit caring and nurturance so that children (and the citizenry) will ultimately lead lives of empathy, openness, and fulfillment.

It is relatively easy to see how Lakoff’s (2002) metaphors map onto popular images of political leaders and their corresponding policy positions. Many observers have noted how, in recent years, conservative American leaders like Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush typically underscore the value of strict rules and self-discipline, whereas more liberal American leaders like Bill Clinton and Al Gore seem to adopt a more nurturant and empathic approach. However, if Lakoff is right about family metaphors, one would expect that the strict-father and nurturant-parent models would also hold special significance in the personal lives of conservatives and liberals, respectively. A strong test of Lakoff’s ideas, then, would entail relating self-reported political values to the implicit psychological themes associated with the strict-father and nurturant-parent models as they manifest themselves in narrative identity. To provide just such a test, Study 1 evaluates the hypothesis that political conservatives, compared with political

liberals, will show a greater number of themes related to (a) rules and reinforcements and (b) self-discipline in their narrative accounts of emotionally significant, self-defining scenes in their lives. Similarly, the study tests the hypothesis that political liberals, compared with political conservatives, will show a greater number of themes related to (a) nurturant caregiving and (b) empathy and openness in their life stories.

Method

The data for Studies 1 and 2 were drawn from 128 case studies of midlife adults collected between the years 2005 and 2007 as part of a large, interdisciplinary project on religious faith, politics, and the life story. All of the participants were active members of Christian congregations who also reported that they were politically engaged and that they voted in the 2004 U. S. presidential election. Each participant was individually interviewed for approximately 2 hr, during which time he or she described key scenes in his or her life story and discussed the nature and development of his or her religious faith, moral issues, and political views. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim into Word documents.

After the interview, each participant received a large packet of written measures, requiring approximately 2–3 hr to complete. On completion, the participants mailed the packets back to us and then received a payment of \$100 each. The packets contained a wide range of measures, including assessments of mental health and well-being, coping strategies, religious observance, spirituality, goals and motives, personality traits, ego development, political orientation, and voting history, as well as demographics. Study 1 focuses on the two main portions of the interview protocol and three measures of political orientation.

Participants. Participants were recruited for a project titled “Personal Faith, Politics, and the Life Story,” conducted at Northwestern University’s Foley Center for the Study of Lives. We contacted local Christian congregations to obtain participants who were between approximately 35 and 65 years of age, active members of those congregations, and willing to discuss in detail their lives, their faith, and their political views. To participate in the project, individuals also needed to have voted in the 2004 U. S. presidential election. To sample a broad range of viewpoints and demographic groups, we contacted a number of different Protestant and Catholic churches, including two churches whose membership was predominantly African American. In addition, some participants entered the project after learning about it from friends or acquaintances. In that we worked with Christian congregations located mainly in Chicago and its northern suburbs, the project was not designed to obtain a sample fully representative of the many religious and demographic groups that populate the United States today. Instead, the project endeavored to collect intensive, high-quality data from a relatively diverse but local group of devout Christians who voted in the 2004 election and who were willing to talk in detail about important events in their lives and about the development of their religious and political beliefs.

Full case studies were assembled for 128 participants. The sample consisted of 78 women (61%) and 50 men (39%), ranging in age from 28 to 74 ($M = 49.2$, $SD = 8.47$). A total of 64.6% of the participants reported that they were currently married; 19.7%, single; 13.3%, divorced; 1.6%, widowed; and 0.8%, cohabitating.

Approximately three quarters (75.6%) of the participants were parents. In terms of race or ethnicity, 92 were White (71.9%); 33, African American (25.8%); 2, Asian American (1.6%); and 1, Hispanic (0.8%). The sample showed a broad range of family income but was skewed toward the upper middle class, with 43.8% of the participants reporting an annual family income of more than \$100,000; 10.9%, \$80,000–\$100,000; 12.5%, \$60,000–\$80,000; 8.6%, \$40,000–\$60,000; 16.7%, \$20,000–\$40,000; and 6.3%, less than \$20,000. Overall, the sample was also highly educated, with 85.9% reporting that they had obtained at least a bachelor's degree. In terms of politics, slightly more than half (53.2%) identified as Democrats, 33.1% as Republicans, 12.9% as Independents, and 0.8% as other.

All participants identified their Christian denomination. In addition, information on the church with which they were affiliated was available for most of the participants. The largest group represented was members of nondenominational Protestant Christian churches, many of which are typically viewed to be evangelical in their orientation. A total of 42.1% of participants identified a nondenominational or generically Christian religious orientation. This was followed by 19.5% Catholic, 10.2% Lutheran, 7% Baptist, 5.4% Episcopalian, 3.9% Presbyterian, 3.9% United Church of Christ, 3.2% Methodist, 2.4% African Methodist Episcopal, 0.8% Orthodox, 0.8% Christian Science, and 0.8% other.

Political orientation. Political orientation was assessed directly via a 5-point self-report rating (1 = *very liberal*, 2 = *liberal*, 3 = *middle of the road*, 4 = *conservative*, and 5 = *very conservative*). Scales of this sort are routinely used in political survey research. Jost (2006) reported that a simple rating on a bipolar liberal–conservative continuum is highly predictive of voting behavior in U.S. presidential elections.

In addition, participants completed two well-validated attitudinal scales that past research has shown tend to correlate significantly with political conservatism. The first of these was the 30-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (RWA Scale; Altemeyer, 1996; Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992). In past research, scores on the RWA Scale have been found to predict a broad range of attitudes related to social, economic, and political conservatism, including political party affiliation, reactions to the 1970s Watergate scandal, pro-capitalist attitudes, severity of jury sentencing decisions, punishment of deviants, and opposition to such liberal policies as environmentalism, abortion rights, diversity on college campuses, and services for AIDS patients and those who are homeless (Altemeyer, 1996; Jost et al., 2003; Peterson, Doty, & Winter, 1993). The second scale was the Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO Scale; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). This 16-item scale measures the extent to which an individual believes that dominant, high-status groups in society should continue to hold their dominance and status. Scores on the SDO Scale correlate reliably with affiliation with the Republican party and with attitudes that are supportive of law and order, military spending, and capital punishment. SDO Scale scores correlate negatively with support of women's rights, racial equality, affirmative action, gay and lesbian rights, and environmentalism (Jost et al., 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Although both the RWA and the SDO Scales tend to predict conservative values and voting records, the two scales typically show only modest positive, although statistically significant, associations with one another (Altemeyer, 1998; Sidanius & Pratto,

1999). Jost et al. (2003) argued that the RWA and SDO Scales capture what they see to be the two fundamental features of political conservatism. According to their view, the RWA Scale taps into the conservative distrust of change and instability, whereas the SDO Scale more directly connects to the conservative acceptance of social inequality.

Family metaphors in life-narrative scenes. Following a methodology used in many previous studies of life stories (e.g., McAdams et al., 2004; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997), each participant provided lengthy, open-ended accounts of 12 important scenes in his or her life story. A scene was defined as a particular episode or event in one's life that was circumscribed in time and space and that entailed an important or memorable sequence of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. For each scene, the participant was asked to describe fully what happened in the event, who was involved, what he or she was thinking and feeling in the event, and what the scene meant, if anything, in the context of his or her entire life story. Therefore, for each scene chosen, the participant told a story about the scene itself and commented on the scene's significance in his or her own life. The interviewer listened attentively to each response and often posed questions of clarification or elaboration and reminded the participant to include a comment on why the scene was important and/or what it may mean in the context of the overall life story.

In order, the 12 scenes were (a) a high point in life (e.g., peak experience), (b) low point, (c) turning point, (d) positive childhood scene, (e) negative childhood scene, (f) vivid adolescent scene, (g) vivid adult scene, (h) imagined future scene, (i) childhood scene of faith, (j) high point of faith, (k) low point of faith, and (l) political scene. The inclusion of one imagined scene from the future reflected the theoretical assertion that narrative identity encompasses the selectively reconstructed past and imagined future (McAdams, 1985; Singer & Salovey, 1993).

Each of the 12 narrative scenes was coded for the presence (score = 1) or absence (score = 0) of two themes (rules–reinforcements and self-discipline) associated with Lakoff's (2002) strict-father model and two themes (nurturant caregiving and empathy–openness) associated with his nurturant-parent model. The use of a presence–absence logic for coding follows the precedent established by McClelland and colleagues (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Schultheiss & Pang, 2007) for assessing motives in Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Murray, 1943) stories and numerous content-analysis procedures developed by McAdams (1985) and others (e.g., Woike, 2007) for assessing motivational themes in life-narrative scenes. Given the relatively low base rate of each theme, as well as the psychological nature of the themes themselves, it makes little sense to rate the amount of the theme in each narrative. Instead, the goal of coding is to detect whether or not the theme appears in each scene. Then, the number of appearances is summed across scenes to provide an estimate of the relative salience of the theme in narrative content. Consequently, the scores for each of the four Lakoff themes were summed across the 12 interview scenes, yielding four scores that ranged hypothetically from 0 (*no evidence of the particular theme in any of the 12 scenes*) to 12 (*presence of the theme in each of the 12 scenes*) for each participant.

Rules–reinforcements referred to events in which any authority figure (e.g., parent, government, church, God, the legal system, or the participant him- or herself acting in an authority role) set forth

and/or enforced specific rules, guidelines, commandments, or principles designed to regulate moral behavior. The narrative account received a score of 1 when an authority figure either advocated such a rule or provided a reward or punishment for behavior that either upheld or violated the rule. For example, 1 participant described how his father spanked him for stealing money from his mother's purse. Another participant spoke in admiring terms about the rules for good behavior he internalized from his father and an admired teacher. Yet another said that her biggest challenge as a mother was enforcing rules with her teenage son. One participant talked about the importance of obeying her church's prohibition on lewd behavior and provocative attire. Another participant described the consequences of breaking the law. Yet another talked about how the officials in his denomination had dismissed a minister because of an extramarital affair: "The bishop said, 'Adulterers don't speak in my altars; it doesn't happen.' And he [the minister] was gone." The coders scored 1 for rules-reinforcements even in those scenes in which the protagonist disagreed with or expressed negative feelings toward a rule, law, commandment, or regulation. The intent of the coding system was to assess the relative salience of thematic content related to strict rules and reinforcement or punishment systems associated with rules, even if the narrator expressed some misgivings about the content.

The second theme associated with Lakoff's (2002) strict-father morality was named *self-discipline*. A scene was scored 1 for self-discipline when the protagonist or another character in the story explicitly displayed an ability to control his or her emotions, desires, or natural inclinations to achieve a moral end. The most common examples of self-discipline were scenes in which the protagonist reined in erotic or destructive urges to live a more disciplined life and scenes in which the protagonist set aside immature desires or tendencies to assume a family, occupational, or societal responsibility. Examples of self-discipline included going sober after alcohol use or drug abuse, setting aside material desires and pursuing a strong work ethic, giving up short-term pleasures in light of long-term commitments, and assuming adult responsibilities in the face of a major life challenge such as the birth of a child, the death of a parent, a financial reversal, or an important civic or community challenge. Examples of a character's explicit efforts to promote the values of self-discipline and personal responsibility in others were also scored 1 for this theme.

The first theme associated with Lakoff's (2002) nurturant-parent model was named *nurturant caregiving*. This theme was scored 1 in scenes in which an authority figure (e.g., parent, government, church, God, the social welfare system, or the participant him- or herself acting in an authority role) provided care or support for somebody or some class of people in need. Routine examples of parenting were not scored for nurturant caregiving. Instead, the coders looked for examples in which individuals in positions of authority voluntarily provided care, aid, help, succor, counseling, or some other form of humanitarian assistance to somebody in a position of dependency, be that person a child, a sick person, a disadvantaged person, or somebody grieving the loss of another. Examples included an aunt's assuming a maternal role when the protagonist's mother was ill, the protagonist's consoling a bereaved friend, a social worker's providing support to a poor family, a church's efforts to take in refugees, and a woman's commitment to care for her dying husband. Examples in which the protagonist spelled out the strong extent to which he or she provided care or

will provide care for his or her children also scored 1 for this theme, as witnessed in this account from a protagonist who grew up with an emotionally distant father: "[Unlike my own father] I will be there for my kids; I will love my children; I will tell them I love them; I will tell them I am proud of them; I will be there for the important events."

The second theme associated with Lakoff's (2002) nurturant-parent model was named *empathy-openness*. A scene scored 1 for empathy-openness when the protagonist or another character in the story explicitly displayed an ability to sympathize with another person's emotional state, to take the role of another, or to be accepting or tolerant of people or points of view that are seen to be very different from their own. The emphasis in this theme was on the ability to emotionally identify with, accept, understand, or tolerate the other. As one example, a woman told of how she knew as a child that her religious tradition urges people to empathize with those in pain, but she never felt real empathy until a good friend of hers lost her baby. Another participant described, with gratitude, how marrying his wife and getting to know her family and friends opened up his eyes to a strange and new world in which many people adopted lifestyles and held opinions that sharply diverged from his own. Participants narrated many scenes in which they witnessed the modeling of empathy, tolerance, or unconditional acceptance of others in their parents, life heroes, role models, and other people they admired or sought to emulate.

Two independent coders, unaware of participants' identifying information, scored the 12 scenes for the four Lakoff (2002) themes. One of the two coders worked with Dan P. McAdams to develop the Lakoff codes in the first place. Therefore, the first coder was not unaware of the study's hypotheses. The second coder, however, was unaware of the study's hypotheses. To maximize coding objectivity and minimize bias, the full texts of each scene account were segregated from the interviews, such that each coder first scored all of the high points for all the participants, then all of the low points, turning points, and so on, until all 12 groups of scenes were scored. Therefore, coders were unable to connect different scenes to the same participant. Furthermore, inspection of the accounts showed that participants very rarely gave any indication of their political orientation in describing life scenes. The one possible exception to this rule was the political scene itself, in which the participant described a personal event that involved political activity of some sort. But even here, participants only occasionally indicated a political orientation, and in those cases their indication could even be misleading. For example, 1 participant who scored very conservative on the self-report political rating scale described a political scene in which he protested against the Vietnam War.

Following conventions established for the coding of TAT stories in research settings (e.g., McClelland et al., 1953; Schultheiss & Peng, 2007; Winter, 1973), coding reliability was determined in two ways.

First, we calculated the extent of agreement in determining presence or absence of the theme in each scene according to Winter's (1973) Category Agreement statistic, originally used for determining agreement between two coders on the presence or absence of power imagery in a TAT story. This simple metric—which is calculated as $[2 \times (\text{the number of instances of agreement on the presence of a theme})] / [(\text{the number of instances of presence scored by Coder 1}) + (\text{the number of instances of$

presence scored by Coder 2)]—has proven especially appropriate for assessing reliability when the presence (score = 1) of the theme is a relatively low base-rate phenomenon, as is the case in motivational imagery for TAT stories (Schultheiss & Peng, 2007) and as was the case for the themes coded here. Category agreements for the four themes were 88% for rules–reinforcements, 79% for self-discipline, 85% for nurturant caregiving, and 80% for empathy–openness. Two of the four figures fell somewhat short of Winter’s (1973) recommendation of 85% for TAT imagery. However, it is probably fair to say that TAT scoring is easier, both because TAT stories are much shorter and more circumscribed than the accounts coded here and because the themes used in the current study are rather more complex psychologically than the typical TAT theme. In addition, training for TAT coding involves working through extensive training manuals (e.g., Winter, 1973), and no such manuals were available for the themes coded in this study.

The second metric for coding reliability was the correlation between the two coders’ total scores on each theme (ranging hypothetically from 0 to 12) for each participant. These indices were .86 for rules–reinforcements, .74 for self-discipline, .88 for nurturant caregiving, and .75 for empathy–openness.

Finally, in keeping with recommendations in TAT-based research on human motives (e.g., Schultheiss & Pang, 2007), we calculated narrative length as the number of words uttered by the participant in each scene. (Words used by interviewers in questions and probes within each scene narrative were not counted.)

Results and Discussion

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the main variables in Study 1. The mean score on the 5-point liberalism–conservatism self-rating (2.94) approached the midpoint (3 = *middle of the road*) of the scale. A total of 11% of the participants identified themselves as very liberal (a self-rating of 1); 26%, liberal; 26.8%, middle of the road; 29.9%, conservative; and 6.3%, very conservative (a self-rating of 5). Self-ratings on liberalism–conservatism were strongly associated with RWA, $r(126) = .60, p < .001$, and less strongly but still significantly associated with SDO, $r(125) = .32, p < .001$. RWA and SDO were also significantly positively related, although at a modest level, $r(125) = .22, p < .05$. Given these significant intercorrelations, we also calculated a composite political orientation index, which was the sum of

the standard scores of RWA, SDO, and the liberalism–conservatism self-rating.

The participants provided lengthy verbal descriptions in response to each of the 12 prompts for personally significant life-narrative scenes. Summing number of words spoken by the participant across the 12 narrative scenes, protocol length ranged from 1,998 to 12,243 words, with a mean of 4,788. Dividing the mean by 12 yielded an average length of 399 words for any given scene. The average did not include questions asked by the interviewer to prompt the participant’s response and to probe for more information during the response. Adding in the interview questions, the average transcription ran about 3 double-spaced pages of text per scene, per participant. Therefore, coding the narrative scenes for Lakoff (2002) themes involved reading through more than 4,600 double-spaced pages of interview text for Study 1.

The text for each scene was coded for the presence (score = 1) or absence (score = 0) of each of four family metaphor themes derived from Lakoff (2002): rules–reinforcements and self-discipline (for strict-father metaphors) and nurturant caregiving and empathy–openness (for nurturant-parent metaphors). For each theme, the scores were summed across the 12 scenes. The procedure yielded a particularly skewed distribution for rules–reinforcements, which showed a mean of 1.52 incidents of the theme summed across the 12 autobiographical scenes, but a range of 0–10. To adjust for skew, we used the log of the rules–reinforcements score in all subsequent analyses.¹ Protocol length was significantly correlated with the transformed log score of rules–reinforcements, $r(127) = .21, p < .05$, but protocol length was not significantly correlated with the other three family metaphor themes. Subsequent analyses showed that protocol length was also not related to any demographic or self-report political variables, with the exception of a negative association with RWA, $r(127) = -.22, p < .05$. Participants high in RWA, therefore, tended to provide slightly shorter narrative accounts of significant scenes in their life stories.

The two strict-father themes (rules–reinforcement and self-discipline) were positively correlated with each other, $r(127) = .40, p < .001$; the two nurturant-parent themes (nurturant caregiving and empathy–openness) were also significantly correlated with each other, although at a lower level, $r(127) = .29, p < .01$. In addition, both strict-father themes were negatively associated with empathy–openness— $r(127) = -.31, p < .001$, for rules–reinforcements and $r(127) = -.21, p < .05$, for self-discipline—but neither was significantly associated with nurturant caregiving.

Correlational analyses showed a few significant associations between demographics and the main variables in Study 1. Most notably, both education and family income (which were highly intercorrelated, $r[125] = .43, p < .001$) were strongly negatively related to RWA: $r(127) = -.41, p < .001$, for education level; $r(127) = .51, p < .001$ for family income. Consistent with many previous studies (Altemeyer, 1996; Jost et al., 2003), participants who were less well educated and who had lower family income tended to score relatively high on RWA. Age was unrelated to the Study 1 variables with the exception of the self-rating on liberalism–conservatism. The data showed a small but statistically

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables in Study 1

Variable	M	SD	Range
Liberalism–conservatism self-rating	2.94	1.12	1–5
Right-wing authoritarianism	136.9	37.8	57–216
Social dominance orientation	32.7	12.9	16–75
No. words in 12 scene narratives	4,788	1,846	1,998–12,243
Strict-father morality			
Rules–reinforcements	1.52	1.39	0–10
Self-discipline	0.90	1.05	0–5
Nurturant-parent morality			
Nurturant caregiving	2.55	1.59	0–8
Empathy–openness	1.41	1.35	0–7

¹ Technically, the transformed scores were the log (1 + raw score).

significant tendency for older participants to rate themselves as somewhat more liberal, $r(125) = -.19, p < .05$.

Gender differences emerged for some of the variables. Women showed somewhat lower levels of education than men, $t(126) = -2.33, p < .05$. No gender differences emerged for age and family income; nor were RWA, SDO, or liberalism–conservatism related to gender. For the family metaphor variables, men scored significantly higher than women on (log) rules–reinforcements ($M_{\text{men}} = 0.94, SD = 0.54$, and $M_{\text{women}} = 0.70, SD = 0.48$), $t(126) = -2.59, p < .05$, and on self-discipline ($M_{\text{men}} = 1.34, SD = 1.22$, and $M_{\text{women}} = 0.62, SD = 0.81$), $t(126) = -4.04, p < .001$. No significant differences emerged for nurturant caregiving and empathy–openness, although a nonsignificant trend with women scoring slightly higher was obtained for nurturant caregiving ($M_{\text{women}} = 2.76, SD = 1.59$, and $M_{\text{men}} = 2.22; SD = 1.56$) $t(126) = 1.88, p = .06$.

Table 2 summarizes analyses that speak directly to the hypotheses of Study 1. Included in Table 2 are the correlations between the self-report political attitudinal variables (including the political composite) on one hand and narrative variables for family metaphors on the other. In addition, Table 2 presents the results of multiple regression analyses in which each of the family metaphor variables was regressed on age, family income, sex, and each of the self-report political variables (as well as the composite).

The results of correlational and multiple regression analyses provide support for three of the four predictions in Study 1. As predicted, both strict-father metaphor themes were significantly associated with self-report measures of political conservatism. The findings were stronger for the self-discipline theme, which showed robust positive associations with self-reported conservatism, RWA, and SDO, as well as with the composite of the three. Rules–reinforcement was significantly correlated with both self-reported conservatism and SDO, and these statistical associations remained significant after controlling for sex, age, and income in the multiple regressions. The rules–reinforcements theme was not significantly associated, however, with RWA.² On the nurturant-parent side, the results provide strong support for a link between empathy–openness and political liberalism. Empathy–openness was significantly correlated with liberalism as assessed on all three self-report political variables and on the composite, and the statistical associations remained significant after controlling for sex, age, and income in the multiple regression. Contrary to prediction, however, the nurturant caregiving theme was not significantly associated with any of the self-report political variables.

The results from Study 1 show that both gender and political attitudes were significantly associated with the kinds of metaphors that the midlife participants used in their narrative accounts of significant life story scenes. Men tended to use strict-father themes to a greater extent than did women, showing higher theme scores on rules–reinforcements and self-discipline. Men and women did not differ, however, on the use of nurturant-parent themes (nurturant caregiving and empathy–openness). In support of Lakoff's (2002) general hypothesis, political conservatism was significantly associated with strict-father themes in narratives, even after controlling for gender. When asked to describe in detail the most important episodes in their self-defining life narratives, conservatives tended to tell stories invoking rules and reinforcements for good behavior, and they featured protagonists who learned the value of self-discipline in life. The statistical relations with self-

reported political conservatism were especially strong for the self-discipline theme.

Support for Lakoff's (2002) prediction on nurturant caregiver metaphors, however, was mixed. As predicted, liberals tended to tell personal stories in which protagonists developed empathy and learned to open themselves up to new people and perspectives (the empathy–openness theme). But contrary to prediction, liberals were no more likely than conservatives to narrate scenes featuring authorities in caregiving roles. Indeed, the nurturant caregiving theme was the most frequently expressed of the four Lakoff categories, for both liberals and conservatives. Even though liberals and conservatives, then, were quick to describe authority figures in their lives as nurturant caregivers, liberals were much more likely to say that they learned lessons of empathy and openness from these authority figures. Thus, when it comes to the nurturant-parent idea in Lakoff's theory, Study 1 suggests that the differences between liberals and conservatives lie less in how nurturant and caring authority figures actually appear to be in their life narrative accounts and more in what the story suggests that the protagonist tends to learn or take away from interactions with authority figures. Whether their authority figures were themselves nurturant or not, liberals in Study 1 said that they tended to internalize the kinds of life lessons regarding empathy and openness that Lakoff (2002) claimed nurturant parents ideally tend to provide.

Study 2: Moral Intuitions

Like Lakoff (2002), Haidt and Joseph (2004) underscored the moral dimensions of political thought and behavior in their moral foundations theory (see also Haidt, 2007; Haidt & Graham, 2007). But whereas Lakoff located moral meaning in deeply ingrained family metaphors, Haidt and Joseph suggested that people operate in accord with implicit moral intuitions (see also Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997). Beneath the elaborate ethical codes and political philosophies that human beings have articulated over the ages lie foundational intuitions about what just feels right and feels wrong. Across many different cultures, people hold moral intuitions about five basic things: (a) *harm–care* (it is wrong to hurt people; it is good to relieve suffering); (b) *fairness–reciprocity* (justice and fairness are good; people have certain rights that need to be upheld in social interactions); (c) *in-group–loyalty* (people should be true to the group and be wary of threats from the outside; allegiance, loyalty, and patriotism are all virtues; betrayal is bad);

² Original coding of the rules–reinforcements theme did not consider the narrator's perspective on the rules enforced. For example, one could argue that liberals might tend to narrate scenes of rules–reinforcements to show how they rejected or disavowed the enforcement of rules. To examine this possibility, one coder, unaware of all identifying information on the participants, reread all scenes scored for rules–reinforcements to identify those in which the narrator explicitly renounced or currently took strong exception to the rules enforced. Relatively few such instances were identified. Subtracting these scenes out from the original rules–reinforcements scores and restandardizing the new scores revealed virtually no effect on the results. For example, the resultant correlation between the log of the now-adjusted rules–reinforcements theme and the self-report conservatism composite index dropped from .19 to .18. (If liberals were more likely to reject enforced rules, the correlation should have risen, perhaps substantially.)

Table 2
Correlational and Multiple Regression Results for Relations Between Self-Report Political Attitude Measures and Family Metaphor Themes Summed Across 12 Autobiographical Scenes in Study 1

Family metaphor theme	Liberalism/conservatism ^a		RWA		SDO		Composite ^b	
	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β
Rules–reinforcements	.23*	.199*	.10	.148	.21*	.178*	.19*	.227*
Self-discipline	.34***	.298***	.33***	.385***	.23*	.203*	.39***	.374***
Nurturant caregiving	-.16	-.145	.00	-.072	-.13	-.101	-.11	-.129
Empathy–openness	-.32***	-.291***	-.33***	-.375***	-.22*	-.192*	-.37***	-.359***

Note. For each set of findings, the first number is the Pearson correlation between the political variable and the family metaphor theme, and the second number is the standardized beta for the political variable in the multiple regression analysis wherein each family metaphor theme was regressed on age, family income, sex, and the particular political variable. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation.

^aThe 5-point liberalism–conservatism self-rating, with 1 = *very liberal* and 5 = *very conservative*. ^bThe composite variable is the sum of the standard scores for RWA, SDO, and the 5-point self-rating on liberal–conservative.

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

(d) *authority–respect* (people should respect social hierarchy; social order is necessary for human life); and (e) *purity–sanctity* (the body and certain aspects of life are sacred; cleanliness and health, as well as their derivatives of chastity and piety, are all good; dirt, pollution, contamination, and the associated character traits—lust, gluttony, and greed—are all bad). Haidt (2007) suggested that each of the five moral intuitions is an evolved mechanism of the mind or learning module that proved adaptive for group life in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness. By virtue of human evolution, people are innately equipped, they suggest, to react with strong feelings in response to harm, fairness, in-group, authority, and purity. Over thousands of years, different human cultures have developed a wide range of ethical, religious, political, and legal philosophies, social systems, and institutions around these five basic moral intuitions.

Whereas virtually all people invest some moral significance into issues related to harm–care, fairness–reciprocity, in-group–loyalty, authority–respect, and purity–sanctity, political conservatives and liberals should show correspondingly different emphases. Moral foundations theory holds that conservatives tend to value all five moral intuitions, whereas liberals focus most of their moral energy on the first two. Relative to liberals, conservatives express especially strong feelings for authority, group allegiance, and purity. By contrast, liberals tend to downplay the significance of authority, group allegiance, and purity, but experience strong moral feelings in response to harm and fairness. They are especially moved by suffering and by injustice.

Using the same sample used in the Lakoff (2002) analysis, Study 2 aims to test hypotheses drawn from moral foundations theory by relating self-reported political attitudes to the relative salience of the five moral intuitions as expressed in people’s extended moral discourse. Whereas Study 1 examined the interpersonal themes that appear in people’s narrative accounts of significant scenes in their life stories, Study 2 focuses instead on how people talk about moral and religious issues themselves. In Study 2, then, participants were asked to describe in detail their religious–moral beliefs and values, how those beliefs and values have developed over time, and how their religious–moral beliefs and values play themselves out in daily life. The open-ended verbatim accounts are then rated for the relative salience of concerns related to harm–care, fairness–reciprocity, in-group–loyalty,

authority–respect, and purity–sanctity, and these ratings are correlated with self-report scores of political ideology.

Method

Overview. Case studies of the 128 midlife Christian participants used for Study 1 provided the data for Study 2 as well. For the current analysis, we used the aforementioned measures of political attitudes—the liberalism–conservatism self-rating, RWA, and SDO, as well as a composite of the three—and the same demographic variables. Study 2, however, examines participants’ open-ended responses to a series of interview questions regarding religious–moral beliefs and values.

Moral intuitions in religious and moral discourse. A substantial section of the interview was devoted to the participant’s story of how he or she has developed as a person of faith. Each participant was asked first to describe in detail the content of his or her religious–moral beliefs and values. Next, participants described regular religious practices, such as worship, prayer, meditation, singing, witnessing, and reading religious publications. Participants were asked to describe the way in which they pray and the kinds of prayers they offer. They were then asked to describe the development of their religious beliefs and practices, telling in what ways their beliefs and practices have remained constant over time and in what ways they have changed. Invariably, these conversations turned on moral and ethical issues, including descriptions of what the participants considered to be good–moral and bad–evil behavior and accounts of how their religious, moral, and ethical values have influenced their own behavior over time.

Two independent coders, unaware of participants’ identifying information, rated the transcribed texts of the religion–faith–morality section of the interview for evidence of five moral intuitions identified by Haidt and Joseph (2004). As with Study 1, one of the two raters worked with Dan P. McAdams to develop the original rating system; therefore, that rater was not unaware of the study’s hypotheses. The second rater, however, was unaware of the hypotheses. The transcribed texts for moral discourse were separated from the rest of the interview protocol to minimize the chances of coding bias.

The aim of the coding was to determine the amount of concern expressed in moral discourse for each of the five moral intuitions identified by Haidt and Joseph (2004). Over the course of the

relevant interview section, the participant could express varying levels of concern for each of the five moral intuitions—from no concern, for example, to a great deal of concern. Therefore, the coding system required rating the relative degree of concern expressed. (In contrast, Study 1 adopted a presence–absence logic for coding family metaphor themes in individual narrative scenes, summing the scores across the scenes to provide a single continuous index.) As a result, each of the five moral intuitions—harm–care, fairness–reciprocity, in–group–loyalty, authority–respect, and purity–sanctity—was rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *no concern*, 2 = *little concern*, 3 = *moderate concern*, 4 = *high concern*, and 5 = *very high concern*) expressed for the corresponding moral intuition.

Ratings on harm–care pertained to the extent to which the participant showed explicit concern for protecting people from pain, injury, abuse, poverty, or some other form of physical or psychological suffering. To receive a high rating, the participant needed to emphasize explicitly the desire to reduce or eliminate suffering as a strong moral or religious principle in his or her life. Relevant for coding harm–care, furthermore, were images of God as a healer or caregiver for people or examples of when God or religious traditions showed concern or compassion for the suffering of people. In one especially vivid account, a participant described her own struggles to understand how a good God could permit the death of innocent children, concluding that in these terrible instances God ends up crying along with the bereaved.

Ratings on fairness–reciprocity pertained to the extent to which the participant showed explicit concerns for fairness, equality, equal rights, justice, or related issues regarding the complex and often conflictual ways in which individuals relate to each other. To receive a high rating on fairness–reciprocity, the participant needed to emphasize the desire to find fair solutions to problems of inequality and injustice in the world as a strong moral or religious principle in life. Relevant for coding fairness–reciprocity, furthermore, were images of God as a just arbiter or examples of when God or religious traditions showed concern for justice, fairness, or equality. Invocations of the Golden Rule were relatively common expressions of some concern for fairness–reciprocity. Other common examples connected to civil rights, gay and lesbian rights, equal rights for women, discrimination of all kinds, and efforts to build a just and equitable society. In one particularly powerful account, a participant (who happened to be a professor of philosophy) described how his personal morality was based on John Rawls’s philosophy of fair moral reasoning and a perfectly just society.

Ratings for in–group–loyalty pertained to the extent to which the participant showed concern for loyalty to one’s own family, group, church, or nation. To receive a high rating on in–group–loyalty, the participant needed to articulate ways in which his or her family, group, church, or nation warranted special allegiance over and against other (competing or alternative) families, groups, churches, or nations. Relevant for coding in–group–loyalty, furthermore, were instances in which God was described as holding a special covenant with His or Her people, as well as invocations regarding how people need to choose God or become part of God’s exclusive family. High scores on in–group–loyalty sometimes indicated a Manichean view of the world in which the good forces or groups are irrevocably pitted against the forces of evil (out-groups). In one example of a high score for in–group–loyalty, a participant ex-

pressed deep concern that young people no longer feel allegiance to family, church, and the United States.

Ratings for authority–respect pertained to the extent to which the participant showed explicit concern for establishing, maintaining, honoring, affirming, or restoring moral hierarchy or order. To receive a high rating on authority–respect, the participant needed to express a strong obedience to or reverence for authority as a central moral principle in life or a manifest concern for the proper relationship between authority and those over whom authority has influence. Relevant for coding authority–respect, furthermore, were images of God as a king, sovereign, ruler, leader, or supreme power. In one response that received a high rating on authority–respect, a woman argued for the authority of tradition and the importance of Western society’s canonical religious and political texts for ensuring order and societal stability. She expressed concern that too many people are too quick to dismiss the wisdom of the ages. In what may be the strongest expression in the entire data set of authority–respect as a moral intuition, a fundamentalist minister laid out an elaborate system of authority for the universe in which God holds complete dominion over all, but under which are arranged, in descending order of authority, angels, leaders of nations, leaders of communities, and finally heads of individual households. He said,

I pray for my president because this is his time in office. I pray that God gives him [the president] wisdom because the word of God is my rule and the word of God states and says that we should pray for the people in authority.

Finally, ratings on purity–sanctity pertained to the extent to which the participant showed concern for corruption, contamination, defilement, imperfection, or other aspects of human life that deviate from that which is sacred, pure, or perfect. Common examples indicating some concern for purity–sanctity included expressions of negative emotion (especially disgust) in response to carnal impulses of various kinds, strong desires to feel cleansed or holy, celebrations of how perfect or pure God and/or Jesus is, and acknowledgments that the self is not holy, perfect, or pure. As opposed to the other four moral intuitions, expressions of purity–sanctity almost always referred to private morality, typically regarding sexuality, sins of the flesh, and feeling that God is pure and perfect but individual souls are impure and imperfect.

Intercoder reliabilities for the five ratings of moral intuitions were .80 for harm–care, .76 for fairness–reciprocity, .78 for in–group–loyalty, .82 for authority–respect, and .86 for purity–sanctity.

Results and Discussion

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics for the ratings of the five moral intuitions and their intercorrelations. Although not significantly associated with each other, harm–care and fairness–reciprocity were both negatively associated with ratings on in–group–loyalty, authority–respect, and purity–sanctity. In–group–loyalty, authority–respect, and purity–sanctity, furthermore, were all positively associated with each other. In addition, education level and family income were both negatively associated with authority–respect, $r_s(127) = -.22$ and $-.21$, respectively, $ps < .05$, and purity–sanctity, $r_s(127) = -.19$ and $-.20$, respectively, $ps < .05$. Women scored higher than men on concerns for harm–care ($M_{\text{women}} = 2.59$,

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Moral Intuition Ratings and the Intercorrelations of the Ratings in Study 2

Rating	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	1	2	3	4
1. Harm–care	2.45	0.90	1–5	—			
2. Fairness–reciprocity	1.96	1.00	1–5	.15	—		
3. In-group–loyalty	2.02	1.01	1–5	–.40***	–.23*	—	
4. Authority–respect	1.65	0.96	1–5	–.30**	–.36***	.48***	—
5. Purity–sanctity	1.73	0.89	1–4	–.33***	–.20*	.46***	.39***

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

$SD = 0.87$, and $M_{men} = 2.24$, $SD = 0.92$), $t(126) = 2.17$, $p < .05$. Age was unrelated to moral intuitions.

Table 4 provides the results from correlational and multiple regression analyses testing the hypotheses of Study 2. For the multiple regressions, each of the moral intuition variables was regressed on age, family income, sex, and the particular self-report index of political attitudes used. The results provided strong support for the hypotheses drawn from moral foundations theory when the political variables of self-reported liberalism–conservatism and RWA were used, as well as the composite. The results were substantially less robust, however, when using SDO as the political index. Overall, conservatives showed significantly stronger concerns for in-group–loyalty, authority–respect, and purity–sanctity compared with liberals. The strongest associations were for authority–respect, whose correlation with the composite index of conservatism was a remarkable .51. By contrast, liberals showed significantly stronger concerns for harm–care and fairness–reciprocity compared with conservatives.³

Overall, the results from Study 2 are in line with Haidt and Graham’s (2007) predictions. When asked to describe in detail the nature and development of their own religious and moral beliefs, conservatives and liberals engaged in dramatically different forms of moral discourse. Whereas conservatives spoke in moving terms about respecting authority and order, showing deep loyalty to family and country, and working hard to keep the self pure and good, liberals invested just as much emotion in describing their commitments to relieve the suffering of others and their concerns for fairness, justice, and equality. Whether conservative or liberal, furthermore, women showed more concern for harm–care than men.

General Discussion

The results from this examination of 128 case studies of devoutly Christian midlife adults suggest that political conservatives and liberals narrate their respective lives in distinctively different ways. When asked to describe in detail the most important episodes in their self-defining life narratives, conservatives told stories in which authorities enforce strict rules and protagonists learn the value of self-discipline and personal responsibility, whereas liberals recalled autobiographical scenes in which main characters develop empathy and learn to open themselves up to new people and foreign perspectives. When asked to account for the development of their own religious faith and moral beliefs, conservatives underscored deep feelings about respect for authority, allegiance to one’s group, and purity of the self, whereas liberals emphasized their deep feelings regarding human suffering and social fairness.

Age and family income appeared to have little bearing on these life-narrative themes. By contrast, gender did show important effects, with men showing more themes of strict-father morality. However, gender differences did not interfere with the strong relationships observed between self-reported political ideology on one hand and life stories on the other. With respect to the self-report political variables, the simple 5-point self-rating on a liberalism–conservatism continuum and the RWA Scale both showed strong and predicted relationships with the narrative indices, whereas the SDO scale showed generally weaker relations to life narration.

The research described in Studies 1 and 2 is among the first in personality and social psychology to test hypotheses drawn from Lakoff (2002) and Haidt (2007; Haidt & Graham, 2007) regarding differences in the ways in which political conservatives and liberals think about life and react to moral issues. Both theories received strong support, although Lakoff’s (2002) prediction that liberals should depict authority figures in their lives as nurturant caregivers was not supported. Both theories speak to the moral nature of political life, but the two operate at very different levels and with respect to very different psychological domains. Lakoff’s conception is fundamentally about the implicit metaphors that people use to understand family relationships. How should parents raise their children? How should children interact with parents? What lessons in life should parents and other authorities pass on to children? According to Lakoff, people tend to analogize politics to family life, with conservatives preferring a strict-father model of the family and liberals preferring the nurturant-parent model. The findings from Study 1 suggest that among politically active midlife American Christians, conservatives and liberals narrate their own

³ Correlations were also run between moral intuitions and the narrative indices of family metaphors examined in Study 1. Haidt and Joseph’s (2004) rating for the moral intuition of harm–care was positively associated with both of Lakoff’s (2002) nurturant-parent themes for family metaphors: nurturant caregiving, $r(127) = .44$, $p < .001$, and empathy–openness, $r(127) = .28$, $p < .01$. Fairness–reciprocity was positively associated with Lakoff’s empathy–openness, $r(127) = .21$, $p < .05$, and negatively associated with Lakoff’s self-discipline, $r(127) = -.24$, $p < .01$. In-group–loyalty was negatively associated with Lakoff’s nurturant caregiving theme, $r(127) = -.21$, $p < .05$, and positively associated with Lakoff’s self-discipline, $r(127) = .20$, $p < .05$. Authority–respect was positively associated with both of Lakoff’s strict-father themes: rules–reinforcements, $r(127) = .29$, $p < .01$, and self-discipline, $r(127) = .34$, $p < .01$. Finally, purity–sanctity was positively associated with Lakoff’s self-discipline, $r(127) = .30$, $p < .01$.

Table 4

Correlational and Multiple Regression Results for Relations Between Self-Report Political Attitude Measures and Moral Intuitions Coded in Open-Ended Moral Discourse in Study 2

Moral intuition	Liberalism–conservatism ^a		RWA		SDO		Composite ^b	
	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β
Harm–care	-.33***	-.287**	-.25**	-.321**	-.15	-.104	-.31***	-.305**
Fairness–reciprocity	-.27**	-.299**	-.32***	-.405***	-.13	-.122	-.32***	-.348***
In-group–loyalty	.35***	.326***	.35***	.375***	.08	.069	.35***	.334***
Authority–respect	.43***	.413***	.48***	.545***	.23**	.227*	.51***	.524***
Purity–sanctity	.39***	.359***	.31**	.291**	.08	.091	.35***	.336***

Note. For each set of findings, the first number is the Pearson correlation between the political variable and the moral intuition rating, and the second number is the standardized beta for the political variable in the multiple regression analysis wherein each moral intuition score was regressed on age, family income, sex, and the particular political variable. RWA = right-wing authoritarianism; SDO = social dominance orientation.

^a The 5-point liberalism–conservatism self-rating, with 1 = *very liberal* and 5 = *very conservative*. ^b The composite variable is the sum of the standard scores for RWA, SDO, and the 5-point self-rating on liberal–conservative.

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

personal lives largely (although not completely) along the corresponding lines suggested by Lakoff. Both hypotheses for the strict-father model received empirical support, as did one of the two hypotheses regarding the nurturant-parent model. By contrast, Haidt and Joseph's (2004) moral foundations theory is focused on the deep feelings that people experience in response to issues of universal moral significance: harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. How do I feel when Person A hurts Person B? How do I react to injustice in the world? To whom should I feel loyalty? What is sacred to me? Whereas Study 2 did not directly measure feelings and reactions to moral transgression, the findings did show that when asked to talk about their most cherished moral and religious beliefs, conservatives and liberals tended to draw on the corresponding moral intuitions identified by Haidt and Joseph—harm and fairness for liberals and loyalty, authority, and purity for conservatives. The findings from Studies 1 and 2 complement each other; the corresponding theories from Lakoff and Haidt and Joseph provide different but complementary perspectives on politics and personality.

The findings from the current investigation dovetail with other studies in political psychology that frame political ideology as a form of motivated social cognition (Jost et al., 2003). Going back to Adorno et al. (1950) and before, social scientists have long suspected that political beliefs and behaviors are less a function of rational calculation and more a matter of deep personal significance. Study 2's findings that RWA and political conservatism were associated with strong concerns for social hierarchy and in-group and weak concerns for fairness–reciprocity, therefore, are perfectly consistent with prevailing theory and past research using the RWA Scale (Altemeyer, 1996), as well as general trends in the literature on political conservatism (Jost et al., 2003). The finding that conservatives express higher levels of concern for purity of the self recalls the results from Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Lerner, and Green (2000) showing a link between religious fundamentalism and efforts to engage in moral cleansing after contemplating heresy.

The current project examines the relation between personality and politics on a personal, autobiographical level. With the exception of a few notable case-based inquiries (e.g., Andrews, 1991; de St. Aubin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 1956), research into personality and politics has tended to ignore the very lives and complex

identities of politically active men and women in the search for common traits, motives, needs, values, and goals. The result is that although social scientists have gained invaluable information regarding the dispositional traits, recurrent needs, and general cognitive styles associated with, for example, RWA (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Jost et al., 2003), they have learned little to date about how real people who score high (or low) on RWA live their real lives and understand who they are in the midst of their complex social worlds. In focusing on the extended life stories told by a select sample of religious and politically active American adults, the current investigation takes small steps toward a more full-bodied, personological inquiry into the dynamics of political belief and value. As such, the investigation aims to complement research into what McAdams and Pals (2006) described as Level 1 (dispositional traits) and Level 2 (characteristic adaptations) in personality, as applied to the political realm, with a much-needed inquiry into what they described as Level 3—the level of narrative identity. If broad Level 1 traits (like Big Five openness to experience and conscientiousness) sketch a dispositional outline of personality and Level 2 characteristic adaptations (such as domain-specific motives, values, beliefs, and schemas) fill in many of the details, the internalized and evolving life stories that reside at Level 3 in McAdams and Pals's (2006) framework speak directly to what people's lives mean. The current investigation moves the investigation of personality and politics into the realm of individual life meanings.

Whereas the current research may open up new ways to think about how conservatives and liberals construct meaningful lives, one should not lose sight of important limitations and failings. Arguably, the most important limitation regards the sample. The generally middle-aged sample came from a large project with a central focus on religiosity. All of the participants were practicing Christians who were actively involved in local Protestant and Catholic congregations. National surveys show that religiosity itself tends to be associated with conservatism in American society. It should be noted, however, that Americans have historically drawn on religion to motivate some of political liberalism's most notable achievements—such as civil rights for African Americans—and that some observers have argued for a recent reemergence of a “religious left” in American society (Wallis, 2005;

Wills, 2007). In any case, sampling highly religious adults to begin with increases the likelihood that differences obtained between conservatives and liberals in the sample are indeed about political orientation itself rather than differences in religiosity. Whether the findings of Studies 1 and 2 would be replicated in a less religious group or among individuals representing other religious traditions remains to be seen.

The distinctive nature of the sample may be especially relevant for the analysis of moral intuitions in Study 2. We coded for concerns regarding harm–care, fairness–reciprocity, in–group–loyalty, authority–respect, and purity–sanctity in participants’ descriptions of their own religious beliefs and values and the development of those beliefs and values over time. Of course, the resultant discourse was laden with talk about morality, ethics, and beliefs regarding right and wrong, enabling us to code for moral intuitions. For this sample, moral concerns were inextricably linked to religion. But the same would not be true for a less religious group. It is important to note that Haidt and Joseph’s (2004) moral foundations theory is not about religion at all, but about morality and its relations to politics. The current study, furthermore, assumes that how people describe their religious and moral beliefs speaks to the kinds of gut feelings that Haidt and Joseph (2004) insisted underlie morality and politics. However, one could argue that the kind of discourse sampled here is too far removed from the online emotional reactions that people experience in everyday encounters of moral significance. Talking about what one feels to be right and wrong is not the same thing as actually feeling it. Alternative tests of hypotheses set forth by Haidt and Joseph (2004) might use more controlled, laboratory-based methodologies in which experimenters prime feelings regarding specific moral intuitions.

For all the discussion of examining full lives in depth, the analysis in the current investigation ultimately relied on quantitative ratings and codings summed across life-narrative scenes and multiple pages of interview text. Given the constraints of a nomothetic, hypothesis-testing project, we were unable to examine any particular life story in detail and context. All the data used came ultimately from first-person reports. That is, participants completed surveys and told stories about their lives. Self-report scales are a very different kind of verbal report than is an extended, open-ended interview protocol, but both nonetheless rely on the words and judgments that participants use with reference to their own lives. No samplings of real political behavior were actually collected. Furthermore, the results are purely correlational. The findings show that self-reported political attitudes correlate with certain themes and narrative patterns obtained in extended life stories. Whether the political variables such as RWA, SDO, and self-attributions of liberalism versus conservatism are to be construed as the causes or effects of patterns of narrative identity cannot, of course, be determined.

The whole idea of narrative identity, finally, raises a number of thorny interpretive questions. Are people’s internalized and evolving life stories veridical reflections of the past as actually experienced, or are they selective reconstructions that serve current concerns? Life-narrative studies typically emphasize the latter of these two viewpoints, but it is surely true that life stories accurately reflect some aspects of one’s past as actually lived and experienced (McAdams, 2006). Narrative identity does not emerge magically out of thin air. Thus, it is difficult to know whether political

conservatives actually experienced more episodes in the past in which parents and other authority figures actually enforced strict rules and encouraged them to develop self-discipline, compared with political liberals. And it is difficult to know whether political liberals, relative to conservatives, actually experienced more scenes of learning empathy over the course of their lives. One possibility is that political values develop through complex genetic and environmental interactions that remain more or less mysterious to scientists and laypersons alike and that people construct stories after the fact to try to make sense of it all. From this perspective, conservatives may project episodes of rule enforcement and self-discipline into their life stories not because they actually experienced more of these episodes than did liberals growing up but because their well-developed tendency toward political conservatism sensitizes them to recall and elaborate just these kinds of events. It is possible that life stories are but narrative rationalizations for what has come (inexplicably) to be. But even if this view holds validity, the psychological study of life stories still provides a clear and revealing window through which to view how people make meaning out of their lives in time and how they understand who they are in social, cultural, historical, and political contexts.

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