A Person-Centred Approach to Understanding Wisdom, Identity, and Well-Being in Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder: An In-Depth Cross-Case Gestalt Analysis

by

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Abstract

This thesis uses a person-centred approach to examine in-depth the lives, experiences, and perspectives of three individuals with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFA). It investigates how young adults with HFA make sense of their past experiences and integrate them into their current understanding of self, while also orienting themselves towards their future ideals. This thesis also explores how these individuals understand, experience, and express the concepts of wisdom and identity, from both a personal-experiential and abstract frame of reference. The current study proposes an integrative theoretical framework that attempts to explain the connection between wisdom, identity, and well-being, with the novel element of values. This is the first study of its kind that has attempted to integrate all four of these constructs under a unified theory. No known studies exist that have investigated all of these topics together, in either neurotypical, or HFA populations.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis uses a person-centred approach to examine in-depth the lives, experiences, and perspectives of three individuals with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFA). It investigates how young adults with HFA make sense of their past experiences and integrate them into their current understanding of self, while also orienting themselves towards their future ideals. This thesis also explores how these individuals understand, experience, and express the concepts of wisdom and identity, from both a personal-experiential and abstract frame of reference.

Case studies were developed from the interviews of three young-adult males with HFA that asked each participant a variety of questions pertaining to their goals, past experiences, pivotal memories, and coping skills, their understanding of their personal identity, and their personal approach to wisdom. The interview also asked them how they define and understand wisdom and identity conceptually. Finally, each participant was asked to nominate the wisest person in their life, and the wisest person in history, and justify those nominations. One of the participants scored high on measures of wisdom and well-being (the anchor case), while the other two participants scored low on measures of both of these constructs (the contrast cases). By utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study hopes to determine how individuals with HFA
who score high on quantitative measures of wisdom and well-being differ from those who score low on these measures.

Person-centred, morphogenic (Allport, 1961) analyses, incorporating elements of interpretive phenomenological analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997) and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994), were pursued for each case study in an attempt to explore how wisdom and identity are understood at a conceptual level in young-adults with HFA, and to illuminate potentially critical factors that contribute to their optimal development, and ultimately, their actualized expression. An integrative theoretical framework is proposed which links this developmental process with well-being, through the generation of wisdom-derived insight-values, their integration into the self, their alignment with actions, experiences, and goals, and their ongoing contemplative-morphogenesis.

**Rationale**

The most recent prevalence estimates suggest that up to 1 in 68 children are affected with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, an increase of over one hundred percent in the last ten years (CDC, 2014). This latest federal monitoring program prevalence estimate underscores the fact that Autism Spectrum Disorder is a serious public health issue with widespread societal implications that far transcend the affected individual and those close to them. Given the generally poor quality of life outcomes for those with HFA, their high risk for experiencing negative psychosocial circumstances, and their lack of skills for dealing with these circumstances, more research is needed on phenomenological factors that may augment their well-being and quality of life. Research on the positive effects of wisdom and identity
development on well-being in neurotypical populations gives promise that these same positive effects can apply to those with HFA.

**High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFA)**

The Diagnostic Evolution of Autism Spectrum Disorders

In DSM-IV, AS was one of five distinct pervasive developmental disorders (PDD). AS represented the higher-functioning presentation of the more severe and classic form of Autism, otherwise known as Autistic Disorder (AD). Additionally, three other PDDs existed, Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS), Rett’s Disorder, and Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. In DSM-5, AD, PDD-NOS, and AS were folded under the umbrella label of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to create a single, unified diagnostic construct. The current study represents the now antiquated AS label with the HFA moniker. The following discussion on symptomatology and defining features is based on the DSM-5 version of ASD, but in the context of the current study, does so with the HFA moniker (or the less severe, higher functioning presentation of ASD), which we conceptualize synonymously with the now antiquated diagnostic label of AS.

Symptomatology and Defining Features

Individuals with HFA typically present with impairments in social, communication, and behavioural functioning (APA, 2013). A core feature of HFA is an impaired theory of mind (ToM; Baron-Cohen, Leslie, & Frith, 1985). ToM allows an individual to assess and attribute mind states to themselves and others, and provides the understanding that other people have mind states that differ from their own (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). A major component of ToM
involves the ability to take on the perspectives of others, a skill that many individuals with HFA
struggle with (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985). Related to perspective taking is mentalising, or the
ability to attribute mental states to others (Robinson, Howlin & Russell, 2017). Studies have
found that while mentalising impairments are common, they are not universal in individuals with
HFA. Happé (1994) found that these impairments might actually result in increased errors and
misattributions in the mentalising process, rather than an outright lack of mentalising ability, or
absence of attempts (Robinson et al., 2017). Taken together, these perspective taking and
mentalising impairments in ToM can make navigating the social environment difficult for
individuals with HFA (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985). Some studies have implicated that
introspection, or the ability to attribute internal states to the self, is another aspect of ToM that is
impaired in individuals with HFA (Fisher et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2017; Perner et al., 1989,
Williams and Happe, 2009). Despite this, some studies have found introspective ability exists in
samples of children with HFA (Chalfant et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2017; Spek et al., 2010).

In addition to the core HFA symptomatology and ToM impairments, other features of
HFA include executive functioning deficits (Pennington & Ozonoff, 1996), impairments in
abstract reasoning (Solomon, Buaminger & Rogers, 2011), a rigid detail-oriented cognitive style
(Happé & Frith, 2006), and difficulties in understanding and expressing emotion (Dapretto et al.,
2006). As we will see, all of these impairments have direct consequences for wisdom and
identity, which both require these abilities to be intact and functioning relatively smoothly for
their successful development.
**Prognosis**

Research on individuals with HFA has shown that adult outcomes are generally poor. The literature suggests that individuals with HFA are at a particularly high risk for poor quality of life outcomes compared to other child psychiatric disorders (Barneveld et al., 2014). Eaves and Ho (2008) found that, at a mean age of twenty-four, half of all participants had poor to very poor global outcome scores, based on work, friendship and independence. Hofvander et al. (2009) found that in their sample of adults with HFA, few led an independent life, and even fewer had a long-term relationship. They also found high comorbidity rates with mood and anxiety disorders, ADHD, and psychoses. Based on the literature, it is clear that individuals with HFA are at a high risk for experiencing unfavourable psychosocial life circumstances, and may lack the skills needed to cope with these circumstances in an effective and constructive manner.

**Intervention**

Interventions for individuals with HFA typically focus on remediating deficits in social, communicative, and/or behavioural functioning. Interventions typically teach skills to improve functioning in each of these areas, all in an effort to reduce impairment, increase quality of life, and if possible, allow for greater participation in “normative” society. For many individuals, particularly those who are lower functioning, the severity of their symptomatology may necessitate more intensive, early intervention to take advantage of the critical developmental period for certain foundational functions and abilities that facilitate higher-order skill acquisition later in life. These include the empirically validated, evidence-based, “gold standard” early behavioural interventions, particularly those utilizing Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA;
Granpeesheh, Tarbox, & Dixon, 2009; Peters-Scheffer, Didden, Korzilius, & Sturmey, 2011).
This involves breaking down the steps of a task or behaviour into components and using operant conditioning to shape or build the component skills until the full target skill is reached. It is very intensive and time consuming, and the goal is to compensate for what these children are not learning naturally or incidentally through interaction with, and awareness of, their environment (Peters-Scheffer et al., 2011). Specific examples of ABA-based treatments for ASD include: Discrete Trial Training, Pivotal Response Treatment, and Early Start Denver Model (Granpeesheh, et al., 2009; Tchaconas & Adesman, 2013). These intensive behavioural treatments are typically a necessity for those with the classic form of ASD. ASD can be much more severe than HFA, as it is more likely to include significant behavioural impairments, such as aggression, dysregulation, and self-injury, as well as delays in the development of language, which if not remediated early, can lead to extreme difficulties with communication that persist across the lifespan, which can have a severe impact on quality of life, and overall prognosis.

The other mainstay treatment for HFA involves targeting individual clusters of symptoms using pharmacotherapy. This could include administering psychostimulants, such as methylphenidate or dextroamphetamine, for inattentive or hyperactive behaviours (Murray, 2010), anti-psychotics, such as risperidone and aripiprazole, for psychotic, aggressive or self-injurious behaviours (McPheeters et al., 2011), or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, such as fluoxetine, fluvoxamine or citalopram, for depressive or anxious symptoms (Williams, Wheeler, Silove & Hazell, 2010).
Subjective Well-Being

What is Subjective Well-being?

Subjective Well-being (SWB) is the field of study pursued by behavioural scientists that examines people’s evaluations of their lives (Diener, Scollon & Lucas, 2002). The study of SWB has seen an exponential growth in the twenty-first century. Knowledge has advanced significantly since Warner Wilson (1967) published his seminal review on the topic which, at the time, was referred to by the more colloquial term, “happiness.” Wilson (1967, p. 294, quoted by Diener et al., 1999) posited that the happy person was a “young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, and of either sex and a wide range of intelligence.” We now understand that SWB reflects much more than a person’s level of happiness, and is influenced by far more than the direct effect of an individual’s life circumstances (Diener, 2013). While happiness is certainly one aspect of SWB, contemporary theorists now constitute SWB as a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions and global judgments of their life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). At a basic level, people have a greater sense of SWB when they feel many more pleasant than unpleasant emotions, when they are engaged in interesting activities, when they experience many pleasures and few pains, and when they are satisfied with their lives (Diener & Suh, 2000).

Bottom-Up and Top-Down Processes of SWB

While the work of pioneers like Wilson and his contemporaries considerably advanced the science of SWB, it still remained one-dimensional in its primary focus on describing its
demographic correlates. In the decades that followed, greater emphasis was placed on also understanding the underlying processes that contribute to SWB (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Diener & Larsen (1984) distinguished between bottom-up and top-down processes contributing to SWB. The bottom-up approach looks at how external events, situations and demographics influence SWB; whereas, the top-down approach looks at how the internal, psychological processes at the level of the individual contribute to SWB. Bottom-up theories propose that a person’s circumstances can promote or hinder the fulfillment of basic and universal human needs, and that the interplay of environment and needs fulfillment determines whether or not that person will be happy (Diener et al., 1999); top down theories propose that a person’s expectations, frame of mind, and cognitions are essential to their happiness.

In the past two decades it has been well established that certain bottom-up factors do influence SWB, but evidence suggests that these factors are responsible for only a small proportion of the variance (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Early reviews suggested that demographic and circumstantial factors only accounted for between 8% (Andrews & Withey, 1975) and 20% (Campbell, Converse & Rodgers, 1976) of the variance in SWB. Reviews that followed confirmed these findings, demonstrating that external circumstances account for only about 15% of the variance in SWB (Hills & Argyle, 2001). These findings produced a shift in the search for the causes of SWB, with greater focus directed towards studying enduring factors within the individual, such as genetic and personality factors, more or less under personal control.

It was once suggested that long-term levels of SWB are the result of genetics (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), making any attempt at increasing our happiness a futile effort. Genetics are
thought to show their effects through an individual’s temperament (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002; Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003) and the structure of their personality (Richard and Diener, 2009; Schimmack, Diener & Oishi, 2002; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto & Ahadi, 2002), which in turn work together to determine their SWB. Steel, Schmidt and Shultz (2008) conducted a meta-analysis on the direct effects of various personality traits and found that the total variance in SWB accounted for by personality ranged from 39% to 63%. Recent studies however suggest much smaller effects of heritability than once thought. A recent meta-analysis of studies involving roughly 56,000 participants found a weighted heritability estimate of 36% for well-being, and 32% for satisfaction with life (Bartels, 2015). Those numbers still leave over 60% of the variance unexplained and potentially open to epigenetic change through environmental factors at least partially under control by the individual. Research has found that a significant moderating influence of bottom-up circumstances and events on SWB is played by top-down processes within the individual, through their cognitions and affect (Carver & Scheier, 2017; Pe, Koval & Kuppens, 2013; Seidlitz, Wyer & Diener, 1997), goals (Emmons, 1986; Klug & Maier, 2015; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz & Carver, 2003), needs and values (Oishi, Diener, Lucas & Suh, 1999; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000), and adaptive coping mechanisms (Chua, Milfont & Jose, 2015; Coyle & Vera, 2013; Sanchez-Alvarez, Extemera & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2016). This speaks to the importance of internal factors within the individual in determining their reaction to negative circumstances. Identifying internal processes that allow a person to overcome particular life circumstances can inform clinical practice and the development of interventions aimed at enhancing those processes through the promotion of existing strengths and acquisition of teachable skills.
Contemporary understanding of SWB

It is now well accepted that SWB results from the interplay of bottom-up factors and top-down processes (Pavot & Diener, 2013). The top-down processes take the form of subjective evaluations of life satisfaction—evaluations that can be positive or negative, global or domain-specific, and cognitively- or affectively-based (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003). The components of SWB are organized hierarchically with the concept of SWB residing at the highest level of this hierarchy (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009). This highest level of abstraction reflects the general evaluations of a person’s life, but to fully understand a person’s overall SWB, it is important to measure the four components at lower levels of this hierarchy, each one providing unique information about SWB: positive affect, negative affect, global satisfaction, and domain satisfactions (Diener et al., 2009).

Positive and negative affective evaluations take the form of both emotions and moods that occur in response to ongoing events in the person’s life (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009), with emotions constituting the short-term, online reactions tied to specific events or external stimuli (Frijda, 2003) and moods constituting the more pervasive and diffuse feelings not necessarily tied to specific events (Morris, 2003). Emotions are thought to have five essential features: (1) either positive or negative feelings, (2) an appraisal of an object or event as good or bad, (3) a change in behaviour towards the environment, (4) autonomic arousal, and (5) changes in cognitive activity (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009). While some debate continues to exist regarding the nature of affective well-being, it is widely accepted that affect is an integral process in the person’s ongoing evaluations of the conditions of his or her life (Diener et al., 2009).
By contrast, global judgments about the quality of their life constitute an overall life satisfaction. Individuals examine the conditions of their lives, weigh the importance of each condition, and evaluate their lives on a scale ranging from dissatisfied to satisfied (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009). These are cognitive evaluations based on information available to the person at the time of the judgment. Research suggests that a person’s current mood can influence ratings of life satisfaction, even if that mood is not indicative of one’s overall levels of affective well-being (Diener et al., 2009; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Even so, there is significant temporal stability in a person’s life satisfaction judgments, related to individual knowledge about the weighted importance of various life domains that contribute to one’s global satisfaction judgments (Diener et al., 2009); so while errors can and do happen, people tend to base their judgments on relevant and stable information, which results in stable and meaningful satisfaction judgments (Diener et al., 2009).

The final component of the hierarchical SWB model regards the individual’s evaluation of the specific domains in his or her life. These domain evaluations are weighted by how important each is to the individual. It is important to note that the aggregation of these domain judgments does not fully inform global life satisfaction judgments. For instance, happy individuals are more likely to heavily weight the best domains in their life, whereas unhappy individuals are more likely to heavily weight the worst (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009); thus, the global evaluation process appears to be more complex than a simple one-to-one aggregation with domain satisfactions, and varies between individuals. Domain satisfactions are much more useful than global life satisfaction judgments when the goal is gaining a better understanding of an individual’s well-being in particular areas. Moreover, honing in on specific domains is
especially useful for researchers studying groups of people for whom those domains may be differentially relevant (Diener et al., 2009).

**Four-Stage Temporal Model of SWB**

Understanding the processes behind SWB is of particular importance not only for researchers, but also for clinicians and other social service professionals. To help conceptualize the multifaceted nature of SWB, Diener, Scollon, and Lucas (2009) proposed a four-stage temporal sequence. Stage 1: external events are experienced and impact the individual through a process of appraisals; appraisals occur through three psychological processes—attention, perception, and interpretation of the event—that ultimately lead to its evaluation as positively or negatively affecting one’s goals, and as to whether one has the resources to cope. Reactions vary as events hold different meanings to different people (Diener et al., 2009). Stage 2: immediate emotional reactions that include physiological responses, nonverbal/behavioural expressions, as well as verbal labeling of emotions (Diener et al., 2009). The degree to which these emotional reactions are remembered and paired with the antecedent experience through repetition, rumination and reminiscing of the emotional information, impacts how strongly these immediate experiences are linked to hedonic sources of happiness. Stage 3: Once emotions are encoded into memory, the memories are constantly reconstructed, sometimes re-experienced or conceptualized very differently from how they were experienced and remembered at Stage 2. The discrepancy between immediate emotion and emotion memory is influenced by the individual’s self-concept, current beliefs, implicit theories and cultural norms (Diener et al., 2009). Stage 4: Global constructions. This stage is impacted by the previous three stages, but to differing degrees depending on proximity: immediate experiences can impact global constructions if the frequency
of positive or negative emotional experiences is high (Diener et al., 2009). But how much these experiences influence global constructions ultimately depends on how those experiences are remembered. Therefore, emotional memory has a greater impact on global constructions than does immediate experience. Cultural norms, and irrelevant but salient details, also have an impact. The concepts at this final stage (e.g., life satisfaction, meaning in life fulfillment) can be considered eudemonic sources of happiness, as compared to hedonically-based immediate experiences (Diener et al., 2009).

**Measuring Subjective Well-Being**

Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) developed a self-report measure that assesses a person’s SWB through the construct of global life satisfaction. Diener et al.’s (1985) measure of SWB is called the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The measure is meant to focus narrowly on global life satisfaction, excluding broader components of SWB such as positive affect and connectedness. The SWLS presents respondents with five items that contain statements pertaining to the conditions of one’s life and their level of satisfaction. These statements are: (1) In most ways my life is close to my ideal; (2) The conditions of my life are excellent; (3) I am satisfied with my life; (4) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life; and (5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing. Respondents indicate their answers on a seven-point likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree).

Initial reliability and validity testing indicated that the measure shows high internal consistency, and high temporal reliability (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Further validation testing has been pursued over the years since the measure’s initial release. Pavot,
Diener, Randall-Colvin and Sandvik (1991) conducted two additional studies to test for reliability and predictive validity of the SWLS. The authors concluded that the SWLS is a valid and reliable measure of life satisfaction for a wide range of age groups and application settings (Pavot et al., 1991). The SWLS also showed high convergence with self- and peer-report measures of SWB and life satisfaction (Pavot et al., 1991). The authors propose this as evidence that the concept of SWB is a relatively global and stable phenomenon, rather than an ephemeral judgment based on transient factors (Pavot et al., 1991).

The current study will utilize Diener’s Four-Stage Temporal Model of SWB as a framework for understanding this broad construct in individuals with HFA, and exploring the potential links that well-being may have with wisdom, identity, and values in this special population. As part of this framework, assessment of SWB, through the narrow construct of life satisfaction, will be carried out for each participant in the current study using the SWLS.

Additional well-being assessment will be carried out using the Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI; Frisch, 2014). The QOLI is a domain-based self-report measure of life satisfaction or quality of life that provides an overall quality of life score, and sixteen domain-specific quality of life scores (health, home, helping, learning, creativity, love, goals/values, self-esteem, work, play, relatives, friends, children, neighbourhood, money, community). The measure provides respondents with a variety of items pertaining to sixteen quality of life domains covered by the measure, and asks them to indicate the domain’s level of importance for their overall life satisfaction (0 [not important]; 1 [important], 2 [extremely important]), and how satisfied they are with the current conditions of that area of their life (-6 [extremely dissatisfied] to 0 [neutral] to 6 [extremely satisfied]). These scores are combined to provide domain-level satisfaction
scores. These domain-level satisfaction scores are then combined to create an overall quality of life t-score. A methods error from Khan’s (2013) study resulted in domain-level satisfaction items being rated by respondents on a 3-point scale (1 [low satisfaction]; 2 [moderate satisfaction]; 3 [high satisfaction]), rather than the intended scale based on the QOLI protocol. Please follow these modified scoring criteria to ensure accurate interpretation of domain-level QOLI scores from the current study.

Finally, two additional measures of well-being are included in the current study. The first is a measure of Purpose in Life, adapted from Ryff & Keyes (1995), that asks participants three questions on a 5-point likert scale (1 [definitely true of myself] to 5 [not true of myself]): (1) My personal existence often seems meaningless and without purpose; (2) I have discovered satisfying goals and a clear purpose in life; (3) If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been worthwhile. Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of purpose in one’s life. The other additional measure of well-being is from the ASTI, and pertains to the four items that ask about Alienation, which are recorded on a 5-point likert scale (1 [definitely true of myself] to 5 [not true of myself]). These items include: (1) I feel isolated and lonely; (2) I feel my life has less meaning; (3) I am less optimistic about the future of humanity; and (4) I am less interested in seeking out social contacts. Higher scores indicate greater subjective levels of alienation, and lower sociability with others. These items were included in the ASTI to test Tornstam’s (1994) hypothesis that self-transcendence is distinct from social isolation or withdrawal (Levenson, 2005).
High Functioning Autism and Well-being

Few studies have directly examined well-being in young adults with HFA. Outcome and life condition constructs broadly related to well-being, such as quality of life, stress, social support, and mental health, are much more typically the targets of existing studies within the literature (Alvarez-Fernandez et al., 2017; Barveld et al., 2014; Egilson, Ólafsdóttir, Leósdóttir & Saemundsen, 2017; Kamio, Inada, & Koyama, 2013; McStay, Trembath, Dissanayake, 2014; Renty & Roeyers, 2006; van Steensel, Francisca, Bogels & Dirksen, 2012). Moreover, many studies investigate these constructs in relation to the more severe, classic form of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD; Cottenceau et al., 2012; de Vries & Geurts, 2015; Kamp-Becker et al., 2011; Ikeda, Hinckson & Kraegeloh, 2014; Stokes, Kornienko, Scheeren, Koot & Begeer, 2017). Finally, these studies typically investigate the quality of life of families (Karst & Van Hecke, 2012), parents (Allik, Larsson & Smedge, 2006; Johnson, Frenn, Feetham & Simpson, 2011; Lee et al., 2009), or caregivers (Khanna et al., 2011), rather than the individuals with HFA themselves.

Of the studies that do investigate well-being specifically, similar issues described above abound. There are several studies investigating the topic in the caregivers of children with the classic form of ASD (Costa, Steffgen & Ferring, 2017; Lai, Goh, Oei & Sung, 2015; Samadi, McConkey & Kelly, 2013; Tint & Weiss, 2016), but again, very few that study well-being directly in young adults with HFA. Van Hees, Moyson & Roeyers (2015) looked at the higher education experiences of students with ASD and the effect that various experience-related factors have on their well-being. Similarly, a feasibility study investigated the effects of dance movement therapy on various outcome measures in young adults with ASD, including well-
being (Koch et al., 2015). Another study investigated various outcome related constructs such as loneliness, friendship, emotional functioning, and well-being in adults with ASD (Mazurek, 2014). The effects of mindfulness on various outcome measures, including those broadly related to psychological well-being, were also investigated in individuals with ASD (Cachia, Anderson & Moore, 2016). And finally, the effect of emotional differentiation on well-being was investigated in individuals with ASD (Erbas et al., 2013). While these studies make excellent contributions to the literature, they do not actually focus on well-being in individuals with HFA. Instead, the focus of these studies was the classic form of ASD.

Two studies that investigated well-being in young adults with HFA did emerge from the literature. One study looked at well-being in individuals with HFA, while the other investigated the construct as it relates to individuals with Asperger’s syndrome (AS). AS is the antiquated diagnostic label for the less severe form of classic ASD from the DSM-IV, and which was, and still is, used interchangeably with the HFA label, but which has since been removed from the DSM-5, and subsumed under the larger diagnostic umbrella label of ASD. The first study examined a narrowly focused sub-type of well-being related to intimacy (i.e. sexual well-being), in a community sample of adults with HFA (Byers, Nichols, Voyer & Reilly, 2013). The authors found that individuals with less severe HFA symptomatology in the social and communication domains reported, on average, significantly greater dyadic sexual well-being, and better solitary sexual well-being. The second study investigated the experiences of university life for students with AS in order to understand what kinds of interventions might aid in student’s social well-being at university (Casement, Carpio de los Pinos & Forrester-Jones, 2017). The authors found that four superordinate themes emerged that indicated the importance of social relationships,
special interests, environment, and support mechanisms in aiding the social well-being of university students with AS.

Given the lack of research specifically investigating the construct of SWB in individuals with HFA, the current study attempts to fill a gap in the literature, particularly as it relates to the potential impact that wisdom, identity, values, past experiences, future ideals, and goals have on the achievement of enhanced SWB and life satisfaction outcomes.

**Wisdom**

Wisdom is understood and defined differently between individuals, and across cultures (Brezina & Oudenhoven, 2012). According to Ardelt (2004), there is no single generally agreed upon definition that captures all of the various aspects of a concept as complex as wisdom. There are, however, a variety of theoretical frameworks within the psychological sciences that attempt to explain its nature, function, and development. Of these, two stand out in terms of their preeminence, as well as the paradigmatism in their approach to conceptualizing and operationalizing wisdom, with each carrying different implications for research and practice. The Berlin paradigm uses a performance measure, while Ardelt uses a self-report scale about personality dimensions.

**The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm**

The first major theory, the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, developed by Baltes and Staudinger (2000), defines wisdom as an “expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life.” The fundamental pragmatics of life represents a domain of knowledge that involves both a conduct component, and an understanding component (Baltes & Smith, 2008). This paradigm
views wisdom as a coordinating concept that organizes knowledge and judgment around the fundamental pragmatics of life, with a conjoint orientation towards both personal and collective excellence and well-being (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). This knowledge system is applied towards the critical pragmatics of life, which include, (1) the planning of one’s life (e.g. what goals to pursue, and how), (2) the management of one’s life (e.g. how to deal with critical problems), and (3) the review of one’s life (e.g. how to make sense of our life history and past experiences; Baltes & Smith, 2008). Through this critical process, an individual can make sense of, and construct their life (Baltes & Smith, 2008). At the same time, it also allows the individual to aid with the construction of others’ lives, at a personal level, through the provision of sound advice, outstanding judgment, and exceptional mentoring, and at a collective level, by contributing to the organization of education and society (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The attainment of wisdom is accomplished when mastery is reached across five distinct areas of knowledge that concern the various fundamental pragmatics of life, which together, form a two-tiered expert knowledge system (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Within the first tier are the two knowledge areas that address the fundamental pragmatics of life directly through, (1) factual knowledge, and (2) strategic/procedural knowledge. Factual knowledge involves a deep understanding of human nature, lifespan development, social norms and their implications, variations in developmental processes and outcomes, interpersonal and intergenerational relations, and identity issues (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Procedural knowledge involves the application of knowledge, and knowing how and when to employ it, in order to review past life decisions, give advice about current life issues, and construct a plan for one’s future (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The second tier involves three additional meta-components that synergize to further inform the idiosyncrasies of the individual’s expert knowledge system: (3) lifespan contextualism, (4) value relativism, and (5)
the recognition and management of the fundamental uncertainty of life matters (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Lifespan contextualism regards knowledge about normative and atypical influencing factors in the person’s life that far transcends their direct control, such as sociocultural, historical, and biological factors, rather than personal events (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Value relativism involves a person’s knowledge about the human diversity of values, goals, and priorities, which manifests as a tolerance and respect for actions and beliefs that may be different, unfamiliar, or in opposition to their own (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The fifth and final area entails knowledge about the fundamental uncertainties inherent to all aspects of life, and ways to manage those uncertainties so that growth can occur at the level of the individual, and collectively at the level of society, culture, or humanity (Baltes & Smith, 2008).

Early work from the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm consortium viewed these knowledge sets as a form of crystallized intelligence that develops across the lifespan and is preserved into old age (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The system does make use of some fluid abilities, but the majority of influence comes from comprehensive general knowledge, and domain-specific specialized knowledge (Baltes & Smith, 2008). By referring to wisdom as an expertise, the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm sought to remove the emphasis on intelligence, and instead focus on knowledge, strategies, and intuition (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Given this, the authors suggest that wisdom is not an innate ability, but rather, a set of tools that can be acquired (Baltes & Smith, 2008). This acquisition depends on intensive personal and societal investment of significant time, effort, motivation, and structured experience (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The authors suggest that three sets of antecedent factors and correlates combine to allow for the development of wisdom, as well as its maintenance, and successful application: (1) general personal factors, such as ability and
personality, which naturally extends to genetic differences associated with HFA (2) expertisespecific factors, such as exposure to life dilemmas and significant life events, motivation, and mentorship, and (3) facilitative experiential contexts, such as age, cohort, historical period, and culture (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The authors believe that all individuals have access to this socially shared system of knowledge, and acquire it with varying degrees of expertise (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Under this framework, observable indicators of wisdom-in-action include exceptional judgment, good counsel, insightful commentary on quintessential issues of life, appropriate conduct, emotion and behaviour regulation, and empathy and concern for others (Baltes & Smith, 2008).

A number of major research contributions have emerged from the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm research consortium. The group’s first discovery was fairly intuitive, showing that high levels of wisdom-related knowledge are rare (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Even though many adults progress along a path towards wisdom, very few will display expert-level wisdom knowledge or behaviour, based on how it is assessed under this framework (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). The second major finding is that late adolescence and early adulthood appears to be the main age window for wisdom-related knowledge to emerge, with diminutive variance is observed in the average levels of wisdom that are attained during adulthood (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). The third finding is that wisdom development beyond the levels typically seen in early adulthood requires more than just increased aged (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). A number of combinatory enhancing factors must be present in order to achieve peak wisdom levels. Time is necessary for the emergence of these enhancing factors, which is why older individuals are more likely to fall in the higher range of wisdom attainment (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000); but
increased age in itself will not allow for the development of wisdom; a combination of time, and
the development of these enhancing factors, is necessary. The fourth major finding is that
intelligence is not the most significant predictor of wisdom-related knowledge in adulthood
(Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). Rather, a combination of psychosocial characteristics and life
history factors is necessary, such as openness to experience, generativity, cognitive style,
involvement with excellent mentors, and exposure to critical life experiences (Baltes &
Staudinger, 2000). People with high wisdom-related knowledge also demonstrate a constellation
of emotions and values that demonstrate a greater concern for the welfare of others compared to
their own happiness, and an increased orientation towards protecting and facilitating the well-
being and interests of others (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000). The fifth major finding comes from
intervention studies that have found certain techniques, such as providing memory cues or
instruction to consult an inner voice, can generate greater levels of wisdom-related knowledge
than were expected based on results from the standard individualized assessment protocol (Baltes
& Staudinger, 2000). The final major finding concerns the factors people consider when judging
a person as wise. The authors found that actions such as attentive listening, empathy, and
tempered concern, were significant contributors to these wisdom judgments, particularly when
combined with older age, and sophisticated verbal expression (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000).

Baltes and Smith (2008) recognized the potential that exists for integrating wisdom with
approaches to understanding optimal human development, well-being, and thriving. Under their
framework, they see wisdom-related knowledge as a benchmark for good behaviour and
judgment regarding the quintessential issues of life (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Wisdom in this sense
consists of the knowledge an individual has regarding the breadth of their desired goals for both
themselves and the collective, and desirable means for the attainment of these goals (Baltes & Smith, 2008). This knowledge guides the individual along their journey through life, by coordinating the life-management strategies of selection, optimization, and compensation (Baltes & Smith, 2008). The final stage of this process towards optimal human development occurs near the end of life, where goals that were unattainable are converted into longings, which preserves their personal meaning and manages the negative effects of non-attainment (Baltes & Smith, 2008).

Ardelt’s Model of Wisdom

In contrast to the highly cognitive, knowledge-based frameworks of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, Monika Ardelt (2003) defines wisdom as a set of personality traits that lie along three distinct dimensions, which collectively contribute to one’s overall wisdom: (1) the cognitive dimension, (2) the reflective dimension, and (3) the affective dimension. Ardelt’s emphasis on both cognitive and affective components is what separates her theory from Baltes and colleagues, who included prosocial and interpersonal factors in their frameworks, but only as ancillary facets. To gain a more thorough understanding of Ardelt’s model, a detailed discussion of each dimension will follow.

Cognitive Dimension. The cognitive dimension refers to the individual’s understanding of life, and their desire to know the truth (Ardelt, 2003). This dimension facilitates insight into the significance and deeper meaning of phenomena and events, particularly as it relates to intrapersonal and interpersonal matters (Ardelt, 2000b; Ardelt, 2003; Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995; Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Sternberg, 1990). This leads to increased
knowledge and acceptance of the positive and negative aspects of human nature, and an appreciation of the inherent limits of knowledge, and the unpredictable and uncertain nature of life (Ardelt, 2003). Knowledge and beliefs about the world are contained within the cognitive dimension of wisdom, but are derived from reflection-based perspective-taking skills contained within the reflective dimension (Ardelt, 2003).

**Reflective Dimension.** The reflective dimension refers to the individual’s perception of phenomena and events from multiple perspectives, and freedom from self-deception through self-examination, self-awareness, and self-insight. This dimension is a prerequisite for the development of the cognitive dimension (Ardelt, 2003). The reflective dimension facilitates a deep understanding of life, and a perception of reality that is free of major distortions; a feat that is accomplished by looking at phenomena and events from multiple perspectives (Ardelt, 2003). By engaging in perspective shifting, a greater understanding of the self occurs through the development of self-awareness and self-insight (Ardelt, 2003). Over time, this practice leads to a reduction in one’s self-centeredness, subjectivity, and projections, which allows for greater insight into the true nature of things, including the behavioural motivations of ourselves, and others (Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Clayton, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Kramer, 1990; Orwoll and Achenbaum, 1993; Rathunde, 1995; Taranto, 1989).

**Affective/Compassionate Dimension.** The affective dimension refers to an individual’s sympathetic and compassionate love for others (Ardelt, 2003). The products of the cognitive and reflective dimensions facilitate the development of the affective dimension (Ardelt, 2003). Reduced egocentricity and greater insight into the behaviour of others leads to a more positive emotionality and demeanor towards others, which tends to manifest through sympathetic and
compassionate love (Ardelt, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, 1990; Levitt, 1999; Pascual-Leone, 1990).

**Three-Dimensional Wisdom.** A person’s total level of wisdom is derived from the integration of these three dimensions, which must be simultaneously present in order for a person to be considered wise (Ardelt, 2003; Clayton and Birren 1980): By removing the affective component, the construct may only be measuring advanced cognitive abilities, rather than wisdom per se (Ardelt, 2003); by eliminating the cognitive component, a person might be benevolent, but interpersonally ineffective (Ardelt, 2003; Webster, 2003); by excising the reflective component, an individual may serve and help others well, but be unable to do so for themselves (Ardelt, 2003; Schmidbauer, 1977).

Ardelt (2000, 2003) views the reflective dimension as the most critical facet of wisdom in that the development of the other two components is facilitated through, and in some respects, contingent upon, reflection-based skills. In order to attain a deep understanding of life and human nature, one must engage in reflective perspective shifting, which in turn, requires one to overcome their subjectivity and projections; but one’s projections do not merely represent cognitive distortions, for they have the power to also distort one’s affect, which leads to negative emotions (Ardelt, 2003; Hart, 1987). Through self-reflection, however, an individual oriented towards wisdom actualization learns to regulate their emotional state, accept the moment, anchor in the present, and gain insight into their own and other’s behavioural motivations (Ardelt, 2003; Ardelt & Ferrari, 2014; Hart, 1987). Through this, the inextricable interconnectedness between the three components becomes apparent, for one cannot fully exist without the others. It is in this way that wisdom represents a personality trait rather than a contextually dependent performance-
trait (Ardelt, 2003; Sternberg, 1998). And when viewed in this way, the theory also becomes compatible with Erikson’s (1994) psychosocial stages of development, which considers ego integrity versus despair as the final conflict that, if resolved, culminates with wisdom development (Ardelt, 2003).

**Three-Dimensional Wisdom Measurement.** Ardelt (2003) devised a measure based on her dimensional model of wisdom, which tests each of the three components individually, and combines the scores to produce a collective wisdom score. This measure is called the Three Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS), and it asks respondents to answer a series of questions pertaining to each of the three dimensions. Cognitive component items measure an understanding of life or desire to know the truth; reflective component items measures the ability to view phenomena from multiple perspectives, and avoid subjectivity and projections; and finally, the affective component items measure the presence of positive emotions and behaviour towards others, as well as the absence of indifference or negativity towards others (Ardelt, 2003).

Each item is assessed on one of two five-point scales that focus either on agreement (1 [strongly disagree] to 5 [strongly agree]), or likeness (1 [not true of myself] to 5 [definitely true of myself]). Please refer to Ardelt (2003) for a full list of items from the 3D-WS. Ardelt (2003, 2011) found that the 3D-WS is positively associated with mastery, purpose in life, forgiveness, and well-being; while negatively associated to depression, economic pressure, death avoidance, and fear of death (Glück et al., 2013). A negative correlation was seen in regards to age, while the opposite was true for education attainment; and finally, no relationship was found with gender (Ardelt, 2003, 2011; Glück et al., 2013).
Initial reliability and validity testing found high construct, predictive, and discriminant validity, and high internal and test-retest reliability, whereas content and convergent validity were satisfactory. In their content, reliability, and validity assessment of the five primary wisdom measurements available at the time, Glück et al. (2013) found that the 3D-WS showed reliability that was well within the acceptance range for the cognitive, reflective, and total wisdom scores, but at the lower range of acceptability for the affective dimension. The authors determined that the face validity originally proposed by Ardelt (2003) might be misleading. They argue that in spite of the presence of reversal items to combat social desirability, disagreeing with a non-wisdom statement may not be the same as agreeing with a wisdom statement; a reality that could potentially reduce internal consistency, and also be evaded by those with higher fluid intelligence (Glück et al., 2013). In terms of construct validity, the 3D-WS was highly correlated with self-efficacy, openness to experience, personal growth, self-acceptance, emotional competence (self), empathy, emotional competence (others), and inductive reasoning (Glück et al., 2013).

The current study will utilize Ardelt’s (2003) 3D-WS as part of our wisdom assessment for each participant. Given that no existing studies have investigated wisdom in individuals with HFA, there will be opportunities examine the appropriateness and fit of each of both major wisdom frameworks in light of the data that emerges from the current study.

**Adult Self-Transcendence Inventory.** Additional wisdom measurement in the current study will be based on administration of the Adult Self-Transcendence Inventory (ASTI; Levenson, 2005). Self-transcendence has been hypothesized to be a critical component of wisdom (Curnow, 1999; Levenson, 2005) and adaptation in later life (Tornstam, 1994; Levenson, 2005), which can be considered integral to Ardelt’s reflective dimension. It reflects a decreasing
reliance on externals for definition of the self, increasing interiority and spirituality, and a greater sense of connectedness with past and future generations (Levenson, 2005). The ASTI has a total of 18 items and includes two scales: self-transcendence (14 items) and alienation (4 items; to be described in well-being measures). Participants’ responses were recorded on a 5-point likert scale (1 [strongly disagree] to 5 [strongly agree]). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-transcendence.

**Wisdom-related Positive Outcomes.** Research has shown that, so defined, wisdom is related to a number of positive outcomes. Wisdom contributes positively to mental health, life satisfaction, and well-being (Ardelt, 1997; Ardelt, 2003). For young adults especially, the reflective and affective components are positively related to well-being and happiness (Bergsma & Ardelt, 2012). Wisdom is also associated with many positive characteristics, such as ego integrity/maturity, judgment, interpersonal skills, and a profound understanding of life (Ardelt, 2003). Wisdom has also been shown to insulate us from negative circumstances or events. People typically report being wise during situations in which they had to cope with difficult situations, turning those negative events into positive and transformative ones (Bluck & Glück, 2004). And finally, evidence exists for the plasticity of wisdom, giving promise that low wisdom scorers have the potential to increase their wisdom when given proper instruction (Bohmig-Krumhaar, Staudinger & Baltes, 2002; Carstensen, 2006; Staudinger & Baltes, 1996).

**HFA and Wisdom.** Apart from Khan (2013), no other known studies have investigated wisdom in individuals with HFA. In his exploratory wisdom and identity study that compared individuals with HFA with aged matched controls across two different cultures, Canada and Pakistan, Khan (2013) found that, compared to the HFA-Pakistan group, the HFA-Canada group
scored significantly higher in social identity, and lower in personal integrity. The value of conservation was also significantly higher in the HFA groups compared to the control groups (Khan, 2013). In terms of wisdom, average 3D-WS scores were significantly different between the HFA and control groups, but no such differences were seen between the HFA-Canada and HFA-Pakistan groups (Khan, 2013). No significant differences were found between the HFA and control groups in terms of life satisfaction (Khan, 2013). Thematic analysis revealed a greater emphasis on the theme of communion for the HFA-Pakistan group relative to the HFA-Canada group (Khan, 2013). Both HFA groups emphasized the theme of cognition in their conceptualizations of wisdom (Khan, 2013).

Based on Ardelt’s (2003) model, it can be hypothesized that individuals with HFA may face significant barriers in their development of wisdom because of the impairments inherent to their diagnosis. In particular, assuming multiple perspectives, a necessary component of the reflective dimension of wisdom, may be difficult for individuals with HFA. They also present with significant difficulties in expressing and understanding their own and others’ emotions, presenting major barriers to the development of the affective dimension of wisdom, which relies on compassion, love, and empathy for others. Finally, individuals with HFA often present with executive functioning deficits, abstract reasoning difficulties, and a tendency to focus on details rather than the sum of parts, posing challenges for developing the cognitive dimension of wisdom, which relies on the understanding and analysis of abstract concepts such as life, truth, and human nature.
Values and Identity

What are Values?

Over the past two decades, researchers who study human values have come to a consensus regarding five features that form the conceptual definition of this construct (Schwartz, 1994). These six criteria help distinguish between values, and needs or attitudes (Schwartz, 1994). Researchers have concluded that a value is, (1) a belief, (2) that pertains to desirable end states or modes of conduct, which (3) transcends specific contexts, to (4) guide selection or evaluation of behaviour, people, and events, (5) is ordered by importance relative to other values, to form a system of value priorities; and where (6) the relative importance of multiple values guides action (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2012; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990).

The above only describes the basic features that define what a value is, but it does not help illuminate the more substantive content of values, such as the various types of values that exist, how they are structured within sets and systems, how they develop and are utilized, and their effects on various aspects of functioning. Theories exist that attempt to answer these questions. The most popular and widely accepted of these theories is Schwartz’ (1994) Theory of Basic Human Values.

Theory of Basic Human Values

Under his framework, Schwartz (1994) defines values as desirable trans-situational goals, which vary in relative importance, and serve as guiding principles in a person’s life, or that of another. This conceptualization views values as goals that serve particular interests, motivate action, function as standards for judging and justifying action, and which are acquired through
socialization to the dominant group values, and through other learning experiences unique to the individual (Schwartz, 1994). Schwartz (1994), then, views the motivational goal expressed by a particular value as the critical content feature that helps distinguish various values from one another. A value is a cognitive transformation of the intrinsic necessities of human life into a form that can be represented and communicated through language (Schwartz, 1994). Values address three universal human needs that exist across cultures and societies, (1) the needs of individuals as biological organisms, (2) the needs for coordinated social interactions, and (3) the needs for smooth functioning of the collective, including group survival. Schwartz (1994) has devised ten types of values with distinct motivational emphases that address these universal needs in different ways. These ten universal human values are: (1) power, (2) achievement, (3) hedonism, (4) stimulation, (5) self-direction, (6) universalism, (7) benevolence, (8) tradition, (9) conformity, and (10) security. Please refer to Schwartz (1994) for additional information about each value, including the definition/central goal, representative exemplary values, and sources of development and derivation. More detailed information for any relevant values pertaining to participants in the current study will be presented within the body of thesis where necessary. In addition to the types of values and their motivational emphases, Schwartz (1994) also included in

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1 Since Schwartz’ (1992, 1994) original incarnation of his theory, a number of refinements have been made. A second determinant of the order of values was added to the theory, which further distinguishes sets of values based on the relative degree to which they focus on socially-oriented outcomes, or personally-oriented outcomes (Schwartz, 2006, 2009, 2012). Another addition addressing the order of the values focused on whether the pursuit of a particular value aims to avoid anxiety, or is relatively anxiety-free, and whether it serves to protect the self, or facilitate self-expansion and growth (Schwartz, 2006, 2009 2012). Finally, in the most recent refinement, Schwartz et al. (2012) added two novel values to the original ten, and modified some of those original ten values by adding specifiers to allow for greater detail and conceptual clarity. Face and Humility are the two novel additions to the theory, while self-direction (thought and action), power (dominance and resources), security (personal and societal), conformity (rules and interpersonal), benevolence (dependability and caring), and universalism (caring, concern, nature, and tolerance) all received specifiers that further define and delineate their unique motivational goals. The current study utilizes Schwartz’ ten values pertaining to the original version of his theory, but future studies would likely see greater benefit from using this updated version that has greater specificity and detail, particularly for mixed-methods research that incorporates narrative and thematic analyses and corroborates findings with quantitative data.
his theory a structure of value relations that addresses conflict and compatibility amongst various value priorities. His theory postulates that the ten value types form a continuum of related motivations, which gives rise to a circular structure where adjacent value types share similar motivational emphases (Schwartz, 1994). Schwartz (1994) identified the following shared motivational emphases: (a) power and achievement (both emphasize social superiority and esteem); (b) achievement and hedonism (both focus on self-centered satisfaction); (c) hedonism and stimulation (both entail a desire for affectively pleasant arousal); (d) stimulation and self-direction (both involve intrinsic interest in novelty and mastery); (e) self-direction and universalism (both express reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of existence); (f) universalism and benevolence (both are concerned with enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests); (g) benevolence and conformity (both call for normative behaviour that promotes close relationships); (h) benevolence and tradition (both promote devotion to one’s in-group); (i) conformity and tradition (both entail subordination of self in favour of socially imposed expectations); (j) tradition and security (both stress preserving existing social arrangements that give certainty to life); (k) conformity and security (both emphasize protection of order and harmony in relations); (1) security and power (both stress avoiding or overcoming the threat of uncertainties by controlling relationships and resources).

Researchers examining the validity of this theory have concluded that the data largely support, (1) the distinctiveness of the ten values, (2) the idea that these values are comprehensive of the major, motivationally distinct types of values, and (3) the appropriateness of the ordering of these values within a circular continuum (Fontaine, 1999; Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2012; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995).
Theory of Basic Human Values Measurement. From his theory, Schwartz developed two measures that assess these ten universal basic human values: the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992, 2006), and the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz, Melech, Lehmann, Burgess, & Harris, 2001). The SVS presents two lists of value items; one containing items that describe potentially desirable end-states (nouns), and the other list containing items that describe potentially desirable ways of acting (adjectives; Schwartz, 2012). Respondents rate the importance of each value item on a 9-point scale labeled: 7 (of supreme importance), 6 (very important), 5 (unlabeled), 4 (unlabeled), 3 (important), 2 (unlabeled), 1 (unlabeled), 0 (not important), -1 (opposed to my values; Schwartz, 2012). Only items that demonstrated near-equivalence of meaning across cultures through rigorous statistical analyses were included in the measure (Schwartz, 1992, 1994, 2006, 2012; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). The PVQ is an alternative to the SVS intended for use on children aged eleven to fourteen, and individuals who did not receive education in Western schools, which emphasize abstract, context-free thinking (Schwartz, 2012). The PVQ presents short verbal portraits of forty people, gender-matched with the respondent, which describe their goals, aspirations, or wishes, and which implicitly reveal the importance of a particular value (Schwartz, 2012). Respondents answer how similar they are to the person described in the portrait on a 5-point scale (not like me at all [1] to very much like me [5]). Both of these scales result in data that indicates respondents’ value priorities, or the relative importance of the different values. This was done because behaviour and attitudes are affected by the trade-off amongst relevant values, rather than the importance of any one value over the others (Schwartz, 2012). Therefore, all values must be considered when interpreting the results of an assessment under this theoretical framework (Schwartz, 2012).
The current study will utilize Schwartz’ Theory of Basic Human Values as a framework for understanding values in individuals with HFA and exploring the potential links that values may have with wisdom, identity, and well-being in this special population. As part of this framework, assessment of values for each participant in the current study will be carried out using Schwartz’ PVQ measure.

**Values-related Outcomes.** Schwartz, Sagiv and Boehnke (2000) found that value priorities influence worries by increasing attention to and perception of threats to valued goals. The authors hypothesize that these worries can be broken down into two distinct types based on their orientation: micro worries concern the self and its extensions, whereas macro worries relate to society and the world. Each of these worries can be connected to the ten original values from Schwartz’ (1994) theory. Schwartz et al. (2000) found that individuals who give priority to the self-transcendence values of universalism and benevolence have lower micro and higher macro worry, whereas those who give priority to self-enhancement values such as power, hedonism, and achievement see the opposite pattern of worries. Similarly, Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) conducted two studies to investigate the relations of value priorities to measures of SWB. The first study found that the values of achievement, self-direction, stimulation, tradition, conformity, and security were correlated with affective well-being, but not cognitive well-being. The second study found that both positive and negative well-being are largely dependent upon congruence between an individual’s personal set of value priorities, and the prevailing value environment within which they operate (i.e. psychology, or business administration). The above research highlights how value systems can potentially impact our emotions and affect, which in turn can influence our overall SWB.
What is Identity?

Identity can be defined in a number of different ways depending on the orientation of the self that one is referring to. This leads to a variety of identity types, such as gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. Given that human beings are by nature, and out of necessity for survival, social animals, it is no surprise that social identity is one of the most studied identity types. Two theories have asserted their principality over this particular sub-domain of the self: (1) identity theory (Stryker, 1980), and (2) social identity theory (Hitlin, 2003; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In each, the individual is linked to the social world through an understanding of the self that is comprised of a variety of distinct social identities (Hitlin, 2003). The difference lies in their focus, with identity theory focusing on roles, and social identity theory focusing on groups (Hitlin, 2003). Another commonality between these theories is their acknowledgement of, but lack of substantive address to, the personal level of identity (Hitlin, 2003). Personal identity is defined as the sense of self that has been constructed over time as the individual wades through life, in pursuit of goals and endeavors that are not oriented towards others or the collective, but rather, that are the property of the individual themselves (Hitlin, 2003). It is typically expressed by individuals through sets of unique attributes and characteristics, which distinguish them from others. Unlike social identity, then, personal identity emphasizes autonomy and self-direction, rather than conformity and community engagement (Hitlin, 2003).

Values-Identity. Hitlin (2003) attempts to integrate social identity and personal identity, with Gecas’ (2000) theoretical construct of value-identities. According to Gecas (2000) value-identities link values with identity theory, defining this identity subtype as the individual viewing their sense of self in terms of the values they hold (Hitlin, 2003). Take for example, an act of
benevolent kindness through helping. Gecas (2000) views this value-congruent behaviour as a manifestation not of the value of benevolence per se, but rather, of the reflexive view of oneself as a “good person.” In his integrated theory, Hitlin (2003) takes a different approach to the construct of value-identities that places more emphasis on the experience of personal identity. He contends that one’s values lead to experiences of personal identity, which lead to development at other levels of identity, such as role-, group-, and value-identities (Hitlin, 2003). Values are more strongly linked to one’s personal identity, whereas concrete behaviours are tied more directly to these other identities (Hitlin, 2003). He contends that to truly understand personal identity, we must examine values themselves, because it is our values that lead to a coherent and unified trans-situational understanding of the self, which emerge, and are understood, through various role-, group-, and value-identities (Hitlin, 2003). The behaviours that result from our identities can cause us to reflect on our values, which can orient us towards different values, causing a shift in our understanding of ourselves (Hitlin, 2003). Using the SVS measure of values, and a slightly modified version of the Schwartz (1994) theory of basic human values as a guiding framework, Hitlin (2003) tested his notion that a focus on values is useful and necessary in order to gain a fuller understanding of the personal self, which in turn, leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the holistic self. Hitlin (2003) found that a values-based conception of personal identity does in fact influence identity formation at a separate level, that of a role identity (i.e. volunteer identity). In support of his theory, Hitlin (2003) found that values relevant to Schwartz’ (1994) self-enhancement and self-transcendence dimensions are significant predictors of a person’s volunteer identity, even when previous measures of that identity were controlled for.
Identity-related Outcomes. Several studies have investigated the potential impact that identity can have on a person’s SWB. Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia and Scabini (2006) investigated the nature and implications of family differentiation among adolescents facing a life transition in two European countries with varying family cultures. They found that family cohesion was associated with better psychological well-being across both countries, while family enmeshment was associated with lower psychological well-being in the United Kingdom sample, but not the Italian sample (Manzi et al., 2006). Structural equation models demonstrated that for both countries, the effects on well-being were fully mediated by life-transition-related identity threat (Manzi et al., 2006). Manuel and Sibley (2014) also found a link between identity and various well-being related factors in a population of Pacific Island peoples in New Zealand. They found that religious identity in particular was an important factor in bridging the link between identity and well-being outcomes in this group (Manuel & Sibley, 2014). Similar connections have been made between identity, particularly as it relates to history and culture, in the well-being of indigenous youth (Wexler, 2009). Finally, Dimitrova, Chasiotis, Bender, and van de Vijver (2012) found that collective identity was a strong positive predictor of well-being for both Roma and Bulgarian adolescents. The above research demonstrates how various aspects of identity are associated with a person’s subjective sense of well-being, and speak to the importance of considering identity in the study of well-being.

HFA, Values and Identity. No known studies have specifically investigated values, in any capacity, in populations of individuals with HFA, or any form of ASD for that matter. Some studies have, however, investigated identity and the self in individuals with HFA. Robinson, Howlin, and Russell (2017) recently investigated how HFA-related impairments in
autobiographical memory and other cognitive skills may impact knowledge and understanding of the self and others. They found that compared to typically developing controls, young people with HFA had autobiographical memory difficulties related to reduced retrieval of semantic personality traits and a greater need for a higher number of initial prompts in order to facilitate episodic memory retrieval, as well as fewer episodic memories containing emotional and sensory information (Robinson et al., 2017). The authors also found that knowledge of self and others was impaired, with reduced introspection and weaker mentalising abilities. It was seen that the HFA group presented with an atypical relationship between autobiographical memory and self-knowledge that was significantly different from controls (Robinson et al., 2017).

**Wisdom and Identity.** Researchers have also been interested in exploring the potential connection between wisdom and identity. In the context of identity, wisdom can be understood as a character strength, or virtue. Research suggests that some of the candidate trait dimensions that many wise individuals are likely to engender include: openness, emotional regulation, humour, critical life experience, and reminiscence and reflectiveness (Webster, 2007). Webster’s (2007) exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses confirmed that these dimensions of wisdom are correlated with the Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (SAWS) in a demonstration of the measure’s construct validity. Webster (2010) also investigated wisdom and positive psychosocial characteristics in young adults. In study one, Webster (2010) found that wisdom was positively correlated with (1) ego-integrity (post-narcissistic love of the human ego that conveys world order, a spiritual sense, and human connectedness; Erikson, 1993), (2) the presence of self-enhancing values such as personal growth and self-understanding, and other-enhancing values such as positive associations with friends, social engagement, and ecological values, and (3) a
sense of coherence about self, others, and life. Webster (2010) also found that wisdom was negatively correlated with hedonistic values. In study two, Webster (2010) confirmed the findings from study one, and found that wisdom was correlated with four additional life attitudes. Wisdom was significantly positively correlated with coherence, purpose, choice, and goal seeking. Wise individuals have well-formulated plans which evoke a sense of self-efficacy (Webster, 2010). Moreover, they seek to maximize meaningful experiences in their life by seeking out novelty, and the fulfillment of exciting new goals (Webster, 2010). Furthermore, wisdom was significantly negatively correlated with attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (Webster, 2010). These findings support the notion that attachment security may be a facilitative antecedent factor for wisdom development (Webster, 2010). Fears of abandonment or romantic rejection are not major motivating forces in the relationships of wise individuals (Webster, 2010). Moreover, wise individuals do not appear to experience high levels of discomfort with intimacy and romantic closeness (Webster, 2010). Finally, study three found that wisdom positively predicted attributional complexity, which is a variable that is found to reduce biases regarding social judgments (Webster, 2010).

Similar research on wisdom and identity is pursued by Beaumont (2009, 2011). Beaumont (2009) investigated whether individual differences in the identity processing styles of young adults predict aspects of personal wisdom, such as self-actualization and self-transcendence, and other related outcomes pertaining to well-being, such as meaning in life and subjective happiness. Informational identity processors are skeptical about their perspectives on self, intentionally seeking out, processing, and utilizing identity-relevant information to resolve their own personal identity conflicts (Berzonsky, 2011). Those with a normative processing style
implicitly adopt a collective identity by internalizing the standards of significant others and referent groups (Berzonsky, 2011). Finally, diffuse-avoidant identity processors are reluctant to confront their identity conflicts, instead tending to procrastinate in their resolution of such issues (Berzonsky, 2011). Identity commitment (Marcia, 1966), not surprisingly, refers to the level that one has committed to a particular identity. People high in this construct have a very certain sense of self, whereas those who score low have an uncertain sense of self (Marcia, 1966). Beaumont (2009) found that both identity commitment and an informational identity style were positively correlated with self-actualization and self-transcendence. When identity commitment was controlled for, these wisdom-related constructs were positively predicted by an informational identity style (Beaumont, 2009). Additional analyses found that an informational processing style positively predicts both wisdom-related constructs, which in turn, positively predicts enhanced well-being through meaning in life and subjective happiness (Beaumont, 2009). Those with normative and diffuse-avoidant identity styles did not fit within this path model between wisdom and well-being (Beaumont, 2009).

In a follow up of sorts to her previous study, Beaumont (2011) confirmed that informational identity processing is uniquely associated with wisdom. Beaumont (2011) also made the novel discovery that an informational identity processing style is also related to positive subjective experiences associated with mindfulness and savouring. Participants ($n = 320$) completed self-report measures of identity style (informational, normative, diffuse), identity commitment, wisdom (cognitive, reflective, affective), mindfulness, savouring beliefs, and savouring behaviours (Beaumont, 2011). Individuals who scored in the top quartile of wisdom also scored highest on levels of informational identity processing, identity commitment,
mindfulness, and savouring beliefs (Beaumont, 2011). The informational identity processing style positively predicted wisdom, which in turn, positively predicted mindfulness and savouring beliefs (Beaumont, 2011).

Related to the work pursued by Beaumont (2009, 2011), Bang and Zhou (2014) investigated the relationship between wisdom and ego-identity among university students in China, using Marcia’s (1966) ego-identity statuses and Ardelt’s (2003) wisdom dimensions as a theoretical and conceptual framework. They found that of the three wisdom dimensions, perspective-taking best predicted identity achievement (Bang & Zhou, 2014). All three dimensions predicted identity moratorium, but the reflective component was the strongest predictor (Bang & Zhou, 2014). Moreover, all three dimensions predicted identity diffusion, but items related to resentment from the reflective component were the strongest predictors (Bang & Zhou, 2014). Finally, gender was a significant predictor of both identity achievement and identity diffusion (Bang & Zhou, 2014). The authors suggest that efforts to develop the reflective dimension of wisdom may lead to healthier ego-identity formation (Bang & Zhou, 2014).

The Current Study

As a lead in to the current study following this comprehensive review of the relevant literature pertaining to ASD, subjective well-being, wisdom, values, and identity, and the potential links between each of these broad constructs, we would like to remind the reader of the purpose of the current study, and how it extends the previous literature, while also demonstrating the potential to make novel contributions. Through a person-centred approach, this thesis examines in-depth the lives, experiences, and perspectives of three individuals with HFA. It explores how young adults with HFA make sense of their past experiences and integrate them
into their current understanding of self, while also orienting themselves towards their future ideals. This thesis also explores how these individuals understand, experience, and express the concepts of wisdom and identity, from both a personal-experiential and abstract frame of reference. The current study proposes an integrative theoretical framework that attempts to explain the connection between wisdom, identity, and well-being, with the novel element of values. This is the first study of its kind that has attempted to integrate all four of these constructs under a unified theory. No known studies exist that have investigated all of these topics together, in either neurotypical, or HFA populations.
Chapter 2

Methods

Study Design

The current study used an existing dataset developed by Khan (2013). That study gained ethics approval by the University of Toronto (U of T), Research and Innovation, Research Ethics Board (RI-REB) in July, 2009. The U of T RI-REB reapproved the current study through a separate ethics approval application in October, 2016. Khan’s (2013) study included forty-six males, aged eighteen to thirty-three, with and without a diagnosis of HFA, from Pakistan and Canada. The study included four contrast groups: non-HFA-Canada, non-HFA-Pakistan, HFA-Canada, and HFA-Pakistan. Each participant took part in a semi-structured interview, asking a variety of questions pertaining to their goals, their life experiences, their personal identity, and their understanding of wisdom. Participants also completed the Three Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS; Ardelt, 2003), and the Adult Self Transcendence Scale (ASTI; Levenson, Jennings, Aldwin, & Shiraishi, 2005), both measures of wisdom, as well as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larson & Griffin, 1985), and the Quality of Life Inventory (QOLI; Frisch, 1994, 2014), both of which measure well-being. In addition to the above, participants completed the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ; Schwartz, 1994), the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire, Fourth Edition (AIQ-IV; Cheek & Briggs, 2013), and an adapted version of Paulhus’ (1991) social desirability scale. As adjunctive measures of well-being, participants also indicated their ratings for 3 items pertaining to Purpose in Life (adapted from Ryff and Keyes, 1995), and 4 items pertaining to Alienation (from the ASTI). Please refer to Khan (2013)
for more detailed information on the methods of the original study, including study site information, recruitment of participants, HFA-Canada group level demographic information, confidentiality procedures, measurement procedures, and internal reliability of study measurement scales.

The current study focuses on the HFA-Canada group from Khan’s (2013) original dataset. Verbatim transcripts were developed based on the original interviews for each participant. Descriptive analyses of these transcripts resulted in a detailed and cohesive narrative for each participant, which was divided based on the particular interview section (i.e. goals, life story, identity, wisdom), along with the focus of a particular interview question (e.g. What are your goals for your contribution to society?). For a full list of interview questions, please refer to the interview protocol in Appendix E.

This qualitative interview data would form the basis for the narrative-gestalts we planned to use as the foundation for this thesis. These narrative-gestalts were intended to capture the unique essence of a case. This narrative-gestalt method is based on Bergman’s person-oriented research (Bergman & Andersson, 2010; Bergman & Magnusson, 1997; Lundh, 2015) that focuses explicitly on the individual as a Gestalt, in the form of typical patterns, their development, and their connections across domains (Lundh, 2015). This approach typically uses data in the form of a “person X, variable a,b,c...z” matrix (Bergman & Andersson, 2010; Lundh, 2015), but the variable values only achieve their importance as parts of a central, united pattern. On their own, these variables have no meaning, but in the context of the entire profile of scores, they gain status (Bergman & Andersson, 2010; Lundh, 2015). The primary unit of analysis, then, is the pattern, not the variable, with the variables only being represented and understood as
components of these patterns (Lundh, 2015). This method combines a focus on the whole of the individual person, with a focus on patterns within the individual (Bergman & Andersson, 2010; Lundh, 2015). This method views the individual as a holistic system, with the integrity of said system dependent upon retaining a focus on patterns, both in the moment, and over time (Bergman & Andersson, 2010; Lundh, 2015). In keeping with the purpose of such a person-centred method, pseudonyms were given to each participant in order to preserve their humanness, while also maintaining their confidentiality.

The initial focus of the study was to develop, analyze, and present a narrative-gestalt for the highest functioning individual in the group in terms of his wisdom and well-being scores. Following the completion and analysis of this singular narrative-gestalt, a number of themes emerged that appeared to be critical contributors to the development of wisdom, and which were also linked to the formation and expression of a cohesive sense of self. A number of themes also emerged that were linked to values, and which were contained throughout the participant’s entire narrative. From these two sets of themes, an explanatory theory was proposed that linked wisdom and well-being, through values and identity.

To test our emergent theory that wisdom and well-being may be linked through identity and values, maximum contrast cases were selected for the purposes of comparison. To facilitate the determination of these maximum contrast cases, participants were grouped into a sextant matrix based on their wisdom and well-being scores from the 3D-WS and SWLS, respectively. Participants were grouped into matrix cells based on whether they scored low, medium, or high on the 3D-WS and the SWLS. Cutoff criteria were set based on within-group relative comparison scores for each measure. In terms of the 3D-WS, the set cutoff point for low wisdom was a total
3D-WS score of 2.75 or less, whereas the set cutoff point for high wisdom was a total 3D-WS score of 3.25 or more. Similarly, for the SWLS, the set cutoff criterion for low well-being was a SWLS score of less than or equal to 5, whereas the set cutoff point for high well-being was a SWLS score of 6. In the high wisdom/high well-being cell, two cases emerged, Stuart (our anchor case) and Marcus. In the low wisdom/low well-being cell, three cases emerged, Eric, Nathan, and Kevin. Eric and Kevin were selected as the most compelling cases to compare against Stuart. Narrative-gestalts were produced for these additional cases in much the same manner as was done for the original case, but with less detail. The emergent theory derived through the analysis of Stuart’s narrative-gestalt was then used as a guiding framework for the cross-case comparison with Eric and Kevin.

This thesis first presents Stuart’s narrative-gestalt, followed by a holistic evaluation. From there, a discussion of emergent themes representative of critical elements for the development of wisdom and identity is presented. This discussion leads into the next group of emergent themes that are representative of Stuart’s values, and which appear to derive out of the same processes that were critical for the development of wisdom and identity. Together, these two groups of emergent themes are combined into an integrated theory that links wisdom, identity, and values, with well-being. To test this theory, narrative-gestalts are presented for Eric and Kevin that integrate the presentation and analysis of their narratives, followed by a holistic comparison analysis with Stuart for each. This forms the basis of our cross-case comparison. Quantitative data is presented in its entirety in a score profile before the presentation of each participant’s narrative-gestalt. Quantitative data is also referenced throughout the results and discussion, and embedded within the body of the thesis where necessary. An integrated
conclusion is then presented to culminate the thesis, along with contributions to the literature, research and practical implications, future directions, and study limitations.

Chapter 3

Results and Discussion

Emergent Theory

Through the analysis of Stuart’s narrative, a theory emerges regarding the relationship between wisdom and well-being. There is outstanding consistency in the emergence of themes across Stuart’s cultural wisdom ideals/exemplars and conceptualization of identity, and his personally experienced manifestation of these wisdom and identity ideals, which we first see manifest through his grandfather, and then through himself, based on his past experiences, including his life history and personal wisdom stories, and his future ideal life and self, based on his discussion of goals. This consistency and convergence of primary themes across every aspect of his narrative indicates that he has a pervading meta-theory that guides his approach to living, and which guides his actions, interactions, and entire sense of self and being. This meta-theory appears to be focused on the phenomenological or cognitive domains of life, through experiencing and contemplation, respectively, or through their combination in the practice of mindfulness.²

The alignment seen between his wisdom and identity conceptualizations, his goals, and his life story, in terms of supportive themes that emerge, also suggests that supplemental

² Please refer to Appendix A for a more detailed description of emergent themes involved in wisdom and identity development.
components of this pervading meta-theory can be conceptualized as a set of values or guiding principles, through universalism, authenticity, and optimism. The positive effect that wisdom development has on well-being may be mediated by the effect of wisdom on identity. Through the development and exercise of wisdom comes the development of a cohesive identity. One’s sense of self is informed by the wisdom one has gained through experience. And it may be that contemplation of experiencing lies at the heart of this process. Identity, then, is the crystallization of one’s wisdom, which manifests through value-oriented actions. And we will see through Stuart’s narrative that when alignment occurs at a conceptual level, it allows for alignment at a practical level, as manifest through the consistent emergence of wisdom-derived implicit insight-values across his identity, his actions, his past experiences, and his future ideals. It is this alignment that distinguishes Stuart from other individuals, and may help explain why he has such high well-being, even in spite of his disability. A more in-depth discussion of the themes that comprise these two theories will help facilitate an understanding of how they unite to illuminate a potential connection between wisdom and well-being through contemplation-facilitated values alignment.

To test the validity of our theory on the development of wisdom and identity, our cross-case comparison analyses will attempt to map the themes of experiencing and contemplation onto the narratives of Kevin and Eric. Moreover, to test our theory that the relationship between wisdom and well-being is mediated by the alignment of one’s valued-ideal life with their actual-

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3 Please refer to Appendix B for a more detailed description of emergent themes representative of wisdom-derived values.

4 Please refer to Appendix C for an in depth alignment analysis between Stuart’s PVQ scores and the wisdom-derived values as manifest through his narrative.
experienced life, additional analyses will evaluate values alignment for Eric and Kevin. We will use quantitative data based on the PVQ to gain insight into the value sets for each participant. A summary of each participant’s narrative will be presented in conjunction with their PVQ values analysis. This will allow for an evaluation of values alignment between each participant’s wisdom and identity conceptualizations, as well as their past experiences, and their ideal future. It should be noted that mindfulness will not be intentionally mapped on to these additional participant narratives. However, if it does arise organically, as associated with contemplation or experiencing, it will be noted in the analysis. This decision was made, despite the centrality of mindfulness in Stuart’s narrative, because this construct, under our proposed framework, actually represents an ancillary element, and as such, is not viewed as essential for wisdom development. As discussed previously, mindfulness practices have the potential to enhance experiencing, and through that, the insights that emerge from contemplation. They are neither necessary, nor sufficient in the development of wisdom; rather, they augment the ingredients that are necessary and sufficient.

If we look at Stuart’s quantitative data as it relates to his scores on measures of wisdom and well-being, we see that Stuart falls at the high-end of this continuum, scoring highest on both measures relative to the other ten participants from the ASD-Canada group. Even though he falls below Ardelt’s commonly used threshold for what can be considered a high level of wisdom (3D-WS ≥ 4.00 on all dimensions) – attaining a score of 3.95 on the 3D-WS overall and 4.64 on the cognitive dimension, he scores only 3.67 and 3.54 on the reflective and affective dimensions, respectively) – an analysis of his narrative illustrates the complexity and depth of his reflective capabilities that Ardelt and others consider central to the development of wisdom. Given that the
3D-WS was developed for use in the general population, it may underestimate wisdom scores when used on clinical populations, such as those with HFA. Given this, a more accurate picture of his true level of wisdom may be gleaned from an analysis of his narrative.

**Anchor Case: Stuart**

**Demographic Information**

Stuart is a 30-year-old male with HFA. He resides in the metropolitan area of a major urban centre in Canada, and considers his ethnicity as Scottish. He has never been married, and does not have any children. His highest level of education attainment is Secondary School, Grade 12. He did not declare any religious affiliation.

**Quantitative Profile**

Stuart’s wisdom scores from the 3D-WS were 4.64 on the cognitive dimension, 3.67 on the reflective dimension, and 3.54 on the affective dimension, bringing his total wisdom score to 3.95. His self-transcendence score from the ASTI was 4.07. In terms of his values priorities, Stuart attains a score of 6 on Self-Direction, 5.5 on Universalism and Benevolence, 5 on Hedonism, 4.5 on Security, 3.5 on Conformity, 3 on Achievement, Power and Stimulation, and 2.5 on Tradition. His values super-groupings indicate that he places the greatest motivational emphasis on values related to Self-transcendence (Universalism, Benevolence; 5.58), followed by Openness to Change (Achievement, Power, Hedonism; 4.67), followed still by Conservation (Security, Conformity, Tradition; 4.00), and Self-enhancement (Stimulation, Self-direction, Hedonism; 3.00). Taken together, Stuart appears to place slightly more priority on social values
as compared to personal values, but in general, shows a fairly unique balance of the two relative to the rest of the HFA-Canada group participants.

In terms of his well-being, Stuart attained a life satisfaction score of 6 on the SWLS, a score of 4.67 on Purpose in Life, and a score of 2.25 on Alienation. His overall quality of life t-score from the QOLI was 58. His domain scores from the QOLI were 6 (extremely important-high satisfaction) for Health, Home, and Helping, 4 (extremely important-mid satisfaction) on Learning, Creativity, Love, Goals/Values, Self-esteem, Work, Play, and 2 (important-mid satisfaction, or extremely important-low satisfaction) for Relatives, Friends, Children, Neighbourhood, Money, and Community.

**Narrative-Gestalt**

**Life Story.** Stuart begins his life story with a brief window into his identity, which is centred on his Scottish ancestry. By engaging in introspection, Stuart illustrates that he has used this facet of himself as a means of self-understanding, “I take a lot of my personal behaviours, traits, and trends from [it].” In this, he mentions personality traits such as being stubborn, his preferences for independence and working alone, and in the first display of experiencing, his experiential-kinesthetic learning style. Stuart also reports another potential source of self-understanding: his family. By engaging in perspective shifting, he is able to simultaneously reflect on both his family and himself, demonstrating insight into their parallels, “My family is the same way. For the most part, we learn by doing. We don’t learn by being told or shown. You put a problem for one of us, we figure it out.”

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5 Due to an error in the original administration of the QOLI mentioned earlier, both are possible interpretations of this score.
Stuart demonstrates avoidance in regards to the original question that asked about his life story, “Uh, I’ll pass on that one. They are not things as they should be. My father was rather ugly, he would like to beat the crap out of his kids just to prove his dominance. So they are not memories I’d rather go into. No offense [laughing].” Stuart instead focuses his reflecting on positive experiences that came later in his life, which is the first instance of perspective shifting as it relates to the analysis of both positive and negative formative experiences. He reminisces about a humorous mishap while hiking with friends during a camping trip. Evidence for the motivating-structural aspect of experiencing, emerges when Stuart says, “Stuff like that, that’s where most of my later memories come from, just being out in the world.” This is the first instance of offline savouring, as evidenced by his boisterous laughter while he engages in reflective re-experiencing. This indicates not only that Stuart has had positive experiences in his life that he considers essential in understanding his life and being, but also that he has the capacity for intense online affective and cognitive reactions to these experiences that end up leaving a profoundly positive imprint on his psyche.

Engaging in a perspective shift back to negative experiences, as well as introspection into how he was personally affected by the experience, Stuart reports that his violent childhood was the most important in helping him become the person who he is today, “because it forced me to be different than my parents…my father, for example, is a mess…he hates anybody who isn’t pure English…and so, by that same manner, I’ve been forced to shed these…negative characteristics…to be better, to grow, to be more positive rather than cursing and blaming every other culture for what could go wrong, what did go wrong, [what] might have been wrong.” Stuart sought to transcend the damaging and impeding influence of his father’s blatant racism,
his negative outlook, and his tendency to blame others. In a display of **insight**, Stuart reflects on how these negative inputs have shaped his own personal growth and being, stating, “it forces me to take responsibility for my own failures, and learn from them, rather than hide from them, [or] blame someone else. I’d rather learn from that mistake, and become better tomorrow, than I am today.”

Stuart recounts that the most difficult situation he has ever faced was when his father shot him with an air soft gun because he wanted to stay out with his friends longer than his father had wanted. Showing **insight** into his father’s motivations through **perspective shifting**, Stuart believes this situation was the result of his father’s racist beliefs, stating that, “he basically thought I should come in because he thought I shouldn’t be hanging out with what he called ‘filth’. My friends have never been one ethnic group. I didn’t care whether you’re Indian, or Black, or...but to him, that was cause enough to kill.” Through **introspection**, Stuart describes the trauma of being shot, and the stressful aftermath of otherization that he experienced during engagement with immediate hospitalization, and ongoing medical services thereafter, “I was there constantly, day, after day, after day, ‘come back tomorrow, come back tomorrow, come back tomorrow’, for this test and for that test. At the end of it, I felt like [a] bloody guinea pig.”

In terms of how he coped with this situation, **perspective shifting** emerges again when Stuart provides an unbiased and honest analysis of the situation and his father, and a refreshingly constructive critical analysis of himself. By engaging in **introspection**, he can use the situation as an opportunity for learning and personal growth, “I took the situation as a learning experience, to stop, think, grow. To assess what I did to provoke it, and at the same time how I could have dealt with it differently.” This last quote also expresses the **authenticity** element of
honesty, by also looking at how he contributed to the event rather than taking the easy route and just placing all the blame on his father. Through an analysis of his father, Stuart gained a number of important insights that guided his future interactions with his father, “By learning what triggers he has...we all have...our tells we’re about to blow out top for certain things...our evidence that its coming...and so I coped with it by learning what those tells were for him. So I’d go, ok, time to back off a little so it doesn’t go boom.” Stuart projects into the future and considers that next time his father may take his violence even further; a realization that provides even more motivation for Stuart to learn from the situation and better understand his father, “he shot me with a BB this time, how long until he tries something bigger? Problem with violent crimes [is] that they have a habit of growing with each crime.”

**Wisdom.** To preface, much of the insight that is gleaned through the lives and teachings of Stuart’s wisdom nominees and exemplars is done so through perspective shifting. In order to focus in on and extract self-relevant teachings from these pivotal influences, Stuart had to examine their strengths, skills, abilities, behaviours, experiences, and motivations. Stuart shifts perspectives to reflect on the experiences of these individuals in such a vivid and eloquent manner that it is almost as if they were his own. Stuart also engages in introspection when he explicitly recounts what he has learned from these exemplars and incorporated into his own life. These lessons gleaned through perspective shifting and introspection represent insights that facilitate his growth, self-actualization, and self-transcendence.

When asked about the wisest person he has known in his life, Stuart unequivocally nominates his grandfather. He does so for several reasons, such as his longevity, his longstanding marriage, and his commitment to sharing his experience and knowledge in an effort to contribute
positively to the lives of others. Specifically, “he’s lived over a century...he’s been sharing great experiences at all times...he's been married 89 years exactly, to one woman. His wife is 110, and he is 114.” This is the first piece of evidence suggesting that Stuart’s insight into the importance of experiencing for personal growth and wisdom development may stem from his grandfather.

**Experiencing** emerges again, this time alongside contemplation, when Stuart shows insight into his grandfather’s commitment to reflecting on his experiences, learning from them, and sharing those lessons with others, “every time he's brought a new experience, he thought through it and he'd share with the family, so they could all grow and gain wisdom from his own experiences.” Stuart’s insight into his grandfather’s commitment to sharing wisdom is also representative of the universalist value of teaching. Stuart uses the metaphor of investing to illustrate this universalist process of sharing wisdom, “He has invested what he’s learned, what he’s gained, what he’s known, in the next generation, bit by bit, rather than trying to pour it into the person at the last minute. So to me, it is wisdom because it’s like investing...your investment grows gradually.” He also ties in elements of interconnectedness, through legacy, by discussing the intergenerational effects of this universalist process of teaching. As he did when discussing his conceptualization of identity, Stuart also incorporates elements of legacy into his implicit wisdom conceptualization, which he ties together with prosocial action, “so that at no point when he passes is his wisdom lost.” This demonstrates that Stuart has been able to make abstract connections between these concepts, and integrate them into a theory that he can use to guide his own thinking and behaviour, and ultimately, navigate life successfully, and make sense of his experiences, the world, and the people around him.
In another display of **experiencing**, Stuart extracts from his grandfather the **insight** into the importance of making mistakes in the process of wisdom development, “*sometimes you have to sit there and get into a fight and realize this was not such a bright idea. Sometimes you have to open your mouth [and] do something stupid. He just chose to make sure that for every stupid mistake he made, that is was passed onto the next.*”

Stuart reflects on a time when he asked his grandfather for his help regarding an issue he was having with a girl, demonstrating insight into the universal, timeless, and pervading nature of the advice he received, “*the advice he gave was a long-term solution to a short [term problem], to the problem at [the] time. And ultimately, the reason that I considered this wise is because his solution did not, how should I put this, invest in the moment. This skill you’d need either way, so [it] dealt with the current problem and the skill you’d need later, and at the same time lets you make your mistakes and grow as you step in.*” Stuart demonstrates insight into uniqueness and power of his grandfather’s advice, It appears that Stuart’s grandfather was a source of guidance and advice regarding the quintessential struggles of life, and what made this advice so impactful was that it transcended the immediate problem and addressed a larger issue or skill that applied to life as a whole. In some ways, it may be said that Stuart’s grandfather helped teach him the tools of life (life skills) so he could more effectively navigate the world, with or without his grandfather’s counsel. The above is an excellent representation of his grandfather’s **universalist** values as expressed through his commitment to **teaching** others.

Reflecting on his entire family, Stuart demonstrates **insight** into the collaborative nature of his grandfather’s **universalist** commitment to **teaching** and the multidirectional effects it has on the growth of each person involved in this process, “*He believed [in] adding his experience*
to your own, for we all deal with [the] same problems differently…he’d sit there and picture and experience, sit there, and say ‘this is my perception, what’s your take?’ And he’d sit there around the table debating the experience so that everybody could see each facet of perspective and grow, not just from his perspective, but from everybody’s based on how their minds work, how their perspective work.” It appears that Stuart’s grandfather was adept at seeking out, considering, and amalgamating the perspectives of others in order to reach a more informed and comprehensive understanding of a particular topic. This may be why Stuart also demonstrates this same capacity for perspective shifting, despite having a diagnosis of HFA, which is expected to imply impairments in theory of mind. It may be that through his grandfather, either directly or indirectly, Stuart was able to conceive of such a process, learn or model the skill, practice and hone it, and use it effectively in his own life. It appears for Stuart, the most pivotal ingredient in wisdom development is one’s ability to contemplate, through introspection, perspective shifting, which ultimately accumulates into the most informed and comprehensive understanding on a particular issue of life, “So to gain wisdom sometimes means: ‘what about this, what about this, what…’ and through that, his little investment of fifty cents became fifty bucks.”

To demonstrate his grandfather’s wisdom, Stuart recounts the time his grandfather got stuck behind enemy lines for six months in World War II. This is an excellent example of Stuart’s superb perspective shifting skills. Stuart extracts critical insights from his grandfather’s experiences that are indicative of wisdom, and which pertain to specific skills, abilities, or attributes that allowed him to survive. He first highlights the importance of mindfulness through observation, “he knew to pay attention to his surroundings and study what he was doing. He never believed in leaping without looking...you may call that just being smart and surviving, but
at the same time there’s wisdom being applied to that…you can say wisdom in itself is to remember [to] look around and observe all things because…observations often provide more answers and more wisdom than simply acting.”. The following meditation from Stuart is a superb illustration of his entire outlook on life, which is centred on the belief that even the simplest of phenomena can have the most profound meanings. This belief orients him towards extracting knowledge, meaning, and truths from everything that surrounds him, and all that he engages with, should there be something there that resonates with his being. An added layer of depth comes from his recognition of, and understanding into the uniqueness of having such a perspective, relative to most others who do not realize how profound this truth is for everything, “The simple way of getting away from an enemy line is first you've to pay attention where the line is, then you've to pay attention to where the movements are, what the troops are doing, all these things, I mean as I said…he survived in the camp, why? Because nobody had the common sense to look! And I mean ultimately it’s like sitting there…its like the wisdom of crossing the street. What's the first thing you were taught as a kid? Look both ways, right? Why? Because otherwise you might get hit, right? This is wisdom but people don't realize it.” Stuart demonstrates insight into how believes his grandfather managed to cope with this situation through his patience, attention, and observation, “He coped by...finding a quiet place, not picking an issue, not announcing he was there. He sat there, watched, paid attention, got intelligence information that he needed to survive. As I said, sometimes the greatest wisdom, [is] simply, to be, [to] sit there, and do nothing, and see what is going on.”

Through introspection, Stuart is able to connect these insights gleaned through his grandfather’s life and teachings back to his own life, which helps inform him of the connection
between experiencing, mindfulness, and contemplation, and which as we will see, also connects to his other conceptualizations of wisdom and identity that also placed heavy importance on the concept of experiencing as manifest through actions, “I act, but while I’m doing that, I’m still observing what I’m learning, what I’m doing…and by that definition, wisdom comes because I’m looking and paying attention and looking for things I can gain [from] them.” In the last quote, Stuart relates the mindfulness element of observation to the development of his own wisdom. There appears to be consistency between his own conceptualizations on wisdom and identity, and the meditations and experiences of his grandfather, indicating that much of Stuart’s understanding of abstract concepts, life, others, and himself is influenced by his grandfather. Stuart has clearly used his grandfather as a guiding role model or conduit for knowledge and experience that has facilitated his own personal development, conceptual understanding, and success in navigating life.

Through introspection, Stuart demonstrates the insight that he is very similar to his grandfather, or is as much like him as he can get in spite of differences in their personality, and not mentioned by Stuart, their HFA status. He again relates this back to identity and wisdom as legacy, combining universalist elements of both interconnectedness and teaching yet again, “but I do believe through me, his life experiences that he’s left into me and through me, and it, by default, I am a piece of him as a legacy.” Stuart describes his grandfather’s legacy as a sort of guide or compass that he carries with him on his journey through life, “as a chalk…he’s rubbed off on me. So I’ve taken a piece of that with me as I go through life.” Stuart extends the concept of legacy beyond his meditations on he and his grandfather, to illustrate his universalist belief in the interconnectedness of all human beings, and the impact we have on one another, “I think we
carry the marks of that so called chalk...of each person we encounter in life, and the influences that they had on you.” We see that interconnectedness emerges as a pivotal guiding principle that likely informs Stuart’s actions, and interactions with others.

In another superb display of introspection and perspective shifting (directed towards family) leading to insight, Stuart readily details the lessons he has learned from his grandfather, which also apply to his family as a whole, and which he has incorporated into his own life, “to be patient, to be observant, to not act out of anger or aggression, of my father’s way to lash out at the world just because you don’t understand things...my grandfather taught us to overcome our [family’s] temper...once we are pissed, we just, we move without thinking, we just do. Our grandfather taught us to be careful about the implementation of such a concept. If you’re going to act in anger...be wise enough to still...watch what the heck is going on, so that you do not strike when you do not need to strike that way.” This last quote illustrates again the universalist element of teaching. Moreover, it also demonstrates the mindfulness element of observation and its capacity for facilitating self-regulation. It appears that this self-regulation process is bolstered by perspective shifting, as Stuart shows the ability to engage in future-oriented thinking in order to consider potential outcomes and long-term consequences that may result from his actions, “If I lose my temper...if I were to be married...I do not strike my wife...or my children...because that too will reap further violence, furthering the conflict later.” In a demonstration of one of his ultimate insights, Stuart demonstrates how his grandfather helped him transcend the abuse that he endured from his father, which for so long left him angry and resentful. Through reframing, Stuart was able to regulate and overcome this anger, thereby converting it into positive emotionality through compassion and sympathy, which facilitated his
post-traumatic growth, rather than releasing the negative byproducts of his trauma back into the world. “it was my grandfather who taught me not to take my father’s anger at me, and take it out into the world. For a long time, I was an angry kid who would have burned the world if he had a match big enough. My grandfather’s legacy was to teach me not to be that kid. Compassion and sympathy are not weakness, but simply other traits we perceive differently.” From this, Stuart does not merely show insight into the universalist teachings of his grandfather, but rather, he shows their integration into himself, and their application within his own life in order to facilitate his positive growth.

Stuart also demonstrates insight into the authentic, self-directed nature of his grandfather’s approach to life and being, which passively allowed his knowledge, advice, and experience to impact the lives of those around him and be interpreted as wisdom solely through them, rather than he himself deeming it as such, “he was not about being wise or being foolish, he was about simply being. Wisdom was always an external thing, it’s what others see you as. It’s not what you see you as because that has little to do with it.” This guiding principle of authenticity, through self-determination, also manifests from his personal identity conceptualization and points to the origin of this value as stemming from his grandfather’s influence and teachings. Stuart also demonstrates insight into the existence and power of differing perspectives, and the person-to-person subjectivity involved in the understanding of wisdom, at both a conceptual and experiential level, “Whether you are wise or foolish is for other people to decide...it depends on who is looking at the perspective. To some people wisdom is simply a thing, to others it’s a word, to some it’s a concept.” Stuart closes with an insight that reinforces his previous conceptualization of wisdom as the collective transmission of knowledge
and experience across generations, and its usefulness as a model or guide for navigating life successfully, “I think its something to aspire to…to me, all wisdom is, is the sum of your predecessors’ experience through you that you’ll pass on to your successors.” This represents a union of the universalist elements of interconnectedness and teaching, which emerge together as a combinatory guiding principle that helps facilitate Stuart’s own positive development, and through that, the positive development of others.

In terms of times when he himself was wise, Stuart demonstrates the authenticity element of humility through his introspection, “I don’t look at myself as being wise, I never have, and I think that is the greatest wisdom of all.” This insight regarding his own level of wisdom is helpful in keeping Stuart grounded, but also in ensuring he remains curious and motivated to continue along a path of growth, which Stuart shows with his next insight that incorporates elements of experiencing, “to remember that even as [the] wiser we get through life, there’s always more to learn, always more [to] experience.” Inspired by his grandfather’s approach to life and wisdom, and in response to its subjective social-relational construction, Stuart shows insight into the importance of authenticity in the expression and understanding of his own personal wisdom, “You can be wise but still can act like a fool. You can be a complete fool and pass for the greatest sage. I’ve never attempted to be wise, I’ll never try to be wise. I’ll simply try to be me and if it passes off [as] wise to someone else, let them learn from what I’ve learned and let them grow from there.” Through this, we see the emergence of the authenticity elements of self-determination and interconnectedness, which echoes the same sentiments he had regarding his grandfather’s wisdom, providing additional evidence for the familial source of such a value.
When asked who the wisest person in history was, Stuart nominates a political/military figure from 17th century Japan: expert swordsmen and rōnin, Miyamoto Musashi. Stuart made this nomination because the work and teachings of Musashi have had a profound influence on his life. The in-depth knowledge that Stuart has accumulated on the life of Musashi and his teachings illustrate his perspective shifting skills and ability to immerse himself within the lives of those whom he has only ever known through books and stories, and extract relevant meaning and lessons from their experiences, “he became a feudal samurai at the age of nine, and learned how to fight and manipulate the human world at a young age...how to manipulate a human so that he can make it appear in their best interest to...go to war, or to turn away from a war, without ever having enough formal education, without even having...basic understanding.” In an explicit expression of the universalist value of teaching, Stuart praises Musashi for his ability to teach others the most valuable and profound lessons on life, despite having no formal education, through his use of simplified metaphors to ensure his message could reach the masses, “when it came to understanding his principles, his teachings, his ideals, it was always compared to how you hold the sword, how do you wield the sword, and in that, how do you teach others what you’ve learned.” Stuart’s lauding of Musashi’s against all odds ascent to power and self-actualization may be indicative of something he deeply admires and strives to emulate, given his own struggles with being abused as a child, and of course, in having a diagnosis of HFA. This manifests later, when Stuart engages in introspection to demonstrate insight how Musashi’s teachings pertaining to the mindfulness element of observation have helped him better understand himself, “it helps me understand my own fullness, my own feelings, by understanding how a sword works, how to manipulate the mind, without formal teaching, without formal learning, by simply observing how people behaved. To me, there’s wisdom there because he
teaches us even...[to] learn to read body language properly. There’s great wisdom [in] simply watching what people do, how they act, how they move.” By seeing the parallels between his own story and that of Musashi’s, including the life of fighting and struggle that they both experienced, Stuart is able to incorporate critical teachings from Musashi that facilitate actualization and enlightenment, in an effort to mimic that process of personal development within his own life. It is clear that for Stuart, mindfulness and wisdom are one in the same. Through attentive observation, reflective sense-making of one’s experiences and interactions, and integrating into one’s self, the knowledge, experience, and teachings of those whom they admire, one can put themselves on a path towards enlightenment and self-realization. Stuart highlights the natural and passive progression of this process, along with the importance of the mindfulness elements of presence within the moment, and the savouring of all facets of our experiences, both positive and negative, through the following introspection which allows for insight into the parallels between Musashi’s life and that of his own, “I consider him wise and most influential to me because like him, I spent a lot of my life fighting, not looking for wisdom, not looking for identity, not looking for growth, simply living from one moment to the next. But in that...you start to appreciate the moments between, the moments in transition, the moments of reflection and the moments of wisdom. You take each joy for what it is, each sorrow for what it is, and you learn from each as you go.” From presence, the other components of mindfulness, represented by the subthemes of observation and savouring, can be fully realized and expressed.

Stuart’s introspective capacities are illustrated beautifully through his insights into how Musashi’s teachings have informed the development of certain qualities within him that
illuminate novel pathways along his journey through life, “From him I learned that both resourcefulness and attention to detail ultimately can provide newer, better paths, rather than sitting there, assuming I have all the answers, charging forth and not looking...where I’m going, what I’m doing.” Stuart explicitly relates Musashi’s teachings to the **mindfulness insights** of **presence** and **savouring**, “take joy in the simple pleasures, rather than hope for what might be tomorrow, live each day like it will be your last because we have no guarantee of tomorrow.”

Stuart felt that the greatest **insight** he gained from Musashi was that of **savouring** positive emotions and experiences because it can be a means of enjoying life more fully while thwarting off the routine malaise of daily life, “I think, the greatest lesson I learned was to...always appreciate, to find the way each day to have a little joy so that...each day doesn’t become ‘Ugh... well, what did I do today? Yeah, it was miserable.’ So try and find a little joy in each day so that you appreciate each day that you’re on the surface, not less.” This concept ties back well to Stuart’s **universalist** ideal of **interconnectedness**. His description of wisdom as “all things”, and use of the phrase “to find the way” is redolent of the emphasis on holism and interconnectedness that is so central to Taoist belief, and other eastern philosophies. Through the combination of **savouring** and **interconnectedness**, we see a convergence between Stuart’s values of **universalism** and **mindfulness**. It appears that for Stuart, these two values represent a critical orienting structure that helps guide the rest of his life and functioning, including his actions, conceptualizations, and development.

By applying Musashi’s teachings in his own life, Stuart engages in **introspection** to gain further **insight** into the similarities between himself and Musashi and how he is learning through him, “the lessons of looking, observing, understanding, and ultimately, he hated ignorance, he
did not believe in not knowing...being who I am, I am learning him by reading what he’s done, by understanding what he believed...and as I said earlier, to me, wisdom is passing on the experiences from the past so that the next generation might profit from it, but it does not always have to be the teachings of your immediate predecessors, it can be little bits of wisdom that you’ve found elsewhere.”

This lesson of learning by observation that Stuart extracts from Musashi is redolent of the very same lesson that he extracted from his grandfather’s story of surviving behind enemy lines in World War II, which speaks to the centrality of this lesson to his current being. It is hard to say whether Stuart honed in on this lesson because he identified with it, in that it addressed a need in his life that he knew he was lacking and which could help remediate a particular deficit in his functioning, or if he was drawn to this lesson because it was congruent with his existing schemata and only served to enhance or confirm what he already did or believed in. Regardless, the alignment in terms of the insights that Stuart extracts from both his grandfather and Musashi is superb.

From the externally derived insights gleaned through his grandfather and Musashi, we see the emergence of Stuart’s explicit definition of wisdom, which shows exceptional consistency with how he has implicitly and explicitly expressed and defined wisdom thus far. The consistency seen across his wisdom conceptualizations, including the insights he has gained into his own wisdom, his grandfather’s wisdom, and the wisdom of Musashi, indicate that his understanding of wisdom at a conceptual level has been inspired and derived primarily through external sources and the experiences of others. At the highest level of his wisdom conceptualization, that is, his broad cultural ideals as expressed through his definition of wisdom, we see the emergence of the contemplative subthemes of abstraction, Stuart reiterates the
conceptualizations of wisdom he has expressed throughout his interview, explicitly defining his understanding of it as “the sum and legacy of experiences passed on from one generation to the next.” From these externally derived insights which he has amalgamated into his abstract understanding of wisdom, we see him equate wisdom with growth through the totality of experience, extending it beyond the micro level of the personal and interactional, to the macro level of culture and society, “it means the growth of a society and a culture based on past mistakes, past tragedies, past victories...some of the greatest sorrows, some of the greatest victories...all these things can lead to wisdom, and sometimes takes two [or] three generations to figure out what you have learned from it. Ultimately I believe wisdom is all the experiences passed forth so that we do not repeat the tragedies of the past.” This insight demonstrates the implicit emergence of the universalist element of teaching. Teaching that occurs at the level of the individual allows for personal growth, which as a human collective, leads to the growth of culture and society. This concept of collective accumulation also incorporates the universalist belief in the interconnectedness of all living things. With the inclusion of the universalist element of interconnectedness, Stuart sees all human beings as part of a cultural and societal super organism, linked together by a collective consciousness, with all inputs at the level of the individual contributing to the collective whole. It is through these universalist beliefs in teaching and interconnectedness, and their implications for wisdom and growth, not just at the level of the individual, but for all of humanity, that we come to understand the transcendent nature of much of Stuart’s motivations, goals, reflections, and actions. Stuart is able to tie back his understanding of wisdom to the externally derived insights of universalism and mindfulness gained from his grandfather and Musashi, “wisdom is the companion that guides us to the dark moments, the joys, it is all things that remind you [to] appreciate today, because tomorrow could
be your worst.” This last quote also contains an emergence of online savouring. At this level, savouring, through the act of appreciation, does not occur at the level of the individual experience, but rather, at the collective level of life as a whole. Finally, Stuart closes again with the expression of his universalist and optimistic belief in the potential for wisdom that all human beings possess and its omnipresence along the journey of life, “wisdom follows us through life, and we all possess it, it’s a treasure that we all have…it is more valuable than gold, and yet you cannot even hold it in your hand.” This last quote echoes the Biblical book of Proverbs, which says “Happy are those who find wisdom…for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold” (Proverbs 3:13-14). This indicates that Stuart may have implicitly used the insights and teachings of religious texts, despite his explicit secularism, to inform the development of his own conceptualizations. Moreover, he may have explicitly integrated these insights into his own implicit theories, passing them off as his own.

We see, then, that Stuart’s insights into the teachings of Musashi, and to a lesser extent those of his grandfather, appear to facilitate within him the development of a meta-theory on navigating life that is founded on mindfulness. The elements of observation, attention to detail, being present, and savouring of experience appear critical to this meta-theory. Through this theory he is able to orient himself and his life in such a way that facilitates the development of certain virtues, and the engagement in value-congruent actions, that ultimately allow for the realization and achievement of an ideal sense of self and being, and a holistic understanding of all aspects of life and consciousness.

Identity. Abstraction emerges from Stuart’s ability to reflect on, integrate, and express his understanding of abstract ideas, such as that of identity, at both a conceptual level, and a
personal level. At a conceptual level Stuart presents an understanding of identity that is highly complex, tying in elements of legacy, influence, helping, teaching, optimism, universalism, and the interconnectedness of all humanity. At a personal level, Stuart is able to integrate these elements into the understanding of his own identity to create congruence between his abstractions, and his real-life actions and experiences.

Within Stuart’s identity conceptualization, we first see the emergence of universalism within his definition of identity as legacy, through a combination of the subthemes of interconnectedness and teaching, “Identity is…more a legacy of what you leave behind, what evidence...that said that you were here. Who did you influence, what did they gain from it... because I believe every person [has] something to teach.” This also illustrates the optimism element of impact potential, which synergizes with universalist elements of interconnectedness and teaching.

Interconnectedness and teaching emerge together yet again through Stuart’s views that we can all influence each other through the smallest of gestures, “You may not see it at the time, but we are all...in constant transition, a simple exposure can leave marks for life...its like rubbing against chalk, even [though] the chalk might remain on whatever you’re rubbing against, a piece of it comes with you.” Stuart connects this with teaching when he says, “I believe identity is like that chalk, because we all influence each other. You can’t change the world of millions of people at a time, you do one person at a time. That’s how identity is, how did you change someone’s life.” The optimism elements of human potential and impact potential also emerge through this last quote, which as we can see, converges beautifully with the universalist elements of interconnectedness.
For Stuart, it appears that identity is a concept that can only be understood relationally or socially, that is, in terms of one’s desire to contribute positively to the lives of others, the impact you have on them and the memory of that interaction, and the inextricable connectedness we have with one another. This ties back beautifully to his conceptualization of wisdom as legacy, and the universalist elements of helping, teaching and interconnectedness, which appeared to be heavily influenced by his grandfather’s life and teachings. That Stuart places so much emphasis on social and relational aspects of identity is surprising, given what we expect about the typical HFA diagnostic profile as lending towards being nonsocial. This universalist thinking may be a product of his wisdom development, through contemplative inquiry into his own experiences, and the experiences and teachings of others, which has allowed him to transcend his impairments or nonsocial tendencies, to gain perspective, and understand that we are all part of something much greater than any one of us. This insight propels Stuart towards actions consider and contribute to the common good, and maintain a sense of connectedness to the collective.

When asked about his own identity, Stuart engages in introspection by reflecting on a personal experience he had while serving at a mission, “There’s this girl sitting behind the church, you know, starving, freezing. I gave her a coat, my coat, shed it off my back, because I didn’t need it, or I can get another. That girl now, in one gesture, has become a passer herself, and is now teaching, helping grow others the same way, by practice, not by words...because someone gave her a break, helped her, she’s now going out and helping others.” Through perspective shifting, Stuart gains insight into how this girl changed as a result of his universalist act of teaching and helping, which in turn, led to a benefit at the level of the collective, highlighting the theme of interconnectedness. Implicitly, we also see the emergence
of Stuart’s belief in the **optimism** value of **impact potential** story. By reflecting on experiences such as this, and engaging in **introspection** specifically, Stuart can understand the meaning of his actions and the influence he has on others, which can help inform the initial development, ongoing evolution, reevaluation, and fulfillment of these supporting values. “*what I bring out of it, for personal growth, was how did I change that incident to help the people.*” By reflecting on experiences such as this, Stuart can understand the meaning of his actions and the influence he has on others, which can help inform the initial development, ongoing evolution, reevaluation, and fulfillment of these supporting values. **Experiencing** emerges again when Stuart demonstrates **insight** into the importance of this element in truly understanding the experiential attributes that inform his identity through actions, “*Like I said, the attributes you asked about before, the loyalty, the resourcefulness, well those things are experiential. They are nothing to encounter by just looking at a book. [Rather] getting off your ass and being in the world.*” While Stuart can appreciate the benefits of theoretical knowledge, he understands that the most useful lessons in life come through experience.

In a combined display of his **abstraction** and **introspective** capacities, Stuart gains **insight** into how wisdom and identity are connected with the **experiencing** element of action, “*You may call it wisdom, but for me, they are inseparable...because I am what I do, I am my actions...but at the same time I gain my wisdom by those same actions.*” He explicitly understands that both wisdom and identity develop through the meaning and lessons extracted from his experiences and actions. Taken together, Stuart demonstrates that he can form complex conceptualizations at both an abstract and pragmatic level, and integrate them with his own sense
of self and being, through a combination of experiencing and, contemplation (on both himself and others).

We also see how the element of experiencing emerges in Stuart’s introspection of his personal identity that also incorporates universalist elements of teaching, helping, and interconnectedness, and which appears critical to his understanding of his own sense of self, “my identity is defined by how I’ve acted and how I’ve acted is what I’ve learned and gained through wisdom…identity for me does not exist with a name or a face, but instead, with our actions, because they flow like a river. You do some good deed for someone today and they may do another good deed for someone else.” The last quote is an excellent example of how the value of universalism emerges through Stuart’s contemplative insights. Stuart’s primacy on the self-directed and self-informed development of his identity, expressing it as a choice that he and only he can determine, may implicitly represent his transcendence beyond the HFA label given to him by the medical establishment, and may be an important contributor to his ultimate actualization. Stuart contends that actions speak more deeply to the true character and motivation of an individual, whilst words can serve to deceive and do harm. He then engages in introspection into his past in order to gain metacognitive insight into where this set of values pertaining to the authenticity element of self-determination originated, “It’s my belief that…because of a violent childhood, actions speak ultimately so much stronger, be it generosity, be it kindness, be it resourcefulness.” The above quote illustrates the active dynamics and personal intention involved in the development of an authentic, self-determined, meaningful, and cohesive sense of self. These are not things that he simply read or heard about from others, or witness being played out through the lives of those around them. While these things may be a part of the process,
Stuart touches on the unstable and fluid nature of identity over the lifespan, and the diversity of inputs that shape its development. In another demonstration of **insight**, Stuart stresses the importance of independent thought and action in the development of his own identity, stating “These things are all my identity because this is what I’ve chosen to become...identity is not...what somebody else would define you with, its not something someone can give you, its something you must find for yourself through your life.” In another display of **perspective shifting**, Stuart references the work of Friedrich Nietzsche as an inspiration for his **insights** into the importance of living a life of **authenticity**, through **self-directed** thought and action, and choosing who you want to be and how you want to live your life, according to your own definitions rather than someone else’s, “[in] him I found great strength about both wisdom and identity, because he tells you to just find yourself by your own definitions, to not be a follower...my identity is defined by what I choose to be, not by what someone would have me be.” He closes by demonstrating **insight** into the uniqueness and diversity of identity across individuals, and optimistically expresses his hope in the vast universal potential that resides within us, “Humans and identity, to me...is the number zero. In itself, there’s nothing there, but it is full of infinite potential, and through that we learn and grow and gain wisdom, and with that wisdom we learn and grow some more.” This last quote is an excellent implicit representation of the **optimism** element of **human potential**.

**Goals.** Stuart’s goal for his personal growth centres on the **universalist** value of **conservation**, in that he wants to become a conservationist, or someone who advocates for the
preservation and restoration of nature, and the environment, “my personal goal is to become a conservationist.” Despite providing such a clear goal, he concedes that how he will achieve this is still very much in transition, and not yet to the point of even planning, let alone action, “as to how I will achieve it is still...in transition, that's all I've to say, its not to the point of figuring out what to do yet.” When asked about his relational goals, Stuart was frank in his declaration that he had no such goals, “Don't have any, to be honest.” This is curious considering the saturation we see in his wisdom and identity conceptualizations, as well as his life story, of highly social and relational elements pertaining to universalist values, such as interconnectedness, helping, and teaching. The authenticity element of self-determination is also apparent in the unapologetic conviction of Stuart’s answer, which illustrates that he has such a strong sense of self-understanding, and confidence in that understanding, that he does not fall into the trap of conformity, being influenced by others, or the pursuit of normality. Instead, Stuart follows only that which is congruent with his inner motivations and desires. The authenticity element of self-reliance also manifests from Stuart’s lack of relational goals, which shows that he is more reliant on himself than he is of others. Finally, the authenticity element of honesty emerges from Stuart’s sincerity and openness in telling the interviewer that he had no goals for his relationships. Stuart does not hide that he does not have any goals for his relationships. Rather, he expresses this in spite of the fact that it may appear odd, unsavoury or against the norm given the highly social nature of human beings and the negative connotations that solitude or reclusiveness can carry. In terms of his contribution to society, Stuart’s goals centre on the pursuit of issues related to the universalist values of social justice and conservation, “be it... make...say to...there are more homes for the disabled, more education programs, or more appreciation for the world we have.” Stuart’s motivation for such goals appears to stem from his
own personal experiences, “*hopefully to make [society] slightly better than it was for me.*” This alludes to the potential experiencing of traumatic societal events in his life that have pushed him towards certain proclivities. These goals are consistent with themes that emerged through his wisdom and identity conceptualizations, that appear to be connected to external sources, such as his grandfather, but also internal sense making of his experiences, as seen through his life story and personal identity. As was seen before, Stuart provides a clearly stated goal, and one that appears to be of high personal relevance. However, there is also no apparent plan for how he will achieve it.

**Holistic Evaluation of Stuart’s Narrative-Gestalt**

The first portion of Stuart’s interview pertaining to his life story actually relates more to his identity. It illustrates the well-developed sense of self-understanding that he has, and exposes potential sources of this understanding that are external to himself, such as his ancestry/heritage, and his family. He attaches meaning to these units/sources, which allows him to better understand the external. But going further, he also integrates this meaning into his sense of self, allowing him to gain a better understanding of the internal. The meaning that he has extracted from his ancestry and his family, and integrated into himself, relates to personality traits, behavioural tendencies/preferences, and learning/cognitive styles. Armed with this external and internal knowledge, Stuart is better able to navigate life successfully according to his own definitions by choosing paths that are congruent with his identity and sense of self, and avoiding those that are in their opposition. This adaptive process may allow Stuart to live a more authentic life, and possibly a more fulfilling and satisfying life. This shows congruence with the
emergence of the theme of authenticity throughout Stuart’s identity and wisdom conceptualizations, as well as his discussion of goals.

The telling of his life story is the first demonstration of Stuart’s capacity for contemplation. Stuart is able to reflect on both the positive and negative facets of his past, but his tendency for positive reflecting appears to be more dominant. Stuart also exhibits the capacity for humorous reflecting by highlighting the hilarity involved in one particular hiking story. And within the same story, Stuart also shows the capacity for savouring, as he re-experiences the event and laughs with fondness while reminiscing. When discussing the most pivotal memory from his childhood, which was related to the abuse he incurred at the hands of his father, Stuart demonstrates his ability to not just reflect on his past experiences, but to learn from them in order to facilitate positive growth and change. Stuart is able to make sense of his past experiences through introspection and perspective shifting, by examining himself, other people, and the context/situation. From his father’s abuse and negative influence, Stuart managed to see the characteristics within his father that were likely the cause of his damaging behaviour. Seeing this connection, and the pitfalls of such negative traits and behaviours, Stuart put himself on a path that would ensure he did not blindly follow the risky developmental trajectory his father had set for him. By recognizing and understanding his father’s behaviour, Stuart had an external referent with which he could compare his own behaviour and modify it to better reflect the person he wanted to be. The person who Stuart strived to become was essentially the opposite of his father, and in this sense, Stuart’s father represents a sort of anti-role model or exemplar whose negative impact inspired Stuart to transcend and be better than.
When discussing the most difficult experience he faced, Stuart engages in perspective shifting to reflect on the impetus and motivation behind the behaviour of others, namely, that of his father and how his actions stem from his racist beliefs. Stuart’s introspection allows him to gain insight into his own affective state during the aftermath of this event while at the hospital, and from that, better understand his difference and otherization at the hands of those around him. Stuart’s coping strategies appear to stem from these same contemplative capacities of introspection, perspective shifting, and insight. Certainly, the most striking features of these contemplative skills are the unbiased and honest nature of the analysis that results, as well as his ability to consider alternative perspectives, and examine multiple facets of the situation. Stuart reflects not just on how his father contributed to the event, but also on how he himself contributed. Through this, Stuart was able to gain a better understanding of his father, himself, and the situation, in an effort to mitigate future events should they occur, or avoid them altogether. Stuart does not mention how he coped with the direct consequences and immediate aftermath of the event. Instead, he projected into the future to focus on what he could have done differently next time. In this sense then, Stuart’s coping style can be described as future-oriented, with a focus on learning and growth, so he is able to cope with or manage similar situations more effectively in the future.

These contemplative skills are used in full effect during Stuart’s conceptualizations of wisdom. We see the emergence of Stuart’s implicit wisdom theory through the discussion of his cultural wisdom ideals, through his wisdom definition, and nominee for wisest person in history, and the personally experienced manifestation of these ideals, through his nominee for the wisest person in his life, and his personal stories evidencing his own wisdom. This implicit wisdom
theory and the elements contained within it, shows exceptional alignment with his past experiences and life story his identity conceptualizations, and his future ideals through his discussion of goals. The most profound alignment is seen between the elements contained within Stuart’s personal identity conceptualization, and those that emerge from his analysis of his grandfather’s life, and the teachings of Miyamoto Musashi. The exceptional consistency seen across these three areas suggests that Stuart may have used both of these figures as exemplary models for how one should act and behave in order to facilitate a good life for themselves, and through that, for others as well (Zagzebski, 2017). When integrated into his own life, these insights may have had a profound impact on the development of his own wisdom and personal identity. Stuart’s discussion of wisdom also highlights the incredibly rich and detailed insights that emerge from his contemplative skills, and demonstrates the complexity and sophistication of his ability to reflect on himself, the people around him, as well as other sources of inspiration with whom he has had no direct contact with.

It is clear that his grandfather was a major source of guidance and advice for Stuart. Through his lifetime of experiences, commitment to contemplation, acceptance and analysis of his failures, and openness to differing perspectives, his grandfather had a deep reservoir of knowledge that he could draw upon in order to help those around him with whatever issue they presented with. Stuart was able to seek out support from his grandfather whenever he faced a difficult situation he did not know how to traverse. But the value in his grandfather’s advice lay not in its ability to solve a proximal issue; rather, the true strength of his grandfather’s advice lay in its generalizability, and application to the many pervading issues of life. Stuart equates this advice giving as a transmission of skills. Although these skills may help him solve an immediate
problem, they are actually skills that will serve him throughout the lifespan, and that he can apply to a variety of issues, both proximally and distally. In essence, the skills that his grandfather taught him have allowed Stuart to navigate life more effectively. It may be that these types of influences, teachers, and models are a major source of positive development and protection against risk that for someone with HFA may be especially critical in order to facilitate their optimal development in spite of their impairments.

Stuart’s reflections on his grandfather highlight his ability to contemplate on those whom he knows personally, and extract meaning from their experiences, actions and behaviours. Interestingly, contemplation appears to be an ability that his grandfather also excelled at. This suggests that Stuart may have learned or honed this ability through direct engagement with his grandfather, or indirectly through vicarious learning and modelling. Ironically then, the most critical skill that Stuart potentially learned through his grandfather may actually be that of contemplation. Evidence for this comes from the tremendous insight Stuart shows regarding critical facets involved in his grandfather’s contemplative skills, which include: (1) a commitment to reflecting on new experiences in order to extract knowledge and meaning from them, (2) an openness to reflecting on all experiences, especially one’s mistakes and failures, (3) the ability to extract meta-knowledge, and lessons pertaining to life through these reflections, and (4) the intentional pursuit and consideration of external perspectives, and where necessary, the integration of those external perspectives into one’s internal schemata. By understanding this process, and witnessing it being played out through his grandfather (as well as his family), Stuart can model it and incorporate it into his personal reflective repertoire in order to facilitate his own positive development, learning, self-transcendence, and self-actualization.
Stuart’s grandfather demonstrated a commitment to reflecting on every new experience that he had. He would then share his insights from that reflection with his family. Stuart also demonstrates this same commitment, which is evident across every section of his narrative. This is unexpected given what we know about the impairments supposedly inherent to HFA, particularly in regards to theory of mind deficits. As discussed in the introduction, having a theory of mind is being able to reflect on the contents of one’s own and other’s minds (Baron-Cohen, 2001). We would expect, then, that an individual such as Stuart, who has HFA, would show impaired contemplative skills. But based on the interview, we do not see this trend, and in fact, we see the opposite: Stuart’s reflective capabilities are superb, and as has been seen, are well-developed, complex and multi-faceted. So, why is this the case? While we will never know for sure, based on this interview, it may be that Stuart learned how to reflect, either through explicit teaching from his grandfather, or through vicarious learning and modelling of his grandfather. Given that reflective exercise and debate was a common occurrence at the family dinner table, Stuart also had the opportunity to observe and practice this ability on a regular basis with multiple family members. This exposure, particularly if it occurred at an early age, may have sparked theory of mind development, and remediated the severity of deficit that Stuart was born with. Continued exposure to reflective exercise and practice of this ability across the lifespan may have allowed Stuart to bring his contemplative skills close to that of a neurotypical individual.

The second lesson that Stuart extracts from his grandfather’s life has both an experiencing and a contemplation component. This lesson relates to the importance of making mistakes, and reflecting on those mistakes so you can learn from them. This knowledge can then
be implemented into your own life at an abstract level, to inform your wisdom and identity development, and at a practical level, to help you better navigate future circumstances and events, and inform your future actions and behaviour. Through this process, one also humbly realizes that they are not perfect, that they do not have all the answers, and that they are prone to error as much as any other human. In some respects, it’s a way of being honest with yourself and keeping your ego in balance. By learning from your mistakes, you can give advice and counsel to those around you, in an effort to guide them away from repeating those same mistakes. This process manifests throughout Stuart’s narrative with the consistent emergence of the themes of authenticity and universalism. We see these themes emerge through every aspect of Stuart’s life, from his past experiences, to his future ideals, and within his sense of self, and understanding of abstract concepts, such as wisdom and identity. We can see then that Stuart does not merely show an awareness of, or insight into, the teachings of his grandfather, but rather, he shows their integration into his own identity, including their application within his own life in order to facilitate his positive growth. We see this explicitly when Stuart is able to relate his grandfather’s lessons to his own personal struggles overcoming the abuse he endured from his father, and the intense anger that developed within him as a result. Through reframing, facilitated by his capacity for perspective shifting, Stuart was able to regulate and overcome this anger and convert it into compassion and sympathy, which allowed for his post-traumatic growth, rather than releasing the negative byproducts of his trauma back into the world.

One particularly important contemplative sub-skill that Stuart learned through his grandfather, and which we have seen on full display throughout his narrative, was that of seeking out and considering other people’s perspectives, and if necessary, integrating those perspectives,
or parts of them, into your own, so as to gain a more complete understanding of a particular issue. This skill is particularly critical for Stuart, given his HFA status and the inherent perspective taking difficulties resulting from theory of mind deficits. His grandfather’s teaching, as well as observational modelling of him, may have had a direct impact on the positive development of Stuart’s theory of mind ability. Couple this with the fact that this skill was being modelled to him by not just his grandfather, but his entire family (less his father), where they would debate various issues at the dinner table, and it is likely that Stuart was exposed to perspective-taking exercises throughout his life and maybe even beginning at an early age. This may be why Stuart shows such strong ability to look at issues holistically and consider multiple perspectives, other people’s perspectives, ambiguity, relativity, and subjectivity. Compared to the average individual with HFA, this would give Stuart a major advantage in terms of his learning and development in a wide range of life domains, particularly when it comes to social and emotional functioning, and cognitive functioning.

There is no better showcase of Stuart’s aptitude in perspective shifting than from his reflections on the experiences and teachings of historical figure and military theorist Miyamoto Musashi, whom he nominated as the wisest person in history, and whose teachings appear to have had a tremendous influence on Stuart’s life. Stuart appears to use Musashi as an exemplary model, much like he does with his grandfather. Stuart extracts two important lessons from the teachings of Musashi: (1) observing others in order to better understand human nature, behaviour, and the mind, and (2) using that understanding in one’s interactions with others in order to influence and teach them, and orient them towards a particular goal. By implementing the lesson of observation, Stuart gained a better understanding of himself, and other people,
which allowed him to navigate the social and relational world more effectively. Given the theory of mind impairments associated with HFA, and the negative impact they can have on self- and other-reflection, it makes intuitive sense that these particular lessons would speak so clearly to Stuart, and have such a profound impact on his life. The lessons Stuart extracts from Musashi’s teachings are redolent of the lessons contained within many mainstream ASD interventions, such as reading body language, understanding feelings, and engaging in vicarious learning through observation and modelling. As he did with Nietzsche, it appears then that at least in some respects Stuart may be using the teachings of Musashi as a form of self-intervention. Musashi’s story resonated with Stuart through the shared experiences of struggle and overcoming the odds. Stuart lauded Musashi for the control he had over his environment and others, for his resourcefulness in the face of adversity, and for his eventual mastery and enlightenment despite a less than favourable beginning. It was through this common ground that Stuart recognized the self-relevant lessons that he could apply to his own life. But knowing which lessons are pertinent, and why, requires a certain prerequisite level of self-awareness, and insight into one’s history, their impairments and current level of functioning, as well as the forethought of their ideal self. It may be that the other influences in Stuart’s life, namely that of his grandfather and family, facilitated this prerequisite awareness and understanding into the self, through constant modelling, and practice of reflective activities. These abilities primed Stuart for success when it came time to extract, reflect upon, and absorb the wisdom of other sources, such as Musashi or Nietzsche.

Other lessons from Musashi that Stuart has extracted and implemented into his own life include the importance of being present in the moment, and the savouring of experiences.
Interestingly, these lessons of observation, presence, and savouring all have their foundation in mindfulness, or the careful observation of one’s surroundings, one’s self, and others. Retrospectively, we also see many of these same lessons of mindfulness emerge through Stuart’s reflections on his grandfather. From his grandfather’s experience as a soldier caught behind enemy lines, Stuart also learned the significance of mindfulness, and more specifically, observing and paying attention to the environment, and one’s own behaviour. Stuart blends elements of contemplation and experiencing with mindfulness when he suggests that by analyzing these mindful observations, one can uncover and hone in on critical information that can inform the best course of action.

The emergence of mindfulness represents a novel unit of meaning that stands apart from other elements contained within Stuart’s life story and conceptualization of wisdom, and to be discussed shortly, his understanding of identity and discussion of goals. Up to now, Stuart’s implicit wisdom theory has been focused primarily on either cognitive or phenomenological domains, through contemplation and experiencing respectively, whereas the novel element of mindfulness uniquely spans both of these domains. It appears then that observation, as well as presence and savouring, work alongside, and for, experiencing and contemplation. With the combination of presence, observation and savouring, and a commitment to contemplative reflection thereafter, one can extract the most profound, valuable, and self-relevant units of meaning and life-lessons from their experiences. These insights help inform future actions, which modify future experiences. From there, the process comes full circle, beginning anew through contemplative inquiry into one’s experiences and exposures, augmented all the while through mindfulness based practices and beliefs.
For Stuart then, a critical element in the development of contemplative insight, may come from these mindfulness-based skills and attributes. It is through these insights that we can appreciate the inextricable connection between experiencing, contemplation, and mindfulness, and their combined impact upon wisdom and identity development, and through that, enlightenment and self-actualization. Given the positive effect that mindfulness practices have on well-being, it is likely that the implementation of these elements within his own life have contributed at least partly to his greater sense of SWB. It may also be that mindfulness practices, in conjunction with contemplation, have a beneficial impact on wisdom development, a process that may be attributable to mindful contemplation.

Beyond the development of insight, mindfulness-based skills and practices also support the development of self-regulation, which refers to one’s ability to direct their behaviour and control their impulses in order to meet certain standards, achieve certain goals, or reach certain ideals. Stuart’s grandfather taught both him and the rest of his family the importance of regulating their behaviour, and separating their emotions from their actions (even though Stuart’s father clearly struggled on this point). It is through this lesson that we see a convergence of experiencing, contemplation, and mindfulness. For Stuart, we see that the combination of these three elements facilitates the process of self-regulation. For instance, Stuart recognizes that mindfulness through careful observation of one’s environment, themselves, and others is critical for not just determining the correct action, but also the severity and direction of that action. Moreover, contemplation, in the form of perspective shifting, allows one to consider the various proximal and distal outcomes and consequences that could potentially result from a particular action, which will inform and direct one’s immediate actions through the process of self-
regulation, thereby shaping experiencing. Through this, then, we see that the ability to self-regulate one’s behaviour also involves a convergence of experiencing (through actions), contemplation, and mindfulness, which are the same critical elements involved in wisdom development. Self-regulation represents a critical skill imparted to Stuart through his grandfather that facilitates his optimal development and success in navigating life. This is particularly true when we consider the self-regulatory impairments that are so common to ASD. By overcoming these tendencies for behavioural and emotional dysregulation, Stuart is better able to interface with others and his environment in social acceptable ways, allowing him to engage more positively with those around him, his community, and society.

Stuart’s meditations on wisdom converge beautifully at their denouement, when Stuart expresses his explicit wisdom conceptualization, and the alignment between his implicit and explicit theories becomes apparent. At its core, Stuart’s explicit wisdom theory essentially equates wisdom development with personal growth. As he did with his implicit wisdom theory, and his identity conceptualization, Stuart incorporates the universalist element of legacy into his explicit wisdom conceptualization. This legacy is defined as the sum of one’s experiences, from which meaning or lessons are extracted, and then passed on to others. Through this passing occurs a chain reaction of wisdom development that occurs over time and across generations. It is here that we see Stuart’s universalist ideals emerge yet again, when he extends this process of growth beyond the micro level of the individual, to the macro level of humanity. While organismic evolution occurs at the biological level, societal evolution occurs at the conceptual level, with one form of change being physical, and the other, metaphysical. It is at this metaphysical level that we see a coalescing of the individual wisdom of each person, through
Stuart’s concept of legacy (where wisdom is amalgamated into the self, and passed on to the next generation), into this collective meta-wisdom that facilitates the progression of society. Stuart also includes into his explicit wisdom conceptualization the mindfulness element of savouring seen earlier in his narrative, while also injecting elements of universalism, through his connection of wisdom to all of the things that inspire one to be present and appreciate the moment. For Stuart then, it appears that wisdom has not only a guiding/growth component, but also a mindfulness component, which are both inextricably linked to his universalist ideals. This implicit wisdom theory also shows exceptional alignment with his past experiences and future ideals, as seen through his life story, and to be discussed shortly, through his discussion of goals.

From the above analysis, Stuart’s development of wisdom appears to involve two critical prerequisite ingredients: (1) the input of novel and varied experiences, being experienced either directly by the individual, or vicariously through others, and (2) the conscious manipulation of those experiences by the individual through effortful contemplation. Mindfulness represents an ancillary ingredient in this process. Elements of mindfulness synergize with experiencing and contemplation, through observation, presence in the moment, and savouring, to enhance the experiencing of a particular phenomena, to augment the insights gleaned through contemplation. These three elements of *experiencing, contemplation, and mindfulness* emerge as approaches to living derived from his wisdom nominees that appear to be critically important in the development of wisdom, and which Stuart has implemented into his own being to better facilitate the successful navigation of life.

This process helps explain the development of Stuart’s wisdom, but it does not fully explain his overall growth and self-actualization, particularly as it relates to his identity, and
ultimately his well-being. To fully understand this process we have to consider another critical ingredient that was inspired by his grandfather, and which also emerges as a central component of his identity conceptualizations, that is, the prosocial passing onto others the insights that stem from the contemplative inquiry into his experiences and the experiences of others. At its core, this commitment is founded on critical values that emerged as important externally derived lessons, which Stuart has incorporated into his conceptualization of wisdom. Through his discussion of identity, we see that these values converge at both a conceptual, and a personal level. As we will see, these values constitute a core ethos that plays a supportive role in guiding him along his journey through life, and along with experiencing, contemplation, and mindfulness, facilitate his self-actualization and enlightenment.

Stuart’s conceptualization of identity as the legacy of one’s influence on others shows exceptional alignment with his understanding of wisdom as the sum and legacy of one’s experiences. The connection between wisdom and identity is also made by Stuart explicitly when he links the two with the experiencing element of actions. An implicit connection can also be made with contemplation, in that development through actions occurs through insights gleaned from a contemplative inquiry involving perspective shifting and introspection. The legacy component of identity highlights the importance he places on the social and relational aspects of this construct. For Stuart, one’s identity can only be understood in the context of other people, and the influence they had on them. And ideally, this influence should be positive, founded on teaching, and helping others grow. In this sense then, Stuart views people as interconnected, and inextricably linked to one another through this influence, and in this way, the concept of identity as legacy ties back to universalism and the subtheme of interconnectedness. Stuart’s optimism
regarding the potential of others is also readily apparent. Stuart believes that every person has the potential to achieve this positive influence on others because everyone has something to teach. Moreover, everyone has the potential to be positively impacted by others because we are all in constant transition. Stuart’s optimism is also evident in his belief that even the most simple of gestures can have the most profound impact on someone’s life. This optimistic outlook is likely highly adaptive for Stuart, particularly as it relates to interpersonal relations and social functioning. Stuart’s optimism regarding the potential for positive influence on others, and his belief in the power of our actions on the lives of others, likely propel him towards engaging in prosocial acts, which will bring him closer to others and foster a sense of connectedness with those he interacts with, while also aligning his experienced/actual life, with his valued/ideal life. They will also incline Stuart to choose his actions or words carefully, particularly in the context of others, for he understands the power that they can have, a process that is critical for self-regulation and smooth social-relational functioning. These beliefs do not only impact the what, why and how of Stuart’s interactions with others, but they also prime Stuart to be sensitive to the potential influence that his interactions with others can have on himself. As such, Stuart is more open to the potential for being positively impacted by others, be more sensitive to aspects of the interaction that may have had an influence on him, and more readily reflect on them to gain insight. This process allows Stuart to teach others and help them grow, but also enables him to learn and grow himself through his interactions with others.

We see the incorporation of these universalist elements from his identity conceptualization into his understanding of his own personal identity. As mentioned previously, these elements also show exceptional alignment with his wisdom conceptualizations, particularly
surrounding his grandfather, as well as his past experiences as seen through his life story. It appears that Stuart views his own identity as that of a passer, a prosocial contributor, or someone who teaches others, and helps them grow. Stuart not only expresses this through his words, but provides evidence through a personal story that illustrates his prosocial approach to others. A critical element for Stuart though appears to tie back to his contemplative skills, in that he reflects on his interactions with others to better understand how he impacted them. Stuart’s contemplative skills turn seemingly ordinary interactions and events into something extraordinary, a process that is also facilitated by his belief in the potential for change and teaching, and the power of our actions. This generates within Stuart a sort of perpetual social-relational evolution, whereby he is constantly learning about himself and others, analyzing the relational dynamics of his interactions, and testing and refining his social skills. In some ways, this process is analogous to that involved in the development of wisdom (Weststrate & Glück, 2017), and Stuart is able to make this connection on his own by linking identity and wisdom through the experiencing element of action. Stuart places tremendous importance on his actions, for his actions are representative of his identity, and it is through those same actions that he gains wisdom. It appears that for Stuart, everything starts with his actions, from his identity, to his wisdom, to his social interactions and relationships. His actions have the power to influence, whilst the actions of others inform him of their true character and motivation. His belief in the power of actions then guides his own behaviour, but it also provides him with a frame through which he can better understand other people. Stuart’s contemplative skills are displayed yet again when he demonstrates metacognitive insight into the origins of this belief, which he attributes to his violent childhood. Stuart also demonstrates the ability to reflect on and apply the lessons he has learned through his own study of famous philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, from
whom he learned the importance of autonomous action and choice in his path towards self-
actualization. This harkens back to his contemplative future-oriented style of coping discussed
previously in his narrative, with its focus on growth and lesson extraction, but also adds in
another element, that of self-direction. Through self-directive coping, Stuart sought out an
external source of strength and wisdom in order to gain clarity on his own life, and in his
understanding of himself. And with the combination of these two coping styles, Stuart has
managed to develop a more robust sense of identity through the amalgamation of various inputs,
contemplative lesson-extraction on those inputs, and the mindful application of these extracted
lessons to his sense of self, and through his actions and intentions. Stuart may or may not realize
this, but at least implicitly, he has likely used these coping strategies to not only cope with
specific events or with broader issues pertaining to life, but also to cope with his disability, and
in living a life of satisfaction and quality, in spite of his disability.

From Stuart’s identity conceptualizations we see an emergence of many of the same
themes that we saw through his life story and wisdom conceptualizations. As was seen through
his wisdom conceptualizations, the primary themes of experiencing, contemplation and
mindfulness\(^6\) emerge. It appears that these three primary themes are involved in both the
development of wisdom and the development of identity. From these developmental processes,
we also see the emergence of supportive themes in the form of values, or guiding principles.
These supportive themes include the values of universalism, authenticity, and optimism\(^7\). As it

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\(^6\) Please refer to Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of emergent themes involved in wisdom and identity development.

\(^7\) Please refer to Appendix C for a more detailed discussion of emergent themes representative of wisdom-derived values.
pertains to wisdom, these themes are extracted from Stuart’s own personal experiences, and the teachings of his pivotal influences, and help inform his cultural ideal of wisdom, and the manifestation of this ideal through his own life. From his identity conceptualizations, we see their emergence yet again through his personal experiences and understanding of self and other. Stuart views wisdom and identity as inseparable, and in many ways, representative of the same concept. He makes this connection through experiencing and contemplation, in that his actions represent his identity, and his wisdom is developed through contemplative reflection of his actions and experiences, “You may call it wisdom, but for me, they are...inseparable in a lot of cases because I am what I do, I am my actions, my actions are me...but at the same time I gain my wisdom, by those same actions. So to me, ultimately...they are interchangeable in a lot of cases. Because my identity is defined by how I have acted, and how I have acted is what I have learned and gained through wisdom.” This insight from Stuart is why we see such exceptional alignment between his wisdom and identity conceptualizations in terms of both primary and supportive themes. They inform each other, and both develop from the same process. The development of both is facilitated by the primary themes of experiencing, contemplation, and mindfulness, while the personally experienced manifestation of both occurs through the supportive themes of universalism, authenticity, and optimism.

Looking at these supportive themes more closely, it is possible to conceptualize them as representative of a set of values, or guiding principles. These values may develop out of one’s actions and experiences, and the knowledge, lessons, and meaning that is bore out of them through contemplative reflection. This knowledge can also be provided directly by others, or extracted vicariously through contemplative perspective shifting. This knowledge appears to be
representative of a person’s wisdom at a conceptual and abstract level. But to be implemented at a practical level, one must transform this knowledge into a form that is useful at the personally experienced level of one’s identity. It is through this transformation of wisdom knowledge from an abstract to an applied form that we see the development of values and their implementation through Stuart’s understanding of self, which occurs through his actions, interactions, and behaviours. We also see these values emerge through his personal experiences from his past. His life story helps illuminate some of the personal experiences that may have contributed to the development of these values, but they also provide evidence that these values have been implemented through his actions and experiences across the lifespan. Moreover, these values emerge as central to his ideal future life and self, to be seen through the following evaluation of Stuart’s goals.

Stuart expresses clear goals for his personal growth, and his contribution to society. These goals are well-defined, unique, and complex. They show alignment with the theme of universalism that has emerged throughout his life story, and his wisdom and identity conceptualizations. This demonstrates that Stuart has been reflecting on and establishing these goals over the course of his life. This has led to the development of goals that show a high degree of self-concordance, that is, goals that are consistent with his past experiences, perspectives on life, the world, society and humanity, and his sense of self. In terms of conservation, although not explicitly expressed, it is likely that this goal was influenced by his pivotal childhood memories of going on camping trips and being in nature, which are discussed later in Stuart’s interview. Likewise, Stuart’s commitment to facilitating social justice likely stems from his experiences living with a diagnosis of HFA, leading to the development of a sensitivity to the unique issues
faced by people with disabilities, and a desire to improve the lives of those who face similar
struggles that he did. These goals are also congruent with many of the same universalist themes
that emerged throughout his wisdom and identity conceptualizations, and his life story. The
development of these self-concordant goals, then, has likely been facilitated by Stuart’s ability to
reflect on, extract meaning from his experiences, as well as the lives of others, and integrate that
meaning into his understanding of life, self, and other.

**Caveat.** Despite providing clear goals for these areas of his life, Stuart fails to elaborate
on how he will achieve these goals. He does not exhibit any preparation or planning related to
any of his stated goals, and therefore has no clear route to achievement. In this sense, it can be
said that Stuart has underdeveloped goals. Despite having what appears to be at least high-
average intelligence, showing excellent verbal reasoning ability, and an uncanny ability to reflect
and abstract both on himself and others, Stuart still has only attained a Grade 12 education. There
is also no evidence that Stuart has achieved any of the milestone life goals you would expect
someone who is thirty years old to have achieved. There is no discussion of friends, significant
others, long-term relationships, marriage, children, higher education, employment, or career,
which also happen to be common indicators in objective lists of well-being, and quality of life
(Frisch, 2014). For Stuart, ability is not the issue, as he is clearly capable of achieving most
everything that he sets his mind to. Stuart’s stubbornness and independence may pose more of an
issue in the achievement of his goals. Moreover, his lack of goal achievement may stem from
poor motivation, or as discussed above, may just be the result of having poor pathways thinking,
or planning skills. All together, it appears that Stuart establishes ‘big picture’ goals, rather than
more focused and practical life goals. These goals are fantastical idealisms, and with true
eloquence, Stuart is certainly adept at presenting them as such. Unfortunately though, there is not a whole lot of substance to these goals, for without any preparation, planning, or a clear route to achievement, all they really are is just that: fantasy. For Stuart to truly reach the next level of his being, he needs to start taking practical steps to turn these nobly transcendent and fanciful goals into reality, which given his implicit ability expressed through his narrative, he more than capable of achieving.

While Stuart had clearly established goals for his personal growth and contribution to society, he had no such goals for his relationships. Not only did he not have any goals in this area, but he declared that fact in such a way that made him appear arrogant or defiant. Perhaps Stuart feels that this area of his life is lacking, and/or that building and maintaining relationships is a genuine struggle for him, and as such, acts defensively when confronted with such a question. On the other hand, relationships may just legitimately be an area of less need for him. This hypothesis does not have much merit, though, given his QOLI domain-level scores of two (important-mid satisfaction, or extremely important-low satisfaction\(^8\)) on the socially- and relationally-oriented domains relatives, friends, children, neighbourhood, and community, which indicate that these areas are indeed important to him. His scores of four or six on all other QOLI sub-domains, some of which are less involved socially or relationally, such as work, play, self-esteem, learning, creativity, and health, indicates that Stuart may gain a sufficient level of satisfaction from these other areas of life that are at least as important as the former, and as such, is not as motivated to pursue relationships given their difficulty in the context of his HFA-related impairments. Finally, Stuart may feel that he has adequate levels of satisfaction in this area of his

\(^8\) Due to an error in the original administration of the QOLI mentioned earlier, both are possible interpretations of this score.
life, relative to how important it is for his well-being, and as such, does not feel the need to set any goals to improve it. Despite this, there is always the need to maintain relationships, and Stuart failed to mention any goals relating to this area of his life. Given his reflective skills and reasoning ability, it would be expected that Stuart would also see the importance of maintaining his current relationships, and would at least mention that as a goal, if nothing else. Nonetheless, it is likely that relationships are simply not an area of priority for Stuart, relative to other domains, in terms of the dividends it pays for his well-being compared to the effort he has to put in to receive those dividends, and at a cost to other areas of his life that are more of a priority and contribute more to his overall life satisfaction.

Based on his narrative, Stuart clearly feels a sense of connectedness, not just to those in his in-group (family), or those whom he can relate with (individuals with disabilities), but also to humanity, nature, and the world at large. Not only does he feel a connection to these entities, but he feels a responsibility to protect them and promote their optimal development. It may be that this sense of connectedness he feels to that which transcends himself, and those immediately around him, provides him with enough social needs-fulfillment that he does not feel he has to pursue or maintain specific relationships with others. Even if, from the outside, it appears that Stuart does not have any meaningful relationships beyond his family, it may be inconsequential given his particular set of values, priorities, and motivations. Relationally, he may get what he needs from his family, while his need for transcendent connectedness, a meta-social need, may be fulfilled by his universalist endeavours and long-term goals.

Given his high level of well-being, Stuart’s lack of explicit relationship goals, and lack of fulfillment in terms of his goals for personal growth and contribution to society, do not appear to
be negatively affecting him at the current time. As for how it will affect him in the future is unknown, but for the time being he appears to be content with the current conditions of his life and how it is unfolding, focusing his efforts on domains that he feels are truly relevant to himself. And in that sense, one could say that Stuart appears to have well-developed self-understanding, knows what he wants in life, and is non-conformist in his thinking and behaviour, marching only to the drummer of his own beat. Through that, he is able to gain the greatest sense of well-being that is achievable: one that is truly self-informed.

**Closing Comments on Stuart**

Stuart is clearly the most well-adjusted, articulate, capable, and confident individual in the HFA-Canada group. He has exceptional verbal ability, is articulate, and is very knowledgeable and well read. He has had many positive and negative experiences in his life that he has integrated into himself. He expresses many instances of wisdom in the practicalities of living a good life according to his own criteria. He has role models from his personal life, and pivotal influences whom he has only ever studied through literature. He has insight into, and concern for, issues pertaining to the common good that transcend him. He feels a connection to and responsibility towards, humanity, nature, and the environment, as well as his in-group, while also being independent and abiding to his own code of values, and following pursuits he finds interesting and rewarding. He does not seem to show much worry about what others think of him, or what external forces think he should be doing with his life. This comfort in his own skin likely contributes a great deal to his optimal adjustment, and ability to thrive. Through contemplative introspection and perspective shifting, he has gained insight into his own and others behaviour, and the lessons of life, while also having the confidence to follow only that
which he truly believes in, and pursue whatever it is in life that makes him feel satisfied and happy. He does not appear to let something indiscriminately influence him without putting considerable thought into it first, and then deciding if, and how, it pertains to him. We do not know what he does for work or school, but it appears that he has some form of support, either from his own independence, or through the help of others, such as his family. Stuart’s intelligence and verbal ability have undoubtedly helped him to become as functional as his narrative prevents, despite his disability. Other important contributors to his thriving likely stem from the presence of influential figures, exemplary role models, and pivotal experiences, along his capacity for contemplation that is necessary to extract life lessons and functional skills through these sources, which he can then integrate into himself for later use. Stuart’s combination of critical thinking, contemplation, and openness to experience give him an ideal opportunity for successful living that goes beyond his innate traits, skills, and needs as an individual with HFA.

Contrast Cases

Shifting now to the opposite end of the wisdom and well-being spectrum, we will consider two individuals who present with a combination of low wisdom and low well-being.

Contrast Case #1: Eric

Demographic Information

Eric is a 23-year-old male with HFA. He lives in the metropolitan area of a major urban centre in Canada, and describes his ethnicity as Canadian. His highest level of education
attainment is Secondary School, Grade 12. He has never been married and has no children. He identifies as a Christian, with a degree of religiousness of 7 (out of 10).

Quantitative Profile

Eric’s wisdom scores from the 3D-WS were 2.86 for the cognitive dimension, 2.46 for the affective dimension, and 2.33 for the reflective dimension, bringing his total wisdom score to 2.55. His self-transcendence score from the ASTI was 3.43. In terms of his values priorities from the PVQ, he attains a score of 5.5 for Conformity and Benevolence, a 5 on Security and Universalism, a 4.5 on Tradition and Self-direction, a 3.5 on Power and Achievement, a 3 on Stimulation, and a 2.5 on Hedonism. In terms of his values super-groupings, he places the strongest priority on values related to Conservation (Conformity, Security, Tradition; 5.25) and Self-transcendence (Benevolence, Universalism; 5.25), followed by Self-enhancement (Hedonism, Power, Achievement; 3.5) and Openness to Change (Stimulation, Self-direction, Hedonism; 3.3). Taken together, Eric places much greater motivational emphasis on social values (5.1) rather than personal values (3.4). In terms of well-being, Eric attains a life satisfaction score of 4.6 from the SWLS, and achieves scores of 2.67 in Purpose in Life, and 3.5 in Alienation. His overall quality of life t-score from the QOLI was 46, with domain scores of 6 for Work, Helping and Relatives (extremely important-high satisfaction), 4 for Self-esteem (extremely important-mid satisfaction), 3 for Love (important-high satisfaction), 2 for Friends, Community, Home, and Learning (either (a) important-mid satisfaction, or (b) extremely important-low satisfaction\(^9\)), 1

\(^9\) Due to an error in the original administration of the QOLI mentioned earlier, both are possible interpretations of this score.
for Goals/Values and Neighbourhood (important-low satisfaction), and 0 for Creativity, Play, Money, Children, Health (not important).

**Narrative-Gestalt**

**Life Story.** A number of issues arise from Eric’s discussion of his life story. The discussion that follows is Eric’s strongest display of **introspection**, although a number of distortions, biases, and projections in his thinking are also present. He mentions he was not treated very well by others, including his parents and school teachers, “I have been... for the most part, not treated properly even by my parents... and even by school teachers and other people... all the trauma as I like to call [it].” This is another critical emergence of **experiencing**, in the form of trauma. He engages in **perspective shifting** when he reflects on the thoughts and feelings his parents had for him, “…she actually never loved [me]... my mom doesn’t love me... never loved me... she and my dad... never gave anything... or even cared about what I was thinking.” In another emergence of **experiencing**, as well as a display of **insight**, Eric links this trauma with negative circumstances that emerged later in his life, “It leads to [a]... criminal record... that I end up having as a teenager... and [have] to grow up with.” Eric credits this trauma with the loss of his spirituality, “Then I... lose my spirituality... I end up getting separated from the church.” He closes this section of the narrative with a more positive expression of **experiencing**, demonstrating that he can engage in negative to positive **perspective shifting**, from which we also see an emergence of **insight**, crediting the rekindling of his spirituality, and ultimately his personal growth, to his discovery and joining of a new, “[I] come back to church, but this time I go into... a different kind of church... I stayed in that church for like twelve years... and I’ve become a peaceful person.” In another display of **insight**, Eric credits this as the most
pivotal experience in making him who he is today, “this church has taught me a whole bunch of things [about] what God is doing to me.” Despite this, he does not elaborate on the content of these lessons, other than to attribute a recent occurrence of good fortune to his faith and the presence of God in his life, “for instance, this past week I get rid of a debt with a phone company for stuff I paid like two hundred dollars.” Eric alludes to a pattern of negative experiencing through the following, “I’ve been dealing with enough problems already [laughs], it’s true.” In a display of positive to negative perspective shifting, negative experiencing emerges again when Eric cites the behavioural issues that emerged when he reached adolescence, “I wasn’t a very violent person, but problems begin at fifteen...it really changed my life...my personality...in high school I had over...four hundred suspensions in a single year...this is from punching and kicking and all that kind of stuff...you get the idea...if [you] so much as touch me...you’ll end up like...yeah, at that moment.” It appears that Eric is trying to articulate that he did not use to be a violent person before these issues started to occur, which he attributes to the maltreatment he experienced growing up. From these negative experiences during high school, Eric engages in negative to positive perspective shifting, which leads to insight into the positive, transformative experience of coping through external support services, “…further down the road, I get [to] [HFA community support service provider]...and this...well, not the social group, but the support worker...I end up, they helped me change around, becoming as a...yeah...even nicer [and] such...and phew...and no more...being such as it was before, no violent behaviour, no punching and all that...and going to church, exactly! So when you put it all together...[Interviewer: You are a different person?]...Yeah.”
Wisdom. When asked about the wisest person in his life, Eric is unable to make a nomination, “Umm…the wisest person in my life right now…I can’t think of anyone.” When asked about a time when he himself was wise he challenges the interviewer as to whether it is true that any of us can be considered wise, as it is often a matter of perspective based on who is making the judgment, “…there’s no actual wise person as we can say like…I can guarantee you that…like what determines [that]? [People] end up like saying that Hitler was wise…and the Americans said that Hitler was a traitor. So it becomes…I think…a matter of perspective.” Because this is a unique and unexpected way of understanding wisdom, it represents an emergence of perspective shifting, even if he does not articulate it in a sophisticated manner, or capture its potential profundity through sufficient elaboration. In a similar vein, Eric nominates the 35th President of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy, as being the wisest in history, but can’t explain why, other than that he was the president “I think it probably would be JFK…I know he was an American President…[but] I can’t even explain it. I just can’t explain it…him ruling America? I have no idea.” In the final emergence of experiencing, Eric mentions the story recounted previously when he helped the man with Down syndrome as evidence of his personal wisdom, “when I was wise at…I could say that…umm, I helped a person with Down syndrome, in particular what I was saying earlier.” In a display of insight, Eric explains that this represents a moment of wisdom because it is an act that goes against people’s natural tendency for selfishness, “…this isn’t exactly natural…most people like to think of themselves, instead of helping some person, they only think about them…it’s not normal for…somebody to actually help somebody in any way.” The above quote is an excellent example of where, and how, Eric’s perspective shifting potentially goes awry. That he articulated this belief with such outright conviction may be representative of the fact that he has been unable to reach closure from his
negative relational and interpersonal experiences as a youth. If this is indeed the case, then he is either projecting the negative feelings he has towards his significant others back out into the world, or his perception of these experiences was so damaging that they engrained traumatic memories into his schemata, which then generalized into these highly distorted, widespread judgments. We certainly see no indication from Eric throughout his narrative that would suggest he would consider even engaging in an inquiry into the origins of such a set of beliefs. Finally, Eric defines wisdom as having knowledge and using it to make the right decision, “Wisdom... from my mind...means not just to have the knowledge, but to make the right decision...wisdom is to actually do the right decisions.”

Identity. Eric indicates that he is not concerned about a person’s name, their outward appearance, or other surface-level attributes when it comes to defining their identity “Identity, as far [as] I am concerned...I don’t care about anyone’s name...that doesn’t mean anything to me... the outside means nothing, your face, and your hands, and your skin, and all that kind of stuff.” He also expresses his belief that roles are not very indicative of identity, “I don’t even care about what...[a] person’s job is, he can go from one job and transfer to [the] next. So that really doesn’t show much.” Eric expresses, albeit vaguely and without elaboration, that an individual’s personality is more important in determining their identity, “it’s your personality and...all the other stuff.” In another display of introspection, although only at a very rudimentary level, Eric integrates this conceptualization of identity as personality into his understanding of his own identity, where he defines himself through various surface-level one-word descriptive attributes, “I am giving, and I like helping, and I am polite and nice.” In another display of introspection, Eric shows evidence of his self-professed identity attributes through the telling of a story where
he paid for a man’s groceries, which is also representative of another emergence of experiencing, “…just to give…an example…I helped a guy with Down syndrome…he’s like in his 40’s…I helped him get his groceries…I paid for it with my card. Now there is practically nothing on the card.” This story lacks depth and does not garner any major insights. Moreover, the fact that he recycles this story, in spite of the original lack of depth expressed, potentially speaks to the difficulty he has with introspection specifically, and contemplation in general, that results either from a lack of ability, or a lack of effort. Eric also describes himself as hospitable, but does not provide any evidence to back up his claim, “being hospitable…isn’t different from helping but…if I invite you into my house…just to allow somebody to come to your house, your own personal space…its pretty amazing, especially if its complete strangers.” Clearly, he has used religion and Jesus as a guide for how he should live his own life and a model for how he should act, and we see this with the integration of Christian values into his identity. He appears to engage in acts that are congruent with these values, but he only mentions one story and does not go into much depth in regards to what he learned, how he felt, how it impacted him, how it informed his own being, the implications of the act on the other person, and how they changed from it.

**Goals.** Eric’s discussion of goals represents a display of introspection, albeit at a very basic level, and with a glaring lack of content. Eric lacks concrete goals for his personal growth, relationships, and society. Eric mentioned that he wants to do a B.A. in math, demonstrating introspection into his strengths, “*I think I’d B.A. in math…yeah I’d like that…I already have that skill…I know more of it than even the teachers…I already am a mathematician, I just need the paperwork.*” Despite this, he does not appear to have made much of an effort to learn about the
details of what is involved in a B.A. in Math, the process of attaining it, what it would lead to, and so on, “How much is a B.A. of math anyway?” For Eric, this seems to be more of a fleeting idea rather than a serious goal with a well-thought out plan. He does mention he wants a job, but that he does not know in what field yet, “I do want a job, a nice job…I haven’t really decided the field yet.” In another display of introspection, Eric mentions that he has experience working with children, and has the ability to work with others because he has played sports for over twenty years, “I got experience with children too…and then I’ve got the ability to…work with other people because…I’ve actually done…one particular job for like 20 years…in sports.” This shows the emergence of the primary theme of experiencing, although it really represents a quasi-emergence since it only touches on the concept in the one-dimensional literal sense. For his relationship goals, he says he has none, and that he does not ask for anything; the only thing he expects is that the other person is as nice and giving to him as he was to them, “So far as that goes...there’s no real goals or such. I don’t even ask for anything really...all I really want...from someone else...is just...for the person to be nice and giving, just as much as I did for such person.” This statement has a certain level of wisdom in it and shows some social awareness and understanding, and an ability to shift perspective. Despite this, he does not seem to have a high social drive or be particularly motivated socially. Eric indicated that he does not yet have any goals for his contribution to society, “that I don’t really have yet...that I can guarantee you.” It appears that he is trying to figure out his own life first before focusing on contributing to society. This may be a matter of priorities for different individuals. Eric seems to be very easy going, low maintenance, laid back, is comfortable with himself and content with his life, but objectively speaking may not live a particularly enriching life, as reflected in his low scores on quantitative measures of life satisfaction, purpose in life, and quality of life.
**Closing Comments on Eric’s Narrative-Gestalt.** Taken together, Eric appears to be a happy individual, who is laid back, content with his current situation, and does not expect a great deal from others. He appears to be inattentive and disorganized and has difficulty expressing his thoughts, articulating himself, and going with the flow of conversation. He has had difficult social and relational experiences throughout his life, with a lack of love, caring and attention from his parents, and in general people just treating him poorly. Because of the theory of mind impairments inherent to ASD it is difficult to say whether this assessment of others from Eric is accurate, or simply an expression of his inability to read their connection to him. He was a bit delinquent in high school and got into legal trouble, but turned his life around with the help of a support worker at a community support services provider for individuals with HFA, his Christian faith, and his involvement in a new church. This shows the importance of formal institutions that provide support for individuals with HFA, as well as non-formal education, social, and community engagement opportunities. Now he works, goes to church regularly, and lives his life according to his faith, and the principles taught to him through Jesus, and it is this that guides his interaction with others and society. Objectively, it would appear that he does not live a particularly enriched life in terms of his achievement, relationships, and contribution to society. But he does have his faith, and in the absence of all else, this faith may be powerful enough to cover up that which is lacking. It appears that Eric lives a simple life, and does not have a lot of social or community engagement beyond the church. The extent to which this lack of relationships and social interaction affects him is not fully known, but based on his QOLI scores, it appears that Community (2), Friends (2), and Neighbourhood (1) are all important areas of his life that could improve. His QOLI scores did, however, indicate high satisfaction in the areas of Love (3) and Relatives (6), despite any mention of intimacy or a significant other in his life, and
in spite of the self-reported maltreatment he experienced from his parents (and others) as a youth. Eric may have non-parental, familial sources of support, or other sources of intimacy that he did not mention in his narrative, which provide adequate levels of social capital and social/relational needs fulfilment. Moreover, he indicated high domain-level satisfaction in the area of Work (6), which may also provide additional social and relational opportunities that offset his lack of satisfaction or needs fulfilment in other related areas. Despite his self-reported skills and abilities, Eric does not appear to be utilizing them effectively, or orienting his life and structuring his goals in a way that would allow for their exploitation. Eric may need additional sources of social capital in his life, ideally in the form of a positive role model or community advocate, as well as increased access to formalized remediation and support programs in order to help him achieve some of his academic and vocational goals, and guide him towards activities that would add richness to his life, and open further opportunities. Remediation of his inattention, executive functioning deficits, expressive language difficulties, and poor social skills may also be of benefit in increasing his functioning across various domains of life, particularly his social functioning, and communication. Eric is clearly a capable individual, but likely needs additional supports to realize his true potential. The section below will compare Eric’s display of the primary themes of experiencing and contemplation, with that of Stuart. Following that will be a discussion of Eric’s values, in terms of his value priorities based on the PVQ assessment, and how his narrative aligns with this self-reported measure of values.

Primary Theme Comparison with Stuart

Experiencing. From Eric’s narrative, we see that there is certainly no shortage of experiences from which he can derive insight through contemplation, and integrate into his
internal schemata as it pertains to wisdom and identity at a conceptual level, and expressed personally through his past experiences, current being, and ideal future life and self. Despite the mere presence of experiences, differences between Stuart and Eric do exist, which highlight some of the more nuanced expressions of this element, and their potential impact in facilitating wisdom and identity development.

The first difference we see pertains to the motivating-trait aspect of our conception of experiencing, which relates to the structural account of the ‘Big Five’ openness to experience trait (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Stuart demonstrates a commitment to seeking out and learning from experiences in a way that is not seen by Eric. We see this expressed personally by Stuart during his life story when he mentions that most of his memories come from just being out in the world. We also see this through Stuart’s discussion of identity when he contends that abstract constructs related to the self, such as cardinal virtues, character strengths, and other approaches to living, require real world application through first-hand experiencing in order to be fully realized and understood. A commitment to experiencing also emerges within the first lesson that Stuart extracts from his grandfather’s life, which regarded his commitment to reflecting on new experiences in order to extract knowledge and meaning from them. From this, Stuart learned the importance of having varied life experiences, and the relationship they have to the development of wisdom. We also see this commitment emerge in the second lesson extracted from his grandfather’s life, that is, the importance of learning from your mistakes. In contrast, we see no such evidence from Eric’s narrative, and no expressions from him, either implicitly or explicitly, that indicate he is even aware of the existence of this facet of wisdom development, let alone
appreciate its importance in this process, and through that, orient himself towards engaging in such a commitment.

The second difference between Eric and Stuart on the theme of experiencing pertains to the belief they have in its power and potential. Stuart demonstrates a firm belief in the potential of experiencing to produce growth and change. This is demonstrated most clearly through his life story, and in his conceptualization of identity. More specifically, Stuart alludes to the power and potential of our actions and the impact they have on us, and others. Action represent the personally-oriented, mechanical, and intentional aspect of experiencing, but nonetheless, is considered one part of the larger construct in terms of how it is conceptualized in this study, with the others being the contextual-phenomenological aspect, and the motivational-trait aspect. In contrast, Eric fails to even acknowledge this belief, let alone appreciate its significance, or express it within his own life. Eric did make the connection between his negative interpersonal and caregiver experiences, and the impact they had on his behaviour as a teenager, eventual criminal record, and later loss of spirituality. We also saw Eric mention the impact that a particular support worker had in his life and helping in his rehabilitation. So we see that there are opportunities for Eric to elaborate and express insight that explicitly demonstrates his realization and belief in the power and potential of our experiences and actions but, ultimately, he fails to do so, which likely has to do with his very weak contemplation skills that prevent him from gaining growth-factor insights.

**Contemplation.** The comparison analysis between Eric and Stuart on the primary theme of contemplation will break down contemplation into the various subthemes that we saw
emerged through Stuart’s narrative: perspective shifting, introspection, insight and abstraction\textsuperscript{10}.

**Perspective Shifting.** While the above analysis does demonstrate instances of basic perspective shifting, albeit in the loosest sense of the term, the perspectives that Eric does engage in are often odd, distorted, biased, or just plain false. Most of his perspective shifting is simply an ability to consider and reflect on the full range of experiential valence, which at its most basic level involves experiences that are either positive or negative. Although he does show two instances of negative to positive perspective shifting, it should be noted that most of his reflections still do focus on negative experiences. It is difficult to know whether this is due to a genuine lack of positive experiences, and genuine preponderance of negative ones, or if it is due to a distorted tendency to selectively focus on the negative. In contrast, Stuart’s perspective shifting abilities are superb. He shows the ability to immerse himself with vivid imagination into the lives, experiences, cognitions, emotions, and behaviours of his significant others, as well as those whom he has never known personally. He also shows the ability to consider multiple perspectives at the same time, and switch between competing perspectives. There is also a selflessness and honesty to his perspective shifting in that he can put his ego aside to consider how he himself contributed to a particular problem rather than placing blame on others.

**Introspection.** While Eric may demonstrate the ability to engage in introspection, he does so only at a very basic surface-level, from which he gains only a superficial understanding of himself and his past. In contrast, Stuart is able to engage in very deep introspection, which

\textsuperscript{10} Abstraction will be analyzed in a slightly different way, with the inclusion of unedited, long-form quotes to better highlight the cognitive process behind his conceptualizations.
allows him to gain exceptional insight into his own life and experiences, his sense of self, his relations with others, his thoughts, feelings, motivations, actions, behaviours, and tendencies, and his process of growth, actualization, and enlightenment. From these introspective insights, Stuart is able to relate his experiences to what came before, in order to understand how he has grown over time, and the processes behind that growth. He is also able to use this introspective understanding he has into himself to see parallels between his own life and self, and that of those around him, which allows him to uncover, analyze and integrate into himself the most relevant insights from others.

**Insight.** As we saw before, there is no shortage of experiences from which Eric can generate profound insights, particularly negative experiences, which often show the greatest potential for learning and growth. But instead we see very little generation of insight from these experiences. He links these experiences and outcomes in a simplistic, linear-sequential manner, creating a sort of descriptive time line of the ‘what’ of these events and their eventual outcomes, thereby implicitly connecting them with a superficial ‘why’. But he does not delve into the ‘how’, or the process behind this connection, and all that occurred in the moments between, which is where the real change occurs, and from that, the profound insight. He is able to see what he was, what he became, and what he is currently, but most of the details surrounding the ‘why’, and the entirety of those pertaining to the ‘how’, are completely missed. It is clear that Eric lacks the spontaneous contemplative skills that allow for the depth of insight that someone like Stuart demonstrates. But nonetheless, we do see evidence that Eric’s contemplative skills exist within a Vygotskian zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), since he can engage in contemplation when prompted and supported. This is congruent with his weak perspective
shifting and introspection, and as we will see, his poor abstraction skills. Given that insight stands at the pinnacle of the four contemplative skills discussed in this study, it is no surprise that we see his difficulties in this area. Without adequate functioning in the lower-order contemplative skills, the penultimate generation of higher-order insight is next to impossible.

And with these weak contemplative skills, it is no surprise that Eric demonstrates such low levels of wisdom as indexed by his scores across each of the three domains of Ardelt’s 3D-WS.

**Abstraction.** From Eric’s narrative we see the display of very weak abstraction skills, which lead to a very surface-level understanding of things. Eric is just not able to grasp these abstract concepts with the same level of complexity, and thoroughness of understanding as Stuart. Eric’s difficulties with abstraction are best captured within the context of his full un-edited articulations, which allow you to see the process behind his thinking. The first display of abstraction comes from his discussion of identity, where we see lack of sophisticated thinking, poor reasoning, a tendency to focus on surface-level details, and a propensity to lose track of his thoughts, become tangential, and veer off onto odd diatribes:

**Eric:** Identity? I-I-Identity as far I'm concerned, ok? I don't- I don't care about anyone's name. tha-tha-that doesn't mean anything to me anyway, ok? I understand the importance, that names are important but that doesn't mean identity to me.

**Interviewer:** So what does it mean to you?

**Eric:** Uh-uh-uh ok its a....what I think personally ok? Now- uh, I know this sounds like...very much like I'm repeating myself like a broken record, but one's ... let's see...The outside means nothing: Your face and your hand and your skin and all that kind of stuff...doesn't really...I was gonna say that identity doesn't necessarily mean, like I was saying your face and your skin and as all that. Al-al-all [stutters] it really means is, so far as I see it is, it's your personality and your...all the other stuff. And if you're...that's pretty much what I think, anyway. Oka-oka- you know-...

**Interviewer:** Ok then, what is your identity? I'll ask you, wha-who you are?

**Eric:** Oka-oka-you know and I don't even care about what kind person's job is, he can go from one job and transfer to next. So that really doesn't show much, really, when you think about it. ... And just to show how much, how much the skills from one job can transfer to next if you remember Jesus being a carpenter, you gotta work with people's tools and all kinds of things like...
that then ok? You- ok? Ok, eventually he goes, he goes and talks to-talks to-to non-believers and some other people and so forth you know...words are tools to do it...like ok...for instance...the...when we talk about Jesus like I was saying and it becomes like so. Right? So it works that way but then but then he had no real money to do it at that moment. And yeah...

Interviewer: Ok

Eric: I was going to make my point for the last question, ok? [laughs] Then I got...ok? Now for this one well...its a...wait...how did you, woah how did you know that? [laughs] But I, bu-bu-bu-bu-bu-but I am, bu-bu-but I am giving and I like helping and I am polite and nice and...

Finally, we see Eric’s poor abstraction skills through his definition of wisdom that centres on a combination of knowledge and decision making, “Yo-yo-you know what, I think I have good answer for this. Wisdom from my, from my perspec-, from my perspec-, from my mind, ok? It’s simply to...ok, wisdom means not just to have the knowledge but to make the right decision, ok? Ok? It goes...ok? It goes, wisdom is to actually do the right decisions or such second step...It’s like a...it’s like...you know what I...”

We can see from the above that Eric’s conceptualizations of wisdom and identity highlight his weak abstraction skills. He has difficulty expressing his thoughts, which is evidenced by his frequent pauses, stutters, use of filler words, and engagement in out-loud thinking. He also demonstrates a tendency to repeat himself, loses his train of thought mid-sentence, and can go off on odd diatribes, and seemingly unrelated tangents. This leads to an abstraction that is disjointed, lacks clarity, and sometimes even borders on bizarre or incoherent. It also takes him a long time to get to his ultimate point, but with a marked lack of substantive content in between, and lack of insight at its culmination. His finished abstraction ends up being very rudimentary, only scratching the conceptual surface of a particular idea.

11 Please refer to Appendix D for an additional example of Eric’s poor abstract reasoning
All of this lies in stark contrast to the grace and eloquence with which Stuart is able to construct his abstractions, and the vivid clarity of conception that is produced. His final meditation on wisdom captures the beauty of his abstractive inquiry,

**Interviewer:** So... my last question is what is wisdom and then what does wisdom mean to you?

**Stuart:** Wisdom to me is simply the sum and legacy of experiences passed on from one generation to the next. To me it means the growth of a society and a culture based on past mistakes, past tragedies, past victories, some of the greatest sorrows, some of the greatest victories, some are sorrow, some are pain, all these things can lead to wisdom, and sometimes it takes two, three generations to figure out what you've learned from it. Ultimately, I believe wisdom... is all the experiences passed forth so that we do not repeat the tragedies of the past, such as, for example racism... can it be allowed? No. Why? Because it carries oppression. Can oppression be allowed? No, because it creates resentment, and ultimately creates, and destruction. You cannot... gain wisdom without living life, at the same time you cannot live life without gaining wisdom; so, to me, wisdom is simply experience and knowledge that's passed on from... through history and not necessarily pertained to your family or your own experiences. Sometimes you can read a book and gain nothing but a small... tidbit that will stick out in your mind for the next three four years and suddenly you'll find that piece that transferred is now useful; suddenly wisdom takes you to the next block in the puzzle, that is your life. So ultimately, to me, wisdom is the companion that guides us to the dark moments, the joys, it is all things that remind you to appreciate today because tomorrow could be your worst. It is... both your greatest friend, your greatest friend, but at the same time your greatest capability, because in wisdom you cannot, cannot plead to be ignorant. You cannot plead to be... unenlightened, for wisdom follows us through life and we all possess it; it's a treasure that we all have but can never be measured. It is... beyo... it is more valuable than gold and yet you cannot even hold it in your hand.

**Alignment Analysis**

When we look at the results from Eric’s PVQ assessment, we see that his top four values are Conformity, Benevolence, Security, and Universalism. He attained a score of 5.50 for both Conformity and Benevolence, and 5.00 for Security and Universalism.

Conformity indicates a defining goal of restraining one’s actions, inclinations, and impulses that are likely to upset or harm others, and violate social expectations or norms (Schwartz, 1994). Conformity values emphasize self-restraint in daily interactions, typically with close others (Schwartz, 1994).
Benevolence involves the defining goal of preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the in-group; typically, family or other primary groups; Schwartz, 1994). Benevolence values emphasize voluntary concern for others’ welfare. Indeed, both of these values promote cooperative and supportive social relations and both values may motivate the same helpful act, either separately or together (Schwartz, 1994). The difference between them lies in the motivational base for their defining actions and behaviours. The motivational base for benevolence behaviours is personal and internal, whereas the motivational base for conformity behaviours is social/relational and external.

Security indicates the defining goal of safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self (Schwartz, 1994). Security values can serve primarily individual interests, or wider group interests, but even for the latter, they typically involve the goal of security for self, or those with whom one identifies (Schwartz, 1994).

Finally, universalism, also seen in Stuart’s narrative, relates to the defining goal of understanding, appreciating, tolerating and protecting the welfare of all people and nature (Schwartz, 1994). This differs from the in-group focus of benevolence values. Universalism combines two subtypes of concern, the welfare of those in the larger society/the world, and for nature (Schwartz, 1994). At a basic level, these ten values form a continuum of related motivations, which gives rise to a circular structure of values, where adjacent values share similar motivational emphases (Schwartz, 1994). We would expect then, that the combination of benevolence and conformity would lead to normative behaviours that promote close relationships (Schwartz, 1994). The combination of conformity and security should lead to the protection of order and harmony in relationships (Schwartz, 1994). And finally, the combination
of benevolence and universalism should lead to behaviours that enhance others and which transcend selfish interests (Schwartz, 1994).

If these are the motivations and principles that Eric values most, then we would expect to see elements of these values emerge through his narrative. Given what we know about the motivating and orienting influence that values have on our behaviour, we would expect to see alignment between his values, his actions/experiences (i.e. life story), and his ideal future life and self (i.e. goals).

However, when we look at Eric’s narrative, we see several instances indicating a misalignment between his values, and his experienced life. With the combination of universalism and benevolence, we would expect Eric to place heavy importance on enhancing the lives of others through contribution, either at the level of society, or on an individual basis, and as such, to engage in actions and generate circumstances that would allow for the fulfillment of such defining goals. Instead, we see from Eric a lack of concrete goals for his relationships, and his contribution for society, and in terms of personal growth, we see no indication that Eric is pursuing anything in life that will lead him to a position in which he could help others develop. We only see a single instance of him enhancing others and transcending selfish interests, which comes when he helps a man with Down syndrome by paying for his groceries. But given that Eric does not elaborate further, or reflect on the deeper aspects of this event, we can surmise that he is unable to extract meaning from this event, from which he could integrate into his sense of self and understanding of the world. Without this reflection, one is unable to see how his actions align with his values, resulting in a loss of the satisfaction gained through value fulfillment.
In terms of benevolence and conformity, we would expect Eric to engage in normative behaviours that promote close relationships. Moreover, given his high value ratings for conformity and security, we would expect him to focus on protecting the order and harmony in relationships. Eric does mention certain virtues as part of his personal identity that may facilitate acts that are congruent with security, conformity, benevolence and universalism, and that would promote close relationships, and protect the order and harmony in those relationships, such as character traits of generosity, helping, and politeness. But he does not expand on this point at all by delving into what these things mean to him, where they come from, how they affect others, or how they emerge in his life, other than recounting a single isolated incident in which he helped someone. He also does not indicate any relationships in which he could apply these attributes, nor any plan for improving that reality. Moreover, we cannot say with certainty how normative Eric’s social and relational behaviour is, and how often he engages in interactions. We can, however, make some assumptions about the fulfillment of these benevolence-conformity values, and conformity-security values, based on his success in promoting and maintaining close relationships. Throughout Eric’s entire narrative, there is not one piece of evidence that indicates he has any close relationships. Evidence for this comes from his lack of goals for friends or family, and his inability to think of any wise person present in his life. To the contrary, we actually see in his life story the presence of negative, damaging relationships, and even outright rejection from significant others, including parents, teachers, and peers. Regardless of whether he is correct in this assessment and, if correct, is at fault for this reality, or if it is even under his control, these experiences are in direct opposition to the fulfillment of his benevolence-conformity values and conformity-security values. In contrast to what we saw from Stuart, we see no evidence of his values emerging through any of his wisdom conceptualizations, less the
story of helping he reiterated from his life story. It could be interpreted that his definition of wisdom as having the knowledge and using it to make the right decision could be connoting the word “right” in the virtuous sense of the term, placing a socially conscious, or relationally responsible spin to the definition, which would technically be in alliance with universalism and benevolence. But, unfortunately, we will never know for sure because Eric fails to go deeper or elaborate on what he means. He appears to be content with expressing a vague message, or is unable to reflect on the more nuanced aspects of his abstractions, which may implicate a lack of contemplation as the more significant issue for Eric.

Taken together, the above analysis indicates a misalignment between Eric’s values and his experienced life, as seen through his goals and life story. While on the surface there is some evidence that he has used the knowledge he has about his values to inform the development of his identity, mentioning certain characteristics that are representative or facilitative of those values. But when it comes to those values actually playing out in his life, through his actions, experiences, and circumstances, we see no evidence to suggest that those values are being fulfilled. We also see some evidence for the presence of factors that are in opposition to the fulfillment of those values.

Closing Comments on Eric

We see the manifestation of Eric’s weak reflective wisdom skills, as per the 3D-WS, emerge throughout Eric’s narrative. His skills in perspective shifting, introspection, and abstraction, were all severely compromised, leading either to a complete lack of insight, or the generation of only very surface-level insights. In contrast, Stuart showed superb abilities in all
contemplative areas. He demonstrated the generation of complex insights through meaning-making and lesson extraction that showed elaborative depth, multi-layered complexity, narrative consistency, and temporal evolution, which he integrated into his identity, and applied within his life through his actions and motivations.

If we follow our integrated theory of wisdom, identity, and well-being, which considers values alignment as critical to the link between wisdom and well-being, and views the reflective component of wisdom, through contemplation, as necessary for alignment between one’s notion of the ideal/valued life, and their actual/experienced life, then we can see why Eric is so far unable to achieve a high level of life satisfaction. In our values analysis of Eric, we see initial confirmation of this integrated theory, given that an obvious misalignment is seen between Eric’s values priorities, the expression of those values through his actions, behaviours, life circumstances, and pursuit of goals, and ultimately, the lack of values fulfillment that results from this misalignment between his valued-ideal life and his experienced-actual life. Further evidence for this theory can be gleaned through an analysis of additional cases that also score low wisdom and low well-being, which we will see next with a discussion of Kevin.

**Contrast Case #2: Kevin**

**Demographic Information**

Kevin is a 27-year-old male with HFA. He lives in the metropolitan area of a major urban centre in Canada, and indicates his ethnicity as being German-Canadian. His highest level of education attainment is Secondary School, Grade 12. He has never been married and has no children. He identifies as Catholic, with a degree of religiousness of 8 (out of 10).
**Quantitative Profile**

Kevin’s wisdom scores from the 3D-WS were 3.07 for the cognitive dimension, 2.75 for the reflective dimension, and 2.15 for the affective dimension, bringing his total wisdom score to 2.66. His self-transcendence score from the ASTI was a 4. In terms of value priorities based on the PVQ, Kevin attained a 6 on Security and Conformity, a 5.5 on Benevolence, a 5 on Universalism and Self-direction, a 4.5 on Tradition, a 4 on Power, and 3 on Achievement, Hedonism, and Stimulation. In terms of his values super-groupings, we see Kevin placing the greatest motivational priority on Conservation-related values (Security, Conformity, Tradition; 6), followed closely by Transcendence-related values (Benevolence, Universalism; 5.25), and followed still by Openness to Change (Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism), and Self-Enhancement-related (Power, Achievement, Hedonism) values. Taken together, Kevin’s socially-oriented values (5.4) tend to dominate his motivational emphases relative to his personally oriented values (3.6).

In terms of well-being, his life satisfaction from the SWLS as a 5.00, his Purpose in Life score was a 4.33, while his Alienation score was 3.5. In terms of quality of life, his overall QOLI t-score was 42, with domain scores of 2 (either (a) important-mid satisfaction, or (b) extremely important-low satisfaction) for Health, Self-esteem, Goals/values, Learning, Work, Helping, and Community, and 1 (important-low satisfaction) for Neighbourhood, Home, Relatives, Love, Children, Friends, Creativity, Play, and Money.

**Narrative-Gestalt**

12 Due to an error in the original administration of the QOLI mentioned earlier, both are possible interpretations of this score.
Life Story. When we look at Kevin’s life history, we see that his introspections are rife with contradictions, and his perspective shifts riddled with distortions. Kevin begins with an introspection that turns into an odd perspective shift, which includes the expression of negative to positive experiencing. He begins by describing himself in positive terms, and that people see him as a nice person, but then abruptly pivots to a competing revelation regarding his behavioural difficulties at school, “when people see me...they see me like a nice person...something like my history was that...I got thrown out of school a few times.” He delves in further to this introspection, which allows the listener to appreciate the seriousness of these negative experiences “I was like...sixteen when I touched a girl’s breasts [laughter]...said that I want to slit that girl’s throat with a knife...I didn’t.” Kevin’s laughter during his telling of this story is concerning, and may indicate a lack of remorse, empathy, or insight into the seriousness of the situation, and how it impacted both the victim, and himself. Clearly, this is evidence that he lacks the ability to shift his perspective, and generate benevolent or universalist insights.

Through introspection, Kevin demonstrates the conflict he experiences between his intentions and his actions, “...but then see, I want to say something nice to the girl, but then bad things come out...like every time I see a girl I say ‘Hi, how are you?’...and then I’ll say ‘Shut up...I will beat you, I’ll stab you, I will kill you.’ But, but I don’t mean to say that...it just needs like...control.” In another display of introspection, and a negative to positive perspective shift, the depth of his inner conflict comes alive yet again, when Kevin sees the incongruence between these behaviours and his goal of wanting to be a police officer, “but...I want people to see that I’m a good person...because if people see that then they are going [to], then they are going [to] tell the police and they are going [to] say ‘Ok, this person is a nice person, he likes people, he
cares about people, he treats people nice. ’I want them to say that.’” The naïve simplicity with which he views the situation, and the lack of sophistication he shows in connecting it to his goals, is apparent in the above quote. He seems to think that his becoming a police officer is dependent only on whether others see him as a nice person, and that by engaging in prosocial behaviour, others will speak to that and everything will fall into place and he will achieve his goal. While certainly being a good Samaritan with a prosocial track record is necessary for being a police officer, it is hardly sufficient, a point that is lost by Kevin. This may be further evidence for a lack of sophisticated contemplative skills, and generally poor reasoning abilities. Kevin’s inability to form a cohesive narrative is also illustrated by the erratic nature in which he switches topics and goes off on tangents without warning, and with no real connection to what came before, characterized as an odd perspective shift; for example: “I met my girlfriend through my cousin...in New York City...and then, umm, I don’t know...I don’t know, like...my cousin told me...that she was cloned, and she told me that her name was Meg Griffin...so I...met her there.”

In this last quote that is representative of intimacy related experiencing, we see Kevin’s naivety and social vulnerability through his inability to see that his cousin was pulling his leg by making a reference to a character on the popular television show, ‘Family Guy’. Moreover, we also see the potential that some of his family members may not have his best interests at heart, given that his cousin is introducing him to a less than savoury character, and on top of that, not being transparent with him regarding basic information about her. From this story, he displays another odd perspective shift, abruptly changing topics to engage in introspection that centres on positive experiencing, “[I] did like, took a weight lifting class. I did like, I was on a floor hockey team, on my basketball team, wrestling team, indoor soccer, and...did like...well, I was
never [any] good, I was never good at baking, so [I] did like wood working, and then...
[laughter].” We see that Kevin’s lack of well-being and life satisfaction is likely not from a lack of enrichment, or exposure to a diversity of opportunities. Clearly, he has had many such opportunities to develop various skill-sets, better understand himself and others, and develop a sense of connectedness with those around him, and the community at large. His assessment, though, indicates that he did not come away from these exposures feeling more confident or better off. Kevin’s impairments and misperceptions may prevent him from capitalizing on the potential for growth and self-transcendence that such experiences can afford, from both an online phenomenological perspective, and an offline contemplative perspective. And finally, another odd perspective shift and abrupt change of topics occurs immediately thereafter, when he randomly engages in introspection about his academic difficulties, which also represents an emergence of negative experiencing, “I knew math...I do it, I did like math class and did...long fractions, did long division. But then I just forgot about it, I just forgot that stuff. I knew how to tell time, I knew math. I just forgot...I just forgot that stuff because like every time my family moved...like went to a different school...we did...learned different stuff, and so...so, I just forgot about, I just forgot how to tell time and money.” Kevin is open about his academic troubles and functional decline over time, but he does not approach it in a constructive manner. Instead, he shifts blame to external forces that are outside his control. We also see Kevin demonstrating awareness of the temporal decline that has occurred in his academic and daily living skills. This is especially problematic as it indicates liabilities at a very fundamental level that may have their roots in cognitive functioning, and which may make the navigation of life, and the achievement of independence and other fundamental goals of adulthood, a much more difficult task. He also demonstrates a lack of responsibility for the conditions or outcomes of his life, showing a
tendency to blame his failures on external circumstances or events. Moreover, he shows a tendency to make simplified judgments about why a particular outcome occurred, with no real depth of reason or metacognitive insight. Kevin engages in negative to positive perspective shifting to finish on a more positive note. In a display of positive, hopeful experiencing, he demonstrating his optimistic outlook, however unrealistic it may be, that in some manner may be protective, “…now it’s the best, now is the opportunity to learn…[to] know that stuff.”

Unfortunately though, there is no evidence thus far that Kevin is actively trying to achieve this, or improve the conditions of his life. Taken together, the disjointedness of the above shows that Kevin has difficulties forming a cohesive narrative, which is critical to forming a coherent sense of identity according to narrative psychology (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008; McAdams, 2001; McAdams & McLean, 2013). It also shows that there are many areas of Kevin’s life that are not in ideal form. He shows an awareness of these less than ideal circumstances, and some insight into the how and why behind them, and what he could do to change it, but nonetheless, does not appear to be able to achieve that change. This may result from a lack of motivation or effort, or it may result from deficits that are genuinely out of his control, such as executive functioning deficits leading to impulsivity, weak inhibiting, and poor self-regulation. Finally, it may be that these issues are so severe or pervading as to be too resistant to change without additional support that he may not have access to. In a display of introspection, that also results in some very basic insight into the source of his interpersonal difficulties of past, he discusses the importance of self-regulation, an aspect related to the action component of experiencing, and expresses that his violent social experiences were the most important in helping him become the person he is today, “by thinking what you say…if you were [to]…approach a girl…in a nice way…talk to her nicely…take her to [a] movie. I just wasn’t…I
didn’t know how to...how to like...[I] just wasn’t controlling [these] things...what I was saying.”

Most frustrating is that Kevin appears to know what he needs to do to have more successful interactions, and can think about appropriate replacement behaviours, but when it comes to their application, he is just unable to materialize them. This may stem from the naively simplified manner in which he views phenomena, particularly social interactions. His script for how positive interactions with women should play out may be too basic, appearing on the surface to be a recipe for success, but lacking the depth, flexibility, and contingency planning that would truly allow for it to be successful in the real world. This may also be indicative of contemplative difficulties that prevent him forming accurate and realistic perceptions of phenomena, and gaining a thorough understanding of a particular action or event. This insight into his social difficulties, and mismatch between his intentions and actions, or expectations and outcomes, must be extremely frustrating and psychologically damaging for Kevin, which is apparent by the emergence of regretful experiencing, expressed in the following introspection, “I want...everything to...I want to start over...by sort of like, talking and so on.” In a display of perspective shifting, Kevin also shows some insight, again at a very basic level, into how he could improve his social skills through modelling others, but again, we see no evidence that he is actually engaging in these actions or is truly motivated to improve himself or change, “I mean, I look at my family...I look at how my dad talks to people, how my mom...my [brother], I want to take up from them...I want [to] see how others...like if I go to like a police station...or to a mall, I want to see how people talk to each other so...I can learn from them.”

Finally, when asked about the most difficult situation he has faced in his life, Kevin contradicts himself again in a display of experiencing denial through the following
introspection, “Well…I had no disability…never had fights”, and makes no mention of the serious behavioural difficulties he described earlier “…just had a problem when people mean at me, make fun of me, and stuff like that at school.” Kevin demonstrates a lack of sophisticated coping abilities, as well as a lack of reflective depth or elaboration when he expresses how he dealt with these issues, “Well, [I] just like, talk to the principal or handle it myself.” It appears that Kevin has trouble coping with difficult life experiences in an effective manner, and in some respects, is in denial as to the extent of the troubles in his life. We see this in the more distal past from the previous quote, but we also see it in the proximal past, and present, in regards to his conflict with his girlfriend. These difficult life experiences also constitute a challenge to the narrative construction of identity (Pals, 2006). Exploratory narrative processing of difficult experiences, and coherent positive resolution, are two dimensions of narrative identity processing that, if impaired, have implications for pathways of personality development and well-being (Pals, 2006). Narrative processing is the extent that a person engages in self-exploration when telling their life story; while coherent positive resolution is the extent to which tensions dissolve, allowing for closure and a satisfying narrative ending (Pals, 2006). We see that Kevin shows impairments in both of these dimensions. According to Pals (2006), this may have implications for maturity outcomes in late midlife, and lowered ego-resiliency between young adulthood and midlife, which in turn, can lead to lower life satisfaction. Kevin’s low life satisfaction scores may be an early manifestation of these impaired processes and the negative consequences that result.

**Wisdom.** Significant concerns abound in Kevin’s wisdom conceptualization. In a display of perspective shifting, Kevin nominates his criminal girlfriend as the wisest person in his life.
Kevin demonstrates some insight into the process of his girlfriend’s growth. In a display of transcendent experiencing, his reasoning for this choice is centred on her effort in trying to turn her life around and move on from her negative past, “when she was like…sixteen…she wasn’t like thinking straight…and she like did all that bad stuff and…broke through, like started like…robbing, bringing weapons to school and stuff like that…she’s been in prison a few times, bad record, but now she’s like, trying to…rethink what, the step, like, she wants to go the right path. So she like, so she’s like saying to herself, ‘This is what I did in the past, now this is…now I want to relive in the right now’…so…she wants to put past, the present behind and live on, and move, and live, move on.” While one can appreciate the nobleness in this sentiment, and in some ways the child-like optimism and capacity for trust that Kevin demonstrates, it also illustrates again his naivety, poor judgment, and social vulnerability. If there is truth to his girlfriend’s transformation, then she may actually be a positive influence for Kevin, and someone who can teach him, and steer him in the right direction. But given Kevin’s tendency towards a skewed perception, and his social naivety and vulnerability, he may be completely off base in his assessment of her, or he may be unable to see through her deception. He would be wise to exercise more restraint in his trust and belief in others, and instead wait for more compelling evidence that she is indeed genuine and effortful in her transformation. In another display of perspective shifting, Kevin also nominates his friend Paul as the wisest person, which appears to be more in line with what we would expect from a wisdom nominee and also contains an emergence of experiencing “…my other friend, Paul, he…tells me the same thing…he’s like…taking me, I might go [to] church or some sort, like, showing me, like…This is how you be nice, if you want to be a police officer, you have to be nice to people’, [and] so on.”
It appears that Kevin considers transcendence, personal growth, and helping as behaviours and abilities that are indicative of wisdom. Interestingly, these are the very things that he lacks, but that he so desperately wishes would manifest within his own life. Unfortunately, he may lack the judgment and capacity for contemplation that would orient him towards truly positive influences, and provide him with insight into who he should be modelling, why he should be modelling them, what he can learn from them, how he can learn from them, and why those lessons are particular are relevant to his own life. As such, the very people who he invites into his life as positive role models, may actually be bringing him into damaging circumstances, and modelling thoughts and behaviours that are in opposition to what he wants to achieve.

Because of his skewed perception though, this may be something he never becomes aware of in the first place. In a display of introspection and perspective shifting, we see the generation of a very shallow, seemingly ad-hoc lesson that he extracts from his girlfriend’s life and applies to his own, “…I learned from my girlfriend…if you want [to] say something back, think before you say something, and don’t use weapons. Go on…” It is striking how Kevin completely glosses over the illogical absurdity of his reflections, his insights, and the whole scenario in general, that the person who is supposedly the wisest person in his life, a convicted criminal, has to remind him not to use weapons in such a benign circumstance. That Kevin needs to be told this at twenty-seven years of age is illustrative of his severely impaired functioning, and indicates a dire need for more positive influences, and intensive formal supports. When asked about times when he was wise, Kevin engages in introspection on his interactions with others, displaying the same wishful thinking we saw earlier, “People…I want to be nice to people, I want to be friendly to people.” Following an interviewer prompt about helping people,
Kevin engages in facilitated **introspection** to discuss **experiences** when he engaged in such behaviours, “Like I help my friends sometimes...we’ll clean his car or...or when I like help him bring something.” Kevin’s helping behaviours focus on superficial acts of service, rather than deep, meaningful acts intended to support others emotionally, facilitate their positive growth, or enhance their lives, which indicates a very shallow conception of helping.

Kevin attempts to explain the wisdom in these actions, but completely misses the mark by viewing helping through a quid pro quo lens, “I believe that if you help someone, they will help you.” This illustrates that Kevin is unable to see the deeper aspects of helping, how it affects the other person’s life, and how he himself is impacted by the interaction. It also illustrates a certain selfishness or egocentrism to his helping behaviours, essentially causing Kevin to miss the power and beauty that results from unconditional helping. Kevin’s skewed conceptualization of helping, and his lack of genuineness or thoughtfulness in his meditations on the topic, is also illustrated by the confusing and contradicting **perspective shift** and **introspection** that immediately followed, “I don’t usually say that, just like...like if someone like just fights each other, then I just like get, don’t get involved...because its not my business...that’s all.” Here we see two contradictions in Kevin’s conceptualization of wisdom and its relation to helping. The first is an explicit contradiction, through a self-correction, when he indicates that his previous conception of helping as conditional is not actually representative of his true thinking. The second is an implicit contradiction, in that he conjures a scenario that is supposed to illustrate helping, but that in fact represents apathy and non-engagement instead, which are the very opposite of helping. Kevin attempts to explain himself more clearly, saving himself from his last statement, and expressing a likely unintentional display of **insight**, “when there’s a fight going...
on...I just like talk, see a police officer, like get him, I'll tell him to pull over, tell like there's a
fight going on, he gets involved and I just like...watch...I like learn, so I could observe, see what
he does so when, when I be a cop, then...I'm going [to] say ‘Ok, this officer did that, I'm going to
do that too’...so I always like, I always learn from other people.”

Rather than true helping per se, what we see from Kevin is actually an illustration of
deference, supporting seeking, and learning through observation and modelling. Each of these
represents individual strands of insight that could contribute to wisdom development. Kevin
expresses them in such a manner, and with such lack of detail and elaboration, however, that it
would be difficult to believe that he was even aware of them in the same capacity that someone
like Stuart would be, or expressed them with any intention or forethought. Rather, he may have
just stumbled onto these insights by happenstance. Implicitly, it is difficult to know exactly how
he understands things within his own mind, particularly given his skewed perceptions, but
certainly in an explicit manner, there is no evidence to suggest that he appreciates the wisdom in
his articulation. Although it is a good thing that he views the situation as a learning opportunity,
it is difficult to say that he would actually view the situation as such if he were there in the
moment. If he did view such situations as opportunities for growth and improvement, then we
would expect to see Kevin functioning at a far higher level, and be able to view his life in a far
less tragic manner than how he is implicitly portraying it. Rather, within the context of his
narrative-gestalt, one could justifiably suggest that his self-centredness and egocentricity led to
him viewing the situation as a learning opportunity only in terms of what he could gain from it,
rather than how the other benefitted at a deeper level, as he did previously with helping his friend
wash his car.
A final issue that emerges concerns his unrealistic optimism and misperception of himself and the world. Kevin seems to have no insight into just how far away he is from being in a position to even consider becoming a police officer. Rather, he fully believes that he will achieve his ultimate goal at some point in his life. While this is admirable from an optimistic point of view, and may in some ways be protective, it also sets him up for damaging disappointments from unrealistic expectations and incongruent, or lofty goals.

Moving on to his nomination for wisest person in history, Kevin proposes Christian religious figure, Jesus Christ. Kevin shows difficulties with **perspective shifting** and **abstraction**, leading to a lack of reason into why he made this nomination, “Because I mean, he went and like...umm I don’t know, like...he didn’t do anything, I don’t know why people, people just saw him as a good person, he didn’t do anything, he just treated people nice...he was, he was like friendly, his people he like...and they had nothing, so he went, he was just nice to people, he was just himself...he showed people, he like expressed himself to people...he like, did so many good things for people...he like taught people things...[he] made laws for people...he did uh stuff, and he like...read...God’s messages to people...and he like went to people...the people like followed him to the lake so...he took one bread in his hands and like broke it in half and he shared it with people.”

Several interesting points emerge from the above. The first comes from his initial expression that Jesus did not do anything suggestive of wisdom, which he then contradicts by discussing various acts that he did commit and that are actually indicative of wisdom. The second comes from the fact that he is unable to contemplate on the deeper meanings of Jesus’ actions, and the values, or lessons contained within them, and which he could amalgamate within
his own life at great benefit. He starts to extract some lessons, but only does so at a broad level, and does not elaborate on them further. It appears that he is unable to see the profoundness in Jesus’ acts, his impact on others, and his contribution to the world. He illustrates Jesus’ universalism-benevolence approach to life, self and other in the most simplistic of ways, as merely being nice and friendly, teaching others, and being a ‘good’ person. He does not elaborate or delve deeper into these modes of being, nor does he support them with any clear articulations of evidence.

This may be indicative again of his weak contemplative skills that make lesson extraction, meaning making, and ultimately generation of insight, incredibly difficult. It is also analogous to the tragic immaturity we see in Kevin’s own life, as manifest through his narrative, and the naïve simplicity with which he understands various domains of functioning, and experiential abstractions, such as relationships, self-regulation, social interactions, helping, and police work. Based on his discussion, he appears to think that ‘being a good person’ is natural and should just happen without much effort, as long as you have some basic understanding, and a script for what to do and how to act, then it will just happen, and everything will work out as it is meant to. Of course, the danger in this comes from the reality that being a good person is actually extremely complex, and is a life-long developmental striving that requires incredible effort, skill, intention and commitment, and selfless contribution. This reality inevitably clashes with Kevin’s naivety, vulnerability, idealism, and to a large extent, his impairment.

When asked about what he learned from Jesus, Kevin again demonstrates his difficulties with contemplative perspective shifting and insight generation, showing an inability to extract any substantive lessons that are useful to him at a personal level, “Well, I just learned that I like
him...I learned, I don’t know, I like learned that...he was like...a good person. Ok, go on.” A number of interesting features emerge from this last quote. Firstly, his commanding the interviewer to continue, rather than providing a gentler signal that he is finished, showcases his difficulties with social conventions, which likely stem from HFA-related impairments in social and communicative functioning. This same oddity also occurred earlier when Kevin was attempting to articulate what he learned from his girlfriend. Secondly, this quote confirms the previous assessment that Kevin may have weak contemplative skills that thwart his development of wisdom, identity, and personal growth, and prevent greater levels of well-being. Thirdly, it also confirms the implicit naivety and simplicity with which he views the core ethos of “a good person.” This same lack of contemplative capacity emerges when Kevin is asked about a difficult situation Jesus encountered and how he coped, “the difficult thing was when...he was...hanging on the cross.”

In a final display of abstraction, albeit with little elaboration, Kevin builds off his previous expressions, and defines wisdom in terms of helping, being collaborative, and maintaining harmony with others, “I don’t know...wisdom means something that you do for other people, like help others...work as a team.” Even if this represents his actual conceptualization of wisdom, it may not produce the intended results, at a personal and relational level, given his skewed, egocentric, and surface-level view of helping we saw earlier. Engaging in perspective shifting and introspection, Kevin relates this wisdom conceptualization to his own sense of being, that illustrates very clearly his primary need for affiliation, “I see myself as a...team player...I like to be with a group of people...I like...bring a few people here and I say this is a team. I like to talk to people in a group, I like to play games with a group, I like to go places with
a group.” This last quote also contains emergences of positive experiencing, particularly as it relates to social engagement. Kevin’s wisdom conceptualization suggests that he places a high value on social harmony, affiliation, and engagement with others. Given his continual difficulty in these areas that are likely negatively impacted by his difficulties with contemplation, amongst other issues pertaining to HFA-related impairments, it is no wonder why Kevin does not feel completely satisfied with his life.

Identity. Kevin’s identity conceptualization highlights his limited abstraction skills, where he focuses on surface-level constructs such as a person’s name and identifying information, “Identity means someone who you are, a person who you are...like, I might come to you school...and I could say ‘Hi, my name is so on’, and then you’re going to say ‘Well, I don’t know you’, so I need to show you my I.D., and you say ‘Oh, I know this person’...that’s identity.”

When asked about his own identity, Kevin engages in an introspection that illuminates another contradiction between how he views himself, and how he thinks others view him. This is in spite of his problematic social behaviours that would most definitely result in the complete opposite judgment from others, “someone who sees me as a good person...and like says that you did this...you did this good, we want you to be our friend, we see you as a different person. I’m athletic, I am a good listener...I listen to people...I think before I say something...I don’t...get upset...I like to laugh when someone says something funny...and...like someone says something...just ignore and walk away.” The above quote illustrates the skewed perception that Kevin has of himself, which tends to overestimate his abilities, exaggerates his strengths, and denies the fact that there are circumstances in his life and aspects of his functioning that are of serious concern. This is likely protective in some manner, but it is also damaging in that it
promotes a deluded view that may thwart true personal growth through the acknowledgement of weakness and acceptance of error that motivates one to change and be better. It may be the result of wishful thinking in order to protect his ego and avoid anxiety, or it may be an attempt to present himself in a positive light to others. And finally, it could simply be a matter of him describing the ideal future self he is working towards, rather than his actual current self. Unfortunately though, speculation is all that is available, as he was not very clear in his reasoning, and did not provide any elaboration, or further reflection.

**Goals.** Kevin’s discussion of goals represents an emergence of **introspection.** In terms of his goals for personal growth, Kevin indicates he wants to do security work, and then go on to police foundations, where eventually he hopes to work as a police officer, “*I want... to do security, and I want to do police foundations. I want to become a police officer for [regional division].*” He also incorporates a relational goal for his personal growth, “*I want to go back to New York and see my girlfriend.*” When asked about his goals for his relationships, Kevin engages in **introspection,** which leads to partial **insight** into his relationship with his girlfriend, “*I probably shouldn’t be hanging around her... because I don’t know if I want to marry her because she’s probably like trouble... she’s been in jail a few times, and she... broke some laws... she stole some stuff, like killed somebody, she’s been in jail a few times so she has a record. But I don’t know...*” The cognitive distortions that emerge from Kevin’s contemplations are illustrated perfectly by this last quote. The fact that he puts these transgressions on the same rhetorical plane is striking. Kevin appears to understand that this person is not a very positive influence in his life, but nonetheless, he appears conflicted given that it represents a source of intimacy for him, which is something that may be considerably important for his satisfaction in life. If we look at
his QOLI scores, we see that friends, as well as relatives, and love, all components of intimacy, are indeed important for his overall quality of life. But he also indicates that he is not satisfied in these areas. This psychic conflict is clearly something that is weighing on his mind, but it appears that he is unsure of the correct course of action to take. In another display of introspection, and a negative to positive perspective shift, Kevin abruptly pivots to a discussion of his family and friends, that appears to highlight his engagement with others, involvement in social activities, and general satisfaction in that area of his life, which is curious considering his self-reported QOLI scores that indicate low satisfaction in these domains, “I like my family, and I like my friends...[I] play hockey with my friend, I like talk to my friend a lot...I like go places with my friends...we like...do fun stuff...he like...shows, teaches me how to play hockey. And my family, I go [with] my dad [and] my brother, [we] go golfing sometimes.” This last quote is the first emergence of the theme of positive experiencing. These types of social experiences and non-educational opportunities may serve as an important protective factor for Kevin, as long as the individuals co-operating in such opportunities serve as positive influences in his life, rather than the negativity from apparently unsavoury characters such as his girlfriend, and his cousin who introduced her to him. Kevin engages in introspection again when he discusses some of his interests that center on sports and physical activity, citing these as evidence of his athleticism, which prepares him well for police work, “I play soccer, I play basketball, I play hockey. I like to be active...I like...to play lots of sports because...I know if you want to be a police officer you have to be athletic.” This also represents the second emergence of positive experiencing. Finally, when asked about his goals for his contribution to society, he indicates that he has no goals in this area. When we look at Kevin’s discussion of goals, we see that he has a clearly defined and well-established career goal, which shows some degree of thoughtfulness and self-
concordance, particularly in terms of how it relates to his strengths and interests. We also see that he does not actually indicate a plan as to how he will achieve it. We do see some evidence of a simplified linear ordering of sub-goals (i.e. doing security, then police foundations), although it is lacking in the elaborative detail, specificity, and long-term projection we would expect were it a truly informed and intentioned plan. Unfortunately, we also see the presence of highly oppositional factors in his life that have the potential for severely thwarting the achievement of this goal, that being his criminal girlfriend. In terms of his relationship goals, he does not actually specify any goals in this area, instead, discussing only his current and past interactions with family and friends, and his personal interests. This may indicate that he is already satisfied with this area of his life, and hence does not feel the need to establish any goals, but unfortunately, he does not make this point clear if that was indeed his intent. Finally, we see a complete lack of goals for contribution to society. This is interesting given that his goal of becoming a police officer, a civil servant position with a pivotal role in the smooth functioning of a society, seems so central to his life. Kevin is unable to make this connection, indicating a lack of contemplative skills, particularly in terms of introspection, abstraction, and, ultimately, insight. He may not have a solid grasp on the role of police officer and what they serve and protect in society. He may also not have a deep understanding into why he wants to become a police offer and why it is important for him.

**Closing Comments on Kevin’s Narrative-Gestalt**

Overall, it appears that Kevin has severe behavioural issues, anti-social tendencies, poor self-regulation, high impulsivity, and lacks social skills. He does not appear to have positive social influences in his inner circle. His identity is defined by his personal self and those he has
relationships with (i.e. family and friends). He places a high value on the security of self and his in-group, and in behaving and acting in accordance to social norms. He also values protecting the welfare of all people and beings. Given this, Kevin is loyal, wishes to fit in to society, and wants to help and protect people. Despite this, he has very low affective wisdom, indicating difficulties with positive emotionality towards others, compassion and empathy. Kevin may want to do good, and want to be seen by others as a good person, but his social skills deficits, poor impulse control, and lack of empathy make it extremely difficult for him to accomplish this. Kevin seems to have insight into why this is occurring, and knows what he could do differently, but fails to do so, which may be the result of his weak – and, in many ways, distorted – contemplative skills, particularly in perspective shifting and introspection. Further compounding this is the presence of negative influences and anti-social role models in Kevin’s life. Despite all of this, Kevin does display moderately high degrees of self-transcendence, indicating some ability to cope. In spite of the damaging interpersonal experiences, the toxic relational influences, and his severe array of impairments, he does exude an implicit air of resilience. Unfortunately for Kevin, it appears that he continues to have severe struggles in numerous areas of his life.

Kevin would benefit from social skills, impulse control, and empathy training, and the presence of a strong, positive role model in his life who he can look up to and learn from, and who can provide structure and reinforcement. Kevin would benefit greatly from vocational training, preferably in his areas of interest (policing), but really in anything that is positive and will provide him with structure and opportunities to practice positive social skills. Working with a therapist or a social skills group would give him constructive feedback regarding his
behaviours. Kevin should also be assessed for comorbidities that may be contributing to his impulse-control issues (i.e. ADHD).

**Primary Theme Comparison with Stuart and Eric**

**Experiencing.** As we also saw from Eric, there is no shortage of experiences from which Kevin could generate profound insights. In his discussion of experiencing, we see the inner conflict within Kevin emerge time and again through his abrupt switching from discussion negative to positive experiences. We see Kevin attempt to show evidence that he is a good person, by discussing positive past experiences he has had with friends and family, engaging in physical activities, various classes he took, sports teams he was a member of, and discussion of his interests and strengths, all of which come back to his unrealistic goal of becoming police officer. His need for intimacy is also demonstrated through the emergence of experiencing that he expresses regarding how he met his girlfriend through his cousin, albeit in a tragic manner, given that he fails to see the deception or danger in these toxic influences in his life. From the generally positive accounts of experiencing expressed in the first part of his interview, we then start to see the emergence of negative experiences that are much more likely to play a significant role in his life given the seriousness of some of these experiences. We see negative experiencing through his discussion of learning difficulties, his behavioural difficulties, homicidal tendencies, and his violence against women. It is clear that these experiences cause much stress for Kevin, which is evident through his regret and despair in stating that he wants to start his life over. A protective feature of Kevin is his optimism, which is expressed through hopeful experiencing for the future. In terms of the action component of experiencing, Kevin appears to know that his difficulties stem from issues with self-regulation and control, and expresses things that he could
do differently. Kevin also appears to see that experiences represent opportunities for learning and growth. Later in the interview, we see a change from Kevin’s openness in discussing his negative experiences, where he shifts to begin talking more about positive experiences again in what seems like an attempt at impression management, wishful thinking, or outright denial. He also shows the ability to consider the experiences of others, particularly those of his criminal girlfriend, and her attempt at trying to overcome her past through transcendent experiencing.

Overall, it appears that Kevin has had a mixture of negative and positive experiences in his life. The positive experiences are fairly standard, while the negative experiences are extreme and highly concerning. This duality within Kevin’s experiencing, and the casualness with which he discusses them, is striking. While he does display some instances that seem to show that he views experiences as potential opportunities for growth and learning, there is no evidence that he is able to garner any insights from these experiences, despite his best intentions. He certainly does not view the power and potential of experiences in the same way that Stuart does, or even Eric for that matter. Kevin does show some insight into how his actions can lead to unexpected or negative outcomes related to his experiences, but it seems to be something that he can consider only in hindsight, rather than something is aware of and can control in the moment. Kevin protects himself by focusing primarily on the positive experiences, and turning back to these experiences in an odd fashion whenever he begins to experience the inner conflict he feels when he discusses negative experiences. Kevin does not show that he has reached regarding his difficult past. Rather, it appears that in many ways he denies it, engaging in wishful thinking to tell himself that he is indeed a good person, regardless of what his past may tell him.
Contemplation. We will now begin our comparison analysis between Kevin and Stuart on the primary theme of contemplation. This analysis will follow the same breakdown of contemplation into the various subthemes that we saw with both Stuart and Eric. These subthemes are: **perspective shifting, introspection, insight** and **abstraction**.

**Perspective shifting.** Kevin engages in perspective shifting at several points throughout his narrative, but does so in a very odd, abrupt, and tangential manner that is very unlike Stuart, and more pronounced than Eric. Kevin’s perspective shifting oddities are also more indicative of anxiety-avoidance or misperception biases, rather than purely due to executive functioning deficits, or expressive language impairments as we saw in Eric. We typically see Kevin engage in perspective shifting from negative to positive experiences. When he begins talking about difficult and uncomfortable experiences from his past that are incongruent with the distorted way that he views himself and wishes others would see him as, he then starts to talk about his positive qualities to prove to himself and the listener that he is indeed a good person. The problem is that these positive aspects are merely hearsay, and do not actually have any basis in reality; he certainly does not provide any hard evidence to convince the listener otherwise. Kevin shows very little ability to consider the perspectives of others, particularly in an empathetic sense. The only instance that comes remotely close to empathy has to do with his analysis of his girlfriend’s negative past and current attempt at transcendence. He also shows some evidence that he understands the usefulness of perspective shifting, particularly as it relates to growth and learning through observation and modelling others. He can also shift his perspective to see how others are affecting him, such as his friend Paul who takes him to church, but this is only in a positive sense. He seems unable to shift his perspective to see how others are negatively
influencing him, like his girlfriend and cousin. At the beginning of his narrative we thought perhaps he would generate some insight from an initial perspective shift related to the negative influence of his girlfriend, but he abandons in a display of denial, shifting back to a more positive topic.

Overall, Kevin’s perspective shifting impairments are extremely concerning. They lead to a lack of empathy or concern for others, lack of insight into the motivations, thoughts, and feelings of others, and a lack of understanding into how others affect him negatively. His perspective shifting is also odd, abrupt, tangential, and serves to protect him through denial and wishful thinking that has no basis in reality, leading to distorted and naively simplified perceptions of life experiences, self, others, and the world at large.

Introspection. Similar to what we saw from his odd, abrupt, and self-protective perspective shifts, we see that Kevin’s introspections have the same characteristic distorted quality to them. Again, this is very unlike Stuart, and similar, although much more pronounced, than Kevin. These distorted introspections lead to Kevin viewing himself in a manner that has very little basis in reality, and rather, is just representative of wishful thinking on his part. His introspections also highlight the inner conflict he experiences, which at some level may be representative of his sub-conscious awareness into the distorted way he views himself that is highly discordant from his past experiences, and current behaviour. Unfortunately for Kevin, admitting this fact to himself would likely be too damaging to his psyche, and would mean he would have to come to terms with his difficult past, and potentially abandon or modify his needs and desires, particularly around affiliation, intimacy, and wanting to be a police officer.
Insight. From his distorted perspective shifts and introspections it is not surprise that we see very few instances of generated insight. He does show some partial insight into the negative influence of his girlfriend, and the processes underlying his failed social and relational difficulties, which are actually quite serious and can lead to jail time or worse. But he only ever scratches the surface of these insights, before abruptly abandoning them and switching topics. Kevin finds these experiences so difficult to talk about, and so damaging to the way he so desperately wishes to view himself, and have others view him, that he cannot bare to talk about them before having to move on to things that confirm his distorted perception of himself. Unfortunately for Kevin, this is a never-ending cycle that will never lead to any growth, change, or improvement in his life. Kevin has to be honest with himself and the negative influences around him, and come to terms with his past, and so he can achieve closure, make a commitment to changing his life, and take the necessary steps to remedy that which is holding him back from self-actualization and well-being. Kevin’s optimistic outlook, desire to do good and be seen by others as a good person, and the partial understanding he has into what he needs to do differently, and how he can model others to achieve that change, speak to the potential within him for growth. In one of Kevin’s few parallels to Stuart, and something we did not see in Eric, these optimistic qualities serve as a fertile foundation upon which positive change can begin to grow, but with Kevin’s distorted perspective shifting and introspection capacities, it is likely that he needs some form of formalized support program, engagement with community services, and the presence of positive role models whom he can learn from and who can guide him in the right direction to fully realize his potential and put himself on a more positive path in life.
Abstraction. We only see a few displays of abstraction from Kevin, but those few displays are all that is necessary to see that his capacity in this contemplative area is severely underdeveloped as compared to Stuart, and in some respects, to Eric as well. Eric’s abstractions were made difficult because of what appears to be executive functioning, expressive language difficulties, and perhaps some lower reasoning ability. Even though it was a difficult for him to articulate, we did see Eric engage in contemplative effort, and an attempt at reason. For Kevin, we see far less of either, which comes across as a lack of motivation or investment. For Kevin, we also see the same distortions and misperceptions that damned his other contemplative sub-skills, as well as the naïve simplicity with which he views the most complex of phenomena. We see Kevin’s limited abstraction skills through his identity conceptualization, which focuses on surface-level constructs and literal interpretations of the term. He directly relates these abstractions back to himself, but only in the most basic manner, and with no evidence to back up his claims. We see this very same pattern with his wisdom conceptualization. Moreover, he struggles to extract lessons from the lives of exemplary others, such as Jesus Christ, which pertain to abstract concepts such as wisdom. He even suggests that Jesus did not do anything special; expressing confusion as to why people revered him so greatly, given that all he did was merely act as a good person. He speaks of Jesus’ approach to life, self and other in the most simplistic of ways, which echoes the very same naïve simplicity with which he views various pursuits in his own life, such as facilitating positive social interactions, becoming a police officer, helping others, and being seen by others as a good person. This is further evidence of his weak abstraction skills, and in line with the generally distorted lens through which he views world.
Because he has a very shallow understanding of abstract concepts such as wisdom and identity, and practical indicators that are meant to be representative of these abstractions, it is extremely difficult for Kevin to express and understand how these concepts are applied experientially. And from this, he has no repertoire of practical knowledge, meaning or insight that he can tie back to his abstractions to confirm and inform his understanding, and then amalgamate into his sense of self, to be applied within his own life and actions.

**Alignment Analysis**

When we look at Kevin’s PVQ values assessment, we see that his value priorities are very much the same as we saw from Eric. Kevin’s top five values are Security and Conformity, which both received a score of 6.00, Benevolence, with a score of 5.50, and Universalism and Self-direction, each with a score of 5.00. The difference between Kevin and Eric lies in the small variances in terms of the relative importance each places on their top values, as well as the inclusion of Self-Direction as a primary value for Kevin, which for Eric was less important. For Kevin, we can combine universalism with self-direction, to get the shared motivational emphasis of the reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of existence. For the other values, we can follow the same motivational emphases presented for Eric. When we map these values onto Kevin’s narrative, we see a number of issues pertaining to values misalignment within his life, as well as value distortion.

Based on his combination of self-direction and universalism, we would expect that Kevin would place a high value upon the reliance of his own judgment. The difficulty for Kevin if he were to engage in this behaviour is that he demonstrates very poor judgment. In this case we can
almost see too great of a reliance on this value, or a misinformed reliance, given his poor judgment and skewed perception of the world, which leads him to pursuing actions, circumstances or relationships that he judges as positive and appropriate, but which actually are the very opposite. The behaviour that results from this combination of value priorities then works in opposition to the fulfillment of his other primary values, such as benevolence, universalism, conformity, and security. This represents a distortion of sorts between his motivations and his capacities, which has a ripple effect on values misalignment in other areas. Contemplation may again be at the heart of this issue, for if Kevin had adequate contemplative skills, it would allow for insight into his thoughts and behaviours, and he could see specifically where he misjudged or had a skewed perspective, and specifically where his actions led him astray, and what he could do differently in the future. This lack of metacognitive insight never allows Kevin to reevaluate his life, his actions, and his interactions at the most abstract of levels, which would allow for adjustments that would facilitate value fulfillment, personal growth, wisdom and identity development, and greater satisfaction in critical areas of his life.

We see this process play out through an analysis of his narrative that sees a lack of emergence of his other primary values, and quite frankly, the emergence of elements that lie in opposition to the fulfillment of these values. For instance, if his values were fulfilled we would expect to see evidence of orderly and harmonious relations with others, and the presence of close relationships through engagement in normative behaviour. We actually see the opposite emerge in Kevin’s narrative. While he briefly glosses over the fact that he has friends and family whom he likes and whom he engages in activities with, we do not actually see any evidence that there is a deep level of meaning or connectedness in these relationships, or that he intends to enhance his
existing relationships, or develop new ones. Of the relationships that do indicate some degree of
closeness, such as that of his cousin, and his girlfriend, we actually see that they are maladaptive
in the influence they have on his life, and thwarting of his personal growth. These negative
relationships may also prevent the fulfillment of his universalist and benevolent motivations to
enhance the lives of others and transcend selfish interests in that they orient him towards
behaviour that leads to the very opposite of these desired outcomes.

While his goal of becoming a police officer is congruent with these values, there is no
evidence that Kevin actually understands the deeper role of a police officer from a societal or
interpersonal standpoint that would allow him to appreciate this fact. And we also see the
opposite of selflessness at several points in his interview, where he demonstrates a certain level
of selfishness and egocentricity, particularly in his rudimentary and one-sided understanding of
helping behaviours. We do see universalist and benevolent ideals emerge through his wisdom
and identity conceptualizations, but again, only at a very basic level. There are no extraordinary
insights that emerge from these conceptualizations that would lead to profoundly life changing or
perspective altering lessons and meanings that he could incorporate into his own life, or use as a
guide to facilitate the fulfillment of his values. And although he is able to indicate virtues and
strengths as part of his personal identity that would allow him to fulfill his values for conformity,
security, universalism, and benevolence, we do not see any hard evidence that he actually
engenders these virtues, understands their meaning at a deeper level, or engages in behaviours
facilitative of them.

For Kevin, his lack of sophisticated contemplative skills certainly plays a major role in
the misalignment we see between his ideal/valued life and his actual/experienced life. But
playing an equally significant role are aspects of his cognition, representative of the cognitive component of wisdom, that lead to poor judgment and decision making, a surface-level, rudimentary understanding of situations and phenomena, and a tendency to lose sight of complexity and view things in a naively simplified manner. Some of this may be the result of an innately lower cognitive ability, while some may be the result of a lack of reflective bootstrapping from his weak contemplative skills. As evidenced from his narrative, however, the net effect remains the same: a misalignment and distortion of primary values that leads to frustration, lack of fulfillment, and lowered life satisfaction and well-being.

Closing Comments on Kevin

We see from Kevin no shortage of negative and positive experiences from which he can generate insights that would lead to wisdom and identity development. But like Eric, we see a glaring lack of insights that are generated through these experiences. Compared to Stuart, we see the same lack of primacy placed on the importance of having varied life experiences, and the belief in the power of experiences and actions to positively impact others and ourselves that we saw in Eric. Kevin is certainly more severely impaired than Eric, with his life appearing to be on a much more tragic and dangerous trajectory. Despite Eric’s lack of familial support, and general alienation and isolation through much of his youth, he managed to turn his life around through the help of formalized support services and involvement with community organizations. Unfortunately, Kevin had no such opportunities, which may partially explain why we see a more negative developmental trajectory in his life, relative to Eric, in spite of their quantitative profiles being eerily similar. Perhaps Eric’s involvement in these types of support and remediation services allowed him to develop skills that offset his impairment. Perhaps Eric might have been
destined for the same level of contemplative distortion that we see in Kevin. Kevin’s distorted contemplative skills may be one potential trajectory that can result should a lack of sufficient supports be involved in one’s life, in light of the HFA-related impairments and other negative life circumstances that he is faced with circumnavigating on his journey through life.


Chapter 4

Conclusion

Our primary analysis of Stuart, and secondary comparison with Eric and Kevin, speaks to the importance that wisdom has in achieving life satisfaction and well-being, and the mediating role that values may have in this relationship. It appears that the reflective component of wisdom, and to a lesser extent the cognitive component of wisdom, allows for the development of certain value sets, alignment between one’s ideal/valued life and their actual/experienced life, and the ongoing refinement of these value sets across the lifespan. In the context of Ardelt’s (2003) three dimensional wisdom model, there is also the possibility that the reflective component of wisdom facilitates smooth functioning in the cognitive component of wisdom, which together, allow the development and alignment of value sets that are facilitative of affective wisdom.

The key distinction may be between the post-hoc identification with certain values based on a self-report questionnaire, and the natural emergence of these values through the contemplative component of wisdom through reflecting on lived experiences – it indicates the essentialness of an agentic-phenomenological component, and a cognitive-reflective component, via experiencing and contemplation – without one or the other, the development of truly self-informed, meaningful sets of values is severely impeded. When this process is successful, the resulting values are applied with little effort, emerging naturally within one’s life through actions, which then inform the development of wisdom, which further modifies values, and identity, which informs actions and orients towards certain experiences, and so on, in a perpetual,
circular, positive, integrative feedback loop involving experiencing, contemplation, and growth through wisdom and identity development.

Through contemplation, wisdom may allow one to develop a value set, and may orient one towards certain people or events that will allow for the practice or fulfillment of values, but it most certainly facilitates the extraction of lessons, and formation of meaning, from others and through their own experiences, which are congruent with their core value set, and which help inform and evolve their value set over the lifespan. Through this contemplation, value fulfillment is also established, which allows one to live a more satisfying life.

Contribution to the Literature

The findings from the current study, including the emergent theory that connects wisdom, identity, and well-being, with the development, integration, application, and refinement of sets of value priorities, is congruent with, and confirms previous research that has looked at these topics individually or in various combinations, but that has not looked at each of these topics together in an attempt to form an integrated theory. Given this, and the fact that that the current study is the first of its kind to explore this topic in individuals with HFA, then the current findings do not just confirm previous research, but they make novel contributions to the literature as well. This has implications for both practice and research, to be discussed shortly.

Experiencing as Critical for Wisdom Development. The first part of the theory, which implicates our conceptions of experiencing as critical for the development of wisdom, is congruent with nearly all of the major theoretical wisdom frameworks that propose, either explicitly or implicitly, that life experience is essential for the development of wisdom. We see
this in Ardelt’s (2003) three dimensional wisdom model, Baltes & Staudinger’s (2000) Berlin Wisdom Paradigm. We also see it in Yang’s (2014) real-life process theory of wisdom, Sternberg’s (2001) balance theory, Glück and Bluck’s (2013) MORE model of personal wisdom, and Brown’s (2004a, 2004b) model of wisdom development and its associated measure, the Wisdom Development Scale (WDS; Brown & Greene, 2006), as well as Webster's self-assessed wisdom scale (SAWS; Webster, 2003), and in Weststrate’s (2017; Weststrate & Glück, 2017) model of wisdom development through growth-oriented reflection on experience. The emphasis these models place on experiencing is also congruent with laypeople’s and expert’s understanding of wisdom development. When these individuals were asked how an individual becomes wise, the most common answer they gave was that wisdom is generated through life experience (Glück & Bluck, 2011; Jeste et al. 2010; Weststrate & Glück, 2017). We will now look more closely at how experiencing relates to the two major wisdom models discussed in the introduction.

We see elements of experiencing contained within the conduct component of Baltes and Staudinger’s (2000) definition of wisdom as an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life. This conduct component relates to experiencing through the concept of strategic/procedural knowledge, which looks at how knowledge can be applied, and knowing how and when to employ it. Also related to our concept of experiencing is Baltes and Staudinger’s (2000) consideration of expertise-specific factors such as exposure to life dilemmas and significant life events, motivation, and mentorship, as well as facilitative experiential contexts, such as age, cohort, historical period, and culture, as critical antecedent factors and
correlates that combine (along with general personal factors such as ability and personality) to allow for the development of wisdom, its maintenance, and successful application.

In Ardelt’s (2003) wisdom model, we also see an emphasis on experiencing. We see experiencing emerge through the cognitive component, which contributes to insight into the significance and deeper meaning of phenomena and events, particularly as it relates to intrapersonal and interpersonal matters (Ardelt, 2000b; Ardelt, 2003; Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995; Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Sternberg, 1990). That these cognitive-based insights are derived from reflective-dimension perspective-taking skills (Ardelt, 2003) is also congruent with our secondary emphasis on contemplation, which in our conception generates reflective insights from our experiences through introspection, perspective taking, and abstraction.

Our view of experiencing as critical for the development of wisdom is also congruent with Weststrate & Glück’s (2017) definition of wisdom as a body of experience-based knowledge about the fundamental issues of human life, which is both broad and deep, and implicit and explicit. They view wisdom as dependent not only on the presence of certain cognitive factors, but also sufficient levels of particular non-cognitive resources (Weststrate and Glück, 2017). One of these non-cognitive resources is openness to experience, which also represents one of the three facets of the concept of experiencing used in the current study. Along with openness to experience, Weststrate and Glück (2017) consider reflectivity and emotion regulation as necessary for the successful confrontation of the complexities of life experiences in a manner that fosters wisdom development, an understanding based on Glück & Bluck’s (2013) MORE Life Experience Model of wisdom, that proposes five personal resources that
dynamically interact with life experience to promote wisdom: Mastery, Openness, Reflectivity, Emotion regulation, and Empathy (Glück & Bluck, 2013; Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Those who possess higher levels of these resources are more likely to, (1) encounter experiences facilitative of wisdom development across their life, (2) deal with life challenges in a wisdom-promoting manner, and (c) integrate life events into their evolving story (Glück & Bluck, 2013). This is precisely what we see in the case of Stuart, but we find a lack of integration of experience into the life stories of Eric and Kevin.

**Contemplation as Critical for Wisdom Development.** Our second critical ingredient in the development of wisdom is through contemplation, which sees contemplative sub-skills of introspection, perspective shifting, and abstraction combine to inform the generation of experientially-derived insights, either through one’s own personal experiences and actions, or through the experiences of others. As was just discussed, both Ardelt (2003) and Weststrate (2017; Weststrate & Glück, 2017) both view reflection as critical to the development of wisdom.

Ardelt’s (2003) model of wisdom also places a heavy premium on the ability to reflect, particularly as it relates to viewing phenomena and events from many different perspectives, which facilitates the transcendence of one’s self-centeredness, subjectivity, projections and distortions. This is similar to our concept of perspective shifting that emerged from the current study. However, her pathway for the development of wisdom is slightly different from how we conceptualize it. Ardelt (2003) views insights as constituting and contributing to a person’s cognitive wisdom, but as being derived through reflective dimension perspective-taking skills. Our conception of contemplation appears to combine aspects of Ardelt’s cognitive and reflective dimensions into one dimension, contemplation, that utilizes cognitive-based skills, in the form of
abstraction, and reflective based skills, in the form of perspective-shifting and introspection, to generate insights that contribute to a person’s collective wisdom.

Weststrate & Glück’s (2017) recent study focused specifically on the reflectivity dimension of the MORE Life Experience Model, to show that, as so defined, reflectivity is especially important for how life events are cognitively and emotionally processed, and integrated into a life story in ways that promotes the development of wisdom. In their review of the literature, Weststrate & Glück (2017) found that, in addition to life experience, reflection is a prominent feature in both implicit theories and psychological models of wisdom and wisdom development. In their review of implicit wisdom theory research, Bluck and Glück (2005) found that reflection was among the top five defining characteristics of wisdom based on the implicit wisdom theories of laypeople (Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Jeste et al. (2010) also found that self-reflection and self-insight were among the descriptors most strongly associated with wisdom within the implicit wisdom theories of a panel of wisdom researchers (Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Reflection is also a prominent feature in Webster’s (2003, 2007) model of wisdom development. He defines the concept in a slightly different manner from Ardelt’s (2003) reflective dimension, and our concept of contemplation, but it tends to show more parallels to our definition. Webster (2003, 2007) defines reflection as the propensity to look back on one’s personal past in order to gain insight from it, which can then be used in future situations. This echoes the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm’s ‘life review’ concept that serves as one of the mediating factors involved in the development of wisdom through sense making of our past history (Baltes & Smith, 2008; Weststrate & Glück, 2017).
Weststrate and Glück (2017) consider the reflection component of Webster’s (2003, 2007) understanding of wisdom, and that of the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Baltes & Smith, 2008), to be consistent with their definition of reflection that involves looking back on one’s life experiences. Weststrate and Glück (2017), however, also incorporate into their definition the potential to apply this reflective sense-making to the experiences of others, rather than only those that are personally experienced. It is in this way that Weststrate and Glück’s (2017) understanding of reflection, as it pertains to the development of wisdom, may be the most consistent with our definition of contemplation.

Weststrate and Glück (2017) were also interested in understanding how people reflect on the past, and how they make sense of their life experiences through the construction of coherent and meaningful autobiographical narratives through a process called autobiographical reasoning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Autobiographical reasoning involves two factors: exploratory processing, and redemptive processing. Exploratory processing emphasizes the cognitive facet of reflection, and utilizes an investigative, analytical, and interpretive approach to reflecting on life events to generate meaning (lesson extraction and insight), complexity, and growth from the past (Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Redemptive processing focuses more on the affective facet of reflection, and involves the transformation of initially negative events into emotionally positive one’s, providing the individual with a sense of closure and event resolution (Weststrate & Glück, 2017). Retrospectively, we see both of these processes emerge through Stuart’s narrative. The insight component of our conception of contemplation relates more to the exploratory processing style, which we see Stuart engage in throughout his narrative, and which we coded for using the subtheme of insight. For instance, we see Stuart
engage in exploratory processing Stuart when he converts negative experience of getting shot by his father into a positive experience through viewing it as an opportunity for learning and growth, and reflecting on how he contributed to the situation. This is congruent with Weststrate and Glück’s (2017) assertion that wisdom-fostering forms of reflection require individuals to explore how they contributed to negative life events. At least implicitly, the above instance may actually represent a hybrid of exploratory and redemptive processing, as it is very likely that Stuart did not just process the cognitive facet of this experience, but also the emotional facet as well. Also included in our insight coding for Stuart are instances that could have been considered indicative of a purely redemptive processing style. For instance, we saw this when Stuart converted his anger and resentment, which stemmed from the abuse incurred at the hands of his father, into compassion and sympathy. Weststrate & Glück (2017) found that wiser individuals process life challenges in an exploratory manner that emphasizes meaning and growth, in spite of the unpleasantness inherent to such a process. They suggest that redemptive processing, which is more characteristic of Eric, and to a lesser extent, Kevin, may be a pathway to adjustment, while exploratory processing is a pathway to wisdom. Our results from Stuart, though, suggest that wise individuals engage in both processing styles. It may be that the insights generated from exploratory processing, and the growth that results, overshadow the affective resolutions that result from redemptive processing. This represents an exciting new foray of wisdom research, with opportunities existing for future research to focus on these reflective processing styles in exemplary cases of wisdom, such as Stuart, and comparisons with lower functioning cases, such as Eric and Kevin.
The Link Between Wisdom and Well-being through Identity and Values. The second part of our emergent theory considers how wisdom and well-being may be linked through the effects that wisdom development has on identity development. At the heart of this process is our concept of contemplation. Contemplation allows for wisdom development through the generation of insights based on lesson extraction and sense-making of personal experiences, and the experiences of others. For wisdom to contribute to identity development, these insights must be transformed, through contemplative inquiry, into a form that is useable at a practical level, and which can be implemented through our actions to help create alignment between our valued and experienced lives and selves. This contemplative transformation leads to the generation of insight-values, which are then integrated into a person’s identity, and applied through their actions, behaviours, and goal strivings. This allows for a committed, integrated, robust, and trans-situational sense of self. This sense of self is authentic, self-informed, and self-determined, since the values that are derived stem from one’s contemplative inquiry into their personal experiences, and exposures. It is through this wisdom-derived optimized identity, from the generation of insight-values, their integration into the self, and their application through experiencing, that we can attribute the dividends upon a person’s well-being.

This connection between wisdom and well-being through identity development is congruent with past research. The literature suggests that having a robust, cohesive, and well-defined sense of self is important for a number of well-being related positive outcomes (Dimitrova, Chasiotis, Bender & van de Vijver, 2012; Manuel & Sibley, 2014; Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia & Scabini, 2006). Past research has also shown that wisdom is associated with numerous identity-related constructs, and various facets that can be integrated into identity, and which
contribute to a person’s sense of self (Bang & Zhou, 2014; Beaumont 2009, 2011; Webster, 2007, 2010). A direct link between wisdom and well-being through identity was established by Beaumont (2009) who found that an informational identity processing style positively predicts self-actualization and self-transcendence, which in turn, positively predicts enhanced well-being through meaning in life and subjective happiness (Beaumont, 2009). There are some parallels between findings in the current study, and the identity-processing framework of Berzonsky (2011). Stuart would be a classic informational identity processor, with his focus on critical self-examination, and his commitment to self-actualization through relentless inquiry into every facet of his being. Kevin, on the other hand, would be a classic diffuse-avoidant identity processor, given the palpable tension and psychic conflict that emerges across his narrative, as well as his avoidance of such conflicts through redirection, or outright denial of them through wishful, distorted, and fallacious thinking. In the context of wisdom and well-being, the identity processing framework appears compelling, particularly given the work of Beaumont (2011) that also incorporates elements of mindfulness beliefs and practices into her work, which we also saw in Stuart through presence, observation, and savouring. Despite these parallels, certain differences between the current findings and the work of Beaumont (2009, 2011) could not be reconciled. This difference concerns the direction of the pathway proposed in the link between wisdom, identity and well-being. Our emergent theory considers enhanced well-being to be a consequence of wisdom-derived identity development, rather than identity-derived wisdom development. Research conducted by Bang & Zhou (2014) suggests a wisdom and identity pathway to well-being that is more congruent with the one proposed in the current study. Using Marcia’s (1966) ego-identity statuses, and Ardelt’s (2003) wisdom model as theoretical and conceptual frameworks, they found that perspective-taking from the reflective dimension best
predicted identity achievement, suggesting that the reflective dimension may lead to healthier ego-identity formation (Bang & Zhou, 2014). These findings mesh seamlessly with our emergent theory, based on the case of Stuart, not only in terms of the proposed pathway to well-being, but also in the primacy placed on reflection, and the pivotal role that it has on the development of a wisdom-informed sense of self.

The theory proposed by the current study goes a step further to implicate insight-derived values as the glue that binds together wisdom and identity, and which allows for enhanced well-being through the development of a cohesive sense of self. The emergence of values as critical to the relationship between wisdom, identity and well-being is another reason why the identity-processing framework does not adequately account for the findings from the current study. But given the parallels in the current findings and that of Beaumont (2009, 2011), future research may want to explore how values may fit Beaumont’s, in order to explore an alternative theory to the one presented in the current study that, much like Beaumont’s, ultimately seeks to harmonize the concepts of wisdom, identity, and well-being, under a unified theory. The findings from the current study implicate values as a potential missing link to this conceptual unification. Our theory proposes that the insights that contribute to a person’s wisdom are in the form of abstract, intuitive, units of meaning that are not easily understood in a linguistic or practical sense, and which cannot be readily applied at an experiential level through one’s actions and behaviours – what Sternberg (2001) calls tacit knowledge. To make use of these insights, one must convert them into a functional form, which is where we see the generation of insight-derived values. The implementation of these values through actions, along with a commitment to adherence, results in alignment between values and actions. When this alignment occurs between a person’s valued
and experienced life, then we see an even greater enhancement of well-being, above and beyond the positive effects that resulted from the development of a wisdom-derived cohesive sense of identity.

Drawing from Hitlin (2003), alignment between values and actions may allow for a coherent and integrated sense of self, through his iterated concept of value-identities. Hitlin (2003) suggests that one’s values lead to experiences of personal identity, and that the actions and behaviours that result from the experiential manifestations of these values at the level of one’s personal identity help inform identity development at other levels of the self (i.e. group identity, role-identity etc.). Together, these various identities allow for the formation of a coherent, unified, well-rounded, and trans-situational understanding of the self. Importantly, Hitlin (2003) also considered reflection as critical to this process, in that the behaviours and actions that result from our identities can cause us to reflect on our values, which can orient us towards different values, which causes a shift in our understanding of ourselves.

The positive effects of values on well-being have been substantiated in the literature (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Schwarz, Sagiv & Boehnke, 2000). Moreover, well-being is largely dependent upon congruence between an individual’s set of value priorities and the prevailing value environment in which they operate (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). In some ways, this finding by Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) echoes the alignment facet of our emergent theory. An alternative pathway to well-being under our proposed framework could occur through valued goal attainment. This would echo Sternberg’s (2001) suggestion that tacit knowledge helps orient people towards their valued goals, thereby fulfilling goal attainment, and ultimately, feelings of satisfaction. This particular pathway to well-being cannot be substantiated, though, when we
consider it in the context of Stuart, who demonstrated actualization and enhanced satisfaction, even in spite of his lack of goal attainment. Therefore, the pathway proposed by our emergent framework is more suitable in light of the current findings.

The inclusion of a values component in our integrated emergent theory linking wisdom, identity and well-being is congruent with some aspects of existing wisdom theories. Sternberg (2001) emphasized the role that values play in wise decision making. Within his balance theory of wisdom, Sternberg (2001) proposes that values mediate how a person utilizes their tacit knowledge to achieve a balance between varying, and sometimes competing interests, with the contextually-appropriate course of action, in order to facilitate the common good. The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm also incorporated values into their model of wisdom, through their concept of value relativism, which is a person’s knowledge about the human diversity of values, goals, and priorities, and which manifests as a tolerance and respect for actions and beliefs that may be different, unfamiliar, or in opposition to their own (Baltes & Smith, 2008). Value relativism represents one of five meta-components that synergize to further inform the idiosyncrasies of an individual’s expert knowledge system. In this sense, knowledge of values is one sort of knowledge that combines with other knowledge sets and is integrated into their collective knowledge system that is representative of wisdom. Our theory incorporates values in a way that differs from Sternberg’s (2001) balance theory and the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Baltes & Smith, 2008), in that it understands values and wisdom as dialectically interrelated, rather than a pre- or coexisting factor that informs, or contributes to it.
Case-derived Implications

Case-derived implications were extracted from all three participants. The emergence of mindfulness beliefs and practices, through presence, observation, and savouring, within the narrative of Stuart speaks to the usefulness of including these components in intervention and remediation programs for individuals with HFA. Future studies exploring the pivotal components involved in the development of wisdom and identity would be judicious to explore this area in greater depth. In adhering to their practices, existing wisdom theories should also remain open to the potential for refinement through the incorporation of mindfulness-based elements. In addition to the above, we also saw from Stuart the importance of having access to positive role models who can teach and model wisdom-promoting beliefs, skills, and practices involved in our conception of experiencing and contemplation. Future studies should consider investigating these wisdom role-models and exemplar figures in the lives of wise individuals to better understand how wisdom develops, and to explore how they mitigate risk and promote positive outcomes, particularly in the context of at-risk individuals. Finally, from Stuart we see the materialization of our emergent theory regarding the development of wisdom and identity, that implicates experiencing and contemplation as critical to self-actualization. Given the associations between an integrated and cohesive identity, greater well-being, and more positive outcomes, more research is needed to explore the merit of the proposed theory, and how wisdom potentially contributes to this relationship through the generation of insight-values that contribute to such an identity, and contemplation-facilitated alignment between one’s valued-ideal life and their experienced-actual life, and the ongoing process of contemplative refinement that propels the individual towards self-actualization, self-transcendence, and a deep sense of satisfaction in life.
Implications for Eric and Kevin are better understood conjointly. In Eric, we saw direct evidence for the benefit and significance of formalized community support services for individuals with HFA and their families. And in Kevin, we see direct evidence for the potential damage that can occur, for the individual and all of society, when there is a lack of access to, or utilization of, such services. Such a scenario may be preventable in the future by increasing public education regarding the availability and accessibility of these programs, and how to access them through community outreach programs. Also, from Eric, we saw further support for the potential benefit that access to, and engagement with, informal non-educational opportunities can have on risk mitigation, coping, and deficit remediation, as well as generally facilitating more positive outcomes.

From all three participants, but especially so for Stuart, we see the power that such a person-centred morphogenic gestalt approach to data analysis has for an illumination into the life, mind, and essence of another person. Future studies looking to gain a better appreciation of the full depth of profound, ultimately metaphysical, concepts such as wisdom and identity should consider pursuing such a method. It carries the potential for producing especially compelling and enlightening insights when pursued in the context of exemplary cases such as Stuart, given the complexity of his narrative from which such insights can emerge.

Limitations

The same methodological, measurement, and data limitations that existed in Khan’s (2013) study also apply to the current study. Given the small sample size, and the highly idiosyncratic case studies that were produced, the results from the current study should not be
taken as a generalization of all individuals. Indeed, in such a person-centred morphogenic inquiry, the apriori intention should never be one of hard and fast generalizable theory. Rather, personal development is considered a temporal process that unfolds over time through the collective accumulation of narrative-generated insights. The current exploratory study is only meant to sow the seeds of a process that has the potential to inspire other researchers to pursue this path to even greater knowledge of the potential for wisdom, identity, and well-being of people diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Other limitations include those typical of research involving self-report data, particularly for research involving individuals with developmental disabilities such as HFA (Mazefsky, Kao, Oswald, 2011). A typical remedy for this limitation is to include additional informants to help corroborate the self-report data and potentially reconcile any biases that may arise. The current study only had access to the original dataset from Khan (2013), which unfortunately did not utilize any other informant sources for each participant’s quantitative and qualitative data, and spoke to participants only once. It would have been ideal to have a chance to speak to them several times and observe them in their daily lives, as well as to speak to others in each participant’s life and have them complete each quantitative measure regarding the participant in question. This would have been especially helpful in the case of Kevin, who is clearly an unreliable narrator. But even for our best case, Stuart, it would be good to hear how others see him, and whether they think his high life satisfaction is warranted. In defence of this limitation, the point of the thesis is one of examining subjective well-being, and self-understanding – not an objective list – since, especially in the case of well-being, the ultimate judgment that should matter is the one made by the individual themselves, with the major caveat being how informed
and nuanced their self-understanding appears to be, and on the basis of their narrative, the implicit harmony that emerges between one’s words, and one’s actions. In an apropos denouement to the current study, a poetic mediation on this very notion from Plato’s dialogue concerning the virtues of courage and wisdom, *Laches*,

“I take the speaker and his speech together, and observe how they sort and harmonize with each other. Such a man is exactly what I understand by “musical,”—he has tuned himself with the fairest harmony, not that of a lyre or other entertaining instrument, but has made a true concord of his own life between his words and his deeds […]. Such a man makes me rejoice.” (Lamb, 1955)
References


Appendix A

Emergent Themes Involved in Wisdom and Identity Development

Experiencing is the act of encountering or undergoing an event or occurrence. Experiencing can be conceptualized as having a phenomenological component, related more to the experience itself and how the person makes sense of it, and an applied component, related to how the person interfaces with that experience through action. Experiencing also has a motivational-trait component, ala the Big Five Personality characteristic ‘Openness to Experience’ (Goldberg, 1990). This facet of our conception of experiencing is based on the structural account of openness (McCrae & Costa, 1997), which conceptualizes it as a need for experience in order to enhance and facilitate the development of cognition (Osberg, 1987), sentience, and understanding (Jackson, 1984). Fiske (1949) attributed this active curiosity of open individuals to a factor he called “inquiring intellect." These are individuals who enjoy both the process of exploring, and the novelty of discovery (McCrae & Costa, 1997; Fiske, 1949). McCrae (1996) found that open individuals tend to endorse liberal political and social values because questioning authority is a natural consequence of their curiosity (McCrae & Costa, 1997). This willingness to meditate on issues related to values also leads to higher moral development and a rejection of convention (Lonky, Kays & Roodin, 1984; McCrae & Costa, 1997). Experiencing represents a prerequisite input for the successful use of one’s contemplative skills towards the development of wisdom, and through that, as we will see in our later analysis, on values and the development of a cohesive identity that shows alignment with one’s valued-ideal life and one’s experienced-actual life.
For an individual like Stuart, who lives with HFA, it would be all too easy to allow one’s disability or difference push them towards the safety, comfort and predictability of their inner citadel. This is especially true when one considers the social and communication impairments, behavioural abnormalities, and sensory hypersensitivities that are seen in this population. But this inner citadel lacks exposure to novel experiences, the same experiences that allow an individual to grow and develop, to test the abstract theories they read about, to reaffirm or challenge their understanding of the world and others, to overcome their fears, to interact with others and develop their social skills, to form meaningful connections with people, and learn from them, to learn about themselves and what they like and do not like, what they value, what motivates them, what makes them truly happy, and the list goes on. For Stuart, the lure of the inner citadel is not as strong as the lure of knowledge, wisdom and self-actualization, which he understands can only be gained through experiencing and being out in the world, despite its difficulty or discomfort.

Experiencing also allows Stuart to take the theoretical or abstract knowledge he gleans through his own study, and test it in the real world through practice, which allows him to better understand this knowledge in ways he could not otherwise. Because of the experiential nature of many of the concepts of life and being expressed in theory, such as values, virtues and character strengths, one must take this knowledge and apply it through practice, through their own actions and experiences, in order to truly grasp their meaning, influence, relevance, and significance.

**Contemplation** is the second emergent theme involved in the development of wisdom and identity. Contemplation is the act of engaging in deep reflective thought, and is similar in some respects to Ardelt’s (2003) reflective dimension, except that in our version, contemplation
also ties in aspects of the cognitive dimension. Stuart’s ability to contemplate is superb, and shows multiple layers of complexity that coalesce and synergize to produce exceptional depth of insight. This contemplative complexity is illustrated by the subthemes that fall under the primary theme of **Contemplation**. These are: **perspective shifting**, **introspection**, **insight**, and **abstraction**.

**Perspective shifting** refers to the ability to reflect on the full spectrum of one’s experiences, and examine the full range of possibility from multiple viewpoints, including those separate from your own, without bias, avoidance, denial, or delusion. Perspective shifting implies a certain level of ownership and acceptance of one’s past, a process that facilitates closure/resolution, allowing the individual to move forward from a negative past. It also implies a certain level of maturity in order for an individual to put aside their ego, shift their perspective, consider competing viewpoints, and turn their critical analysis inward. Finally, it allows for more comprehensive insight and meaning-making since the individual is reflecting on all of their experiences and able to consider a range of perspectives. When one’s perspective shifts towards that of an other, the process is called perspective taking. We see Stuart engaging in intense perspective taking that enables him to understand the more personal aspects of another’s experience, and from that, gain a deep insight into the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes that are at the heart of their actions, interactions, and reactions. It also allows him to see parallels between his life and the life of those whom he admires, so he can relate to them and see how their development can inform his own. This deeper level of understanding, then, is critical for Stuart’s successful lesson extraction and meaning making from the experiences of others, as well as vicarious learning and modelling of his exemplars. Beyond this, perspective
shifting also provides him with a means for better understanding other people through an inquiry into their thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and motivations. Moreover, it provides him with a path towards self-improvement through the wisdom, experiences, and lives of others, which he can then integrate into his own schemata, apply through his actions, and through that, continue his own process of personal growth, and contribute to the lives of others in order to help them grow. It also allows Stuart to compare himself to others and use that information to better understand himself, and adjust and refine his own behaviour. And finally, it allows him to take responsibility and examine his own actions and behaviour, in order to better understand how he contributed to a particular event.

**Introspection** refers to the examination and observation of one’s own mental and emotional processes. Introspection allows Stuart to better understand himself and develop a robust sense of identity. Through critical self-examination, Stuart is able to extract meaning from his experiences in terms of how he contributed to someone’s life, or a situation that involved helping another person. Introspection facilitates the extraction of personally relevant, critical lessons from his experiences and interactions, and from his own study, which he can then apply to his life as a means of growth and self-actualization. It also allows Stuart to understand the impact that external events have had on his internal state, and how his past has led to the development of his current self. Finally, introspection allows Stuart to critically analyze his own actions in order to understand his contribution to an event, and make adjustments where needed. Introspection then can be viewed as a critical skill in the ongoing ebb and flow of identity development and self-actualization that occurs throughout the course of one’s life.
**Insight** refers to the capacity to gain an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of a person, thing, or phenomena. Insight ties directly back to wisdom and identity development through the transformative effects it has on the individual, through which positive growth and change occur. Stuart derives insight from the contemplative inquiry into his own experiences, as well as the experiences or teachings of others. There are three types of insights that emerge through Stuart’s narrative that are distinct in terms of their source. The first type are experiential, in that they come from specific encounters and experiences he has had in his own life. The second type are conceptual, in that they come from the conscious manipulation of one’s thoughts, and sense-making of abstract concepts that do not involve a phenomenological component. The final type are external and have to do with his seeking out and amalgamating into himself, the knowledge and experiences of others. Through reflection and sense-making, he extracts the personally relevant lessons of life from these external teachings. He then applies these lessons towards his own life as a means of facilitating personal growth.

**Abstraction** refers to Stuart’s ability to reflect on, integrate, and express his understanding of abstract ideas, at both a conceptual level, and a personal level. It facilitates the integration of his conceptual level abstractions and personal level practices that leads to an alignment between all aspects of his being and his understanding of life, self, and other that indicates the presence of a pervading meta-theory that he uses as a guide along his journey of life. One piece of this meta-theory that plays a unique role is that of mindfulness.

**Mindfulness** refers to the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something. Mindfulness is viewed as a meta-component because it serves as both an augmenting factor for the enhancement of experiencing and contemplation, as well as a unique and separate value on
its own, which functions as a guiding principle that manages and regulates his actions, behaviours, and perspectives along his journey through life. It is in this manner that mindfulness straddles both the experiential and cognitive processes involved in wisdom development. Mindfulness is represented by the subthemes of presence, observation, and savouring. Presence refers to the state or fact of existing, occurring, or being present in a place or thing, while observation refers to the action or process of observing something or someone carefully in order to gain information. Savouring refers to the act of enjoying or appreciating something completely, either in the moment (online), or through reflective re-experiencing (offline). The offline form serves as an element of contemplation, while the online form enhances experiencing, which in turn, augments contemplation. It is through this bootstrapping of experiencing and contemplation, that mindfulness serves wisdom and identity development. But above and beyond these effects, it also appears that mindfulness is representative of a value in its own right, with a motivating facet to its impact on the self. Mindfulness can be conceptualized as a metavalue of sorts because it bridges the gap between the process of wisdom and identity development, and the content or outcomes of these developments, which emerge as values.
Appendix B

Emergent Themes Representative of Wisdom-derived Values

The themes that emerge as the products of Stuart’s contemplative insights do so in the form of values. These emergent values are universalism, authenticity, and optimism. These same values emerge with immaculate consistency across his discussion of his life story and pivotal experiences, his personal accounts of wisdom and identity, and his goals and future ideals. His conceptualizations of wisdom and identity at an abstract level also express many of these same values. Finally, the various elements contained with Stuart’s implicit wisdom theory, as derived from the teachings of his grandfather and Miyamoto Musashi, also show exceptional alignment with these very same values.

Universalism refers to the value that one places on understanding, appreciating, tolerating and protecting all living creatures, nature, and the world (Schwartz, 1994). Under the theme of universalism we see the subthemes of teaching, interconnectedness, helping, conservation, and social justice. Teaching refers to the act of causing someone to learn or understand something by example or experience. Interconnectedness refers to the worldview in which someone sees oneness in all things. Helping refers to the act of making it easier for someone to do something by offering one’s services or resources. Conservation refers to the preservation, protection, or restoration of the natural environment, vegetation, and wildlife. Social justice refers to justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.
**Authenticity** represents a supportive value centred on living one’s life according to one’s inner needs, rather than the demands of others, society, or one’s early conditioning. Authenticity emerges at almost every point in Stuart’s narrative. Under the theme of authenticity, fall the subthemes of **self-determination**, **humility**, **self-reliance**, and **honesty**. **Self-determination** refers to the extent that an individual has control over their own life, and that their behaviour is self-motivated. **Humility** refers to the quality of being humble, or having a modest or low view of one's own importance. **Self-reliance** refers to the reliance on one’s own efforts and abilities. And finally, **honesty** refers to the quality of being free of deceit and untruthfulness.

**Optimism** represents the third supportive value that emerges throughout Stuart’s narrative, and refers to one’s hopefulness and confidence about the future, or the successful outcome of something. We see optimism emerge through two separate subthemes, **Human potential** and **Impact potential**. **Human potential** refers to the belief one has in the innate potential for good and actualization that resides within all human beings. **Impact potential** relates back in some ways to that of **Human potential**, but with a greater focus on actions. It refers to the belief in the potential our actions can have in impacting the lives of others.
Appendix C

Anchor Case Alignment Analysis

Beginning with Stuart’s quantitative scores on the PVQ, we see that his values priorities place the greatest motivational emphasis on the values of Self-direction (6), Universalism (5.67), Benevolence (5.5) and Hedonism (5). The combination of self-direction and universalism should manifest as a reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of existence. This is exactly what see in such explicit fashion through Stuart’s expression of the time he got shot by his father for being friends with people from other ethnicities. Moreover, Stuart expresses excellent judgment throughout his interview, which manifests in such an intuitive and clear manner across every aspect of his life and functioning. The combination of universalism and benevolence should manifest through the enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests. Again we see exceptional alignment between this motivational emphasis and what we see manifest in his life, through his past experiences, current being, and structuring of goals to achieve those value-congruent ends. It manifests through his commitment to helping others, his belief in transferring knowledge and wisdom, his desire to protect those in need and the environment, and promoting an appreciation the world we have, which appear to stem from the direct influence of his grandfather, and the indirect study of teachings from thought leaders and sages. It is interesting that we see such a balance in terms of social and personal values that we do not see from other participants in the HFA-Canada group. Most others place much greater priority on social values relative to personal values. This balance can be interpreted as Stuart having a deep connection to others, humanity, and the world, and a commitment to protecting them and promoting their optimal development, while at the same time having a deep connection
to himself that leads to an inner confidence and conviction in his beliefs and behavioural
tendencies in regards for what he wants for himself personally, while also orienting himself
towards the greater good and considering what is best for that which transcends him. This
balance in terms of his social and personal values is redolent of the balance that we see
throughout his narrative in terms of his experiences, contemplative skills, and mindfulness-based
beliefs and practices, and the alignment we see through every aspect of his narrative, from his
conceptualizations of wisdom and identity, to his inquiry into the lives of others, and his own
experiences, to his generation of wisdom-derived insight-values, and the application of these
values into his own personal identity and approach to wisdom, and structuring of his life in a way
that orients himself towards the fulfillment of his values and propels him towards his ideal future
life and self.

Stuart’s narrative demonstrated exceptional alignment between his conceptualizations of
wisdom and identity, in terms of the supportive themes that emerged, which relate to orienting
values and guiding principles that appear to inform every aspect of his being. Beyond conceptual
alignment, we also see temporal alignment in terms of these orienting values, from Stuart’s past
experiences, based on his life story, to his future ideal self and life, based on his discussion of
goals. This thematic alignment between wisdom, identity, past experiences, and future ideals,
implicates values as potentially critical to the link between wisdom and well-being. The
formation and refinement of these values, as well as their integration into the self, and adherence
through action, may be facilitated through the contemplative component of wisdom, which acts
on various inputs, such as pivotal influences, critical experiences, etc., to extract lessons and
meaning that are concordant with the self. When we see alignment between one’s actions/
circumstances, their identity and sense of self, their implicit wisdom theory, and their values, the individual is much more able to live a satisfying life that leads to a higher level of SWB. This echoes some of the thinking on possible selves articulated by Markus and Nurius (1986). If there is merit to this theory we should expect to see greater values alignment in individuals with high wisdom and high well-being, and lower values alignment in those with low wisdom and low well-being.
Appendix D

Additional Example of Poor Abstract Reasoning

We also see Eric’s difficulties with abstraction through his inability to justify his choice for the wisest person in history, and provide sound reasons for why he was wise, or evidence that demonstrates his wisdom, until he eventually just abandons the thought altogether:

*Eric:* Ok, so...like...ok, there's no actual wise person as we can say like so. I can guarantee that, ok? Like, wha- just for instance we can say that, like what determines ok, end up like saying that Hitler was wise for instance and the Americans said that Hitler was a traitor. So it becomes a little...I think of it as a matter of perspective.

*Interviewer:* These are the perspective of German and American people. So what is your perspective?

*Eric:* I think it probably would be JFK. Bu-but that would be...

*Interviewer:* Why, why was he wise?

*Eric:* Well ... I know he's an American president. But you know...

*Interviewer:* So you're saying that JFK was wise, so why was he wise, why did you choose him?

*Eric:* Umm...oh you know I can't even explain it. ... I just can't explain it.

*Interviewer:* What is beyond that?

*Eric:* I can't expla- I can't explain it. Ok?....Him ruling America? I've no idea.
Appendix E

Interview Protocol

1. What are the goals for your personal growth? [Follow-up: How will you achieve this goal?]

2. What are the goals for your relationships? [Follow-up: How will you achieve this goal?]

3. What are the goals for your contribution to society? [Follow-up: How will you achieve this goal?]

4. Tell me about yourself, and your life history? [Follow-up: What are the things you remember most from your life?]

5. What experiences were most important in helping make you the person you are today? [Follow-up: Of all the experiences you mentioned, what was the most important?]

6. What is a difficult situation you encountered in your life, and how did you cope?

7. What is identity, and what does identity mean to you?

8. What is your identity?

9. Who is the wisest person you know in your life?

10. Describe a time that shows _____ was wise? [Follow-up: What is the wisdom in that story?]

11. Describe a difficult situation that ______ faced, and how did _____ cope?

12. Do you want to become like ______? [Follow-up: What did you learn?]

13. Did her teacher help her become wise?

14. Describe a time when you were wise, or approached being wise? [Follow-up: What is the wisdom in that story?; What is the wisest time out of all the times you described?]

15. Who is the wisest person in history?
16. Describe a story that shows ______ was wise?

17. Can you become like _____? [Follow-up: What did you learn?]

18. What is wisdom? What does wisdom mean to you?