

## Background

- The college transition can be difficult for many students
- It is helpful to study individual differences and aspects of development that may help us anticipate student adjustment**  
Agency, motivations for personal success and control over one's surroundings, can be important for young adult adjustment
- Agency tends to increase over much of the lifespan (Little, Snyder, & Wehmeyer, 2006)
- Agency has been associated with personality traits, such as conscientiousness and tendencies to be well-organized in life (McAdams et al., 2004)
- Students' **autobiographical narratives**—rich recollections of their life experiences—might provide valuable insights into how they incorporate agency into their lives

## Method

- As part of a larger study, we recruited 288 undergraduate students from a Midwestern university.
  - M* age = 18.39 years, *SD* = 1.59
  - 78.3% women
- Participants completed a measure on **Big Five** personality traits:
  - Scores ranged from 1-7
  - Extraversion** (i.e., enthusiastic; not quiet)
  - Agreeableness** (i.e., sympathetic; not quarrelsome)
  - Conscientiousness** (i.e., dependable; not careless)
  - Neuroticism** (i.e., anxious; not emotionally stable)
  - Openness** (i.e., open to new experiences; not conventional)
- Participants provided an open-ended narrative about their college transition experience. These narratives were coded for displays of agency and motivations for self-improvement and mastery (inter-rater reliability,  $\omega = .97$ ).
- Scores** ranged from 0 to 3:
  - 0 = students focus on feeling helpless about the transition
  - 3 = Students talk about showing agency in the moment AND focus on the ways they have control and can drive the next steps of their lives—they discuss being agentic individuals

An example of an agentic college transition narrative excerpt:

...It has made me a **more independent** but also **dependable person**. I love myself more and have **figured out how to work under pressure**...

## Results

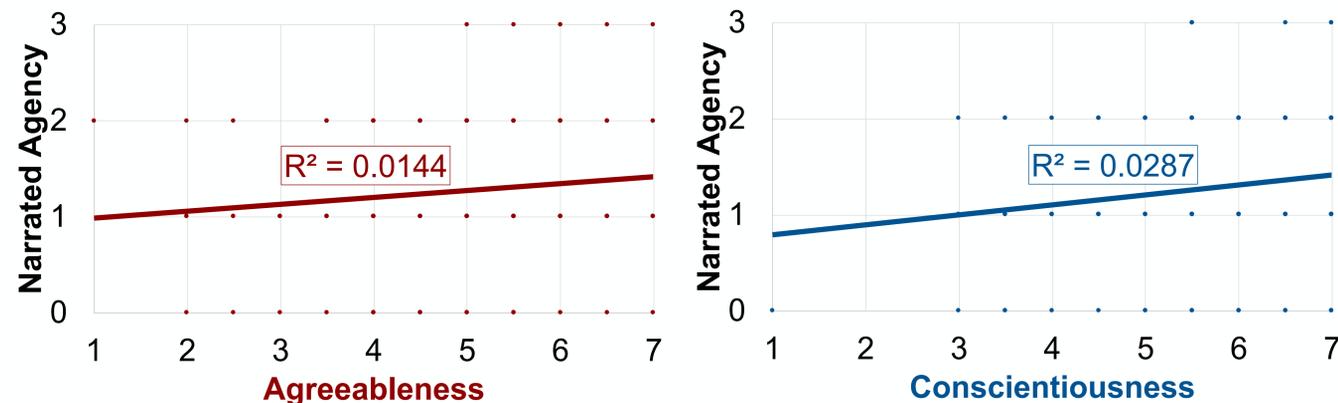
- We conducted **bivariate correlations** to test the direct associations between agency and other variables of age and Big Five personality traits.
  - Agency was significantly and positively correlated with reports of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness.
- We conducted a **regression analysis** of all predictors with the outcome of agency.
  - Only conscientiousness accounted for unique variance in outcomes of agency, when all predictors of interest were considered at once.

## Descriptives

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Narrated Agency	1.28	.64	.00	3.00
Extraversion	4.39	1.53	1.00	7.00
Agreeableness	5.04	1.06	1.00	7.00
Conscientiousness	5.65	1.08	1.00	7.00
Neuroticism	3.35	1.42	1.00	7.00
Openness	5.21	1.01	1.00	7.00

## Figures: Significant Correlations with Agency

Bivariate correlations were tested between agency, age, and Big Five factors. Agency was significantly and positively correlated with the Big Five factors of agreeableness ( $r = .13, p = .035$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = .17, p = .004$ ), but not age or other Big Five factors ( $ps \geq .085$ ).



## Multiple Regression: DV = Narrated Agency

	Beta	S.E.	b	Sig.
Intercept	.84	.60	--	.162
Age	-.01	.03	-.02	.748
Extraversion	-.04	.03	-.10	.098
Agreeableness	.05	.04	.08	.216
<b>Conscientiousness</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.047</b>
Neuroticism	-.03	.03	-.07	.280
Openness	.04	.04	.07	.297

*Note.*  $F(6, 275) = 2.47, p = .024, R^2 = .05$ . Bolded values indicate significant effects at the  $\alpha = .05$  level.

## Discussion

- Age was not linked with agency in this college-focused sample. This is possibly due to the limited age range of focus in this study.
- However, personality, and particularly **agreeableness** and **conscientiousness**, were associated with agency. This is in line with previous findings (McAdams et al., 2006). Being able to identify students who are lower in these traits may help identify individuals who may experience *and have difficulty managing* some of the challenges and rigors of college.
- Using these findings, future directions may begin to identify potential opportunities for intervention in improving the college experience. With these insights we can better identify students who may be at greater risk and benefit from other interventions geared at improving the college transition.

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