Nine Lives: The Up Series and Personality Over Time

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The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of personality development in a particular sample of individuals. Using the Up Series documentary as a platform, we collected extensive amounts of data with the use of personal narratives, the California Child and Adult Q-sort assessments, and a series of personally constructed trait rating scales to produce nine longitudinal case studies. The Up Series follows the lives of fourteen Britons of varying social and economic backgrounds from age seven in the early 1960s to the present day. After synthesizing all of our singular data, contrary to what the directors of the film initially postulated, we found that childhood socioeconomic circumstances do not necessarily dictate the levels of success and failure that these individuals experience throughout their lives. This research will likely impact the perception of social class effects in personality development.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1964, Granada Television interviewed fourteen British children of diverse social and economic backgrounds for the film *7 Up*. Director Michael Apted continued these films in seven year intervals to produce the documentary, the *Up Series*. Each of these films illuminates the levels of success and failure that our targets experience in light of their career paths, relationships, and emerging roles as caretakers. Although these films were originally posed as a deeper look into the developmental effects of social class disparities in England, it becomes evident that they can also be utilized as effective tools for personality psychology measures. As an undergraduate Psychometrics class, we set out to expand upon this documentary in an extensive examination of personality development among these individuals through the use of trait rating scales, Q-sort data, and personal narratives.

METHODS

Though there were a total of 14 participants in the *Up Series*, students collected data for only nine, as they appeared most consistently across each segment: Amber, Bryan, Keith, Mark, Ralph, Rebecca, Ryan, Samantha, and Steve (these names have been changed in order to preserve a certain level of privacy for the individuals involved). We used the California Q-sort and our own trait rating scales to systematically rate each participant's personality (Block, 1961). At every age, each participant was rated by one rater who wrote a brief narrative describing the participant's life and personality at that time. At the end of watching the *Up Series* as a class, each student wrote a case study about one of the participants, integrating data collected from different aspects of their lives. This paper aims to understand attributes of personality in each of these people's lives through the use of the Q-sort and trait rating data that we collected from our case studies.

California Q-sort

The California Q-sort is a set of 100 items (e.g. *is talkative*) intended to systematically describe an individual's personality. Lanning (1994) outlined eight factors that emerge from the California Adult Q-sort (CAQ): the Big Five (Agreeableness, Extraversion, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness), Attractiveness, Insight, and Ambition. The California Child Q-sort (CCQ) is a modified version of the CAQ for children and adolescents. The variation of these constructs over time provides a better understanding of personality development.

This class used the CCQ and CAQ in rating each participant's personality for each age. One student sorted the 100 Q-sort items by hand while the others used an online program. The CCQ was used for ages seven and 14 and the CAQ was used for ages 21, 28, 35, 42, 49, and 56. There were two raters for each participant for each age. Our current data set combines the current results with that of previous classes, making the ratings more reliable.

Trait Ratings

In addition to the Q-sort data, our class created our own trait rating scales. We agreed upon 19 traits that were defined according to class consensus (see Appendix A). Traits were rated on a scale from 1 (very uncharacteristic) to 6 (very characteristic). A middle point (neutral) was excluded in order to force a selection toward one side or the other. Students used these scales to rate each of the nine participants for each corresponding age.

Analyses

Our professor, Dr. Lanning, analyzed the Q-sort and trait rating data using the statistical program R to obtain the averages and correlations across ages, targets (participants), rater gender, year, and combinations of these. The same procedure was conducted for this year's trait ratings. Correlations were computed for the trait ratings, the Q-sort profiles, and between the Q-sort profiles and Q-sort prototypes (such as paranoid or optimal functioning; Block, 1961).

Case Studies

Each student wrote one narrative for a different participant at each age. The students then combined the narratives, Q-sorts, and trait rating data into a case study for each of the participants. The case studies explored the lives of these individuals and their personality development, both from observation and the quantitative data collected. This paper is a collection of samples from those case studies looking at major life events, personality traits, ages, cultures, or themes.

Rather than simply compare each of the nine individuals on a subset of the measures collected, we instead use a more idiographic approach, describing each person using those characteristics which appeared most salient to our raters. Tables on our Open Science Framework site (https://osf.io/h2tgq/) provide summary scores for each individual for each age.

CASE STUDIES

Amber

When Amber was introduced, she was attending primary school in the East End of London. At age seven, Amber appeared to be the quietest and most reserved member of her group of friends; she waited patiently to answer certain questions, such as her career aspirations, which she happily revealed as wanting "to work at Woolworths" (Almond, 1964). By 14, Amber chose a different path than her friends and enrolled in grammar school. Amber married at age 19, managing to maintain a beautiful marriage and raise two daughters throughout the series. At the age of 21, Amber was working with children in a mobile library in London's East End. After the mobile library was shut down due to educational budget cuts, Amber worked at Bethnal Greens, a children's library where she continued "teaching children the beauty of books" (Apted, 1977). At the library, Amber worked passionately with children who had special needs, which she described as "challenging" (Apted, 2005). Unfortunately, by 56, Amber was no longer employed by the library due to additional budget cuts. This, however, allowed Amber to be more involved in her grandchildren's lives, even helping her daughters raise them.

Amber's life revolved around children, reinforcing CAQ findings which showed her to be characteristically *dependable* and *ethically consistent*. She wanted to be a teacher and then a librarian, both careers that are entirely child-focused fields. Through her position as the Chair of Governors at St. Xavier's at 56, Amber continued to fight for what was best for the children of London's East End. All of this would not have been possible without a great deal of patience. According to the data collected,

Amber's rating of patience grew steadily as she aged, which allowed her to accomplish her goals and help educate the youth of London.

Bryan

Bryan spent his childhood in a charity home. Having never met his father, Bryan was the only child of a single parent in the *Up Series*. He married his first wife by age 28 and had five children; after their divorce, Bryan remarried and had another son. The divorce initially caused strain in Bryan's relationship with his five oldest children, yet by *56 Up*, Bryan had a healthier relationship with three of his children and was an active grandfather as well as a foster parent.

The concept of family plays an important role throughout Bryan's life. Bryan's most characteristic CAQ items revealed him to be a highly *compassionate* man, which is consistent with his actions toward his mother in *21 Up* as well as his desire to relate more with his children. Perhaps one of Bryan's most compassionate, family-oriented acts occurs in *49 Up,* when he and his second wife, Stacy, become foster parents. Bryan mentioned being interested in fostering because he went to boarding school where "they didn't allow for personal cares, for loving from the adult carers" (Apted, 2005) and he wanted to give back and do something more for children within his own home.

Fostering appears to give Bryan and Stacy a sense of fulfillment; though it is arguably even more important for the 65 plus children that he and his wife have fostered. Speaking from personal experience, Bryan noted that "something all children want, is to be loved. Is to be wanted. So, if you can give that to them, then everything else is second" (Apted, 2012). The couple aimed to provide a loving and supportive family environment for each foster child; a few even come back to say "'Hello, Auntie. Hello, Uncle. How are you?' They come and have Sunday dinner, come and visit" (Apted, 2005) as if they truly are part of the family.

Keith

Keith grew up in a working class family in London's East End. At the age of seven, Keith expressed his dream to become a jockey, and by 14, he was pursuing an apprenticeship at the Epsom racetrack of London. Keith's extroverted and energetic disposition, shown at an early age, set a precedent for his personality development throughout the rest of the films, which was expressed in his CAQ ratings of *talkative* and *rapid tempo*. Keith abandoned his previous career goals after a string of unsuccessful races, and started preparing to take the "Knowledge," a test that all London cab drivers must take in order to be licensed. Between the ages of 28 and 42, Keith got married, established a stable home, had three children, and found moderate success as a London cab driver. Keith's impulsive nature culminated in a bout of infidelity, discussed at age 42. This event not only put a strain on his marriage for several years, but dominated our perception of Keith through the age of 56.

From the interview in *42 Up*, it becomes apparent that Keith's unfaithfulness has taken a massive emotional toll on his marriage. Though Keith expressed that there is always a possibility that marriages experience difficulties such as this one, he was adamant about how remorseful he was for his actions and for hurting his wife, Abigail. Despite this occurrence, Keith and his wife decided to stay together for their children and try to work on their relationship.

Keith's amicable character and ability to persevere despite his underprivileged background led him to be one of the most likeable targets in the series. However, Keith's score of likeability dramatically decreased after learning about his infidelity. Keith's accomplishments notwithstanding, he was rated harshly at age 42 despite our limited perspective of the nuances or the marital dynamic that could have contributed to his behaviors around this age.

Mark

From age seven, Mark appears to be more mature than his peers, desiring to be a missionary to help others. By 21, Mark gave up on being a missionary and studied mathematics at Oxford University. Mark stuck to his political beliefs, despite being his village's only Socialist. Teaching math at an underprivileged school in London's East End made Mark realize that "being a part of people's advancement and learning, and watching them understand more" was what mattered most (Apted, 1986). While taking a sabbatical in Bangladesh, Mark explained that he "sees education as the key to it all" (Apted, 1992). Consistent maturity in his political and moral beliefs did not reflect in his love life. At age 35, Mark admitted he had not yet found the right person

and felt that he had "a lot of growing up to do still" (Apted, 1992).

Throughout his interviews, Mark does not appear worried about a lack of love, for he knows that "it will come" (Apted, 1970). In *42 Up*, Mark shares that he was "lucky to have found Julie," his wife (Apted, 1998). Their wedding was filmed by Apted. Mark and Julie appear to complement each other well, bringing out the best in each other. Julie believes Mark keeps her "better organized," whereas Mark explains that "you're not thinking about yourself all the time, you're thinking about somebody else" (Apted, 1998).

Throughout Mark's adult life, his most characteristic Q-sort traits identify him as *ethically consistent*. Although Mark has dedicated his life to the mission of helping others, we see that after his marriage to Julie, his focus turned towards taking care of his family by joining the private sector.

Ralph

Ralph was from a middle-class family living in the Liverpool suburbs. At age seven, he attended a local primary school and spoke about his wishes of becoming a coach driver. By 14, even though he had settled into his comprehensive school, Ralph appeared anxious and tired, mentioning how he barely had any time to relax. At 21, Ralph dropped out of university and was living in a squatter's home, relying on the government for assistance. When he was forced to move, Ralph found himself homeless, traveling across the countryside staying in any available barn he could find; Ralph maintained this nomadic lifestyle until he became involved in the local politics as a Liberal Democrat at age 42. After living in the country, Ralph gains a new perspective on life, and eventually finds comfort in God, becoming one of the most spiritual participants in the entire series.

Ralph's story brings awareness to the consequences of labeling someone as "eccentric" or mentally unstable. Psychology students also assumed that Ralph was highly *anxious* and neurotic when describing his personality on CAQ items and trait ratings, respectively. Even though Ralph admitted to worrying about his own sanity in *28 Up*, he never received an actual psychological diagnosis. Ralph never married and expressed concern over having children, troubled by the possibility of them inheriting his unhappiness. Despite his perceived difficulties, Ralph has a positive outlook on life; in *49 Up*, he

stated that "life comes once and it's quite short and you have to appreciate what's good in it" (Apted, 2005).

Rebecca

Rebecca attended primary school in East End London. Since age seven, Rebecca has been socially competent with articulated and elaborated opinions on her peers, other races, and marriage. Rebecca married at 19, but by *35 Up*, she was divorced and later had her son, Robert. By age 42, she was remarried and had two other sons. Rebecca suggested that Apted may have portrayed her and others inaccurately through edited versions of their lives. Her concerns are best documented in episodes *21 Up* and *49 Up*.

In *21 Up*, Apted asked Rebecca about not having as privileged of an upbringing as others. Seemingly content with her socioeconomic status, Rebecca appeared offended by this question and assured him that she had enough financial means. These scenes, along with Rebecca's overall defensive demeanor, potentially caused her to be low in likeability and agreeableness.

Rebecca's love for her children shows throughout the series. Her boys' likeness to her in personality is questioned by Apted who is curious if she is worried they would "pick up her traits" (Apted, 2005). Rebecca takes offense to his "inappropriate" question, breaking the fourth wall to express concern with Apted's editing of the interviews, especially her segment in *42 Up*. Rebecca explains how her interview seven years ago could have been based on another aspect of her life rather than her diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis. When arguing with Apted at ages 21 and 49, Rebecca's most characteristic CAQ items were *verbal fluency*, *hostility*, and *rebelliousness*.

Ryan

Ryan was from the countryside in Yorkshire Dales where he grew up working on his family's farm. Expressing his interest in the natural sciences at age seven, Ryan attended Oxford University to study physics in order to become a nuclear physicist. By the time he was 28, Ryan had fulfilled his dream by immigrating to the United States. He conducted research at the University of Wisconsin and eventually became a full time professor.

Ryan's story provokes major life themes such as loss of place and sense of identity. It is clear at

age seven that Ryan wished to pursue a different life than the one he was born into. His interest in space and his desire to be an astronaut appear to indicate a pursuit for exploring the unknown. Ryan's most characteristic Q-sort items were *intellectually capable* and *aspiration level*. This high ambition prompted Ryan to move away in order to attend university in the US. Although this life transition has, according to him, significantly improved his social relations, Ryan continues to miss his home and his family, especially as his parents age.

When asked about moving to America, Ryan explained the difficulty of becoming immersed into the American culture, which differed greatly from the British lifestyle he was accustomed to. While Ryan appreciates his life in the United States, he continues to express his feelings of missing home. In *56 Up*, Ryan explains that, though he enjoyed being home, the political nature of the nation at the time did not facilitate a proper environment for him to pursue or work in higher education.

Samantha

Samantha came from an upper class family with access to a private education. At seven, she appeared to be sheltered and expressed a desire to marry and have two children. By 14, Samantha became dismissive of Apted and her participation in the *Up Series*, which she felt forced into. At age 21, Samantha became caustic and cynical; stating that she had no faith in marriage and could not see herself having children. By *28 Up*, she was married to Max and had two children, which had largely changed her personality; Samantha appeared to have found greater stability and adopted a happier demeanor than the last two interviews. Her marriage remained stable for the rest of the series.

Samantha's CAQ traits shifted after her marriage to Max, at which point she became more characteristically *relaxed*, *dependable*, and *compassionate*. It can be argued that Samantha's marriage to Max brought about the life change she needed, which allowed her to settle down and find satisfaction in life. When her mother unfortunately passed away, Samantha was training to become a bereavement counselor; this personal experience gave Samantha the ability to relate to her clients in a unique way.

Steve

At the age of seven, Steve was living in England at a children's charity home. By *7 Plus Seven*, he had migrated with his father to Australia. Throughout the series, Steve's most characteristic CAQ traits revealed him to be *dependable,* despite the perceived struggles he had in life. Since Steve never knew what he wanted his dream job to be, he spent most of his life doing physical labor. At age 21, Steve fell in love and spent a few months traveling across Australia in a van with his wife before settling down to start a family.

Though Steve is still perceived to struggle with confidence and self-esteem, he is constantly depicted as a *dependable* family man, with his wife Eliza often appearing by his side during the interviews. It appears as though his marriage with Eliza becomes a source of strength in which Steve overcomes his less than ideal childhood. Steve's story shows that, though important, childhood upbringing is not the only influence in an individual's personality, as shown through his roles as a loyal husband, dependable father, and loving grandfather.

DISCUSSION

The *Up Series* participants were selected on the basis of socioeconomic status and gender in the United Kingdom with the intention of predicting what England would be like in the year 2000. The bold statement "Give me a child until he is seven and I will show you the man" (Almond, 1964; Apted, 1970, 1977, 1984, 1991, 1998, 2005, 2012) is echoed throughout the series to suggest that early socioeconomic factors will determine future success. In *7 Up*, children from affluent backgrounds had a structured curriculum with Latin studies and daily physical exercises, while working class education seemed to prepare students for menial jobs rather than pursuing higher education. At the time, it may have been assumed that the working class girls would only have a family instead of pursuing careers. This was not the case with Amber, who was happily married with two children all while being a librarian for more than 30 years. As expected, the working class male targets had labor intensive jobs: Keith drove a cab, Bryan operated a forklift, and Steve worked as a bricklayer. These assumptions did not predict future upward or downward social mobility, however, as seen in Keith and Ralph, respectively.

Q-Sort Limitations

The CCQ and CAQ are useful psychological tools used to categorize personality into fixed distributions, however, they present various problems

with sorting data. Due to limited compatibility with different operating systems, one student conducted the Q-sort method by hand while other students utilized the online version. A limitation of the Q-sort is that item order is associated with item variance; hence the items placed at the end have a greater chance in being sorted into the middle. Manual sorting may be more accurate than an online program since the cards can be randomly shuffled. Additional errors may occur in the data because raters do not always reevaluate item placements that they have already made, opting instead to simply fill open spaces toward the end (Sherman & Serfass, 2012). The CCQ and CAQ presented different items that could not be easily compared. Although the Q-sort method is subject to many ordering effects, the data derived from the end result still has many advantages in evaluating personality.

Intergroup Biases Between Raters and Targets

When examining the data between raters and targets, intergroup behavior and biases should be considered. Social psychological research on groups has shown the presence of favoritism towards in-group members and discrimination towards non-group members, even when groups are determined from arbitrary conditions (Billig & Tajfel, 1973). The study's raters and the *Up Series'* participants vary in many aspects, including education, nationality, age, and gender.

Raters were undergraduate students from an American liberal arts college, ranging in age from 18 to mid-20s. It is possible that college students show favoritism towards university graduates from the *Up Series.* Nationality may also have an effect considering the targets were from the United Kingdom while the raters are from the United States. Differing values between cultures could have also altered rater perceptions. Raters could be expected to have rated subjects more favorably at age 21 since they belong to the same age group, which creates a shared group identity, facilitating in-group favoritism. This favoritism risks the possibility of increased discrimination as the targets age and become part of the outgroup.

Gender differences also produce a concern; the manner in which males or females perceive the opposite sex could result in considerable bias. For example, male raters saw the CAQ trait of *calm, relaxed in manner* as uncharacteristic of female targets compared to female raters who saw it as

characteristic. Out of the 54 CAQ contributors, only 14 were male. This gender imbalance lessens credibility for the claim of gender bias.

In reference to reliability, it is important to note that *56 Up* only has two to four CAQ ratings per target. Data from this age are not as reliable as needed for proper consideration.

What Have We Learned?

In many cases, socioeconomic class was unable to predict the future of the *Up Series* participants. Some predictions, such as participants attending university, getting married, or having children, were easier to make than others (e.g., the death of a parent, divorce, or health issues). For example, Ralph was from the middle class with a bright future who was expected to maintain middle class status, but dropped out of university after one semester and spent a good portion of his adult life on government assistance. While Ryan, on the other hand, was expected to remain in rural England in order to take over his father's farm, but instead became a nuclear physicist, teaching at the University of Wisconsin.

Once all of the data had been consolidated from the CAQ and trait ratings, results indicated that participants had stable personalities. The biological view of the Five-Factor theory proposes the plaster hypothesis in which all personality traits stop changing by age 30 (Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003). With the exception of some participants, such as Ralph, many of the trait ratings and Q-sorts (which were correlated with The Big Five traits of personality) increased then stabilized after episode *28 Up.* Since the film was done in increments of seven years and the viewers had little information to refer to at the beginning of the series, ratings were difficult and had greater overall standard deviations. Traits develop throughout childhood and mature in adulthood, eventually stabilizing in cognitively intact individuals (Srivastava et al., 2003).

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APPENDIX A

Agreeableness	Is sympathetic, kind, appreciative, affectionate
Ambition	Has high aspiration level for self
Autonomy	Independence, resourcefulness
Confidence	Being secure in one's ability to do something
Conscientiousness	Is organized, thorough, planful, efficient
Dominance	Authoritative, exerts command over others
Extraversion	Is talkative, assertive, active, energetic; not quiet or reserved
Honesty	Straightforward, lacking in deceit, evasiveness, greed
Intelligence	Ability to adapt to intellectual challenges, knowledge, cognitive speed, cognitive efficiency
Likeability	The rater's own personal reaction to the participant
Loyalty	A strong feeling of support/allegiance to someone/something
Narcissism	Acts as though entitled; indicates inflated sense of self-importance or abilities
Neuroticism	Is tense, anxious, nervous, moody
Openness	Has wide interests, is imaginative, intelligent, original
Patience	The capacity to accept or tolerate delay or trouble without getting angry or upset
Resilience	The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness
Sensitivity	Shows understanding of the affective and cognitive states and motivational concerns of self and others
Spirituality	Indicates an important role for faith; does not imply adherence to a specific religion or belief system