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RESEARCH PAPER

Life Satisfaction and the Self: Structure, Content, and Function

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Abstract Seventy-nine participants rated their involvement and satisfaction with time spent in each of 14 roles (e.g., me as a student), as well as overall life satisfaction. They also described themselves in each of these roles, as well as five general self-conceptions (e.g., ideal self), by repeatedly selecting from a list of traits. Each participant's set of self descriptions was idiographically modeled using hierarchical classes analysis, from which three indices were coded: trait overlap between actual, usual, ideal, ought, and future selves (*self-ideal congruence*), trait overlap between each of the 14 roles and actual and usual selves (*self-role congruence*), and dispersion of negative traits across self-aspects (*negative elaboration*). Within-person correlations were computed as a measure of satisfaction with time spent in self-congruent roles (TSR). Self-ideal congruence, negative elaboration, and TSR each independently accounted for variance in life satisfaction. For all 14 roles, self-role congruence was correlated with involvement in the target role. Self-ideal congruence and negative elaboration were not highly correlated with role involvement, and self-role congruence was not a robust predictor of life satisfaction. Role-based self-aspects might contribute to life satisfaction to the extent they are enacted according to one's wishes and are congruent with the more general, actual self.

Keywords Life satisfaction · Self congruence · Negative elaboration · HICLAS · Self-complexity

1 Introduction

Is life satisfaction primarily dependent on a sense that one's self approaches a hoped-for ideal? Or is it more important to cordon off and bracket one's negative qualities? How are the roles one plays in everyday life implicated in judgments of satisfaction? In the present

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study we address these questions through the lens of a conceptual model that represents relationships among multiple aspects of self (Rosenberg 1997; Rosenberg and Gara 1985).

A multifaceted self reflects the complexities and contradictions of social life. Some self-aspects are framed in the context of specific roles—those which we *do* as well as *have*—while others are more abstract generalizations about the present and future, the products of self-reflection. One self-aspect might be virtually interchangeable with another while differing from a third in seemingly fundamental ways. A person might wish for more time to spend in one self-aspect while being content with the energy invested in another. Some people restrict their undesirable qualities to a few self-aspects while others spread them out across many. We assume that these dimensions of the multifaceted self matter in the evaluation of well-being—that certain features of the structure, content, and functional enactment of self lead one toward or away from a satisfying life, complicated as it may be.

1.1 Structure, Content, and Function of the Self

Contemporary models of the self (Cervone 2005; McConnell 2011) generally rest on two assumptions. First, the self possesses both the quality of unity through abstract generalizations of experience, and of multiplicity through an interconnected set of context-specific schemas (McAdams 1997; Rosenberg 1997). Second, the self functions as a source of plans or scripts integrated into a feedback loop connecting behavior, social response, self-reflection, and affect (Carver and Scheier 2002; Markus and Wurf 1987). In the prevailing view, self is a constellation of ideas by which one guides behavior in response to social cues, then recursively interprets the meaning of these interactions for one's legitimacy in that role, and for his or her standing with respect to society. The structure, content, and conduct of self are deeply implicated in adjustment to and management of the social environment. Disharmony with the social environment is reflected in (or caused by) dissonance in the self and rendered in awareness as agitation or dissatisfaction.

It follows, then, that well-being is related to the content and structural organization of the "parts" of the self. One dimension of this organization, congruence, has for several decades been central to discourses on psychological well-being. A congruent self is one whose aspects are in psychological harmony with the actual self—a generalized conception of who one "really" is (Rogers 1961). Congruence yields two important psychological benefits that would promote life satisfaction. First, consistency among the elements of self facilitates a clear, efficient, and unequivocal course of action (Jones and Gerard 1967). Second, congruence has an aesthetic quality that is phenomenologically sensed as wholeness, unity, and continuity (Erikson 1968), especially in Western cultures (Suh 2002).

Congruence has generally been conceptualized on two different levels. According to a voluminous literature in personality and social psychology *self-ideal congruence* is achieved when one cognitively aligns the actual self with hypothetical, possible, or idealized selves (Higgins 1989; Markus and Nurius 1986). Role-theoretical models, by contrast, have focused on *self-role congruence.* This psychological state obtains when the attributes of one's role-identity—the view of self in the context of a specific social position or relationship—match those of the actual self (Sarbin and Allen 1968; Schlenker 1985).[1]

[1] There is a wide variety of names in the literature for constructs related to this self-structural property—self-discrepancy, self-concept clarity, self-concept differentiation, and integration, to name a few. For simplicity (and notwithstanding the nuanced distinctions among these terms) we will refer to these phenomena as self-ideal congruence and self-role congruence to link the present study to other self-structure literature.

Self-role congruence has a more functional orientation than self-ideal congruence in that it is concerned with concrete role enactments; unsuccessful performances can make it difficult for one to legitimately claim the role as part of the self.

1.2 Self-Structure and Well-Being

Self-ideal and self-role congruence are core constructs in discrepancy-reduction theories of personality. Disjunction among the various selves and social or interpersonal feedback is assumed to arouse negative emotion and press toward reconciliation and personal integrity (Backman 1988; MacKinnon 1994). Accordingly self-ideal congruence has been related to several affective and self-evaluative outcomes. Higgins (1989) has repeatedly found associations between actual-ideal or actual-ought discrepancies (the converse of self-ideal congruence) and various measures of dejection and agitation. This effect has generally been confirmed in subsequent research using multiple assessment methods (Campbell et al. 2003; Hart et al. 1997; Heppen and Ogilvie 2003; McDaniel and Grice 2008; Renaud and McConnell 2007; Tangney et al. 1998; but see Phillips et al. 2007). In a related literature self-role incongruence has been theoretically linked to the experience of dysphoria and inauthenticity (Hochschild 1983; Schlenker 1985), and a substantial body of research has documented that self-role congruence predicts role-specific satisfaction and commitment (Chassin et al. 1985; North and Swann 2009; Reich 2000; Reich and Rosenberg 2004; Roberts and Donahue 1994; Sheldon et al. 1997). Further, Donahue and Harary (1998) reported positive correlations between four self-role congruence scores and both role-specific and aggregated satisfaction scores. Self-esteem and feelings of agitation (Alexander and Higgins 1993; Erickson and Ritter 2001; Leary et al. 1998) have also been empirically associated with self-role congruence.

Self-ideal and self-role congruence are content-free structural properties of the self. Well-being has also been related to the content of self, or more precisely the structural organization of traits in the self-concept. Gara et al. (1993) found that clinically depressed participants were more likely than non-depressed controls to have their negative traits dispersed throughout their roles and relationships. Their result was replicated in a number of concurrent and prospective studies linking this self-structural property with affective outcomes in clinical and non-clinical samples (Woolfolk et al. 1995, 1999, Reich et al. 2008). This body of research is in line with studies demonstrating the liabilities of negative self-complexity (Bell and Wittkowski 2009; Gara et al. 2002; Woolfolk et al. 2004) and the benefits of self-concept compartmentalization, or restriction in the range of negative attributes across self-aspects (Showers 1992; Showers and Zeigler-Hill 2007).

In the present investigation we examine an important component of well-being, life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is widely viewed as a necessary, though not sufficient, precondition for well-being (Diener et al. 1998, 2003). Diener (2000; Diener et al. 1999) identified this construct as the judgmental or evaluative aspect of well-being, a subjective summary evaluation of one's quality of life. Life satisfaction is relatively stable (though not a permanent fixture) and is correlated with, but distinct from, other dimensions of well-being including positive and negative emotional states, optimism, neuroticism, and self-esteem (Pavot et al. 1997; Lucas et al. 1996; details on the life satisfaction measure are presented below).

Our guiding assumption that actual selves cognitively represent goal achievement with respect to idealized or anticipated selves (Higgins 1996) suggests a conceptual link with life satisfaction, one component of which is progress toward meaningful life goals (Oishi and Diener 2009). Self-ideal or self-role incongruence is expected to arouse

dissatisfaction with life owing to stress, distraction, or a pervasive sense of dislocation (Burke 1991; Giddens 1991). Further, following social-cognitive (McConnell 2011) and symbolic interactionist (McCall and Simmons 1978) models, we argue that enacting self-congruent roles promotes life satisfaction because doing so tends to provide a stable opportunity structure in which to validate and legitimate one's actual self. Self-role congruence would also signal social acceptance of competent role performances. Thus, life satisfaction is expected to be higher among those who spend their preferred amount of time in self-congruent roles. Finally, we expect negative elaboration to be correlated negatively with life satisfaction. Attaching undesirable traits to multiple self-aspects would have the effect of priming negative affect consistently across occasions, for example after embarrassing, awkward, or role-inappropriate interactions (Woolfolk et al. 1999).

1.3 The Present Study

Here, we test a model of global life satisfaction and role-specific positive affect (*role involvement*) as a function of self-ideal congruence, 14 indices of self-role congruence, satisfaction with the time spent in these roles, and the dispersion of negative traits across self-aspects (which we refer to as *negative elaboration*). Measures were carefully selected to capture each of the relevant component constructs. We then employ a well-developed and validated methodology for assessing self-structure which describes the relations between them (e.g., Robey et al. 1989; Reich et al. 2008; Woolfolk et al. 1995). We know of no other study to date that examines these variables simultaneously in an attempt to determine their relative contribution to life satisfaction. In doing so we hope to support our model of identity as a theoretical device that integrates a diverse literature on well-being.

According to our theoretical model, people typically maintain several distinct self-aspects, each associated with a particular set of characteristic traits that express and validate the individual actor in that context. Any two self-aspects may share the same set of traits, or may share some traits but not others, or may have no traits in common at all. Thus, self-ideal congruence and self-role congruence are conceptualized as featural overlap between self-aspects. One has high self-ideal congruence to the extent that traits expressive of his or her actual self and usual self—the latter akin to M. Rosenberg's (1979) "presenting self"—also characterize the ideal, ought, and future selves. One enjoys self-role congruence insofar as the traits enacted in his or her roles such as work, home, or social life also express one's beliefs about the usual or "real me."

Several hypotheses are derived from the analysis above: (a) self-ideal congruence is expected to correlate with higher life satisfaction; (b) negative elaboration should be associated with lower life satisfaction; (c) spending one's preferred amount of time in self-congruent roles will be related to higher life satisfaction; (d) self-role congruence should be related to higher life satisfaction; and (e) congruence between self and a particular role is expected to be positively correlated with involvement in that role. There is not a large body of research on the relationship between self-ideal congruence and role-specific affect. Donahue et al. (1993) found that self-concept differentiation—an aggregate measure of self-role incongruence—was correlated with satisfaction with five roles. On the basis of their findings we hypothesize (f) positive correlations between self-ideal congruence and role involvement.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Eighty undergraduate students (59 women) from a Midwestern public university participated for course credit. The mean age was 23.9 (SD = 7.76, range 18–53). One male participant's data was discarded as unusable. Of the 79 remaining participants, 44.3 % were white, 13.9 % African-American, and 10.1 % Asian/Pacific Islander. The remainder either selected multiple categories or did not answer this question.

2.2 Procedure

2.2.1 Self-Aspects

Participants first described 19 self-aspects presented in random order. These included the fundamental "real" me (i.e., actual self), how I usually am, how I desire to be—the "ideal" me, how I should be, and me in the future—how I will probably be, as well as 14 role-based selves: in my community, in my religious role, with my closest sibling in age, with my dad, with my mom, as a member of my family, with my boyfriend or girlfriend or significant other, with my roommate, with my best male friend, with my best female friend, at work, as a student, when I am engaged in health/physical fitness activities, and in my hobby or during leisure time. Two undesired selves, me at my worst and me in an unsatisfying relationship, were also included to elicit negative trait attributions, but were not included in further analyses as we expected little meaningful variance in role-specific affect. Each self-aspect appeared on the top of a page and was followed by a checklist of 60 traits (see Appendix). Participants indicated the traits that they felt applied to that self-aspect. There was no upper or lower limit on the number of traits that could be selected.

2.2.2 Role-Specific Ratings

Participants then rated each role a series of items: I am satisfied with this aspect of my life, I am emotionally involved with this aspect of my life, I am committed to this aspect of my life, I have a lot of obligations to this aspect of my life, I can handle the demands of this role, and When in this part of my life, I feel close to the "real me" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Role involvement was computed as the mean of these 6 items. Role involvement αs ranged from .83 (hobby) to .95 (roommate). Participants then indicated satisfaction with time spent in that role: I spend (*more time than I would like*; *the right amount of time*; *not enough time*) in this aspect of my life.

2.2.3 Life Satisfaction

Finally, life satisfaction was rated on the 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985). This measure has been used extensively in diverse populations across the world. It has demonstrated excellent reliability, construct validity, and independence from response artifacts such as momentary mood (Pavot and Diener 1993, 2008). In the present study, $\alpha = .93$.

2.3 Self-Ideal Congruence, Self-Role Congruence, and Negative Elaboration

2.3.1 Structural Analysis of Trait Checklist Data

Each participant's set of trait checklist data was formatted into a matrix with 19 rows (self-aspects: 5 general and 14 role-specific selves) and 60 columns (traits). Each cell contained a 1 if the trait in that column was used to describe the self-aspect in that row (e.g., as a girlfriend I am loving); 0 otherwise. To capitalize on the value of idiographic analysis (Pelham 1993), each matrix was submitted individually to a hierarchical classes analysis (HICLAS; De Boeck and Rosenberg 1988; De Boeck et al. 1993). HICLAS is used to model 2-way binary data (in the present case, self-aspects by traits). It is an iterative procedure that arrives at an optimally-fitting solution which places self-aspects into classes on the basis of the traits they share, and simultaneously classifies traits on the basis of their co-occurrence across self-aspects. HICLAS has been used in several studies on self-structure in a variety of populations (Gara et al. 1993, 2000; Reich 2000, Reich and Rosenberg 2004; Robey et al. 1989).

HICLAS is unique in that any two self-aspects are structurally related in one of the following ways: they share the same set of traits (*equivalent*); one self-aspect subsumes another if its traits are a superset of those contained in the other (*superordinate/subordinate*); each self-aspect contains a trait class not attributed to the other (*disjunctive*); or one or both are unclassified due to sparse or inconsistently patterned trait attributions (*residual*). In a greatly simplified example, Ellen's actual self and ideal self would be equivalent if both contained only happy, smart, and friendly. Her actual self would be a subset of her ideal self if the former contained smart and friendly, and the latter happy, smart, and friendly. Her actual and ideal selves would be disjunctive if the former contained only happy, and the latter only smart and friendly. Her actual or ideal self would be in a residual class if no traits were applied to this self-aspect.

These empirically derived structural relationships are assumed to correspond to psychological features of the self-structure (Reich et al. 2008; Rosenberg and Gara 1985). Equivalent self-aspects are felt to be "close to" one another, subordinate self-aspects are experienced as "embedded" in superordinate ones, and disjunctive self-aspects represent different "sides" of the self. A residual self-aspect is cognitively unelaborated and probably peripheral to one's major life concerns. Thus, HICLAS analysis is ideally suited to the measurement of self-ideal and self-role congruence. HICLAS is also unique in that it explicitly links self-aspect classes to the trait classes they contain, so that one can easily see which set(s) of traits correspond to any given identity.

2.3.2 Self-Ideal Congruence

We used the information in each participant's HICLAS output to compute a measure of self-ideal congruence. A pair of self-aspects received a score of 3 if they were equivalent (highest congruence; self-aspects contained the same set of traits), 2 if they were superordinate-subordinate (one self-aspect contained traits not attributed to the other), 1 if they were disjunctive (each self-aspect contains traits not attributed to the other), or 0 if one or both were in a residual category (lowest congruence). Using this scheme, self-ideal congruence was the mean of 6 scores: actual me and usual me with ideal me, ought me, and future me. Scores ranged from 0 to 3, $M = 1.81$, SD $= .72$ with an internal consistency of $\alpha = .73$.

2.3.3 Self-Role Congruence

We computed 14 self-role congruence scores in a similar way by averaging scores between each role-based self-aspect and actual, ideal, ought, future, and usual me. This operationalization corresponds to theoretical definitions of self-role congruence. For example, Schlenker (1985, p. 68) argues that "A situated identity is, from the actor's perspective, a theory of self that is … constructed in a particular situation or social relationship. As such, its contents can differ from those contained in the self-concept." Erickson (1995, p. 126) similarly states that: "…the contents or meanings underlying a social identity that others attribute to an actor may not be the same as those meanings that an actor attributes to self." Self-aspects with no selected traits were assumed not to apply to that person's life (e.g., roommate for someone who lived alone) and were not scored. Each of the 14 self-role congruence scores ranged from 0 to 3, and *M*s ranged from .85 (health) to 1.71 (with sibling) with SDs between .91 and 1.11. Self-role congruence αs ranged from .70 (health) to .94 (religion).

2.3.4 Negative Elaboration

We then used HICLAS to create an index of negative elaboration (i.e., dispersion of negative traits across self-aspects). As mentioned, HICLAS outputs link each self-aspect class to their associated trait classes. A trait class was counted as negative if at least half of its members were negative in tone; as in other research using HICLAS models (Reich et al. 2008; Woolfolk et al. 1999) the vast majority of these classes contained only negative traits. Negative elaboration was the number of self-aspects linked to a negative trait class. Counts ranged from 0 to 11, $M = 1.85$, SD $= 2.30$. A square-root transformation was applied to correct for skew.

2.3.5 Time Spent in Self-Congruent Roles (TSR)

Finally we computed within-person correlations across roles between self-role congruence and satisfaction with time spent. The latter was scored 1 if the participant reported spending the "right amount" of time in this role, and -1 if the participant spent more time or less time than he or she would like in this role. Within-subject correlations ranged widely from $-.62$ to .80. For simplicity we indexed TSR by splitting participants into 2 groups: those with a positive correlation (who tended to spend their preferred amount of time in self-congruent roles, $n = 48$) and those with a negative correlation (who tended to spend a suboptimal amount of time in self-congruent roles, $n = 31$).

3 Results

3.1 Derivation of Self-Role Congruence Measures

One aim of the present study is to examine the relationship between self-role congruence and life satisfaction. However, it would be cumbersome to examine the correlations between each self-role congruence score and life satisfaction, not to mention the inflated Type I error rate. To address this issue we performed a principal components analysis with varimax rotation on 12 of the self-role congruence scores. Boyfriend/girlfriend/significant other and roommate were not used because these roles were not relevant for 11 and 22

Table 1 Factor loadings of self-role congruence scores

	Factor 1 Family role congruence	Factor 2 Personal involvement congruence	Factor 3 Social identity congruence
Family	.72		
With father	.71		
With mother	.67		
With sibling	.53		
Work	.52		
Hobby		.74	
Health		.66	
Student		.62	
With male friend		.61	
With female friend		.52	
Community			.83
Religion		.43	.68

Varimax rotation. Only loadings >.40 are shown

participants, respectively; the remainder were well represented (*n*s $\geq$ 73; missing data were replaced with column mean). A 3-factor solution, shown in Table 1, accounted for 51.89 % of the variance and was clearly interpretable (a fourth factor had an eigenvalue of 1.13 but did not add to interpretability). Three factor scores were computed: family role congruence, personal involvement congruence, and social identity congruence.

3.2 Predicting Life Satisfaction

Table 2 shows that the correlations between life satisfaction and (a) self-ideal congruence, (b) negative elaboration, and (c) time spent in congruent roles were significant and in the expected direction. Table 2 also shows that only family role congruence was correlated with life satisfaction. This score was retained for further analyses.[2] Multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) revealed that self-ideal congruence, negative elaboration, and TSR each independently contributed to life satisfaction. Family role congruence was not significant, however, when placed alongside these predictors.

TSR is a composite of satisfaction with time spent and self-role congruence. It is possible, therefore, that its correlation with life satisfaction can be more parsimoniously explained. Perhaps life satisfaction is actually a function of satisfaction with time spent in one's roles regardless of how self-congruent they are. TSR might also not be associated with life satisfaction after controlling for role involvement averaged across all roles. To investigate this possibility, we calculated for each participant the proportion of roles in which he or she spent the "right amount" of time (excluding non-relevant ones). This variable was correlated with life satisfaction, $r = .28$, $p < .02$. Each participant's average role involvement was then calculated. Life satisfaction was correlated with average role involvement, $r = .43$, $p < .001$. Yet TSR remained significant as a predictor in a regression analysis predicting life satisfaction including these two control variables, $\beta = .25$, $p < .02$. We then computed for each participant a composite score of satisfaction with time

[2] Only four self-role congruence scores were individually correlated with life satisfaction: work ($r = .23$), roommate ($r = .32$), family ($r = .23$), and with mother ($r = .29$), *p*s < .05.

Table 2 Zero-order correlations among major variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-ideal congruence						
2. Negative elaboration	−.27*					
3. TSR	.08	−.12				
4. Family role congruence	.39**	−.29**	−.01			
5. Personal involvement congruence	.44**	.12	.14	.00		
6. Social identity congruence	.03	−.11	.12	.00	.00	
7. Life satisfaction	.44**	−.40**	.29**	.26*	.05	.05

TSR time spent in self-congruent roles

N = 79; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3 Predicting life satisfaction from self-structural variables

	R^2	B	SE B	β
	.33**			
Self-ideal congruence		.45	.15	.32**
Negative elaboration		−.28	.11	−.27**
TSR		.24	.10	.23*
Family role congruence		.06	.11	.06

TSR time spent in self-congruent roles

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

spent weighted by role involvement, where a high score reflects a tendency to spend one's desired amount of time in highly involving roles. While this score was correlated with life satisfaction, $r = .43$, $p < .001$, TSR still accounted for variance beyond this score, $\beta = .21, p < .05$. These findings, coupled with the failure of self-role congruence scores to independently predict life satisfaction, suggest that it was satisfaction with time spent *in self-congruent roles*, and not only involvement or time spent in one's roles generally, that contributed to life satisfaction. Thus, results support the first three, but not the fourth hypothesis.

3.3 Predicting Role Involvement from Self-Role Congruence

We expected that the congruence of a role with the actual self would be positively correlated with involvement in that role. Table 4 shows that in each of 14 cases, self-role congruence was correlated significantly with involvement in that role. Moreover, for all 14 roles, self-role congruence was more strongly associated with involvement in that role than with involvement in any other role. Thus, our fifth hypothesis was strongly supported.

3.4 Predicting Role Involvement from Self-Ideal Congruence and Negative Elaboration

The previous analysis shows that self-role congruence is reliably and specifically associated with involvement in that role. However, the same cannot be said for the more general congruence measure. Table 5 shows that self-ideal congruence was significantly correlated with 4 of 14 role involvement scores. Negative elaboration was significantly correlated with 8 role involvement scores. Thus, we obtained only weak support for the hypothesized relationship between self-ideal congruence and role involvement.

Table 4 Predicting role involvement from self-role congruence

	Role-specific correlation between SRC and RI	Range of correlations between SRC and RI in non-target roles
Hobby	.37**	−.17 to .24*
Health	.32**	−.10 to .28*
Student	.33**	−.09 to .33**
Work	.61**	.09 to .49**
With female friend	.48**	−.13 to .37**
With male friend	.39**	−.08 to .24*
Roommate	.57**	−.10 to .30*
Boy/girlfriend	.67**	−.03 to .38**
Family	.59**	.07 to .40**
With sibling	.54**	−.09 to .25*
With mother	.51**	.07 to .39**
With father	.46**	−.01 to .30*
Religion	.54**	−.05 to .16
Community	.39**	−.03 to .33**

Ns = 72–79 except roommate (n = 54) and bf/gf (n = 64). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

SRC self-role congruence; *RI* role involvement

Table 5 Predicting role involvement from self-ideal congruence and negative elaboration

	Self-ideal congruence	Negative elaboration
Hobby	.17	−.13
Health	.13	−.30**
Student	.24*	−.35**
Work	.11	−.15
With female friend	.25*	−.10
With male friend	.15	−.15
Roommate	.24	−.31*
Boy/girlfriend	.33*	−.37**
Family	.06	−.35**
With sibling	.24*	−.20
With mother	.13	−.24*
With father	−.11	−.25*
Religion	.08	−.32**
Community	.06	.18

Ns = 72–79; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

4 Discussion

Self-ideal congruence, negative elaboration, and time spent in self-congruent roles, were each independently associated with life satisfaction. A subset of self-role congruence scores was correlated with life satisfaction but did not account for variance beyond the other global self variables. The correlation between self-role congruence and role-specific measures of involvement was quite robust: not only did we find significant relationships in all 14 cases, but all 14 self-role congruence scores were more strongly correlated with involvement in that respective role than for any of the other 13 roles. The more general

self-structural measures of self-congruence and negative elaboration were not consistently associated with role involvement.

4.1 Self-Ideal Congruence and Life Satisfaction

Our finding for self-ideal congruence generalizes those of Pavot et al. (1997); Cozzarelli and Karafa (1998), and Heidrich and Powwattana (2004), who reported correlations between actual-ideal or actual-ought congruence (actually, discrepancies) and life satisfaction. Theoretically, life satisfaction would follow from a subjectively coherent sense of self engaging in relatively clear and unconflicted lines of action. Conversely, the subjectively agitating state of incongruence might reflect or magnify frustration in goal attainment. Circumstances in which a self-image fails to capture what are felt as essential qualities of the desired self can produce uncomfortable levels of self-consciousness and distraction. Those faced with such a predicament tend to reinvest time and effort into renegotiating the basic interpersonal understandings of self necessary to goal achievement (Clore and Pappas 2007; Schlenker 1985; North and Swann 2009), often at the expense of activities oriented toward the goal itself. Persistent failure in such negotiations might result in higher depression or anxiety among self-incongruent persons, if this experience is understood as affective concern over whether their psychological "center" will hold.[3]

A recurrent issue in research on subjective well-being is the relative influence of a top-down process by which life satisfaction is a manifestation of an underlying dispositional factor, or a bottom-up process where life satisfaction is a product of several domain-specific judgments of satisfaction. Although this debate is far from resolved (Pavot and Diener 2008), recent theorizing points to a dynamic interplay between personal propensities and context-specific estimations of life satisfaction (Heller et al. 2004). Our results are conceptually related to this issue and suggest another path by which satisfaction in specific domains translates into global life satisfaction: spending one's preferred amount of time in self-congruent roles. It is plausible that self-congruent or ego-syntonic life domains play into life satisfaction to the extent they are concretely enacted according to the person's wishes. Indirect support for this conjecture comes from Heppner et al. (2008), who collected daily reports from participants over a 2-week period and found within-subject associations between authenticity and self-esteem. Authenticity was conceptualized as "unimpeded operation of one's true self in one's daily enterprise" (p. 1141) and thus bears some resemblance to our measure of overlap between actual and role-based selves. Future research might explore the benefits of time spent in self-congruent roles using more real-time behavioral measures such as experience sampling.

4.2 Negative Elaboration and Life Satisfaction

That negative elaboration was independently associated with life satisfaction replicates the results of Reich et al. (2008). As negative elaboration is a measure of the dispersion of negative self-beliefs across roles, dissatisfaction could conceivably be the affective consequence of frequent and consistent negative self-attributions ("there I go again")

[3] We also included trait anxiety (Spielberger 1983) as a measure of negative well-being. Findings were largely redundant with those for life satisfaction: In a regression analysis controlling for age (which was negatively correlated with trait anxiety $r = -.24$, $p < .05$), self-ideal congruence and negative elaboration independently contributed to trait anxiety. TSR did not, however, nor did any of the three self-role congruence factor scores. In the interest of brevity we report only the findings on life satisfaction.

stemming from role performances perceived as inadequate. This line of reasoning has been applied to the link between negative self-beliefs and depression (Woolfolk et al. 1999). We know of no other research linking negative self-beliefs to life satisfaction; however we surmise that pervasive and intrusive negativistic thinking concomitant to negative elaboration inhibits progress toward important personal goals. If true, one might expect rumination to be integral to this self-defeating process (Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008).

4.3 General and Role-Specific Congruence, Life Satisfaction, and Role Involvement

General self-structural measures—self-ideal congruence, negative elaboration, and time spent in self-congruent roles—were correlated with general life satisfaction. Self-role congruence was correlated to role involvement with a high degree of consistency and specificity. Our finding that family role congruence was correlated with life satisfaction is in line with the robust link between close relationships and well-being (Diener and Seligman 2004; Myers 2000), and adds to this literature by suggesting that happiness is a function of identifying with, and not simply having, these relationships. This effect, however, was diminished in the multiple regression analysis. Moreover, self-ideal congruence was not a good predictor of role-specific involvement. Taken together, then, our results demonstrate little cross-over between general and role-specific variables. While this pattern of findings would suggest that general and role-specific experience are separate and distinct domains, in the spirit of the unity-multiplicity dialectic we submit that they are interdependent. Indeed our self-role congruence measures were based on the assumption that at least some roles share trait clusters with the actual or usual selves. Our findings suggest that self-congruent roles are especially important to general well-being. Validation and legitimation in these roles implies validation and legitimation of the actual self such that satisfying their demands carries the additional benefit of verifying what one takes to be core contents in his or her identity.

5 Caveats and Conclusions

Our results are limited to the extent that our undergraduate sample of 59 females and 20 males represent the general population. The relatively small number of males, for example, precluded any detailed investigation of gender effects. More generally, our novel index of satisfaction with time spent in self-congruent roles will likely need further confirmation as a useful measure given there is little precedent in the research literature. We hope to have provided the theoretical and methodological framework for future longitudinal investigations of well-being and the self. Structural, content-based, and functional aspects of self each contributed to the prediction of life satisfaction. Thus, our results support the pragmatic maxim that the self is something people have and something people do in their pursuit of the good life.

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Appendix

See Table 6.

Table 6 Trait terms used in the self-description task

Trusting	Indecisive	Determined
Assertive	Close	Frustrated
Unimportant	Important	Unhappy
Content	Withdrawn	Consistent
Angry	Pessimistic	Lacking Confidence
Worrying	Courageous	Trapped
Procrastinating	Knowledgeable	Optimistic
Passionate	Manipulative	Self-controlled
Confident	Stupid	Sad
Committed	Caring	Hurt
Moody	Secure	Happy
Overwhelmed	Jealous	Nervous
Intimate	Distant	Agreeable
Cold	Weak	Loving
Achieving	Comfortable	Confused
Loyal	Strong	Warm
Argumentative	Exploring	Dissatisfied
Bored	Passive	Pleasant
Open	A disappointment	Free
Satisfied	Uncomfortable	Out of place

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