Proposal

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Exploring the Role of Deviance on Self-Concept Clarity Across the Lifespan

Self-concept clarity means a clear and certain understanding of oneself and is usually associated with positive feelings about the self (Campbell et al. 1996; Campbell 1990) . In research on the self, self-concept clarity is one of the concepts associated closely with well-being (Campbell, Assanand, and Paula 2003). Recently, a curvilinear relationship has been found on self-concept clarity over time (Lodi-Smith and Roberts 2010). Yet, the underlying mechanism for this relationship stays unclear. This study aims to test a potential explanation for the relationship between self-concept clarity and subjective well-being.

Self-concept Clarity and Well-being

Researchers have found positive relationships between self-concept clarity and subjective well-being, emotional stability, resilience, and physical health; as well as negative relationships between self-concept clarity and negative affect, including anxiety and depression (Campbell et al. 1996; Campbell, Assanand, and Paula 2003; Light 2017; Ritchie et al. 2011; Light and Visser 2013; Stopa et al. 2010). Research also suggests that well-being factors can influence self-concept clarity: better well-being, especially physical health, relation stability, and role stability, is also associated with higher self-concept clarity, (Carter and Bruene 2019; Slotter and Walsh 2017). It is notable that both well-being and self-concept clarity change with age.

Self-Concept Clarity and Age

Despite the past assumption of a positive association between self-concept clarity and age, Lodi-Smith and Roberts (2010) found a reverse U-shaped curvilinear relationship between the two variables across lifespan. But why the relationship between the two variables changes over time? One potential explanation is social role. The entrance of a social role might add to self-concept therefore increasing self-concept clarity (Light and Visser 2013). In contrast, the exit from a social role, especially when an individual is unprepared for the exit, may lead to a decrease in self-concept clarity (Light and Visser 2013). When people are in emerging adulthood, even though they might exit their role as a student, they have other roles like employees, partnerships, parents, etc. to enter. For middle-aged people, their role entrance opportunities are more restricted than young adults and they might exit their roles as parents or children. However, generally speaking, their social roles are relatively stable and middle-aged adults are able to obtain and maintain social roles. Later adulthood is when social role exits start to rise. For example, retirement and independence of children can both lead to role exit. Without the cognitive attribution of pairing a role exit with entering a new role, the effect of role exit on self-concept clarity is associated with a drop in self-concept clarity (Light and Visser 2013). In Light, in her -Light (2024) unpublished data, they find a more specified interactive variable, the importance of self-concept clarity to subjective well-being, showing the same pattern as Lodi-Smith and Roberts (2010)'s finding. Specifically, when the slope representing the effect of self-concept clarity on subjective well-being is on y-axis and age is on x-axis, the curve rises from emerging adult to middle age and drops in elderly adulthood, thus forming a reversed U-shape (Light 2024).

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