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# The self, social networks, and psychological well-being

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*University of Iowa*

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THE SELF, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

by

Mark Henry Walker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in Sociology  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2015

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Freda B. Lynn

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D.  
DISSERTATION

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. Dissertation of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the  
thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
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## ABSTRACT

In daily life, individuals participate in multiple social roles. According to sociological theories of the self, the social roles individuals participate in are fundamental to individuals' self-concepts. For example, one's role as a mother, lawyer, volunteer, and student are important aspects of one's overall self-view. Additionally, these role-based identities provide behavioral guidance and have important implications for emotions and psychological well-being. However, little is known about how the relationship *between* the meanings of the various identities an individual participates in impacts identity processes and mental health. Additionally, although identities are thought to be embedded in different social groups (e.g., work, family, and church), and these role-based groups are viewed as essential in identity development and role-performance, little is known about how the structure of social networks impacts identity processes.

The purpose of this dissertation is to lay the theoretical scaffolding for a more holistic view of the multiple-identity-self. I highlight four key weaknesses in current treatments of multiple identities. First, the potential impact of the interplay among identity meanings on emotions and interaction is often glossed over or ignored by current research in identity theory. Second, current theoretical treatments of the self-structure do not incorporate the fact that individuals are able to reflect on themselves as a *general* social object. Third, in the absence of a theory of self-structure that ties identity meanings together, identity theory's ability to make long-term predictions about mental health outcomes is severely limited. Fourth, although one's identities are embedded in multiple social groups, the structure of social relations within and between an individual's social groups is given very little attention in current theory and research.

Overall, my findings suggest that 1) participating in social roles that align with an individual's view of themselves "as they truly are" (i.e., core self meanings) is associated with a reduction in depression, 2) working parents who participate in occupations that are viewed as culturally incompatible with their parental identity report lower levels of psychological well-being, and 3) the impact of network

density is depends on whether or not one belongs to a self-affirming social environment.

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

In daily life, individuals participate in multiple social roles, such as mother, doctor, churchgoer, student, and volunteer. Attached to each of these roles are cultural meanings and expectations that individuals tend to internalize into their self-concept. For example, mothers are generally viewed as warm and caring and lawyers are generally viewed as somewhat cold and tough. According to sociological theories of the self, these role-based identities provide behavioral guidance and have important implications for emotions and psychological well-being. Further, since these role-based identities are embedded in various social groups (e.g., the role-identity of doctor is embedded in one's work-based social group), social ties to role-based others are important sources of socialization as well as one's overall commitment to a given identity.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine two key questions: 1) how does the relationship between identity meanings impact the self and psychological well-being and 2) how does the structure of social networks (i.e., the pattern of ties between one's social contacts) factor into the linkages between identity processes and mental health? Overall, my findings suggest that 1) participating in social roles that align with an individual's view of themselves "as they truly are" (i.e., core self meanings) is associated with reductions in depression, 2) working parents who participate in occupations that are viewed as incompatible with their parental identity report lower levels of psychological well-being, and 3) the impact of network density is depends on whether or not one belongs to a self-affirming social environment.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: When Keeping it Real Goes Right: Identity Meaning Structure and Psychological Distress .....	13
Chapter 3: More than ‘Maxed Out’: Working Parents and the Psychological Toll of Spanning Culturally Discrepant Roles .....	27
Chapter 4: The Contingent Value of Embeddedness: Self-Affirming Social Environments, Network Density, and Well-Being .....	57
Chapter 5: Conclusion .....	79
References .....	84
Appendix A. Additional Analyses for Chapter 2 .....	92
Appendix B. Measuring Third-Order Identity Discrepancy using EPA Ratings .....	99
Appendix C. Survey Instrument for Chapter 3 .....	104
Appendix D. Measures – Chapter 3 .....	106

## LIST OF TABLES

### Table

2.1. Descriptive Statistics .....	18
2.2. OLS Regression Predicting Depression .....	23
3.1. Descriptive Statistics .....	49
3.2. OLS Regression Predicting Well-Being .....	50
4.1. Demographic Characteristics .....	65
4.2. Correlation Matrix for Key Variables .....	70
4.3. OLS Regression Predicting Self-esteem and Self-efficacy .....	72
A1. Raw Self-Role Discrepancy Scores by Meaning Dimension and Role .....	93
A2. Quadratic Regression: Self-Student Discrepancy .....	96
A3. Quadratic Regression: Self-Friend Discrepancy .....	96
A4. Quadratic Regression: Self-Work Discrepancy .....	96
B1. Crosswalk between EPA worker identities and occupational labels in MIDUS ...	101

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	
1.1. Perceptual Control Model .....	4
1.2. Fragmented vs. Integrated Self-Concepts .....	6
1.3. General Model of Interplay between Identity Meaning Structure, Reflected Appraisals, and Cultural Meanings .....	8
2.1. EPA Values for Core Self and Student Identity .....	20
3.1. Work-Mother Discrepancy in EPA space .....	31
3.2. Mean incompatibility scores with 95% confidence intervals for mother – occupation combinations .....	34
3.3. Relationship between EPA calculated discrepancy and perceived incompatibility .....	35
3.4. Gender- versus Parent-based incompatibility .....	37
3.5. Cultural Constraints on Self-Affirmation .....	41
3.6. Self-Affirmation for Aligned Work-Parent Identities .....	42
3.7. Predicted Values of Self-Acceptance .....	52
4.1. Density – Self-affirmation Typology .....	62
4.2. The Impact of Network Density on Self-Esteem at Different Levels of Self-Affirming Environments .....	73
4.3. The Impact of Network Density on Self-Efficacy at Different Levels of Self-Affirming Environments .....	74
A1. Example of Self-Enhancement Effect Misspecified as Discrepancy .....	92
A2. Frequency Distribution of Self-Work Discrepancy .....	93
A3. Frequency Distribution of Self-Student Discrepancy .....	94
A4. Frequency Distribution of Self-Friend Discrepancy .....	94
A5. Impact of Taking Absolute Value of Raw Discrepancy Scores for Symmetrical Data Where Mean=0 .....	95
A6. Scatterplot of Self-Student Discrepancy by Depression .....	97
A7. Scatterplot of Self-Friend Discrepancy by Depression: Activity Dimension .....	98
A8. Scatterplot of Self-Work Discrepancy and Depression: Evaluation Dimension .....	98

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Structural symbolic interactionist theories paint a picture of the self-concept that consists of multiple identities that are embedded in role-based groups and institutions. According to this view, identities are internalized self-views that are based upon culturally shared role meanings and expectations. For example, one's view of oneself as a lawyer is based, to some extent, upon what most people think about lawyers. Additionally, identity meanings are thought to be negotiated in the context of networks of interpersonal social relationships, and interpersonal social ties are viewed as essential in determining the relative importance or salience of a given identity for the focal actor. Despite the importance of social networks and the view of the multiple-identity-self to identity theories, almost no research examines the role of social network structure on identity processes and very little research examines how the relationship *between* identity meanings impacts identity processes.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this dissertation is to build upon current theory and research in the structural symbolic interactionist approach by laying the theoretical scaffolding for a more holistic view of the multiple-identity-self. I highlight four key weaknesses in current treatments of multiple identities. First, the potential impact of the relationship *between* identity meanings on emotions and social interaction is often glossed over or ignored by current research in identity theory. Second, current theoretical treatments of the self-structure do not incorporate the fact that individuals are able to reflect on themselves as a *general* social object. Third, in the absence of a theory of self-structure that ties identity meanings together, identity theory's ability to make long-term predictions about mental health outcomes is substantially undermined. Fourth, although one's identities are embedded in multiple social groups, the structure of social relations within and between an individual's social groups is given very little attention in current theory and research.

### The Problem of Multiple Identities

As noted above, although identity theory acknowledges that the self consists of multiple identities, very little research explicitly addresses the potential problems that the multiple-identity-self poses. Indeed, the "problem of multiple identities" has been noted in various

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<sup>1</sup> See Walker and Lynn (2013) and McFarland and Pals (2005) for notable exceptions.

reviews of the field (e.g., Stryker and Burke 2000; Smith-Lovin 2007), yet empirical research in the field has generally continued either ignoring or assuming away this problem. Specifically, research in identity theory generally tests hypotheses with respect to a single identity at a time. For example, research that examines the link between commitment and salience generally looks for an association between the strength and number of ties to a given role-based group and the salience of a given identity and, if more than one identity is examined, the process is repeated for each identity that is included in the survey (e.g., Stryker and Serpe 1982; Stryker et al. 2005). This general approach is used in research linking the identity theory perceptual control model to behavior (e.g., Burke and Reitzes 1981, Riley and Burke 1995), as well as research linking identity verification to emotion and mental health outcomes (e.g., Burke and Harrod 2005, Burke and Stets 1999).<sup>2</sup> What this general approach ignores is the fact that identities are nested within individuals and the impact of a given identity on behavior, emotion, and other outcomes likely does not occur in isolation from other identities.

### *Traditional Notions of Self-Structure*

In sociological social psychology, the self-structure has traditionally been conceptualized as identities that are cognitively ordered in terms of their relative salience, or the likelihood of being activated in and across social encounters (Stryker 1980), importance (McCall and Simmons 1978), or centrality to an individual's self-concept (Rosenberg 1979). However, the link between social roles and behavior is predicated upon the culturally agreed-upon meanings and expectations that are associated with roles, and the extent to which those meanings are internalized into the self-concept. That is, identity theorists argue that individuals use the cultural meanings associated with roles (e.g., doctors are generally viewed as worthy, kind, powerful and competent) as important guideposts for formulating lines of behavior while performing roles and negotiating role-based identities. For example, since the role-identity of doctor is generally viewed as worthy and competent, physicians can draw from this cultural understanding of what it means to be a doctor to formulate their own role-based self-view. Thus, physicians will (on average) have work identities that are generally worthy and competent. Further, because of these positive meanings associated with their work identity, physicians will generally try to behave in ways that embody worth, kindness, power, and competence. For example, one could accomplish

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<sup>2</sup> See Burke (2006) for a notable exception.

this by advising patients, delegating tasks to nurses, and firmly demanding respect when it is not given freely.

Additionally, self-held identity meanings are key components in the production of individuals' behavior in a given social situation. Identity theory's perceptual control model (see figure 1.1) proposes that social behavior is a function of how well an individual's self-held identity meanings (i.e., identity standard) match his/her perception of how others view him/her in the situation (i.e., reflected appraisals). That is, individuals compare reflected appraisals to their identity standard, and if there is a misalignment between the two, negative emotion is experienced and social behavior is geared toward pulling reflected appraisals in line with one's identity standard. In more simple terms, identity theory proposes that social behavior is geared toward the purpose of getting others to see us in the same way we see ourselves. To illustrate, consider the example of Jane, who works as a lawyer and views herself as competent and assertive in that role. According to identity theory, if Jane thinks that her colleagues are being dismissive of her, then she will view this as a threat to her identity as a lawyer (i.e., reflected appraisals do not match Jane's identity standard), and this discrepancy between her self-view and situational meanings will cause her to experience negative emotions (e.g., anger). Further, Jane's subsequent behavior will be directed toward bringing situational meanings (e.g., others' perceptions of Jane) in line with her own self-view by behaving in an especially aggressive manner.

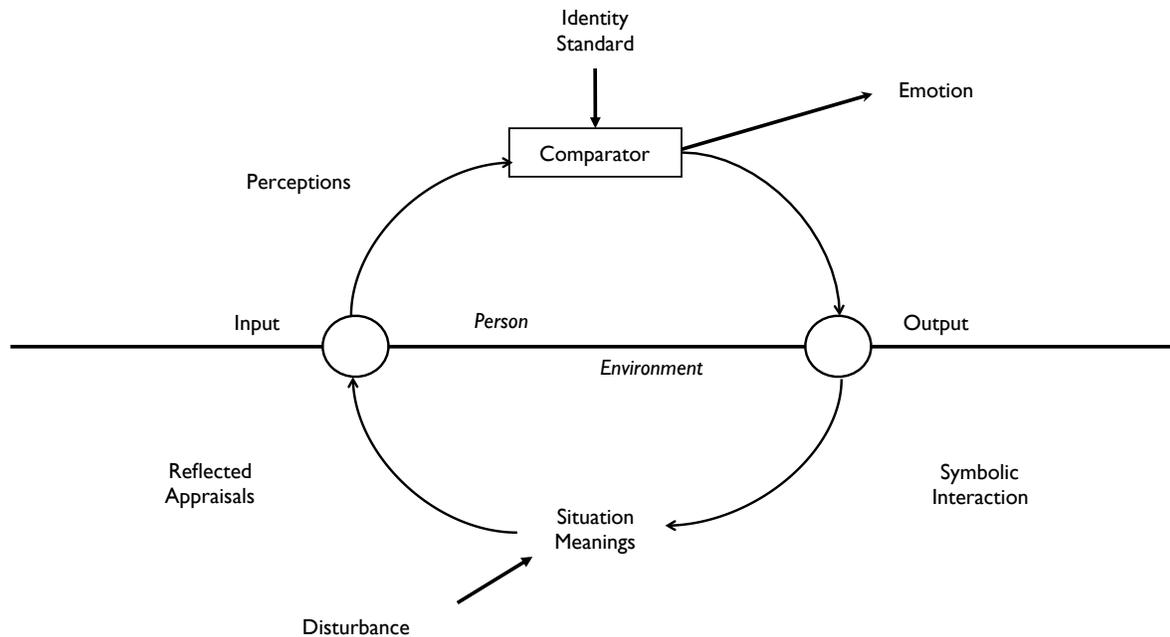


Figure 1.1. Perceptual Control Model. Adapted from Burke and Stets (2009).

Clearly, from an identity theory perspective, the various meanings of identities are key components for the production of behavior and emotion in social interaction. However, self and identity research generally ignores the relationship between the meanings of an individual's identities. Given the importance of identity meanings for the link between culture, the self, and behavior and emotions, I argue that the interrelations between identity meanings can be viewed as the “meaning structure” of the self, and that this meaning structure has important implications for identity processes and mental health. For example, what if one views oneself as powerful and competent in their occupational role, but weak and useless in their spousal role? Indeed, thinking of the self-structure in terms of the interrelations between identity meanings has been relatively common for psychologists, where the self-structure has been described in terms of integration versus fragmentation (Donahue et al. 1993) and self-complexity (Linville 1985, 1987).

#### *Conceptualizing and Measuring Identity Meaning Structure*

One potential reason for why the relationship between identity meanings have not been extensively studied in identity theory is that the measurement approach utilized by researchers in this area—the Burke-Tully method (Burke and Tully 1977)—is not especially conducive to such

comparisons. This method suggests that the relevant identity meanings for a given identity should be taken on a case-by-case basis. Specifically, the Burke-Tully method suggests that determining which dimensions of meaning are relevant for a given identity involves selecting a list of potentially relevant bipolar adjectives based on theory or focus groups (e.g., hard vs. soft, emotional vs. not emotional, and honest vs. dishonest) and determining what the relevant counter-identity is for the identity in question (e.g., husband vs. wife, boy vs. girl, and college student vs. non-college peer). Next, semantic responses are gathered for the identity and counter-identities (e.g., “husbands usually are...” and “wives usually are...”), and the relevant bipolar adjectives are determined by using discriminant function analysis. One consequence of this approach is that identity meanings (e.g., student identity and spousal identity) are not directly comparable to one another, because different bipolar adjectives are used to measure different identities.<sup>3</sup>

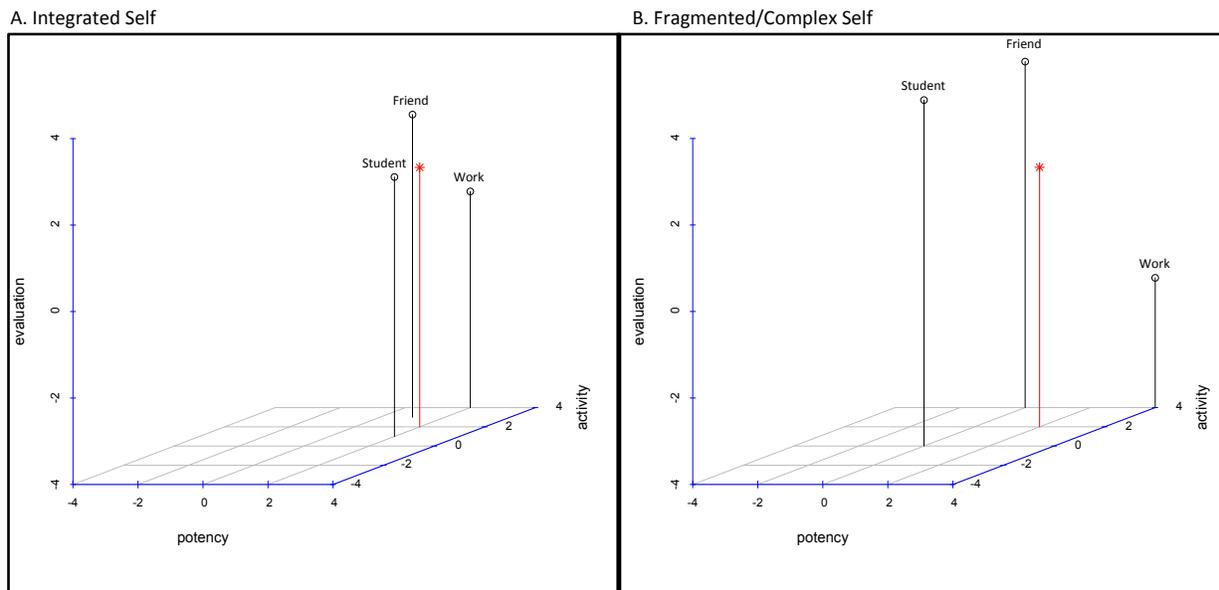
In order to avoid the issues associated with the Burke-Tully method, I draw from a long line of research in social psychology that is concerned with measuring the cultural meanings associated with various social objects (Osgood et al. 1957). Based on numerous surveys across many cultures, Osgood and colleagues conclude that the meanings that individuals attach to social objects generally fall along three fundamental dimensions of meaning: evaluation (how good or nice a thing is), potency (how big or powerful a thing is) and activity (how expressive, active, or loud a thing is). Researchers in affect control theory (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) have utilized this underlying meaning structure in order to quantify how (dis)similar identities are to one another by plotting them in three-dimensional Evaluation-Potency-Activity (EPA) space.

The upshot of this approach is that any two identities can be compared to one another with respect to how (dis)similar they are in meaning, and individual’s overall self concept can be characterized based on how similar identities are to one another, as well as how they relate to one’s core self (Hoelter 1985). For example, figure 1.2 displays the core self, along with three identities for two hypothetical individuals. Both individuals view their core self as quite good, powerful, and active (denoted by the red asterisk), but their overall identity meanings structures are quite different. Specifically, person A’s friend identity is slightly more good and active, but

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<sup>3</sup> This method also assumes that (1) identities have relevant counter-identities that can be used for comparison and (2) the relevant aspect of an identity’s meaning are the dimensions of meaning that differentiate a given identity from its counter-identity.

slightly less powerful than A's core self; A's student identity is equally as good and powerful, but slightly less active than A's core self; and A's work identity is somewhat less good, somewhat more active, and equally as powerful as A's core self. On the other hand, B's role-identities depart substantially from her core self meanings. Conceptually, the distance between these meanings indicates the dissimilarity of core self and identity meanings. Importantly, this conceptual framework allows me to *quantify* the dissimilarity of identity meanings and core self meanings, as well as other important features of the meaning structure of the self-concept, such as the overall fragmentation or integration of an individual's self-concept.



**Figure 1.2. Fragmented vs. Integrated Self-Concepts.**

### *Conceptual Problems with an Atomized View of Self-Structure*

One clear counterargument to the notion that identity meaning structure matters for identity processes and individual well-being is what I refer to as an “atomized view” of the self-structure. Under this view, identities are essentially independent of one another and the individual essentially acts as an agent of identity maintenance and identity verification. That is, an individual can maintain a cold and uncaring identity in one social domain and a warm and caring identity in another with very few repercussions for the self and emotional well-being, so long as they can negotiate reflected appraisals that match identity standards. This view of self most closely resembles Goffman's (1959, 1967) general approach to understanding the linkages

between self, situation, and behavior. In particular Goffman's work on interaction rituals (1967) emphasized the importance of deploying situational identities that ensure that interaction unfolds smoothly and without interruption. Others have espoused a view of identity that seemingly supports an atomized view of the self. For example, Burke and Stets (2009) argue that individuals are agents acting on behalf of identities:

The behavior itself is the action of the person acting as an agent for the identity that has been activated. Each person acts as the agent for many identities, as many as the person holds. This view turns much sociological thought on its head. Rather than signs and symbols being the mechanisms that provide a link between persons, this view says that persons are agents that link signs and symbols to identities (p. 105).

Most research in identity theory (IT) currently focuses on how discrepancies between a single identity and reflected appraisals are associated with higher levels of distress and lower levels of well-being. IT and other self-verification theories further argue that, if there is a mismatch between identity standards and reflected appraisals, identity standards will, over time, be pulled in alignment with reflected appraisals (Burke 2006). That is, the perceptual control model at the core of IT and self-verification theories is one that tends toward equilibrium. This presents a conceptual problem for applications of IT to meaningful mental health outcomes. Specifically, if identity non-verification is to have an appreciable impact on psychological well-being, then one must experience reoccurring and sustained instances of identity non-verification. However, if we embrace an atomized, multiple-identity picture of the self, then it is unclear how chronic identity non-verification can occur. If role-identities are viewed as independent of one another, then one's identity standards in different role domains should eventually converge with reflected appraisals.

To illustrate, imagine somebody who views themselves as quite nice and powerful parent, but in their occupational identity they view themselves as only somewhat nice and powerful, as in figure 1.3 (see the dots labeled parental identity and occupational identity). Further, imagine that they perceive that others view them as extremely nice and extremely powerful in their parental role (as indicated by the reflected appraisals in the top right corner of figure 1.3), while they are viewed as only slightly nice and powerful in their work role (as indicated by the reflected appraisals in the bottom left corner of figure 1.3). If these identities are viewed as independent of one another, then over time both identities should converge with reflected appraisals, thereby alleviating the distress associated with identity non-verification. However, if

there is some feature of the self-structure that motivates individuals to maintain similar identities, then chronic identity non-verification is possible.

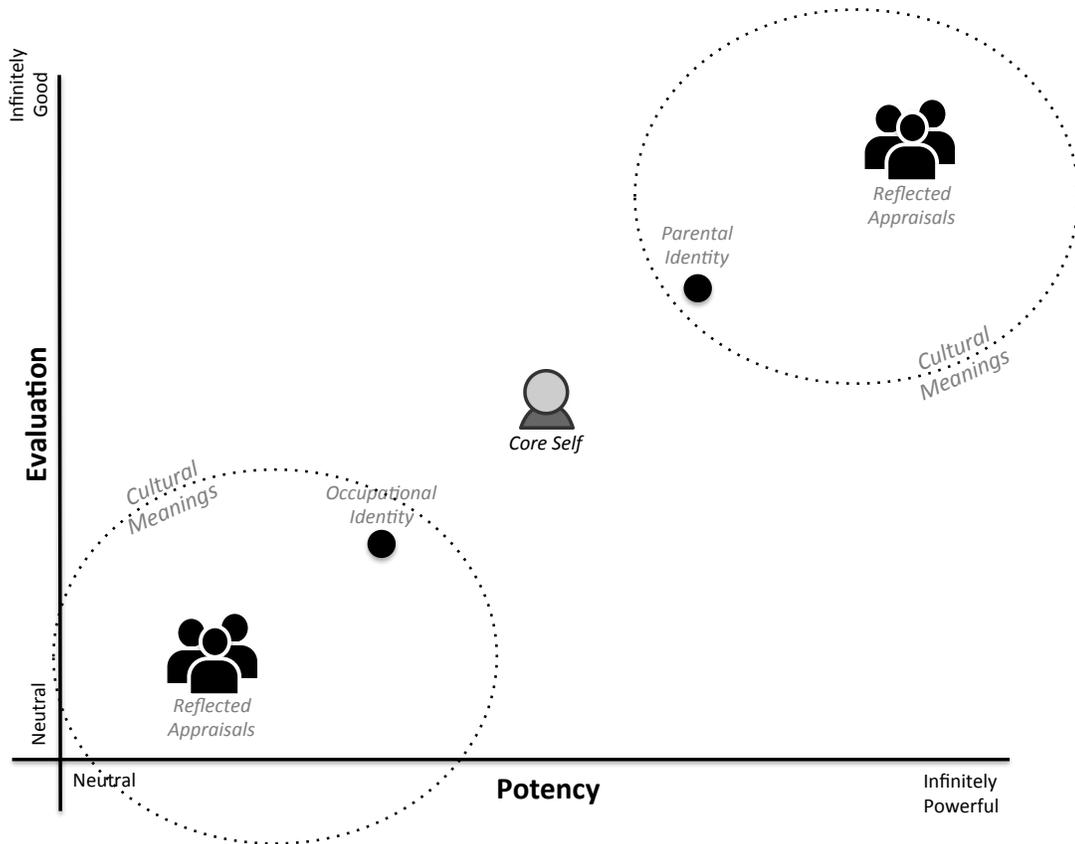


Figure 1.3. General Model of Interplay Between Identity Meaning Structure, Reflected Appraisals, and Cultural Meanings

### *Self-Consistency and Authenticity as Forces of Self-Integration*

Another problem with current treatments of the self-structure is that they do not account for the fact that individuals are able to reflect on themselves as a general social object. Here, I suggest that this general view of oneself has important implications for identity processes and mental health.<sup>4</sup> Drawing from MacKinnon and Heise (2010), I suggest that an individual’s core self view serves as an “anchor” for other identity meanings, and that identity meanings that depart from the core self can have important implications for individuals’ sense of self-consistency, authenticity, and ultimately psychological well-being. Specifically, I suggest that role-identity

<sup>4</sup> To be clear, I am not arguing here for a unitary self nor do I suggest that the core self drives behavior in most social situations.

meanings that depart from core self meanings undermine individuals' sense of self-consistency and therefore negatively impact psychological well-being. My view of the core self and its role in identity processes are rooted in two fundamental concepts in social psychology: self-consistency and authenticity.

The concept of authenticity has experienced a recent resurgence in sociological fields ranging from social psychology to economic sociology. Most empirical research investigating authenticity in social psychology tends to focus on how certain structural characteristics can lead individuals to report having engaged in inauthentic behavior or produce a general sense of inauthenticity (e.g., Kiecolt 1994; Kiecolt and Mabry 2000; Didonato and Krueger 2010; Sloan 2007). Further, research suggests that individuals' subjective perception of authenticity is associated with various aspects of individual well-being (Wood et al. 2008; Goldman and Kernis 2002; Lakey et al. 2008). However, in the absence of some semblance of a core self, the notion of authenticity is rendered relatively meaningless. That is, how can individuals decide whether their behavior is an authentic reflection of self if there is no core self to compare behavior to? In this way, the theory and research presented here adds to the vitality of the concept of authenticity by presenting a model of self that is consistent with what we commonly understand as authenticity. Further, Chapter 2 contributes to research on authenticity by highlighting how features of self-structure could lead to feelings of inauthenticity and a lack of self-coherence.

Returning to figure 1.3, if these identities are rooted in some core sense of self, then chronic identity non-verification can occur. In this way, the idea of a core self can provide identity theory with the conceptual framework needed to link identity theory's perceptual control model to chronic distress and mental health outcomes over the life course. Further, figure 1.3 also illustrates why many describe identity conflict as being "pulled apart" or being "pulled in different directions." According to this general model, individuals who participate in role-based groups with role-meanings and expectations that do not align with one another are in a very real sense having their core self pulled in different directions.

Nearly every theory of self and identity in sociological social psychology cites the self-consistency motive as the key mechanism driving the link between self-meanings and behavior (e.g., Stryker 1980; Heise 2007; Burke and Stets 2009). Specifically, these theories argue that receiving self-verifying feedback provides individuals with a sense that one is a coherent social object, which reduces the existential uncertainty that is inherent in complex social reality (Swann

et al. 2003). Interestingly, many of the theories that point to the self-consistency motive as the driving force behind individuals' need to have reflected appraisals match identity meanings seem to allow for the maintenance of a fragmented self-concept containing inconsistent identity meanings (e.g., Stets 1999; Burke and Harrod 2005). A fundamental proposition in this dissertation is that the self-consistency motive should be extended to apply to individuals' overall self-structure. That is, in the same way that receiving social feedback that does not align with one's identity undermines one's sense of self-consistency, so should maintaining identities that do not align with one's other identities and one's general self-view.

### **The Role of Self-Reflection and Introspection in Identity Processes**

As highlighted above, identity theories that adopt a perceptual control model make predictions about behavior and the emotions experienced in a given social encounter. Thus, the perceptual control model links identity processes that occur in social interaction to emotional well-being. That is, the explanatory power of the identity theory model of mental health is tied to particular social encounters. One drawback of this approach is that it does not leave much room for the human capacity for self-reflection and introspection. In particular, I suggest here that individuals can and do reflect on their behavior across social situations and role-domains and they compare the behavioral strategies they adopt in different role-domains to one another and assess whether behavior reflects their general sense of self.

### **The Role of Social Network Structure**

Although identity theory views social networks and interpersonal social relationships as key components in the link between self and the overall social structure, very little research has been dedicated to examining how network structure factors into self-society dynamics. I argue that social network structure combines with the meanings that inhere in social relations to produce an individual's overall social environment. In previous research (Walker and Lynn 2013), I argued that role-based social contacts bring identity meanings into social encounters with them. Because of this, role-based groups that are broadly connected to an individual's overall social network tend to color the majority of that individual's social encounters with role-based meanings. Based on this, we hypothesized that the embeddedness of a role-based group in one's overall social

network would be positively associated with identity salience. In Chapter 4, I highlight how the (self-) meanings that inhere in one's personal social network can help us understand the impact of network structure on individuals' psychological well-being. Specifically, I highlight how the types of interactions that characterize one's social environment (i.e., self-affirming or disaffirming social environments) can change the impact of personal network density on individuals' self-esteem and self-efficacy.

### *Dissertation Plan*

In Chapter 2, I utilize this concept of "identity meaning structure" to illustrate how discrepancies between an individual's core self-view and their role-identity meanings can undermine individuals' sense of self-consistency and thereby increase depression. Using affect control theory's (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) method for measuring the meaning of social objects, I am able to systematically compare the similarity of an individual's various role-identities with their core self meanings (i.e., "Myself as I truly am"), and empirically examine if participating in social roles where identity meanings do not align with one's general self view can impact mental health.

In Chapter 3, I apply the general notion that a discrepancy between identity meanings is problematic for individual's psychological well-being to the well-studied topic of work-family conflict. Whereas previous research on this topic largely highlights how time and energy demands from work and family roles can interfere with one another, thereby producing strain for working parents, I argue that discrepancy in the cultural meanings associated with occupational and parental identities can create cultural constraints that undermine well-being.

Chapter 4 examines the question of whether holding a diverse array of role-identities is beneficial or detrimental to one's psychological well-being. At this point, it is unclear whether holding multiple role-identities with dissimilar meanings serves to "diversify" the self-concept, and therefore reduce the threat of failed role-performances in a given role domain, or serves as a source of identity conflict and thereby produce feelings of inauthenticity and identity-related stress. Building on the notion that ties between role-based groups can increase the likelihood that two identities will be activated in a given social encounter, I hypothesize that the impact of holding diverse role-identities depends on the prevalence of social ties between the role-based groups where discrepant identities are embedded. That is, self-diversification may only be

beneficial to well-being as long as one can maintain a relatively fragmented personal social network.

Chapter 5 provides some concluding remarks about the implications of the findings reported here and discusses various avenues for future research. Specifically, I discuss the implications of my findings for identity theory more broadly and research linking identity verification to mental health.

## Chapter 2: When Keeping it Real Goes Right: Identity Meaning Structure and Psychological Distress

In daily life, individuals participate in multiple social roles, such as mother, student, lawyer, and friend. According to identity theory, social roles are a crucial aspect of how individuals define themselves because the cultural meanings and expectations that are attached to roles tend to be internalized into the self-concept. Despite the importance of the self-structure to theories of self and identity and other sociological theories, little research in sociology addresses how the relationship *between* the meanings of identities impacts the self. That is, the self-structure has generally been conceptualized in terms of the relative importance or salience of identities (e.g., Stryker 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978; Burke and Stets 2009) and little attention has been given to the identity meaning structure of the self.

This lack of focus on the “meaning structure” of the self is unfortunate, given the potential importance of identity meanings for behavior and mental health. For example, it is unclear at this point whether holding multiple role-identities with dissimilar meanings serves to “diversify” the self-concept, and therefore reduce the threat of failed role-performances in a given role domain (Higgins 1987), or serves as a source of identity conflict and thereby produce feelings of inauthenticity and identity-related stress. Having a diverse set of identities may be beneficial to well-being because an individual can adopt identities that deviate from one’s general picture of self as a way to compensate for identity non-verification in other social domains (MacKinnon and Heise 2010). Further, being a “jack of all trades” could be beneficial to mental health in its own right (Emmison 2003). Finally, self-enhancement theories suggest that it is not the (dis)similarity of identity meanings that impacts well-being, but instead that maintaining positive identity meanings enhances well-being and maintaining negative identity meanings reduces well-being (e.g., Baumeister 1982; Baumeister et al. 1989).

In this paper, I empirically examine how the meaning structure of the self impacts mental health, using an innovative approach to measuring identity meanings. Specifically, I draw from a long line of research regarding the measurement of cultural meanings (e.g., Heise 1979; Osgood et al. 1957; Heise 2007) in order to represent self-held identity meanings and quantify two important aspects of identity-meaning structure: 1) overall valence in identity meanings (in terms of average evaluation, potency, and activity of identities) and 2) the (dis)similarity of identity meanings. Based on the notion that individuals are motivated to maintain consistent self-

concepts, my core hypothesis is that individuals with role-identity meanings that do not align with core self meanings will experience higher levels of depression than individuals with role-identities that align with core self-meanings. Additionally, drawing from self-enhancement theory as well as self-esteem and self-efficacy theory, I expect that individuals who generally hold identities that are high in evaluation and potency should report lower levels of depression.

### **Why Meaning Structure Matters**

For most theories of self and identity, the meanings attached to identities are fundamental to individual behavior and emotional outcomes in social encounters. Identity theory (Stryker 1980; Burke and Stets 2009) argues that behavior is guided by the drive to verify self-meanings in social encounters. That is, individuals compare how they see themselves in a given role (i.e., identity standard) with how they think others view them (i.e., reflected appraisals), and experience negative emotions if reflected appraisals do not match one's identity standard. Additionally, if reflected appraisals do not match identity standards, then behavior is guided by the goal of pulling situational meanings in line with their identity standard.

Despite the importance of identity meanings for behavior and emotional outcomes in identity theory, the self is generally viewed as structured in terms of the relative importance or salience of the various identities that one participates in (e.g., Stryker 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978). Consequently, very little attention has been given to the relationship between the meanings of the various identities that an individual holds. Here, I highlight two important aspects of identity meaning structure: 1) the overall positivity of identity meanings and 2) the (dis)similarity of identity meanings. Based on previous research regarding the self-motives of self-enhancement and self-consistency, I argue that these two features of self-structure have important implications for emotional well-being.

#### *Self-Enhancement Motive*

What aspects of identity-meaning structure should impact psychological well-being? Arguably the most straightforward way in which the identity-meaning structure should impact well-being is through the overall positivity of the identity meanings that an individual holds. That is, individuals who are able to maintain positive role-identity meanings likely have lower levels of depression. A large body of research highlights individuals' desire to maintain or increase the

positivity of their self-concept (for a review, see Leary 2007). Research suggests that individuals tend to interpret events in ways that reflect positively on the self or protect one's self image from negative outcomes. For instance, individuals tend to attribute positive outcomes to their own characteristics, but attribute negative outcomes to situational factors that are out of their control (Blaine and Crocker 1993). Additionally, individuals tend to rate themselves more positively than they should, based on objective information (Alicke and Govorum 2006). Based on the notion that self-enhancement is a basic self-motive, researchers have argued that our tendency toward self-enhancement promotes well-being (Taylor and Brown 1988). Thus, I hypothesize that more positive identity meanings will be associated with decreased levels of depression.

In this research, I utilize affect control theory's (Heise 2007; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) measurement approach to capture the meanings of individual's identities. Affect control theory assumes that individuals affectively respond to social objects—including themselves and their various identities—based on three fundamental dimensions of meaning: evaluation (how good/nice or bad/nasty the thing is), potency (how powerful/big or powerless/small the thing is), and activity (how active/noisy or inactive/quiet the thing is). When applying this evaluation-potency-activity measurement approach to the self, the evaluation dimension is thought to map onto feelings of self-worth and self-esteem and the potency dimension is thought to map onto the concept of self-efficacy (MacKinnon and Heise 2010). However, the activity dimension is thought to map onto the expressiveness of an individual, which doesn't necessarily translate to a positive self view. That is, it is unclear whether viewing oneself as more active, lively, and noisy is necessarily a positive self-view. Because of this, I limit my hypotheses to the evaluation and potency dimensions of identity meanings:

*Hypothesis 1a:* The average evaluation of one's identities will be negatively associated with depression.

*Hypothesis 1b:* The average potency of one's identities will be negatively associated with depression.

### *Self-Consistency Motive*

Whereas the self-enhancement motive highlights individual's desire to be viewed positively, a large body of research has demonstrated that individuals prefer social feedback that aligns with

their self-view (Swann et al. 2003). A fundamental premise of identity theory and other structural symbolic interactionist theories is that individuals are motivated to verify self-meanings through social interaction (Burke and Stets 2009; Stryker 1980; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992; Swann 1999). That is, social behavior is largely motivated by our need to convince others that we are who we think we are. A key psychological mechanism that underlies individuals' drive to verify self-meanings in social interaction is the need for psychological coherence (Swann 1999). As Swann, Rentfrow, and Guiles (2003) put it:

[S]table self-views provide people with a crucial source of coherence, an invaluable means of defining their existence, organizing experience, predicting future events, and guiding social interaction (cf. Cooley, 1902; Lecky, 1945; Mead, 1934; Secord & Backman, 1965). Moreover, by stabilizing behavior, stable self-views make people more predictable to *others* (Goffman, 1959)... This reasoning suggests that people may seek self-verification for one or both of two reasons: to bolster their feelings of psychological coherence ("epistemic" concerns) or to ensure that their interactions proceed smoothly ("pragmatic" concerns). (p. 369)

According to this view, individuals strive for self-verification because it supports the notion that one is a coherent social object, which reduces existential uncertainty. Interestingly, while researchers in identity theory have applied the notion of self-coherence to the relationship between identity meanings and feedback from interactional partners (i.e., reflected appraisals), they have yet to apply it to the relationship between the various identities that an individual holds.

Here, I suggest that one key feature of self-coherence is the extent to which the various identities that an individual holds align with one another. In the same way that receiving feedback that does not align with one's identity can disrupt one's sense of self-coherence, so can holding specific identity meanings that do not align with one another. For example, if one views oneself "as they truly are" as kind and warm, but has to adopt a cold and tough persona at work, then this should have serious implications for their overall sense of self-coherence. The misalignment between role-identity meanings pose an interactional problem for individuals because if one participates in social roles that do not align with their own self-view, then "epistemic concerns" can come into conflict with "pragmatic concerns." That is, the power of the situation can cause one to adopt situational identities that do not align with one's other identities. In cases where an individual's self-in-role meanings do not align with other identities, the social motivation to maintain the interactional order can come at a cost to one's sense of self-coherence. Based on this, I argue that a discrepancy between identity meanings (hereafter referred to as self-discordance) reduces an individual's sense of self-coherence, thereby

undermining one's sense of existential certainty and producing psychological distress. Thus, my core hypothesis in this study is that increases in self-discordance will be associated with increases in depression (*hypothesis 2*).

## **Methods**

In order to test the hypotheses above, data that elicits numerous role-identity meanings, core self meanings, and measures of depression is needed. Further, the self-meanings need to be on some common metric so that I can compare meanings to one another. Since data of this kind are not currently available, I collected a novel dataset that includes various self-meanings (using the common metrics of evaluation, potency, and activity) of 395 students from a large Midwestern University. The descriptive statistics for this sample are given in table 2.1. The sample was mostly female (73.44%) and white (83.6%), and tended to come from upper-middle class families (median parental income = 85,000, SD=58,152). Just over ten percent of respondents were married (10.62%) and about one-third of respondents were in their first semester at the university (32.93%). Further, there was a relatively even distribution of freshmen (21.1%), sophomores (16.55%), juniors (21.58%), seniors (19.18%), and graduate students (21.58%) in the sample.

## *Measures*

*Depression.* To measure depression, I use the CES-D 10 depression scale. The CES-D 10 asks respondents how often in the past week felt a certain way (1=rarely or none of the time, 2=Some or a little of the time, 3=occasionally or a moderate amount of time, and 4=All of the time). Items include “I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me,” “I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing,” “I felt depressed,” “I felt that everything was an effort,” “I felt hopeful about the future (reverse coded),” “I felt fearful,” “My sleep was restless,” “I was happy (reverse coded),” “I felt lonely,” and “I could not get going.” The scale revealed acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

Table 2.1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Depression	2.02	0.55	1.00	3.70
Self-Discordance	1.62	0.78	0.23	5.20
Female	0.74	0.44	0.00	1.00
Age	21.92	5.22	18.00	60.00
White	0.84	0.36	0.00	1.00
Parental Income	98.16	57.43	5.00	225.00
Married	0.09	0.28	0.00	1.00
First Semester at University	0.33	0.47	0.00	1.00
Academic Year				
Freshman				
Sophomore	0.17	0.37	0.00	1.00
Junior	0.22	0.42	0.00	1.00
Senior	0.19	0.39	0.00	1.00
Graduate/Professional	0.21	0.41	0.00	1.00
Agency	2.34	0.72	1.00	4.00
Agreeable	3.28	0.65	1.00	4.00
Extroversion	2.97	0.72	1.20	4.00
Neuroticism	2.32	0.68	1.00	4.00
Openness	3.12	0.56	1.00	4.00
Conscientiousness	3.29	0.60	1.00	4.00

*Self-Discordance.* To measure self-discordance, two types of self-meanings were gathered: 1) self-in-role meanings and 2) core-self meanings. Specifically, *self-in-role meanings* are elicited by asking how respondents view themselves in the various roles they participate in, in terms of evaluation (infinitely bad/awful=-4, infinitely good/nice=4), potency (infinitely little/powerless=-4, infinitely big/powerful=4), and activity (infinitely slow/inactive/quite=-4, infinitely fast/active/noisy=4). Self-in-role meanings are gathered for the parental, student, religious, spouse, friend, and worker roles. For example, to gather student self-in-role meanings, respondents are asked to rate themselves as a student (i.e., “As a student, I am...”) on the evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions. In this study, I only use student, friend, and work identities, given that the sample consists of college students and very few respondents reported being married or had children. To measure *core-self meanings*, respondents are asked to rate “myself as I truly am” on the evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions. Using this approach,

I can map out the distance in three-dimensional EPA space between individuals core self-views and their views of themselves as a role-participant in each role-identity.<sup>5</sup>

To illustrate, imagine someone who views themselves “as they truly are” as quite good/nice ( $E_{self}=2$ ), slightly big/powerful ( $P_{self}=1$ ), and slightly active ( $A_{self}=1$ ). Further, as a student, this individual views themselves as slightly good ( $E_{student} = 1$ ), quite powerless ( $P_{student} = -2$ ), and extremely active ( $A_{student} = 3$ ). As illustrated in figure 2.1, this individual views themselves “as a student” to be less good, less powerful, and more active than their view of themselves “as they truly are.” Following MacKinnon and Heise (2010), I view the distance between these two points to be indicative of the discrepancy between the core self and the student identity. Formally, this distance is measured by taking the three-dimensional Euclidean distance between the two points, which is calculated as:

$$D_{sr} = \sqrt{(E_{self} - E_{role})^2 + (P_{self} - P_{role})^2 + (A_{self} - A_{role})^2}$$

In the example above, the distance between the core self and the student identity (i.e., the self-student discrepancy) is 3.74. To calculate the overall self-role discrepancy, I simply take the average distance between all possible identity combinations in EPA space.<sup>6,7</sup> Additional analyses indicated that the direction of discrepancy between the various identities did not matter for depression, suggesting that this measurement approach is suitable for the purposes of this study. See Appendix A for a detailed examination of this issue.

<sup>5</sup> Following Burke and Harrod (2005), I standardize the EPA values prior to estimating the discrepancy scores. The results are not sensitive to whether or not I use standardized scores or unstandardized scores, however.

<sup>6</sup> For individuals who indicated that they did not currently work for pay, work identity meanings were not elicited and work identity meanings were therefore not included in the calculation of self-role discrepancy.

<sup>7</sup> The effect of self-role discrepancy doesn't seem to be sensitive to different specifications. For example, taking the maximum value rather than the average produces similar results, although the effect size is slightly smaller.

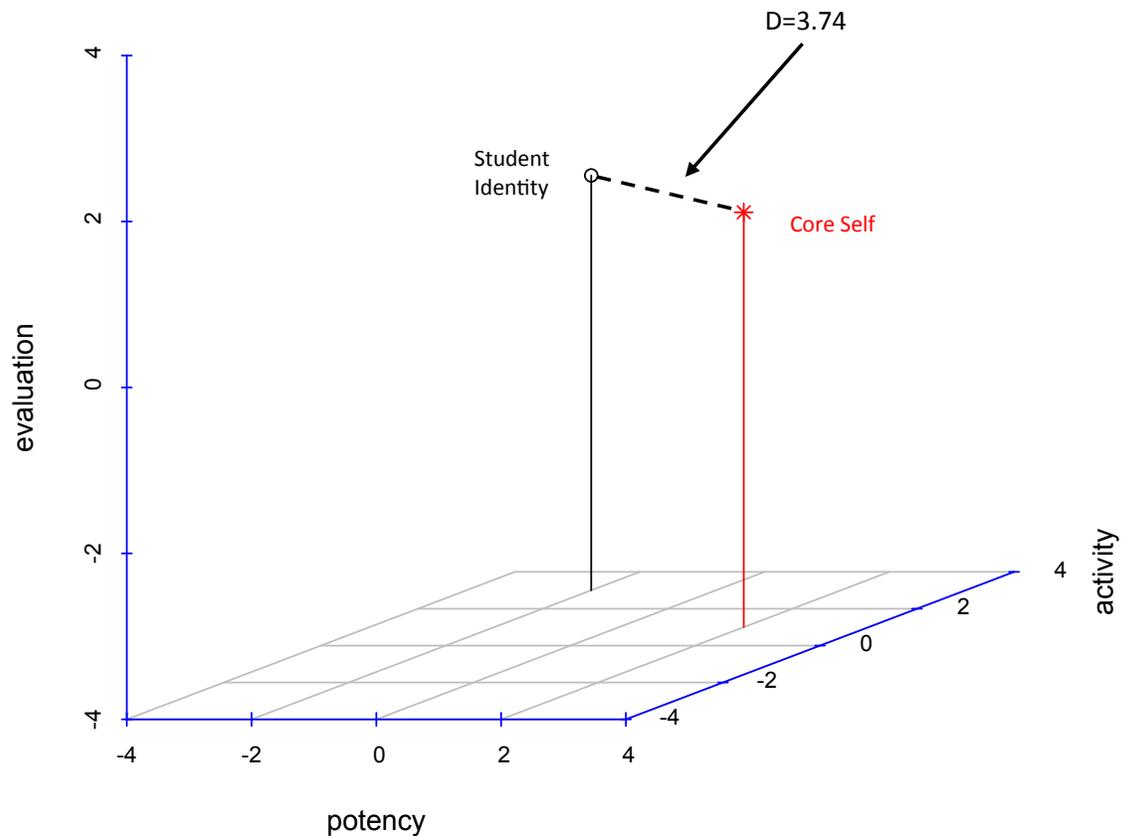


Figure 2.1. EPA Values for Core Self and Student Identity.

*Personality traits.* Given the fact that these data are cross sectional, it is possible that certain types of individuals tend to hold self-in-role meanings that do not align with their core-self meanings, and that these same types of individuals are also more susceptible to depression. To address the potential for personality-based selection, I control for the big five personality traits (Goldberg 1990) and agency. I include agency in addition to the standard big five personality traits, given its similarity to the potency dimension of the EPA measurement approach. Personality traits are measured asking respondents how much self-descriptive adjectives describe them (1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Some, 4= A lot). *Neuroticism* is measured by taking the average of response to the adjectives of moody, worrying, nervous, and calm (reverse coded). *Agreeableness* is measured as the average of helpful, warm, caring, and softhearted. Extroversion is measured using the adjectives of outgoing, friendly, lively, active, and talkative. *Openness to experience* is measured using the adjectives of creative, intelligent,

curious, imaginative, broad-minded, sophisticated, and adventurous. *Conscientiousness* is measured using the adjectives organized, responsible, hardworking, and careless (reverse coded). Finally, *agency* is measured using the adjectives self-confident, forceful, assertive, outspoken, and dominant.

*Demographic characteristics.* To account for the possibility that individuals with certain demographic characteristics are both more likely to maintain role identities that are discrepant from their core self meanings and more likely to report higher levels of depression, I control for potentially relevant demographic characteristics. Specifically, since research shows that high-status actors tend to have more control over the definition of situations, and are therefore likely more able to negotiate identity meanings that align more closely to their core self meanings, I control for *race* (white = 1, non-white = 0), *parental income* (in thousands of US dollars)<sup>8</sup>, and *gender* (female=1, male=0). Further, since role obligations and mental health may change as one progresses through the university, I control for *student status* (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate/professional student). I also include a dummy variable for whether or not this is the *respondent's first semester at the University* (1=first semester, 0=not first semester), due to the fact that this change in environment may produce distress and because identity meanings may not be fully negotiated yet.<sup>9</sup>

## Results

As you can see in table 1, the average level of depression was moderately low (mean=2.02, SD=0.55), which corresponds to experiencing depressive symptoms “some of the time,” on average. Further, the mean self-discordance score was 1.62 (SD=.78), indicating that the average respondent had a small amount of discrepancy between their identity meanings.

The results for the OLS regression predicting depression are given in table 2.6. As you can see in model 1, whites tend to report lower levels of depression ( $p<.01$ ) as did individuals who originate from high-income families ( $p<.05$ ). Model 2 shows that, as expected, personality traits have a large impact on depressive symptoms. Extroverts tended to report significantly lower levels of depression ( $p<.001$ ), neuroticism is associated with higher levels of depression

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<sup>8</sup> I use parental income, rather than respondent's income because this sample consists of college students. Thus, I view parental income as a better indicator of respondents' SES than their own income.

<sup>9</sup> Given that these data include graduate students as well as transfer students, student status and first semester at the university are distinct from one another.

( $p < .001$ ) and conscientious is associated with lower levels of depression ( $p < .001$ ). Model 3 displays the impact of average evaluation, potency, and activity of identities on depression, controlling for personality and demographic variables. As expected, average evaluation was negatively associated with depression ( $p < .001$ ), providing support for hypothesis 1a. This suggests that individuals who hold nicer identity meanings in general tend to have lower levels of depression. However, contrary to hypothesis 1b, the average potency of an individual's identities is not significantly related to depression. Thus, these data suggest that maintaining identity meanings that are high in worth and pleasantness is more important than holding identities that are associated with power and efficacy for reducing depressed emotion. Finally, model 4 displays the full model including self-discordance. As hypothesized, self-discordance has a positive and significant impact on depression ( $p < .001$ ), providing support for the claim that discrepancy between identity meanings increases depression (hypothesis 2).

**Table 2.2. OLS Regression Predicting Depression**

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-0.053 (0.064)	-0.140** (0.054)	-0.127* (0.053)	-0.116* (0.052)
Age	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
White	-0.199** (0.074)	-0.038 (0.068)	-0.040 (0.067)	-0.042 (0.066)
Parental Income	-0.001* (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Married	-0.107 (0.121)	-0.110 (0.096)	-0.122 (0.092)	-0.131 (0.093)
First Semester	0.016 (0.083)	-0.013 (0.064)	-0.037 (0.063)	-0.038 (0.064)
Sophomore	0.063 (0.121)	-0.043 (0.092)	-0.073 (0.091)	-0.064 (0.090)
Junior	0.063 (0.108)	-0.030 (0.083)	-0.050 (0.083)	-0.037 (0.083)
Senior	0.002 (0.125)	-0.088 (0.097)	-0.114 (0.096)	-0.130 (0.096)
Graduate Student	-0.111 (0.102)	-0.244** (0.086)	-0.265** (0.085)	-0.269** (0.086)
Agency		-0.046 (0.041)	-0.046 (0.044)	-0.032 (0.042)
Agreeable		0.010 (0.040)	0.048 (0.044)	0.045 (0.044)
Extroversion		-0.182*** (0.046)	-0.151** (0.052)	-0.143** (0.049)
Neuroticism		0.368*** (0.033)	0.357*** (0.035)	0.335*** (0.036)
Openness		0.071 (0.049)	0.092^ (0.048)	0.055 (0.047)
Conscientiousness		-0.142*** (0.038)	-0.090* (0.041)	-0.075^ (0.041)
Avg. Evaluation			-0.105*** (0.031)	-0.089** (0.031)
Avg. Potency			0.013 (0.029)	0.017 (0.028)
Avg. Activity			-0.018 (0.026)	-0.009 (0.025)
Self-Discordance				0.122*** (0.034)
Constant	2.463*** (0.184)	2.322*** (0.226)	2.210*** (0.234)	1.968*** (0.239)
Observations	395	395	395	395
R-squared	0.066	0.396	0.419	0.444

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05, ^ p&lt;0.1

## Discussion

The findings reported here strongly suggest that identity-meaning structure is important for emotional well-being. Net of demographic controls and personality variables, the overall positivity of individuals' identity meanings (in terms of evaluation) was negatively associated with depressive symptoms. In addition to this, the overall "spread" of identity meanings had an independent and positive impact on depression, suggesting that emotional well-being may be a product of both the valence and the *variation* in identity meanings. Importantly, the fact that self-discordance is positively related to depression provides evidence that individuals are motivated to maintain a consistent self-concept and an inability to do so produces psychological distress.

This research suggests that the focus on self-esteem and self-efficacy in mental health research may ignore an important feature of the self-structure for mental health. Recent research on self-esteem and self-efficacy has moved in the direction of focusing on domain specific measures in lieu of traditional global measures (e.g., Rosenberg et al. 1995; Lent 1997), generally operating under the assumption that higher levels of domain specific esteem and efficacy will result in positive well-being outcomes. However, this research highlights a paradoxical fact about the impact of self-views on mental health. Specifically, adopting an extremely positive identity may not be beneficial for mental health if an individual's other identities are comparatively less positive. Although the increase in the overall evaluation of one's identity-meaning structure may boost well-being, the resulting increase in self-discordance may dampen, negate, or even overpower that boost. Future research linking self-views to mental health outcomes should attend to both the valence and the diversity in identity meanings.

Given that the data used in this study is cross-sectional, I cannot clearly establish the causal order between self-discordance and depression. That is, in the absence of longitudinal data, I cannot definitively exclude the possibility that depression causes individuals to maintain a discordant self-concept. Although data limitations restrict my ability to demonstrate causal ordering here, the fact that the results are robust to controlling for the big five personality traits and agency provide some evidence that my findings are not due to personality-based selection. One possibility is that non-depressed individuals are more capable at cognitively reconstructing role-performances and the responses of interaction partners in a way that allows them to maintain self-consistency. Research suggests that depressed affect is positively related to the accuracy of

social perceptions in general (e.g., Taylor and Brown 1988; Casciaro et al. 1999). If individuals' "actual" role-identity meanings tend to be diverse in general, and those who report low levels of depression are more likely to engage in cognitive reconstruction, such that role-identities reflect the core self, then depressed individuals would tend to report higher levels of self-role discrepancy than those with low levels of depression. However, the research highlighting the relationship between depressive symptoms and the accuracy of social perceptions suggests that errors in social perception are systematically overly positive for those with low levels of depressive symptoms. That is, non-depressed individuals tend to *overestimate* themselves and their importance in social life. This would suggest a general upward shift in non-depressed individuals various identities, which would not account for the discrepancy findings presented here. Nonetheless, future research should be directed toward gathering longitudinal data so as to demonstrate the causal ordering between discrepancy and depression.

Another potential limitation of this study is that I employ a convenience sample of college students. Thus, these findings are not generalizable to the population at large. Although the purpose of my research was not to uncover generalizable trends in the population, but rather to examine a social psychological process, focusing on such a specific age group and population could be problematic in its own right. Since the sample consists of mainly young adults, it is possible that the results reported here are specific to this particular age group or stage in the life course. First, young adults could be more sensitive to feelings of inauthenticity than older adults. As people age, marry, and find careers, they may come to accept that role-expectations are not going to match their core self views. Second, since college is culturally viewed as the time to "find oneself," college students may be especially attentive to discrepancies between identity meanings.

## CONCLUSION

Although there are various limitations to this study, it does provide an important first step in understanding how the interrelations between identity meanings can impact mental health. The findings of this study suggest that 1) individuals that maintain identities that are more positive on the evaluation dimension tend to report lower levels of depression, 2) a mismatch between identity meanings is associated with increased depressive symptoms, and 3) the negative effects of this discrepancy occur whether role-identities are viewed more positively or less positively

than the core self. In total, this provides strong evidence that the self-consistency motive extends to comparisons between core self meanings and role-identity meanings.

This research also highlights the importance of taking a more holistic view on identity processes for the advancement of identity theory and other theories of self and identity. That is, focusing on a single identity at a time likely obscures the important fact that the self is a system of interrelated identity meanings. Perhaps because of this, theory and research that explicitly addresses the interrelation between identity meanings is seriously lacking in sociological research on self and identity. It is my hope that this research can spark an interest in what is essentially “uncharted territory” in identity theory.

### Chapter 3: More than ‘Maxed Out’: Working Parents and the Psychological Toll of Spanning Culturally Discrepant Roles\*

That actors inhabit multiple roles is a key feature of social life and yet sociologists still have much to learn regarding its implications for self and society. For example, imagine a father of two who is employed as the head of a local mob. In terms of broad, cultural meanings, this man’s work-family identity is marked by incompatibility given that most would consider his work role (i.e., stealing money, skirting the law, being “bad”) to be misaligned with our culture’s generic notion of fatherhood (i.e., providing and protecting children, being “good”). In contrast, a father who works as a grade-school teacher evokes a sense of compatibility in social roles: this father is considered a “good guy” in both the work and family domains. That is, regardless of what he *actually* does at home or at work, the father-mobster is a combination of roles that is marked by a diffuse sense of cultural incompatibility or misalignment relative to the father-teacher. What effect, if any, does this abstract sense of discrepancy have on the psychological well-being of incumbents of multiple roles?

In the following study, we examine this question with respect to working parents. What happens when a parent works in an occupation that is viewed as culturally incompatible with the parental role? Our general proposition is that upholding two identities that are considered culturally incompatible will exact a psychological toll on incumbents. This is because an actor holding two incompatible roles—vis-à-vis the generally agreed upon “rules of the game”—has more difficulty achieving self-affirmation than actors with two roles that are culturally aligned.

The first section of this study lays the groundwork for the key concept in our analysis: cultural perceptions regarding parent-worker incompatibility. Based on original survey data, we empirically measure perceptions of incompatibility with respect to various parent-occupation combinations (e.g., mother-lawyer, father-secretary). We show that certain role combinations are in fact viewed as more incompatible and “unnatural” and that these perceptions of appropriateness are, as expected, partly rooted in the affective sentiments associated with role identities (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988; Mackinnon 1994; Heise 2007) but also other cultural constructs (e.g., gender-occupation stereotypes).

Our second aim is to test whether the perceived incompatibility of a role combination is associated with lower levels of psychological well-being for incumbents of multiple roles. To this end, we merge our survey data on perceptions of parent-occupation incompatibility with the

1995-1996 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS), a large nationally representative sample of middle-aged adults with extensive measures of mental health and traditional measures of allocational work-family conflict (i.e., time, place, and energy-based conflict). The augmented MIDUS data enable us to assess whether the perceived incompatibility of various worker-parent combinations is associated with respondents' levels of psychological well-being, net of allocational work-family conflict and other key covariates associated with both occupation and psychological well-being (e.g. respondent's income, perceptions of occupational worth). This approach allows us to assess whether the *cultural* incompatibility of work and parental identities adds to the psychological toll that stems from allocational conflict (for a review, see Allen et al. 2000).

Below, we begin with a discussion of work-family conflict as it has been traditionally defined, distinguishing between allocational conflict—rooted in conflict between the time and energy required by work and family responsibilities—and cultural conflict, which is rooted in conflict between the societal meanings attached to certain work and family roles. This latter type of work-family conflict, which we develop from previous social psychological work on culture and identity, helps shed light on the understudied area of behavior-based conflict among work and family researchers.

## **Dimensions of Work-Family Conflict**

### *The Dominant Perspective: Allocational Conflict*

The effect of conflicting social roles on psychological well-being has long been of interest for sociologists and psychologists (e.g., Merton 1957; Coser 1974; Marks 1977; Seiber 1974; Baruch et al. 1987). In one of the earliest formulations of the role-strain hypothesis, Goode (1960) argues that individuals likely encounter “conflicts of allocation,” (i.e. conflicts of time, place, or resources) when trying to meet the obligations required of performing multiple roles (p.485). Building on Goode's general concept of role-strain, work and family scholars have expanded the definition of work-family conflict to encompass three dimensions: *time*-based conflict, *strain*-based conflict, and *behavior*-based conflict. As summarized by Wharton (2012), work-family conflict can arise from: “incompatibilities associated with time, such as having to work long hours that prevent one from spending time with their children or partner; incompatibilities associated with behavior, such as being required to be non-emotional and

detached while at work, while being expected to be emotionally engaged at home; and from incompatibilities associated with strain, such as being too tired or drained after the work day to play with children at night” (223).

Empirical research, however, has focused almost exclusively on time- and strain-based conflict, which we refer to collectively as *allocational* conflict. At this point, there is virtually no doubt that working parents (a) feel ‘maxed out’ based on time and energy constraints and that (b) experiencing this conflict takes a psychological toll. Studies have clearly shown, for example, that allocational work-family conflict is associated with lower job, family, and life satisfaction (Ford et al. 2007; Allen et al. 2000; Kossek and Ozeki 1998). Similarly, researchers have repeatedly documented the negative effects of allocational work-family conflict on mental health (Eby et al. 2005; Byron 2005), and its positive effects on (a) psychological distress (Burke and Greenglass 1999), (b) psychiatric disorders (Frone 2000), and (c) stress (Kelloway et al. 1999). The robustness of these results led Mullen et al. (2008) to characterize the inverse relationship between allocational work-family conflict and individual well-being as “unequivocal” (198).

Conceptually, allocational conflict is rooted in the notion of “scarcity” (Wharton 2012); individuals are viewed as managing finite personal resources (i.e., time and energy) and work and family roles are viewed as depleting those resources. To illustrate, consider the example of a mother who is a lawyer. Work and family may conflict with one another via competing demands on her time (e.g., work obligations may cause her to miss her child’s dance recital) or excessive demands on one’s energy, patience, or ability to cope with stressors (e.g., she may be too tired after a long day of work to help her kids with their homework or stress from work may make her irritable at home).

### *Identity-based Work and Family Conflict*

The point of this paper is not to contend with the importance of allocational work-family conflict and its relationship to individual well-being, but rather to highlight another face of work-family conflict that stems from culture and identity. According to a long line of work in social psychology, all social roles are imbued with cultural meanings (Stryker 1980; Burke and Stets 2009). These affective meanings are socially constructed, third-order beliefs (i.e., one’s beliefs about how “most people” feel about an identity). It follows then that two roles are culturally discrepant to the extent that their cultural meanings differ in some substantive way.

For example, building from Osgood, Tannenbaum and Suci's (1957) pioneering work on measuring sentiment, the sociologists working in this area (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) argue that the affective meanings we hold for social identities (mother, woman, politician, lawyer) and "objects" (e.g., tornado, dog) can be adequately conceptualized in terms of three dimensions: Evaluation (good vs. bad), Potency (powerful vs. weak), and Activity (lively vs. quiet).<sup>10</sup> Given that the affective sentiment associated with any single identity or object can be quantified with a three dimensional metric (i.e., the EPA rating), we can also capture the (dis)similarity in the cultural sentiments of any two identities by calculating the distance between their respective points in EPA space (see appendix A). As an example, Figure 3.1 plots three occupational identities based on mean EPA ratings from the online dictionary available through INTERACT<sup>11</sup> and their corresponding Euclidean distances to the role of mother: mother-politician ( $d=3.28$ ), mother-teacher ( $d=0.76$ ), and mother-server ( $d=2.77$ ).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For example, a tornado is typically rated as extremely bad, extremely powerful, and extremely active whereas doctors are perceived as good, powerful, and quiet. Overall, there appears to be a large amount of cultural agreement regarding the sentiments associated with identities and objects: 80 percent of individual variation in the evaluation dimension and 60 percent of the variation in the potency and activity dimensions are predicted by cultural norms (Heise 2007).

<sup>11</sup> The EPA ratings are available at [www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ACT/interact/JavaInteract.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ACT/interact/JavaInteract.html) and are based on a 2003 sample of undergraduate respondents from Indiana University (Francis and Heise 2007).

<sup>12</sup>

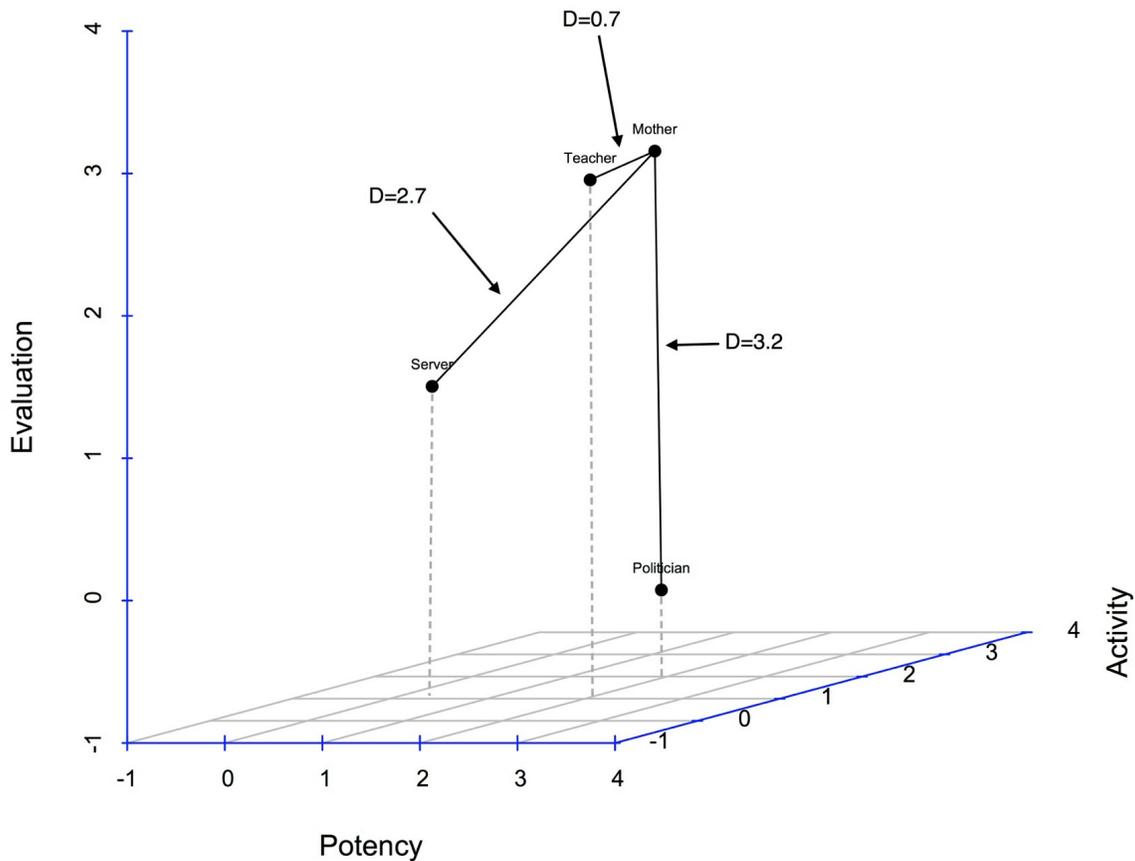


Figure 3.1. Work-Mother Discrepancy in EPA space

The point of this illustration is to raise the issue of identity-based incompatibility with respect to parent-occupation role combinations. For some role combinations, their distance in EPA space is low, which suggests that their affective meanings are aligned. But for other combinations, the affective meaning of the parent role is far away from the occupational role. The latter case represents a situation in which the broader culture is essentially “insisting” that the “type of person” you are supposed to be at work is incompatible with the person you are supposed to be at home.

For example, we generally view fathers as being in a position to give orders whereas laborers or manual workers are generally viewed as those who take orders; we thus suspect that the father-laborer role combination will be culturally viewed as a incompatible or inappropriate pairing of two identities. In a similar vein, the mother-lawyer mentioned earlier may be expected to be cold and aggressive while at work and yet warm and nurturing at home. In this way, our

theory of cultural incompatibility dovetails with the notion of behavior-based conflict described above (Bruck, Allen, and Spector 2002; Carlson et al. 2006, Greenhaus 1988). As noted above, behavior-based conflict—a source of work-family conflict that is currently far less developed relative to allocation conflict—arises when the patterns of behavior that are deemed appropriate in each role-domain are incompatible in some way (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Stephens and Sommer 1996).

In this study, we address two central questions that arise from our conceptualization of identity-based work-family conflict. First, to what extent are various parent-occupation role combinations actually perceived as incompatible? The EPA distances (figure 3.1) certainly suggest that some parent-worker pairings are more or less aligned in their cultural meanings but it is an open empirical question as to how members of a collective actually internalize the appropriateness or naturalness of a pairing. Second, to what extent does identity-based work-family conflict have implications for psychological well-being? We already know that allocation-based work-family conflict has strong and negative consequences for mental health ; we posit that identity-based conflict will as well. In the following section, we measure perceptions of parent-occupation incompatibility to demonstrate that there are indeed some role combinations that are viewed as more discrepant than others. We then lay out our theoretical rationale for *why* incompatible behavioral expectations are expected to produce psychological strain.

## **Measuring Perceptions of Incompatibility: Parent-Occupation Role Combinations**

### *Eliciting Direct Perceptions*

To what extent are various role combinations actually recognized as incompatible when actors are presented *directly* with the role combination itself? To our knowledge, researchers have not heretofore elicited perceptions pertaining to the inappropriateness or unnaturalness of combining two roles. We gather original survey data (n=397) on the perceptions of various role combinations (see appendix B for details on survey instrument). Whereas the EPA-derived discrepancy measure is based on a simple linear function of how two roles are viewed *separately*, our purpose here it to elicit direct perceptions of incompatibility.

We base our survey on the same 31 work identities (i.e., occupations) available in the INTERACT dictionary. We keep only one of the four military identities (Army Enlistee)

included in the dictionary, and so our final survey asks about the pairing of the parent identity with 28 distinct work identities.<sup>13</sup> Respondents are asked about their perceptions regarding (a) the similarity of the incumbent's behavior at home (as a parent) and at work (in the given occupation) (1=extremely different, 6=extremely similar) and (b) the naturalness of the given work and parent combination ("How natural do you think it is to combine the role of \_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_?" [1=very unnatural, 6=very natural]).

A composite measure of *incompatibility* is then constructed by taking the mean of similarity and naturalness (both reverse coded) per parent-occupation combination; similarity and naturalness are highly correlated ( $r_{\text{mother}}=.95$ ;  $r_{\text{father}}=.79$ ). High values on the incompatibility measure correspond to parent-occupation combinations that are considered culturally inappropriate whereas low values correspond to role combinations perceived to be culturally compatible.

We present respondents in our survey with gender-specific parent-occupation pairs (i.e., mother-lawyer, father-sheriff). This allows for potential variation in perceptions of incompatibility for a given work and family role combination as a function of gender of the parent. For instance, although we find that the EPA-derived cultural discrepancy measures are nearly identical for mothers and fathers (because "mother" and "father" have nearly identical EPA rating), this does not "need" to be the case for perceptions of incompatibility. In fact, it seems likely that perceptions of parent-occupation incompatibility will be based, at least in part, on perceptions of lack-of-fit based on gender stereotypes associated with the given occupation (see Heilman 1983, 1995, 2001). For example, when presented with a given parent-occupation combination, respondents may see father-occupation as *more compatible* than mother-occupation when the occupation is *male-dominated* (and vice versa).

### *Results*

Our measure of perceived incompatibility shows a fair amount of variation across the set of parent-occupation combinations. As an example, figure 3.2 displays the mean incompatibility score of each of the 28 mother-occupation combinations with 95% confidence intervals. This highlights the fact that respondents perceive meaningful differences in the incompatibility of

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<sup>13</sup>These 28 work identities are not a representative sample of all occupations in the U.S.; we limit our survey to these 28 work identities so that we can compare our results with the EPA-derived measures based on INTERACT.

occupational and parental roles. For example, the combination of mother and teacher is viewed as significantly more compatible than 26 of the 27 other mother-occupation pairings. Not surprisingly, we find that a moderately positive correlation between the EPA-derived measure of cultural discrepancy and the perceived incompatibility measure ( $r_{\text{mother}}=0.31$ ;  $r_{\text{father}}=0.38$ ).

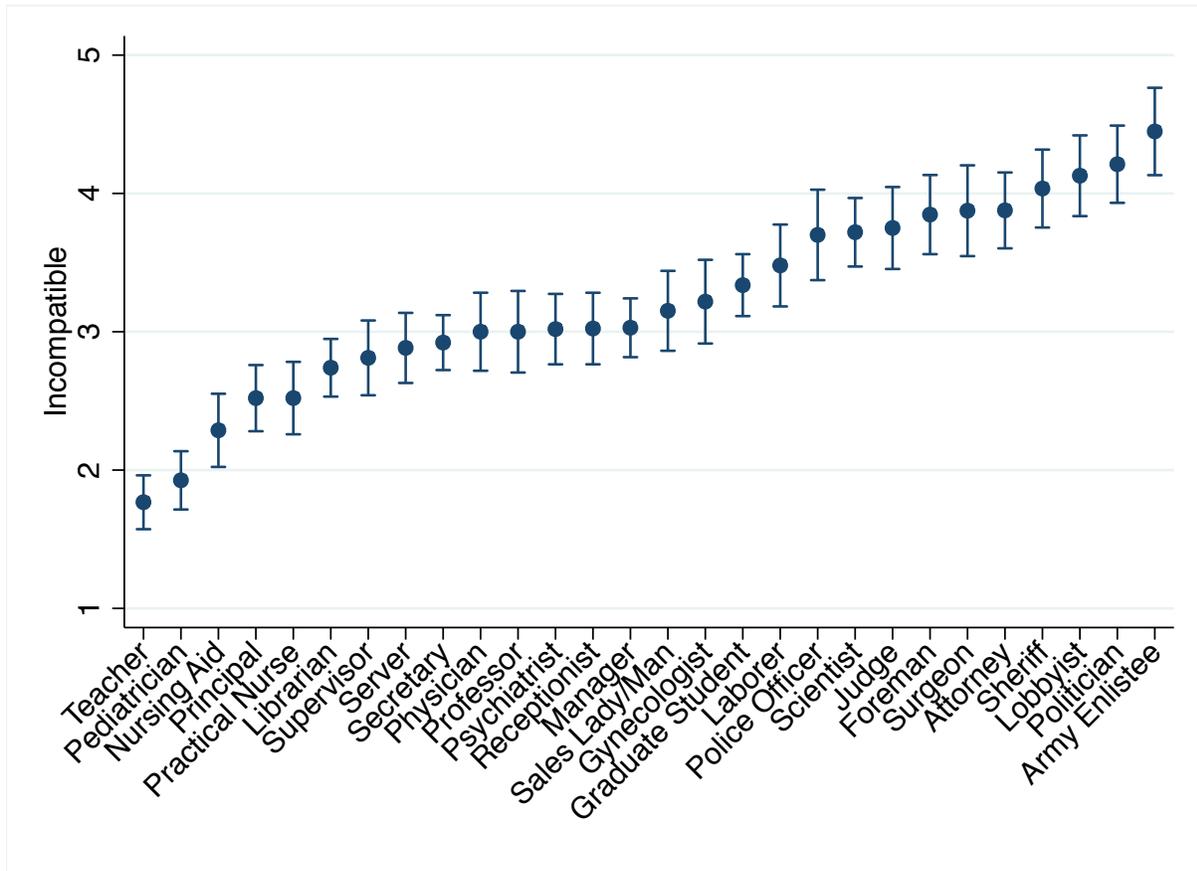
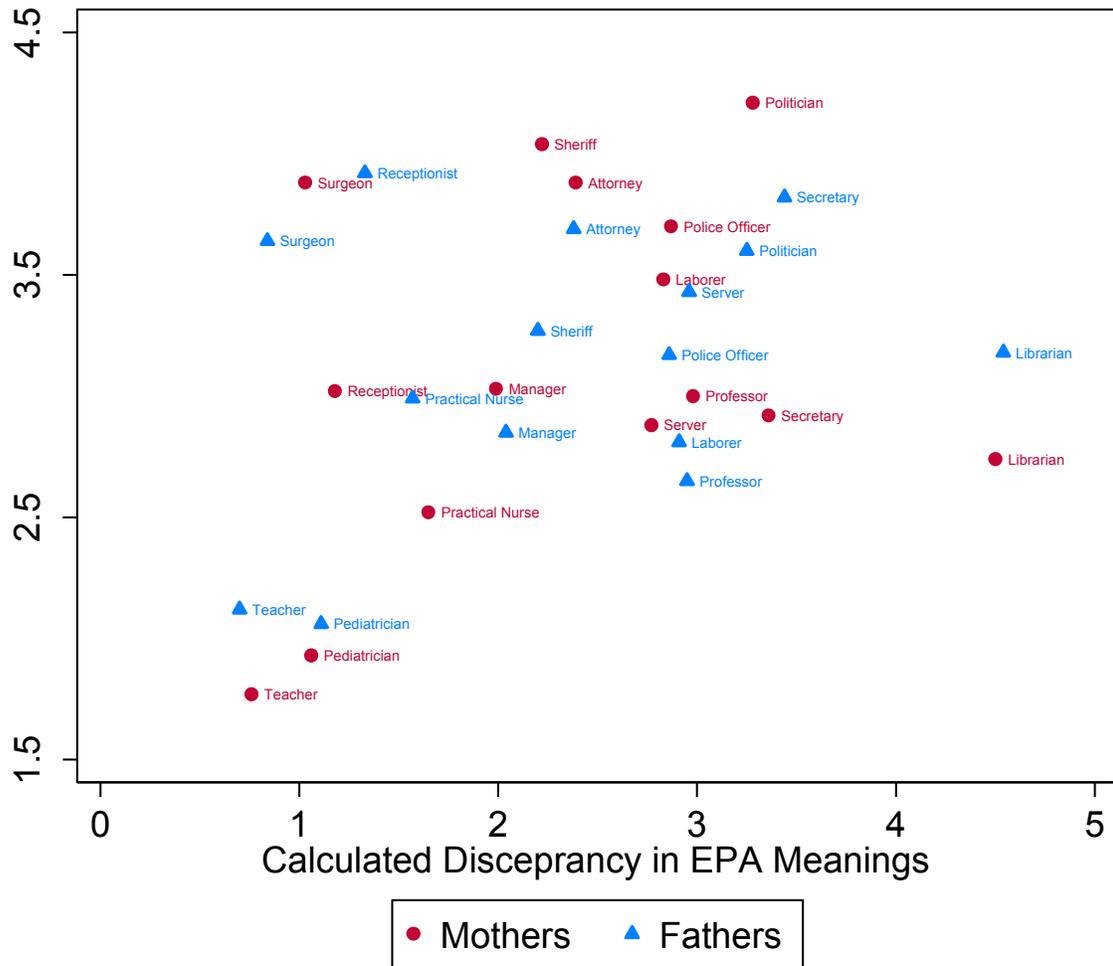


Figure 3.2. Mean incompatibility scores with 95% confidence intervals for mother – occupation combinations

Next, we explore the results for this measure by gender of parent (see Figure 3.3). We plot 15 of the 28 parent-occupational pairings separately for mothers and fathers; mothers are represented with circles and fathers are represented by triangles. Clearly, our survey respondents perceive gender differences in the incompatibility of most of the parent-worker combinations (the triangles and circles for any given occupation are not at the same place on the y-axis). For example, the father-teacher combination is perceived as being more incompatible than the mother-teacher combination ( $t=2.23$ ,  $p=.028$ ), and fathers are seen as more incompatible than mothers when working in other female-dominated occupations, such as receptionist, practical nurse, secretary, and librarian. Conversely, a father-politician is perceived to be less

incompatible than a mother-politician ( $t=-2.74, p=.007$ ), and fathers are seen as less incompatible than mothers when working other in male-dominated occupations, such as laborer, police officer, and sheriff.



**Figure 3.3. Relationship between EPA calculated discrepancy and perceived incompatibility.**

Note: This scatterplot is based on a random sample of 15 of the 28 mother/father-occupation combinations that were included in our survey of role combinations. Pairings were eliminated so that readers could decipher occupational labels.

Clearly, the gendered-nature of the occupation is affecting how respondents rate perceived incompatibility. How then do we isolate the perceived inappropriateness of a pairing *due to the parent role specifically*? Again, the potential problem is that for the role combination of mother and surgeon, perceptions of unnaturalness can stem from the fact that *women* are “not supposed to be” surgeons (i.e., lack-of-fit based on gender stereotypes) as well as because the

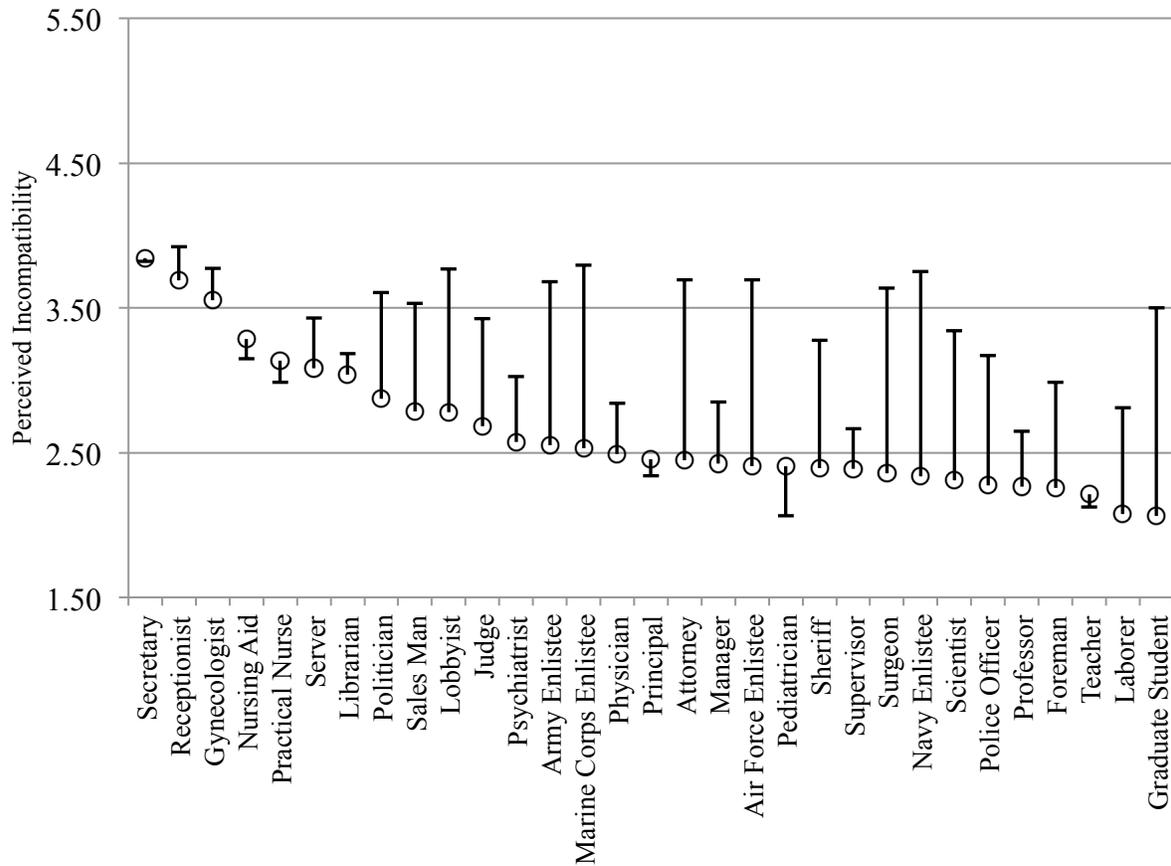
abstract cultural image around mothers does not match that of a surgeon (i.e., lack-of-fit based on role meanings). We are only interested in measuring the latter.

To separate these two distinct types of perceived misalignment, we measure perceptions of unnaturalness and dissimilarity for a set of *man/woman*-occupation pairings that parallel our *father/mother*-occupation pairings (see appendix B for details). Finally, to create the measure of incompatibility we take the average *father/mother*-occupation incompatibility score and subtract the average *man/woman*-occupation incompatibility score. This difference gives us the inappropriateness value associated with lack-of-fit around parenting roles specifically (we refer to this as the “parent-based lack-of-fit” hereafter).

Figure 3.4 illustrates for fathers the decomposition of lack-of-fit based on gender versus parenthood for all 28 occupations. As an example, note that MAN – ATTORNEY is associated with a 2.45 on the incompatibility scale whereas FATHER – ATTORNEY is associated with a 3.69 (i.e., the father-lawyer combination is viewed as more inappropriate or unnatural relative to the male-lawyer combination)<sup>14</sup>. To create our final measure of role-based incompatibility, we subtract the later from the former to get +1.24 for father-attorney (i.e. the length of the whisker).

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<sup>14</sup> Overall, when the parent-occupation combination is viewed as *less* compatible than the baseline gender-occupation combination, the role-based incompatibility value will be positive. Conversely, when the parent-occupation combination is viewed as *more* compatible than the baseline gender-occupation combination, the value will be negative.



**Figure 3.4.** Gender- versus Parent-based Incompatibility

Note: The circle corresponds to the perceived incompatibility score based on gender lack-of-fit (i.e., based on the man-occupation ratings of unnaturalness and dissimilarity). The whisker represents the additional “penalty” associated with the parent-based incompatibility penalty. The end of the whisker corresponds to the perceived incompatibility score for father-occupation ratings on unnaturalness and dissimilarity.

In sum, these data help illustrate a less tangible “face” of work-family conflict. In addition to the practical or allocational constraints associated with having to perform multiple roles (e.g. there are only 24 hours in a day, time and energy is finite), work and family can conflict to the extent that the cultural meanings associated with one’s work role do not align with the meanings associated with one’s family role. As described above, we operationalize perceptions of cultural discrepancy in roles with respect to a newly derived, parent-based lack-of-fit score. The question that arises next is whether this form of identity-based work-family conflict is consequential with respect to well-being. That is, are there psychological consequences to inhabiting culturally discrepant roles?

## The Psychological Toll of Spanning Cultural Discrepant Roles

For over a decade, economic sociologists have closely examined what happens to actors who make attachments to multiple categories and thus challenge the “neat partitions” that inhere in categorical schemas (see Negro et al 2010; Hannan 2010).<sup>15</sup> In the labor market, for example, employers prefer candidates who have some diversity in their work histories but disapprove of those who have skipped around too much between “really unrelated jobs” (Leung 2014:143). Similarly, in the movie industry, casting agents are more likely to hire actors who specialize in the genre for which they are casting (Zuckerman et al. 2003). A central set of ideas to emerge from this body of work is that *the audience* tends to penalize those who fail to fall neatly into one category: the audience is less certain about the “true nature” of generalists and thus perceive them to be illegitimate (Zuckerman 1999), inauthentic (Kovacs et al. 2014), of lower quality (Leung and Sharkey 2013), and, consequently, of less value overall (Hsu et al. 2009; Hsu 2006; Pólos, Hannan, and Carroll 2002). But what do we know of the impact of spanning roles on *the self*?

Although the impact of participating in discrepant roles is relatively unexplored in social psychology, we posit that there are strong reasons to believe that cultural discrepancy in meanings—however abstract—are real enough to take a psychological toll on actors who span discrepant identities. In doing so, we add to the concept of behavior-based WFC by providing a theoretical account for why discrepancy in behavioral expectations can produce psychological distress. Specifically, we draw from social psychology to highlight two potential mechanisms that may be driving the link between discrepancy and psychological well-being: (1) constraints on self-affirmation, and (2) the cognitive and emotional strain resulting from consistent and sustained frame switching.

Affect control theorists argue that individuals have generalized feelings regarding how good/bad, powerful/powerless, and active/inactive their “true self” is (MacKinnon and Heise 2010; Kroska 1997; Lee 1998), which are referred to as self-sentiments or self-held meanings (MacKinnon and Heise 2010). Importantly, we know that social actors generally strive to affirm or verify their self-held meanings in social interaction (Swann 1999; Burke 1991) by seeking out

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<sup>15</sup> For example, a scientist spans categories when she works in different research areas or disciplines (Leahey et al. 2013); a job applicant spans categories when her work history includes stints in different employment sectors (Leung 2014); an eBay seller spans categories when she lists products under multiple product headings (Hsu et al. 2009).

social situations that are self-affirming (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992),<sup>16</sup> as well as attempting to get others to (re)define the situation in a way that aligns with their own self-concept (Burke 1991, Burke and Stets 2009). The self-verification motive is rooted in individuals' drive to reduce the existential uncertainty that is inherent in complex social reality (Swann et al. 2003).

According to Thoits (1983), one important way that actors affirm their core sense of self is through role participation, which provides individuals with a meaningful, guided existence. That is, roles serve to attach us to the larger society because they serve as “institutionalized vehicles” for self-verification. Adequate role performance is a way to get others to acknowledge the focal actor's standing as a legitimate role-incumbent. An important implication of this argument then is that it will be easier for an actor to achieve self-affirmation when the cultural meanings associated with one's roles align with his/her general self-view. For example, if the roles I participate in reflect my view of “myself as I truly am,” then successful role performances also allow me to affirm my core sense of self.

So then how does self-affirmation work when an actor has multiple identities that are not aligned in their cultural meanings? We argue that self-affirmation is simply harder to achieve when actors hold two identities that are considered culturally discrepant. Figure 3.5, for example, plots the parent identity and a hypothetical work identity in E-P space (circles) with four hypothetical individuals, each of whom is associated with these same two identities and hence associated with the same level of cultural discrepancy (distance between the two blue dots).<sup>17</sup> The location of the actor icon (person A, B, and C,) indicates the self-sentiment of each hypothetical individual. Person A views herself as extremely powerful and extremely good. As a result of this self-sentiment, she likely finds her parental role to be self-affirming but does not find her work role to be self-affirming. Conversely, B views himself as slightly powerful and slightly good and, as a result, feels affirmed at work but not at home. That is, B feels as though

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<sup>16</sup> Based on this self-verification motive, researchers in affect control theory have reasoned that social actors may prefer role-identities that align with their self-sentiment. For instance, Lee (1998) found that discrepancies between individuals' self-sentiment (in terms of their EPA ratings for “myself as I truly am”) and the EPA meanings associated with scientific identities predicted the scientific interests of talented high school students who attended summer programs for math and science. Similarly, Moore and Robison (2006) find that individuals prefer occupations that align with their biographical worker identities, as indicated by the EPA ratings of their ‘ideal job’. However, individuals do not always have a complete control over their job, since there are numerous factors that can impact occupational choice (e.g., social background, education/credentials, personal aptitudes, and opportunity).

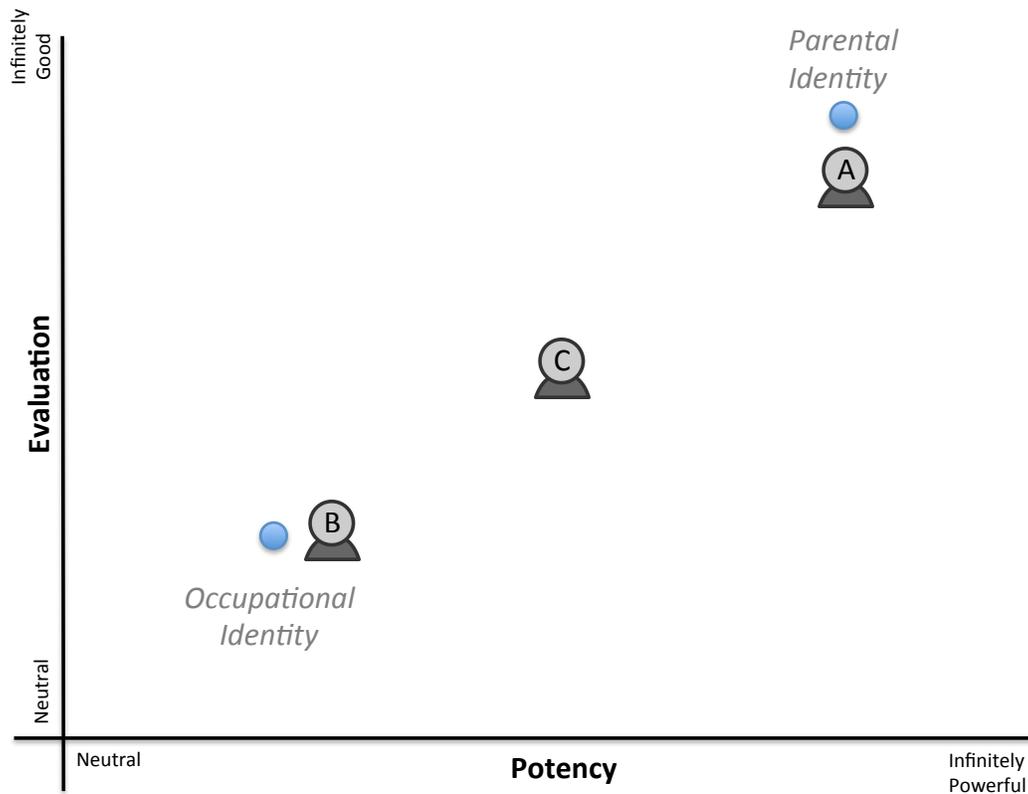
<sup>17</sup> To simplify the example, the two dimensional EP space is used as opposed to the three dimensional EPA space used in figure 1.

he is neither powerful enough nor nice enough to be a “true” parent. In contrast, C’s self-sentiment splits the difference between his parent and occupational identity, in which case neither role is truly self-affirming. In other words, it is likely that C views neither her parent role nor her work role as her “true calling” in life. At work, C feels she is too warm and assertive to be a “proper” worker; at home, C feels that she lacks the warmth and assertiveness needed to be a “true” parent. By comparison, person D in figure 3.6 represents someone who has work and family roles that are similar in meaning. Because of the fact that D’s work and family roles are aligned in the cultural sentiments they evoke, D likely finds participation in work and family roles to be self-affirming. For D, participation in work and family roles feel like a true expression of self, whereas A, B, and C experience some level of disconfirmation as a result of participating in work and family domains.

In sum, there appears to be no solution to the “problem” of multiple identities with respect to self-affirmation; the more discrepant the identities, the harder it is for an actor to achieve the level of self-affirmation that can be achieved with aligned identities. Given that self-affirmation should boost psychological well-being (Burke and Stets 2009; Burke and Cast 2002), we expect that the inability to achieve self-affirmation in the face of discrepant identities will negatively impact the focal actor’s psychological well-being.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, there is research suggesting that an actor’s self-definition will eventually align with role-expectations if the self is consistently disconfirmed (e.g. Burke 2006). Such a shift is needed in order to resolve the psychological tension that results from identity disconfirmation (Burke 2006; Burke and Cast 1997). However, in the case where there is a discrepancy between the work identity and parental identity (e.g. Figure 3.5), there is no redefinition of self that can fully align with the cultural sentiments associated with *both* the work and parental role.

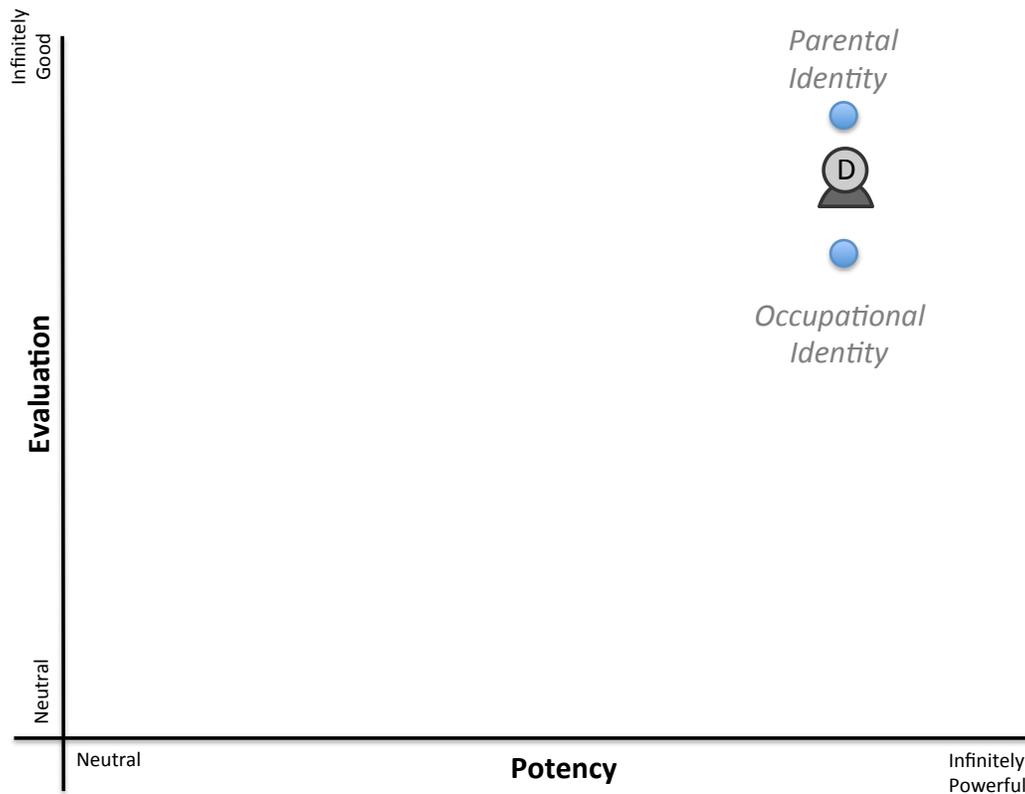
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<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that identity discrepancy is the only factor that matters for the link between the self-structure and well-being. Indeed, research suggests that the *number* of identities one holds also matter. For instance, holding multiple role-identities compared to only one identity serves to provide individuals with a meaningful, guided existence, thereby enhancing well-being (Thoits 1983, 1986).



**Figure 3.5. Cultural Constraints on Self-Affirmation**

*Note* – The figure above plots the self-sentiment of four hypothetical working parents (Person A, B, and C,) who have discrepant occupational and parental identities. The figure demonstrates three potential situations for those holding discrepant work and parent identities: 1) the parental role is self-affirming and the work role is not (Person A); 2) the work role is self-affirming and the parental role is not (Person B); 3) neither role is self-affirming, but the self-role discrepancy is not large (i.e., the self-sentiment “splits the difference” between work and family identities) (Person C).



**Figure 3.6. Self-Affirmation for Aligned Work-Parent Identities**

*Note* – The figure above shows the relationship between self-sentiment and the cultural sentiments of one’s role for an individual (Person D) with parental and occupational identities that are aligned with one another (i.e., low discrepancy). For this individual, both work and parental roles are close to one’s self-sentiment. Thus, Person D likely finds participation in their work and parental roles to be self-affirming.

Moreover, as the survey data described above clearly suggest, mothers and fathers working in certain occupations are explicitly viewed as being less “natural” than men and women working in these same jobs. The sense of unnaturalness or unease, as experienced over repeated interactions, is likely to undermine the well-being of the focal actor (i.e. the discrepant identity holder). First, the focal actor may feel it necessary to engage in deliberate impression management (Goffman 1959) in one or both domains as a way to (preemptively) defend against claims of illegitimacy. For example, mothers who are lawyers may feel that—during the workday—they need to actively convince their coworkers that they are “tough” enough to be a lawyer but then after work they need convince their children’s Parent-Teacher Organization that they are “just as much of a mom” as the idealized stay-at-home mother (i.e., a mom who does

not straddle discrepant roles). This pressure to engage in effortful and sustained self-presentation at home and at work (i.e. a persistent source of interactional strain) could then lead to lower levels of psychological well-being.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the interactional strain that occurs from holding discrepant occupational and parental identities, effortful and sustained self-presentation at work and at home increases the likelihood that the focal actor takes on a frame-switching mentality. A burgeoning field of research on biculturalism (see Hong et al. 2000) suggests that switching back and forth between cultural systems is cognitively and emotionally taxing when the focal actor does not perceive those cultural identities to be aligned; indeed, among those who engage in constant cultural frame-switching, those who view their cultural identities as consistent and overlapping tend to have higher levels of psychological well-being than those with oppositional cultural identities (Chen, Benet-Martinez, and Bond 2008). Similarly, we expect that that it will be more exhausting than energizing for those actors who feel that they must switch back and forth between two modes of being (e.g. between being warm/nurturing and competitive/aggressive). Put simply, actors with mis-aligned identities have to actively manage being tugged in different directions whereas those in aligned roles have less identity work.

Taken all together, individuals with culturally discrepant work and parent identities likely feel like they are “swimming upstream” in social interaction. Those who span discrepant roles are perceived as less “natural” by the generalized other, which likely creates an increased identity workload for the focal actor. Over time, these interactional disadvantages, as well as the cognitive and emotional fatigue that stems from routine frame-switching, can accumulate to negatively impact individuals’ overall well-being.<sup>20</sup>

## **Hypothesis**

The key empirical prediction is straightforward: an increase in the cultural discrepancy of work and parental identities will be associated with lower levels of psychological well-being. To test this hypothesis, we examine the statistical association between the role-based incompatibility

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Vohs, Baumeister, and Ciarocco (2005) show that when individuals engage in effortful and sustained self-presentation, they are less capable of exercising self-regulation in other aspects of life such as diet, managing emotional responses, and managing self-presentation in other domains of life.

<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that some theories would suggest that having identities with meanings that do not align with one another could be beneficial to well-being. For instance, Linville (1985, 1987) suggests that self-complexity can serve as a buffer against stressful life events. Additionally, MacKinnon and Heise (2010) suggest that adopting compensatory identities can be a way to cope with holding non-affirming identities.

score (as derived above) and several outcomes related to individual well-being. If our hypothesis is correct, an increase in the role-based lack-of-fit will result in a decrease in well-being. Importantly, we account for self-reported allocational conflict (i.e., the perception of work-family based time and energy constraints) and a host of person- and occupation-level characteristics that could be associated with occupations as well as well-being,

## Data and Measures

To assess the effect of cultural discrepancy on psychological well-being, we utilize nationally representative data on the psychological profiles of non-institutionalized adults in the United States from the 1995-1996 National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS). MIDUS is well-suited for our research purpose as it provides extensive measures of psychological well-being as well as detailed information regarding allocational conflict between work and family role domains. Given our substantive interest in work-family conflict, we restrict the analytical sample to working parents.<sup>21</sup> Of the MIDUS sample contacted through random digit dialing ( $N=3,034$ ), just over half ( $n=1,656$ ) were working parents with non-missing income data. Occupation-level characteristics collected from our survey described above were then merged with the individual-level records in MIDUS. Males and fathers were merged with male-occupation compatibility scores and father-occupation penalty scores; females and mothers were merged with female-occupation compatibility scores and mother-occupation penalty scores for men and women. The precise sample size for each model differs according to the availability of non-missing data for the particular outcome measure we are predicting in the given model.<sup>22</sup>

## Outcomes

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<sup>21</sup> We did not require that the married respondent be in a “dual-earner” marriage, nor did we restrict the sample to parents living with children under the age of 18. As a sensitivity analysis, we included a dummy variable indicating whether or not the parent is currently living with a child under the age of 18. Including this measure does not change the main substantive results (available upon request).

<sup>22</sup> Overall, there was a minimal amount of missing data. An additional 51, 52, and 49 of those individuals were missing data on one or more independent or dependent variables, resulting in a final sample size of  $n = 670$ , 669, and 672 for the models predicting self-affirmation, environmental mastery, and perceived constraint, respectively. Although analyses (not shown) suggest that the sample was disproportionately female, white, and had higher levels of income and more prestigious occupations than eligible respondents of excluded from the sample, differences in psychological well-being between those in the sample and those not in the sample were completely accounted for by control variables. Thus, any selection into the analytical sample was on the independent variables and not on the dependent variables.

Our analysis focuses on three widely used indicators of psychological well-being (Ryff 1989; Ryff and Keyes 1995): 1) self-acceptance, 2) environmental mastery, and 3) perceived constraint. *Self-acceptance* is measured using a three-item scale designed to indicate positive attitudes toward oneself and acceptance of one's past life (Ryff 1989). Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statements "I like most parts of my personality," "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far," and "In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life" ( $\alpha=.59$ ). *Environmental mastery* is measured using a 3-item scale, including "The demands of everyday life often get me down," "in general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live," and "I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life" ( $\alpha=.52$ ).<sup>23</sup> Conceptually, environmental mastery refers to one's ability "to choose or create environments suitable to his or her psychic conditions...[and] the ability to manipulate and control complex environments" (Ryff 1989: 1071). See Appendix C (panel 1) for a summary of these two measures. *Perceived constraint* is measured using an 8-item scale (Skinner 1996;  $\alpha=.85$ ). These items are designed to indicate the extent to which respondents feel they are constrained by external forces (e.g., "other people determine most of what I can and cannot do"). The perceived constraint scale is a subscale of the larger construct of perceived control (Skinner 1996), which focuses on the extent to which one feels they have control over their own life (see Appendix C, panel 2). Importantly, rather than focusing on personal mastery dimension, which corresponds to one's sense of efficacy, perceived constraint indicates the extent to which one "believes there are obstacles or factors beyond one's control that interfere with reaching goals (Lachman and Weaver 1998:765)."

### *Work-Family Conflict*

Our analysis includes two different sources of work-family conflict: allocational conflict and cultural discrepancy in parent-work roles. We expect that both forms of conflict will negatively affect well-being.

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<sup>23</sup> Although the alpha reliability scores for self-acceptance and environmental mastery are below what is generally viewed as acceptable scale reliability, these dimensions of well-being have been validated and the psychometric properties are well established (e.g., Ryff 1989; Ryff and Keyes 1995; Ryff and Singer 2006; Clarke et al. 2001). The low alpha reliability scores are likely due to the fact that 3-item subscales were used in the first wave of MIDUS. The shortened scales used in MIDUS have previously been shown to have correlations ranging from .70 to .89 with the 20-item parent scales (Ryff and Keyes 1995).

*Self-Reported Allocational Conflict.* To measure allocational work-family conflict (i.e. time and resource constraints), we construct an 8-item index including measures that indicate the extent to which one's work life interferes with their family life and vice versa ( $\alpha=.96$ ; see Appendix C, panel 3). This scale combines the negative family-to-work spillover scale with the negative work-to-family spill over scale. This index is designed to measure the structural features of work (e.g., time investments, impact on sleep, and effort required in each role-domain) that interfere with one's family life, and vice versa. For example, one item asks the respondent to indicate the extent to which "responsibilities at home reduce the effort you can devote to your job." The measures used to comprise this scale are similar to those used in most research on allocational-based work-family conflict (e.g., Grzywacz, and Marks 2000; Byron 2005).

*Cultural Discrepancy in Parent and Work Roles.* Respondents, all of whom are working parents, are assigned a parent-based lack-of-fit score (derived above) based on the combination of their sex and occupation. Occupational labels in MIDUS are based on the 1980 three digit occupational codes. Appendix A includes a full inventory of how occupations were coded and merged with our parent-based lack-of-fit scores. To be sure, for some occupations, the three digit occupational codes are not as detailed as the EPA identities and vice versa for other occupations. For example, the EPA dictionary includes ratings for gynecologist, pediatrician, surgeon, psychiatrist but the 1980 occupational codes used in MIDUS do not distinguish between types of doctors. In this situation, all MIDUS respondents with the occupational code "84 Physicians" are assigned the EPA work-parent discrepancy score that corresponds to "physician." Given that this type of "rounding" with respect to occupational type introduces measurement error, we expect that the measured effect of cultural discrepancy is downwardly biased (i.e. a conservative estimate).

In addition to perceptions of parent-based incompatibility, we control for several other types of occupation-level characteristics that could also have an effect on well-being (but for reasons unrelated to perceptions of parent-based incompatibility). For example, workers in jobs that require sustained physical or psychological effort as well as in jobs that provide incumbents little in terms of resources (e.g. salary, job security) are generally expected to have lower job satisfaction (see Karasek 1979; Bakker and Demerouti 2007), which in turn could harm incumbents' well-being. To address this issue, we control for two objective occupational characteristics: physical demands (1-4, high = greater demands) and the average hourly earnings

of men in a given occupation. These variables were merged in via the 1980 occupational codes from data prepared by England and Kilbourne (1988), which were originally based on a sample of individuals from the 1970 census.

Next, we control for perceptions of gender-based incompatibility associated with man/woman-work combinations. For the same “swimming upstream” rationale associated with role-based incompatibility, it could be that well-being is affected when women/men work in occupations that are perceived to be more appropriate for the opposite sex. Perceptions of gender-based incompatibility come from our survey of man/woman-occupation role combinations (described above). As noted earlier, the gender-based incompatibility score for an occupation is the mean of its “natural” and “similar” score (reverse coded); high values indicate that the man/woman-occupation pairing is considered less appropriate (more incompatible).

Finally, in lieu of occupational prestige, we breakdown the social status value of occupations with respect to (a) cultural perceptions of an occupation’s worthiness in society and (b) cultural perceptions of an occupation’s “efficacy” in society (see Goldthorpe and Hope 1972). Social psychologists have demonstrated that incumbents of high status positions tend to exhibit more positive emotions than those in lower status positions (e.g., Lovaglia and Houser 1996; Hegtvedt 1990), which leads us to expect that incumbents of high status occupations will exhibit higher levels of self-acceptance and environmental mastery and lower levels of perceived constraint.

Perceptions of an occupation’s worthiness are measured with respect to its likability (1=infinately unlikable, 9=infinately likable), 2) sincerity (1=infinately insincere, 9=infinately sincere), and 3) the goodness/niceness of incumbents (1=infinately bad/awful, 9=infinately good/nice). The perceived efficacy of a given occupation is measured vis-à-vis its perceived potency (1=infinately small/powerless, 9=infinately big/powerful), an incumbent’s perceived commitment to work (1=infinately uncommitted to work, 9=infinately committed to work), and 3) and incumbent’s competence (1=infinately incompetent, 9=infinately competent).<sup>24</sup> Note that we compute gender specific versions of occupational perceptions (e.g., on a 9 point scale, the perceived worthiness of a woman-doctor is 7.44 as opposed to 6.84 for a man-doctor). For the 28

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<sup>24</sup> Factor analyses including the efficacy, worthiness, and incompatibility items confirmed the measurement approach used here. That is, the factor analyses revealed three factors including the (1) worthiness items (rotated factor loadings > .75) (2) the efficacy items (rotated factor loadings > .53) and (3) the incompatibility items (rotated factor loadings > .51).

occupations in our dataset, the correlation between worthiness and efficacy is low (e.g.,  $r_{\text{mothers}} = -0.06$ ;  $r_{\text{fathers}} = +0.15$ ).

### *Background Characteristics*

A number of control variables are used to account for variation in background characteristics that are relevant to well-being. Since socioeconomic status has been shown to have important impacts on psychological well-being, we control for years of formal education as well as household income. We control for marital status (baseline = married) and number of children to account for differences in family composition.<sup>25</sup> We also control for the number of hours per week that the respondent works in order to account for the salience of the work identity. Although this is not an ideal measure, research in identity theory has established a link between the amount of time spent in a role and the salience of the role identity (Stryker and Serpe 1982). Additionally, we expect that individuals who work full time or more will be more likely to view their occupational identity as a core part of how they define themselves than individuals who work part-time. Finally, we include dummy indicators for race (1=white, 0=non-white) and gender (1=female), age (years), and self-rated physical health (e.g., “In general, would you say your physical health is excellent, very good, fair, or poor?” [poor=1, excellent=5]).

### **Results**

The descriptive statistics for the analytic sample are given in Table 3.1. The respondents in this sample tended to be middle-aged (mean=46.33, SD=10.49), from the middle-class (median=\$66,000; SD=\$67,990) and had on average about 2 years of college education. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (71.7%) were married. Respondents in this sample were slightly more likely to be female (52.57%), were mostly white (92.9%) and had, on average, between two and three children (mean = 2.38; SD = 1.15). Additionally, the average respondent (in our working parent subsample) worked approximately 42 hours a week (SD = 14.58).

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<sup>25</sup> Models controlling for the number of children under the age of 6 yielded substantively similar results.

**Table 3.1.** Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	s.d.
Self-Acceptance	16.88	3.28
Environmental Mastery	16.09	3.32
Perceived Constraint	2.55	1.22
Allocational conflict	4.16	1.02
Role-based Incompatibility	-0.15	0.75
%Female	52.57	-
Number of Children	2.38	1.15
%Married	71.7	-
Age	46.33	10.49
Education	14.06	2.72
Income (in thousands of USD)	85.7	67.99
%White	92.9	-
Hours worked per week	42.38	14.58
Physical Health	3.61	0.9
Physical Demands Scale	1.13	0.63
Mean Hourly Earnings of Men	9.59	2.83
Gender-Based Incompatibility	2.53	0.32
Worthiness	6.39	0.66
Efficacy	6.83	0.5

The results of the OLS regression predicting self-acceptance, perceived constraint, and environmental mastery are presented in Table 3.2. The analytic strategy is straightforward. To the extent that the incompatibility between work and parental identities has an effect *net of allocational conflict, job characteristics, and demographic factors*, this suggests that cultural perceptions of parent-based lack-of-fit also contribute to the psychological strain of working parents.

**Table 3.2: OLS Regression Predicting Well-Being**

VARIABLES	(1) Self- Acceptance	(1) Perceived Constraint	(2) Environmental Mastery
<i>Background Characteristics</i>			
Female	0.065 (0.506)	-0.207 (0.207)	0.063 (0.533)
Number of children	0.110 (0.114)	-0.033 (0.045)	-0.068 (0.117)
Married	0.298 (0.297)	0.118 (0.118)	-0.110 (0.333)
Age	-0.011 (0.012)	-0.001 (0.005)	0.031* (0.013)
Education	0.128* (0.059)	-0.026 (0.021)	0.030 (0.061)
<i>ln</i> (income)	0.567** (0.179)	-0.139* (0.068)	0.082 (0.189)
White	0.562 (0.561)	-0.009 (0.183)	0.249 (0.578)
Hours Worked per week	0.001 (0.008)	0.002 (0.004)	-0.008 (0.014)
Physical health	0.687*** (0.135)	-0.202*** (0.050)	0.663*** (0.136)
<i>Occupational Characteristics</i>			
Physical Demands Scale [DOT]	0.072 (0.257)	-0.050 (0.081)	0.095 (0.264)
Mean Hourly Earnings of Men [DOT]	0.102 (0.061)	-0.070*** (0.020)	0.133* (0.060)
Cultural Perceptions: Gender-based Incompatibility	-0.786 (0.861)	0.462 (0.355)	-1.773* (0.823)
Cultural Perceptions: Worthiness	-0.336 (0.507)	0.502* (0.204)	-1.014 (0.531)
Cultural Perceptions: Efficacy	0.390 (0.662)	-0.301 (0.240)	0.057 (0.639)
<i>Work Family Conflict</i>			
Cultural Perceptions: Role-based Incompatibility	-0.676*** (0.187)	0.276*** (0.070)	-0.453* (0.198)
Allocational Conflict	-0.625*** (0.135)	0.252*** (0.053)	-0.763*** (0.141)
Constant	12.630* (5.593)	1.646 (2.200)	24.121*** (5.392)
Number of Observations	670	669	672
R-squared	0.210	0.176	0.158

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05

Consistent with previous research, the results from models 1-3 in table 3.2 suggest that those with higher income, higher levels of educational attainment, and higher levels of self-rated

health tend to have higher levels of well-being. Although the effects are not consistent across outcomes, education and income have a positive effect on self-acceptance ( $p=.030$  and  $p=.002$ , respectively) and income decreases perceived constraint ( $p=.042$ ). The effect of self-rated health is positive and statistically robust across all three outcomes. In terms of occupational characteristics, some turn out to not be systematically related to well-being (perceptions of efficacy and physical demands) but most appear to have at least some effect as predicted. For example, mean hourly earnings has a negative effects on perceived constraint ( $p<.001$ ) and a positively effect on environmental mastery ( $p<.05$ ). Cultural perceptions related to gender-work incompatibility also have a negative effect on environmental mastery ( $p<.05$ ).<sup>26</sup>

Importantly, however, we find that both measures of work-family conflict are statistically related to all three outcomes even after controlling for background and occupational characteristics.<sup>27</sup> Both types of conflict appear to harm well-being (i.e., negatively affect self-acceptance and environmental mastery and positively affect perceived constraint). For example, figure 3.7 illustrates the magnitude of the effect of role-based incompatibility on self-acceptance by plotting the predicted values of self-acceptance for high and low values of role-based incompatibility as well as high and low levels of allocational conflict.<sup>28</sup> Individuals associated with a high role-base incompatibility score have predicted values of self-acceptance that are approximately .80 units higher than those with low levels of incompatibility penalty (16.91 vs. 16.11 and 17.53 vs. 16.73), whereas high versus low allocational conflict results in a .62 difference in self-acceptance.

## Discussion

The findings reported here strongly suggest that the parent-based lack-of-fit has important implications for mental health and psychological well-being of working parents. Net of

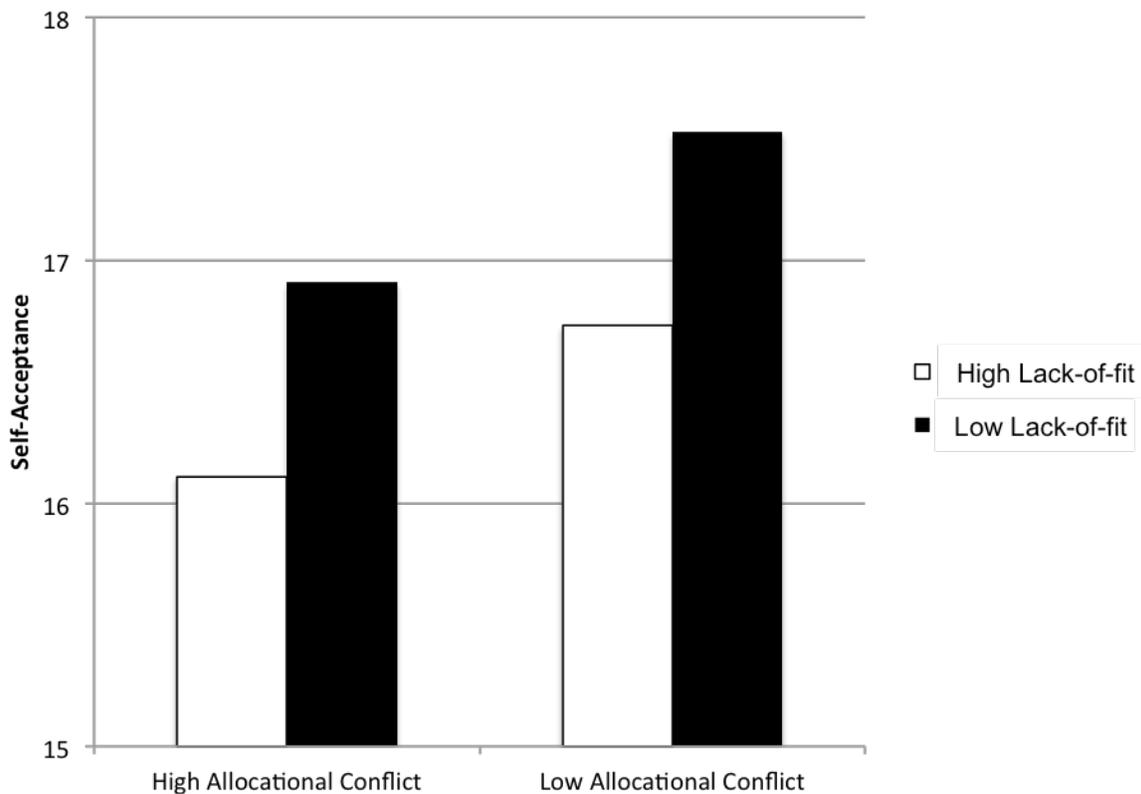
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<sup>26</sup> The unexpected findings regarding the negative effect of cultural perceptions of worthiness on well-being may be due to the fact that, net of perceived efficacy, individuals may feel constrained by the cultural expectations regarding the niceness associated with their occupations. Given that occupations that were viewed as worthy tended to be care-based ones, the emotional labor required may cause individuals to feel “trapped” or constrained by cultural expectations. Although this is speculation, the fact that this effect is only significant for environmental mastery and marginally significant for perceived constraint supports this notion.

<sup>27</sup> Additional analyses (results available upon request) controlling for the big 5 personality traits, percent female in an occupation, spousal occupational status, and occupational prestige reveal substantively similar results, with one potential exception: adding the big 5 personality variables to the model makes role-based lack-of-fit no longer significant for the model predicting environmental mastery ( $b=-.25$ ,  $p=0.14$ ). In general, this suggests that selection into discrepant roles based on unobserved individual characteristics likely is not driving the results.

<sup>28</sup> High and low discrepancy and allocational conflict correspond to 80<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> percentile scores, respectively.

demographic variables, perceptions of allocational conflict, and various occupational characteristic that could affect well-being (e.g., an occupation’s perceived social worth), combining parent-work identities that are perceived to be incompatible significantly increases perceived constraint and reduces both self-acceptance and environmental mastery. Thus, our findings suggest that spanning two roles that are considered culturally discrepant is associated with psychological distress. As shown in Figure 3.7, the effect of perceived incompatibility on well-being outcomes is not trivial.



**Figure 3.7. Predicted Values of Self-Acceptance**

*Note* – High allocational conflict and high penalty correspond to the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile scores for each variable and low allocational conflict and low penalty scores correspond to the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile scores for each variable.

An important issue that needs to be addressed going forward concerns self-in-role meanings. That is, we argue that the relationship between cultural discrepancy and well-being is linked to self and identity processes but we do not directly measure how individuals’ self-in-role meanings factor into this process. Our data do not allow us to observe how individuals define themselves as a parent and/or worker. Although previous theory and research suggests that

individuals' self-in-role meanings generally reflect culturally-shared meanings (e.g., Stryker 1980, Mead 1934, Burke and Stets 2009), and that individuals are socially sanctioned for role-performances that do not align with what is deemed as culturally appropriate (Goffman 1959; Murphy 1999), future research should examine the role that self-in-role meanings play in this process. Additionally, since we do not have measures of identity salience available in the MIDUS dataset, we were unable to examine the role that the salience of work and parental identities plays in this process. However, this is likely not extremely problematic for two reasons. First, work and parental identities tend to be culturally important and highly salient roles in the US. Thus, there is likely very little variation in the salience of these particular identities. Second, although many have hypothesized that identity salience will enhance the impact of discrepancy, empirical research has generally not provided support for this claim (e.g., Thoits 1991).

This research has important implications for both research on work and family as well as social psychological theories of self and identity. With respect to work and family research, this study suggests that the prevailing focus on allocation-based work-family conflict and its impact on psychological well-being is too narrow. Although the demands that work and family roles make on one's time and energy clearly are important for psychological well-being, those who hold roles that are discrepant in meaning seem to bear an added psychological burden. Further, the effects of allocational conflict and cultural discrepancy seem to be largely independent of one another, suggesting relatively independent effects of allocational and cultural bases of conflict between work and family roles. By differentiating between allocational conflict and conflicts in meaning (i.e., cultural discrepancy), this study highlights the importance of the meaning of work and family roles—and the relationship between those meanings—for psychological well-being. Demonstrating an effect of cultural discrepancy on psychological well-being adds to the current conception of how work and family interfere with one another.

This research also builds on the concept of behavior-based WFC by providing a theoretical backdrop as to why certain types of behaviors will be viewed as “in conflict” with others. Further, our research proposes that the cultural meanings associated with work and parental roles can be viewed as a key potential source of behavior-based WFC, and provides social psychological theory that explains why behavior-based WFC should take a psychological toll on working parents. Although we cannot examine the relationship between cultural

perceptions of role-inconsistency and subjective reports of behavior based conflict, this provides suggestive evidence that the cultural meanings associated with work and family roles can produce inconsistent behavioral expectations, which in turn reduces psychological well-being. Future research should examine this link more thoroughly.

The EPA-derived discrepancy scores and the survey data also shed light on how (a) discrepancies in worker-parent combinations can be deduced from the cultural meanings associated with single identities and (b) discrepant parent-occupation role combinations are indeed to be judged more negatively than non-discrepant role combinations. Importantly, by highlighting how certain parent-worker combinations are interpreted as being more “difficult,” less “natural,” and less “likeable,” these data augment the existing body of research in demography on attitudes towards women and work. In effect, these data document some level of cultural resistance to the notion of mothers (and fathers) engaging in particular occupations.

This research also has the potential to refine previous research regarding the impact of multiple role involvement on psychological well-being (e.g., Thoits 1983, 1986, 2003). As we highlight above, it was originally thought that, since each role that an individual participates in carries with it various obligations (e.g., demands on time, resources, and energy), role accumulation would necessarily produce increased role-strain and therefore negatively impact individuals’ well-being. However, as Thoits (1983, 1986) argues, role-identities are an important source of behavioral guidance, belongingness, and mattering. Thus, although role accumulation may produce increased demands on one’s personal resources, there are also strong mental health benefits of participating in multiple roles. Research investigating the link between well-being and role-accumulation largely supports the claim that the mental health benefits of role accumulation outweigh the costs (Adelmann 1994; Baruch and Bamett 1986; Burton 1998; Thoits 1983, 1986; see also Thoits 2011 for a review).

In more recent work, Thoits (2003) points out that voluntary identities (e.g., churchgoer, club member, friend, neighbor) seem to be more beneficial to well-being than obligatory ones (e.g., spouse, parent, worker). Thoits argues that this is likely due to the fact that “voluntary roles make fewer or less intense demands on time, energy, and commitment; they are often deliberately acquired for their anticipated benefits; and they can be exited more easily when their costs exceed the rewards that individuals obtain from them” (2003:190). Our research suggests that one important cost to consider is the extent to which a given role’s cultural sentiments align

with one's other identities. Thus, voluntary identities may be beneficial to individual well-being because they are more likely to align with one's other role identities and general self-sentiment than obligatory identities.

This study also informs current research by affect control theorists regarding the relationship between one's core sense of self and the cultural sentiments associated with the role-identities that individuals participate in. In their recent book, MacKinnon and Heise (2010) proposed an Affect Control Theory of Self, which describes how the relationship between individuals' self-sentiment (i.e., EPA rating for "Myself as I truly am") and the roles that they participate in can produce predictable behavior. They argue that (a) individuals prefer identities that are self-actualizing (i.e., identities whose cultural sentiments are similar to their own self-sentiment) and (b) when individuals participate in identities that do not align with their self-sentiment, they attempt to adopt identities that can compensate for misalignment between self and role (e.g., if one's work role is not as nice as their self-sentiment, they will try to adopt an identity that is even nicer than their self-sentiment outside of work). Our study builds on these propositions by highlighting the psychological consequences of participating in discrepant roles. That is, this study suggests that even if one's work and family roles are compensatory or "redeeming" (as in the case of person C in figure 3.5), the fact that one has to participate in social roles that do not actualize their self-sentiment still takes a psychological toll. Although adopting compensatory identities may be a useful coping mechanism for dealing the feelings of inauthenticity that result from a misalignment between self and social role, this study suggests that the "ideal" situation with respect to an individual's psychological well-being is one where their identities are tightly clustered around their own self-sentiment in EPA space (i.e., where all of one's role-identities are self-actualizing).

Finally, this research provides a first step in understanding how the relationship *between* the identities that one holds can impact behavior and outcomes for individuals. Although social psychological theories of self have long acknowledged that the self is composed of multiple identities (James 1890), most contemporary identity theories "assume away" the problem of discrepancy between identities by asserting that one identity emerges in a given social encounter to guide behavior (Stryker and Burke 2000; Smith-Lovin 2002, 2003, 2007). By demonstrating that maintaining discrepant identities results in lower levels of psychological well-being, our research provides suggestive evidence that assuming away the problem of multiple identities

likely misses important identity processes. This study highlights the fact that the self consists of multiple interrelated identities, and that different constellations of identities can have important implications for self-related outcomes and behavior. Future research should take care to address the interrelations between identities and should pay special attention to the meanings of the identities individuals hold.

## Chapter 4: The Contingent Value of Embeddedness: Self-Affirming Social Environments, Network Density, and Well-Being

MARK H. WALKER

How do the social networks we belong to impact our well-being? Beginning with Durkheim (1951 [1897]), the question of how interpersonal relationships impact mental health and well-being has been of central importance to both sociologists and mental health researchers (Berkman et al. 2000). According to theories of social capital, belonging to social networks characterized by dense, overlapping social ties produces trust and cooperation, mutually beneficial exchange, and a sense of shared identity (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1986). Similarly, structuralist theories of social integration have long argued that network density is indicative of social integration and social cohesion (Durkheim 1958[1893]; Ueno 2005, Moody and White 2003). Taken together with the importance of social integration and social support to individuals' mental and emotional well-being (House et al. 1988; Berkman et al. 2000; Thoits 2011), many have theorized a positive relationship between personal network density and well-being.

However, research investigating the link between personal network density and mental health has produced mixed findings (Lin and Peek 1999). Drawing from a symbolic interactionist view of social integration (e.g., Thoits 1983), individuals with the same network structural characteristics, such as high density, may have vastly different experiences depending on the *nature* of the social interactions that occur within their personal network (Friedkin 2004: 422). Here, I propose that the affirmative nature of one's network dictates the impact of density on key pillars of psychological well-being: self-worth and self-efficacy. While not direct measures of psychological well-being, self-esteem and self-efficacy are psychological resources that help individuals feel worthwhile and effective in the world and thus are vital in maintaining ongoing levels of mental health (Pearlin 1999; Stets and Cast 2007; Taylor and Stanton 2007). For individuals embedded in affirming networks that uphold their self-view, high density should further enable self-verification and self-expression, and thereby produce a sense that one is valued and capable, as predicted by theories of social capital and structuralist accounts of social integration. However, individuals in networks that undermine their self-view should experience high density as further constraining self-verification and self-expression, thereby lowering self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Below, I review previous work on network density and psychological well-being. Then, I discuss a symbolic interactionist approach to social integration, which highlights the importance of role commitments, role participation, and self-verification for social integration and individual well-being. I then synthesize structuralist and symbolic interactionist approaches to social integration to provide an innovative, conditional account of how density influences well-being. I then test my core hypothesis—that the affirmative nature of one’s network determines the impact of density on well-being—using a novel data set.

### **Embeddedness, Social Integration, and Psychological Well-being**

Social scientists have long argued that the density of social relations can be seen as an indicator of one’s overall social integration and social cohesion (e.g., Ueno 2005; Durkheim 1958[1893]). Indeed, one of the proposed benefits of network closure is that it generates a sense of belongingness, shared identity, and group solidarity (Coleman 1988; Bourdieu 1986). Additionally, dense social networks are thought to produce trust and reciprocity, which pave the way for mutually beneficial exchange and the provision of social and emotional support (Glanville and Bienenstock 2009). According to Granovetter (1992:35):

[T]o the extent that a dyad’s mutual contacts are connected to one another, there is more efficient information spread about what members of the pair are doing, and thus better ability to shape behavior. Such cohesive groups are better not only at spreading information, but also at generating normative, symbolic, and cultural structures that affect our behavior.

Because of the efficiency with which information can be spread in densely knit social networks, embeddedness is conducive to mutually beneficial exchange and building trust between network members (Coleman 1988; Granovetter 1985). As Coleman (1988) argues, embeddedness in a densely knit social network creates a situation where there are multiple third parties that have a stake in the focal actor’s (ego) dealings with each of his or her social contacts. Consequently, members of dense social networks know that their dealings with specific others in the network will likely become known to the rest of their social network. That is, violations of trust or normative standards in a given social encounter will likely become known to social contacts that are not personally present in the encounter. Since this is true for all network members, ego can also have some assurance that their social contacts—insofar as ego’s contacts are rational and self-interested—will not violate their trust or behave in a way that is inconsistent with the

normative standards of the group. In a general sense, a trusting social environment should leave individuals feeling at ease and thus enhance subjective well-being (Helliwell and Putnam 2004).

As Granovetter (1992) points out, embeddedness also allows for the creation of seemingly legitimate normative, symbolic, and cultural structures because densely knit social networks allow for the quick and redundant spread of social and cultural information, which causes the meaning of social objects to quickly crystalize. Consensus regarding the meanings of social objects can be quickly achieved in densely connected social networks (Friedkin 2004: 414-415) and these intersubjectively held meanings tend to be viewed as valid and natural. This produces a shared definition of the situation, which enables the smooth unfolding of social interaction (Goffman 1959). Together with the fact that well-being is thought to be partly a product of one's overall level of social integration (Burke and Stets 2009; Cast and Burke 2002; Leary 2007; Thoits 2003, 2011; Berkman et al. 2000), research often proposes a positive relationship between personal network density and well-being.

Interestingly, however, empirical studies of the relationship between personal network density and well-being yield mixed results (Lin and Peek 1999). For example, Hansell (1985) finds that personal network density increases symptoms of psychological distress, but also increases general satisfaction with school and the perceived ability of the respondent to cope with distress. Additionally, using a small sample of younger recent widows and mature women who recently returned to college, Hirsch (1980) finds a negative relationship between personal network density and self-esteem. Other research suggests that the effect of density depends on group membership or individual characteristics such as urbanicity of residence (Kadushin 1983), socioeconomic status (Fischer 1982), and gender (Falci and McNeely 2009). Meanwhile, other studies find no statistically significant relationship between personal network density and psychological well-being (e.g., Ueno 2005; Israel and Antonucci 1987; Haines and Hulbert 1992).

How can we account for the inconsistent relationship between network density and mental health? One possibility is that the link between personal network density and well-being depends upon the *nature* of the social interactions that are occurring in an individual's social network as well as the meanings that characterize one's social environment. The structuralist perspective on density, which for the most part implies an unconditional, positive relationship

between network density and well-being<sup>29</sup>, implies that individuals will unconditionally accept the normative, symbolic, and cultural structures within which they are embedded. However, people vary substantially in the extent to which their attitudes, self-views, and values align with those of the social groups they belong (e.g., McFarland and Pals 2005; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn 2004). As a result, network density may either positively or negatively impact psychological well-being.

In the following section, I draw from symbolic interactionism to highlight the importance of self-verification for social integration and personal well-being. Based on this, I argue that the impact of network density on well-being depends on the implications of network density for self-verification, and outline the conditions under which high network density can constrain or enable self-verification.

### **A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to Social Integration**

Whereas structuralist theories of social integration highlight the importance of network density for social solidarity and social integration, symbolic interactionist theories argue that social integration derives not from density per se but rather from individuals' role-commitments (Mead 1934; Thoits 1983; Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2011). Role participation connects us to other individuals as well as to the social institutions where roles are embedded (Thoits 1983, 1986). Individuals derive a fundamental sense of who they are by taking on role-identities such as student, worker, volunteer, parent, child, or spouse; role identities are cornerstones of psychological resources and well-being because they provide individuals with behavioral guidance and social integration and thereby reduce existential uncertainty (Thoits 1983).<sup>30</sup>

However, role participation may not uphold existential security if it occurs in a social context where individuals are consistently receiving disaffirming social feedback. Research suggests that the benefits of role participation may be highly dependent upon the quality of experiences that one has in a given role-domain (e.g., Barnett and Baruch 1985; Baruch and Barnett 1986; Gove et al. 1990; McLanahan and Adams 1987; Umberson and Gove 1989).

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<sup>29</sup> There are some notable exceptions to this. For instance, Burt (1992, 2000) argues that individuals who are located in structural holes (which, by definition, are low density personal social networks) have a competitive advantage over those with dense personal networks. Also, Lin (1982, 1990, 1999) and Wellman and Wortley (1990) argue that weak, bridging social ties can be useful in gaining resources that may not be available in dense networks of strong social ties.

<sup>30</sup> Giddens (1984) views ontological security as a key human motivation (see also Turner 1978; Swann et al. 2003).

Indeed, Thoits (1992) finds that holding a role-identity is “psychologically beneficial [only] when ongoing stress in the role is low” (p. 249). According to social-psychological research (Burke and Stets 2009; Stryker 1980; Swann 1983, 1999), one important aspect of role participation is whether or not the role provides an outlet for affirming who one is, in terms of one’s identities. A failure to verify identities that are important to oneself in a given social encounter leaves one feeling unsettled, misunderstood, and potentially embarrassed, angry, or ashamed (Stryker 2004; Stets 2005; Stets and Burke 2005).

From the focal actor’s (ego) perspective, successful role-performance is tantamount to being treated as a legitimate role-incumbent. When interaction partners accept ego’s role-performance, they are essentially indicating that s/he has conducted his or herself appropriately (i.e., they are acting as a teacher, lawyer, mother or student “should” act). Thus, receiving self-verifying feedback from group members reinforces feelings that one is accepted and valued by the group (Cast and Burke 2002). Additionally, self-verification, though felt deeply and personally, is a *social achievement* that occurs in structural contexts that either uphold or undermine one’s self-concept. Because of this, individuals who are able to “convince” others to accept their self-view come away from social interaction feeling worthwhile and socially efficacious (Cast and Burke 2002).

Here, I posit that the extent to which individuals view their social environments as affirming (or disaffirming) *modifies* the impact of personal network density on self-esteem and self-efficacy. Drawing from the structuralist view, perceptions of “who one is” and one’s rightful place in the social order can quickly become legitimate and concrete social knowledge in dense social networks. In the same way that information about trustworthiness quickly spreads across a dense network (Coleman 1988), so should information regarding the identity meanings (e.g., competence, worthiness, warmth, morality and likability) of a social actor (Raub and Weesie 1990). Further, because of the fact that dense networks are conducive to the production of “normative, symbolic, and cultural structures” (Granovetter 1992: 35), individuals with self-views, values, or beliefs that do not align with those in their social network are especially at risk of social sanctions and stigmatization. That is, belonging to a dense network gives the meanings that characterize one’s social world *the weight of social legitimacy*, and the impact that this has on an individual depends on whether these meanings are conducive to self-verification (i.e., self-affirming) or whether they serve to constrain self-verification (i.e., self-disaffirming).

	Low Density	High Density
<b>Disaffirming</b>	<b>A. Fragmented Disaffirmation</b>	<b>B. Dense Disaffirmation</b>
	<p>Self-verification is constrained</p> <p>Disaffirming meanings are not given the weight of social legitimacy.</p> <p>Ego has the ability to “carve out” self-affirming social space.</p>	<p>Self-verification is highly constrained.</p> <p>Disaffirming meanings have the weight of social legitimacy behind them.</p> <p>Ego is unable to escape disaffirming self-meanings.</p>
<b>Affirming</b>	<b>C. Fragmented Affirmation</b>	<b>D. Dense Affirmation</b>
	<p>Self-verification is enabled.</p> <p>Affirming meanings are not given the weight of social legitimacy.</p> <p>The burden of proof is somewhat on ego to verify self-meanings.</p>	<p>Self-verification is highly enabled.</p> <p>Affirming meanings are given the weight of social legitimacy.</p> <p>The “benefit of the doubt” is given to ego in social encounters.</p>

**Figure 4.1. Density – Self-Affirmation Typology.**

In certain cases, network density can serve to enhance personal well-being. As shown in figure 4.1 (cells C and D), if the identity meanings that characterize one’s social environment are self-affirming, then higher network density should *enable* self-verification and therefore enhance personal well-being, as structuralist theories of social integration and social capital theories would suggest. For instance, if an individual is viewed by a large segment of her network as equally as competent as ego views herself, then belonging to a dense network reinforces ego’s self-view, making it easier to achieve self-verification (as in figure 4.1, cell D). That is, for someone with a self-view that aligns with that of his or her social network, the added weight of legitimacy that results from network density eases social interaction and gives ego the “benefit of the doubt” when engaging in social interaction. On the other hand, if ego’s social contacts are not

tied to one another, their social persona is not given the added weight of social legitimacy (see figure 4.1, cell C). Thus, even though ego may view their network as self-affirming, the burden of proof is still, to some extent, on them to continue to demonstrate their competence to the different segments of their social network.

In other cases, high network density can be detrimental to well-being. If an individual's social environment holds behavioral expectations that are at odds with the basic dimensions of their identities, then the structural context fundamentally conflicts with the individual's self-view. Thus, for those with disaffirming social environments, high network density should further *constrain* one's ability to self-verify, thereby undermining personal well-being. Specifically, if an individual is viewed by a large segment of her network as less competent than she views herself, then belonging to a dense network will allow those disaffirming meanings to quickly spread throughout her personal network (see figure 4.1, cell B). In this case, the spread of information about ego's identity acts to reinforce meanings that undermine the self-concept. However, if one belongs to a disaffirming social environment that is sparsely connected (i.e., not dense), the disaffirming meanings are not given the added weight of social legitimacy that density provides (see figure 4.1, cell A). In such a low-density network, individuals can agentically carve out self-affirming social space by interacting selectively with others who support them in their identities. Thus, high network density acts as an added constraint on self-verification for individuals who are embedded in a disaffirming social environment.

To illustrate, imagine if ego is tied to three people (A, B, and C) who view her as incompetent. Because they view ego as incompetent, their interpretation of her behavior will be colored by this preconceived notion of ego's incompetence, which is, in itself, a suboptimal situation for ego. However, if A, B, and C all know one another (as in figure 4.1, cell B), they can talk about ego and corroborate her lack of competence. Because of this, high network density can transform individual perceptions of ego into a seemingly legitimate social fact (Ridgeway and Erickson 2000; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). On the other hand, if A, B, and C are not socially tied to one another (as in figure 4.1, cell A), ego is only charged with overcoming (or ignoring) the individual perceptions of A, B, and C in social interaction, and A, B, and C only have their own experience to draw on to make judgments about ego's competence. Thus, belonging to a low-density network is beneficial to well-being for those in disaffirming social environments.

Based on the argument outlined above and the typology given in figure 4.1, a set of hypotheses and empirical predictions can be derived. First, given the general importance of self-verification for self-esteem and self-efficacy, I expect that belonging to a self-affirming environment will be positively related to self-efficacy and self-esteem (*hypothesis 1*). Second, I expect that the extent to which individuals' social environments are self-(dis)affirming will substantially modify the effect of network density on psychological well-being (*hypothesis 2*). Whereas individuals with self-affirming social environments experience high network density as further enabling self-verification, those in disaffirming social environments experience high density as an added constraint on self-verification. Thus, I expect network density to be positively related to self-esteem and self-efficacy for those with self-affirming social environments (*hypothesis 3a*), but negatively related to self-esteem and self-efficacy for those with disaffirming social environments (*hypothesis 3b*).

### **Data and Measures**

Data on personal social networks were collected via an online survey using a convenience sample of 198 young adults from across the U.S. who were between 18 and 24 years old and childless (see Walker and Lynn 2013).<sup>31,32</sup> As shown in table 4.1, the sample is mostly white (69.7%), female (55.05%), and roughly 22 years old on average. Nearly 30% of the respondents had a Bachelor's degree or higher and the average respondent had about 2 years of college education. Respondents tended to originate from middle-class families (median parental income = \$50,000). The full questionnaire is given in the appendix of Walker and Lynn (2013).

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<sup>31</sup> Qualtrics™ hosted the survey and managed the recruitment and compensation of participants. Participants either signed up directly with one of Qualtrics' online vendors or they responded to an advertisement posted on select websites (e.g., airline company websites for VIP members and restaurant club members). The questionnaire was completed online and participants were compensated with cash-equivalent rewards (including airline miles, magazine subscriptions, and gift cards). Additionally, the sample was restricted to childless 18-24 year olds in order to ensure clarity in the meaning of role-based probes (e.g., "family members" may have a different meaning for individuals with children than for childless adults) and to maximize the extent to which the network elicitation method was applicable to the population of interest.

<sup>32</sup> Six respondents are missing in the analytical model due to the fact that they had fewer than 2 alters in their social network and network density was therefore undefined.

**Table 4.1.** Demographic Characteristics (*n*=198)

Variable	Mean/percent	<i>s.d.</i>	Min.	Max.
<b>Race</b>				
%White	69.70	-	-	-
%Non White	30.30	-	-	-
<b>Sex</b>				
%Male	44.95	-	-	-
%Female	55.05	-	-	-
<b>Parental Income (\$1000's)</b>	66.02	52.13	5.00	225.00
<b>Education</b>				
%4-year degree or higher	29.80	-	-	-
<b>Marital Status</b>				
%Married	9.60	-	-	-
<b>Age</b>	22.05	1.73	18.00	24.00
<b>Network size</b>	17.83	9.91	0.00	45.00
<b>Average strength of ties (1=not at all close; 4=very close)</b>	2.61	0.52	1.00	4.00
% Very close	23.61	19.38	0.00	100.00
% Close	29.80	20.95	0.00	100.00
% Somewhat close	30.58	20.16	0.00	100.00
% Not at all close	16.00	19.26	0.00	100.00
<b>Network Density</b>	0.40	0.23	0.00	1.00
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	4.00	0.93	1.83	6.00
<b>Self-esteem</b>	4.10	1.01	1.42	6.00
<b>Self-affirming Environment</b>				
% Extremely Disaffirming	8.59	-	-	-
% Disaffirming	12.12	-	-	-
% Somewhat Disaffirming	16.16	-	-	-
% Somewhat Affirming	22.22	-	-	-
% Affirming	26.77	-	-	-
% Extremely Affirming	14.14	-	-	-

*Note* – Network size does not include ego. Thus, network size indicates the total number of alters listed by respondents.

### *Personal Social Networks*

Traditional methods for eliciting personal social networks tend to focus on emotionally close social relationships (e.g., Marsden 1987), social contacts that provide social and emotional support (e.g., Wellman 1979; Wellman and Wortley 1990), and individuals with whom one engages in mutually beneficial social exchange (e.g., Fischer 1982). Although these types of

social ties clearly matter for well-being, social contacts that one may not feel emotionally close to, but who are nonetheless important fixtures of one's social environment may be equally important (Finch et al. 1989; Rook 1984). Given that the theory outlined above is concerned with the interconnectedness of different portions of an individual's overall social world, a method for eliciting a diverse array of social ties from the various social domains that an individual participates would be ideal. I employ a unique dataset that utilizes a novel method for eliciting extensive personal social networks that was designed to elicit a diverse array of social ties from the various social groups and social roles that one participates in.

Eliciting Network Alters. To elicit personal social networks, respondents are presented with a vignette-styled question about their social networks:

We want to learn about the people in your life. Imagine that you have won an award that you are very excited about. Those presenting the award to you want to throw a party in your honor. They will pay for all of the expenses related to the party, including food, drinks, travel and housing for guests. Who would you invite?

After the guest list is generated, additional probing questions are used to identify alters with whom the respondents were less close but still had meaningful relationships with in their everyday lives. Thus, after respondents generated their guest lists and completed an accompanying set of name interpreters (see Walker and Lynn 2013, appendix A), they are prompted to name any additional contacts from numerous role domains (i.e., work, family, church, friends, and school) that they "interacted with on a regular basis" but who were not currently on the guest list. For example, if respondents reported that they were employed, they were asked to identify other work-based contacts that were not yet on their guest list:

Can you think of other coworkers that you see or talk to on a regular basis who are not on this list? If yes, please name them below (regardless of how close you are to them).

Alter-Alter Relationships. To gather the structure of alter-alter ties in respondents' personal social networks, respondents were asked to indicate which of their social contacts know each other "well enough to stop and chat if they passed one another on the street" (check box if "yes"). This threshold of "knowing" is similar to that used in the GSS (2006) "Number Known" module on social capital (see DiPrete et al. 2011). This approach tended to elicit quite extensive personal social networks (mean = 17.83, SD=9.91) consisting of a diverse array of social contacts (mean strength of ties = 2.61 on a scale from 1 [not at all close] to 4 [very close]). The average respondent reported a social network that consisted of 23.61 percent "very close" ties,

29.80 percent “close” ties, 30.58 percent “somewhat close” ties and 16 percent “not at all close” ties.<sup>33</sup>

### *Well-Being*

Based on the importance of self-verification to the theory proposed here, I use self-esteem and self-efficacy as my two key outcome variables. As discussed above, self-esteem and self-efficacy have been explicitly highlighted as important outcomes of the self-verification process (Cast and Burke 2002). *Self-esteem* was measured using the 7-item version of Rosenberg’s self-esteem scale (Rosenberg 1979). Respondents are asked how much they agree with seven statements regarding how they see themselves (i.e., “I feel good about myself,” “I feel I am a person of worth, the equal of other people,” “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” “I am able to do things as well as most other people,” “I certainly feel useless at times” (reverse coded), “At times I think I am no good at all” (reverse coded), and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of” (reverse coded)) and the average responses are used as the self-esteem score ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ). *Self-efficacy* was measured using a 6-item scale (Schwarzer 1993) asking respondents how much they agree with the statements such as “When I make plans, I am almost certain I can make them work” and “I don’t have enough control over the direction my life is taking (reverse coded).” Other items included “In my life, good luck is more important than hard work for success (reverse coded),” “Every time I try to get ahead, something or somebody stops me (reverse coded),” “My plans hardly ever work out, so planning only makes me unhappy (reverse coded),” and “Chance and luck are very important for what happens in my life (reverse coded).” The average of the six items are used as the self-efficacy score ( $\alpha = 0.79$ ).

### *Network Variables*

*Network density* is measured as the proportion of all possible ties in a given social network that are present. Following previous work in egocentric networks (e.g., Marsden 1987), I exclude ties between ego and his or her network contacts when calculating density. Given that ties are undirected in this dataset, network density ( $D$ ) is given as:

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<sup>33</sup> This network-generating approach tends to produce social networks with properties generally similar to more commonly used and validated name-generators (e.g., GSS “important matters” name generator [Burt 1984], and the multiple-item name generator used in the NCCS [Fischer 1982]). Of course, since this name-generator was designed to gather extensive personal networks, the networks elicited using this approach are larger than those produced by the “important matters” name generator (Walker and Lynn 2013).

$$D = \frac{2L}{g(g-1)}$$

Where  $L$  is number of alter-alter relations observed and  $g$  is the number of nodes in the given graph, excluding ego.

*Network size* is measured as the total number of alters listed by respondents and the *average strength of ties* is the mean strength of ties between ego and alter (1=not at all close, 2=somewhat close, 3=close, 4=very close). I control for these two network characteristics since they tend to be related to both density as well as psychological well-being, given that they are often viewed as indicators of social support (e.g., Cohen and Wills 1985; Kessler and McLeod 1985; Berkman and Glass 2000).

### *Self-Affirming Social Environment*

Conceptually, belonging to a self-affirming social environment refers to the extent to which one feels as though they can freely express themselves in various social situations and expect that those self-expressions will be met with social acceptance. Thus, individuals who belong to self-affirming social environments generally feel that they can “be themselves” in most social situations and those who belong to disaffirming social environments likely find it difficult to “be themselves” in many social situations. Based on this, I measure the extent to which one views their social environment as self-affirming or disaffirming by asking respondents how much they agree with the statement “I cannot be myself in many situations” (0=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). Thus, higher values on this variable indicate more self-affirming social environments and lower values indicate disaffirming social environments.<sup>34</sup>

### *Demographic Control Variables*

Six control variables are included in addition to the covariates outlined above, to address the possibility that demographic factors may be associated with network structure, self-affirming social environments, and psychological well-being. Research in identity theory suggests that high-status individuals and individuals with relational power over others in their social network

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<sup>34</sup> More generally, this item was designed to gauge the experiential component of self-society (mis)alignment. That is, the measurement strategy employed here is based on the assumption that individuals who hold self-views, attitudes, or values that do not align with those of their social contacts will feel that they are unable to “be themselves” in many social situations. This is due to the fact that others’ expectations of who they are—and consequently what they should do—do not align with the focal actor’s own self-view.

tend to have more control over the definition of the situation than low-status and low-power individuals (Cast, Stets, and Burke 1999; Cast 2003). That is, high-status and resource-rich individuals find it easier to negotiate situational identities that align with their own self-view, given the advantages that status confers in interpersonal social interaction (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1972). Taken together with the fact that status characteristics also tend to be associated with self-esteem and self-efficacy (Gecas 1989; Bachman et al. 2011; Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000; Twenge and Crocker 2002; Block 1983) as well as the structure and content of individuals personal social networks (Marsden 1987; McPherson et al. 2006, 2008), it is possible that demographic characteristics could confound the link between self-affirming social environments, network density, and well-being. Thus, I control for *race* (white=1, non-white=0), *gender* (female=1, male=0), *parental income* (estimated annual income in thousands of U.S. Dollars), and *education*<sup>35</sup> (years of education).

Given the important life transitions that occur during young adulthood, individuals' social networks likely undergo important changes as well. Additionally, both self-esteem and self-efficacy tend to increase through young adulthood (Robins et al. 2002; Gecas 1989). Thus, I control for the *age* (in years) of the respondents. Further, marriage may serve as an important context for self-verification (Burke 2006; Burke and Cast 1997; Burke and Stets 1999; Cast 2003; Stets and Burke 2005), can have important implications for social networks (Milardo 1987; Fischer and Olicker 1980; Milardo, Johnson, and Huston 1983), and also tends to be positively associated with subjective well-being (Myers 1999). Thus, I control for *marital status* in this analysis by including a dummy variable that indicates if the respondent is married (married=1, not married=0).

## **ANALYTIC STRATEGY & RESULTS**

To test the hypotheses outlined above, I calculate two sets of OLS regressions predicting (1) self-esteem and (2) self-efficacy. As shown in table 4.1, the average respondent fell somewhere between “somewhat agree” and “somewhat disagree” when asked how much they agree with the statement “I cannot be myself in many situations” (mean = 2.89; SD = 1.5). Although a majority of respondents felt as though they could be themselves in social encounters (63.13 percent

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<sup>35</sup> For those currently enrolled in school, education indicates their expected degree. Substantive findings are the same for models using highest level of completed education for all respondents.

indicated that they somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that they cannot be themselves in many situations), a sizable minority of respondents (36.87 percent) indicated at least some level of disaffirming social environment. To be sure, there is considerable variation in how affirming individuals found their social environments.

Table 4.2 displays the correlation matrix for the key independent and dependent variables used in this analysis. As expected, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-affirming environment are all positively and moderately correlated with one another (*rs* ranging between .57 and .59). Factor analyses exploring the covariance structure of these three constructs revealed no clear evidence that my measure of self-affirmation is tapping into the constructs of self-esteem or self-efficacy, however.<sup>36</sup> Also of note is the fact that there is essentially no bivariate relationship between density and belonging to a self-affirming social environment, suggesting that the two are independent of one another. Additionally, Table 4.2 reveals no statistical relationship between network density and self-esteem or self-efficacy. Thus, contrary to what structuralist approaches to social integration would suggest, increased network density does not seem to uniformly produce positive well-being outcomes.

**Table 4.2.** Correlation Matrix for Key Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-esteem	1.00					
2. Self-efficacy	0.59	1.00				
3. Self-affirming Environment	0.57	0.58	1.00			
4. Density	-0.03	-0.06	-0.07	1.00		
5. Avg. Closeness of ego-alter ties	-0.02	-0.05	-0.01	0.18	1.00	
6. Network Size	0.20	0.23	0.29	-0.38	-0.14	1.00

The results for the OLS regression predicting self-esteem are given in table 4.3.

Beginning with model 1, the extent to which one views their environment as self-affirming has a large positive effect on self-esteem—a one-unit increase in self-affirmation is associated with a

<sup>36</sup> In a factor analysis including the 7 self-esteem items, the 6 self-efficacy items, and my measure of self-affirmation, the highest rotated factor loading for self-affirmation was 0.48. In fact, three factors seemed to emerge from the analysis (using a rotated factor loading of 0.6 as a cut-off): a factor including 4 of the self-esteem indicators, a second factor including the other 3 self-esteem items, and a third including two of the self-efficacy items.

0.367 increase in self-esteem ( $p < 0.001$ ). To put this into context, individuals reporting the most affirming social environments (i.e., affirmation = 5) would be expected to report self-esteem that is nearly 2 standard deviations higher ( $((0.367 \times 5)/1.01 = 1.817)$ ) than those with the least affirming social environments (i.e., affirmation = 0). Further, model 3 displays similar results for the effect of self-affirming social environments on self-efficacy: a one-unit increase in self-affirmation is associated with a 0.351 unit increase in self-efficacy ( $p < 0.001$ ), controlling for demographic and network variables.

With respect to hypothesis 2, model 2 shows a significant and positive interaction between self-affirmation and network density ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that, as hypothesis 2 suggests, the effect of network density on self-esteem is contingent upon how self-affirming individuals' view their social environments. Similarly, model 4 shows a positive and significant interaction between self-affirmation and network density ( $p < .01$ ), providing additional support for hypothesis 2.

**Table 4.3.** OLS Regression Predicting Self-esteem and Self-efficacy

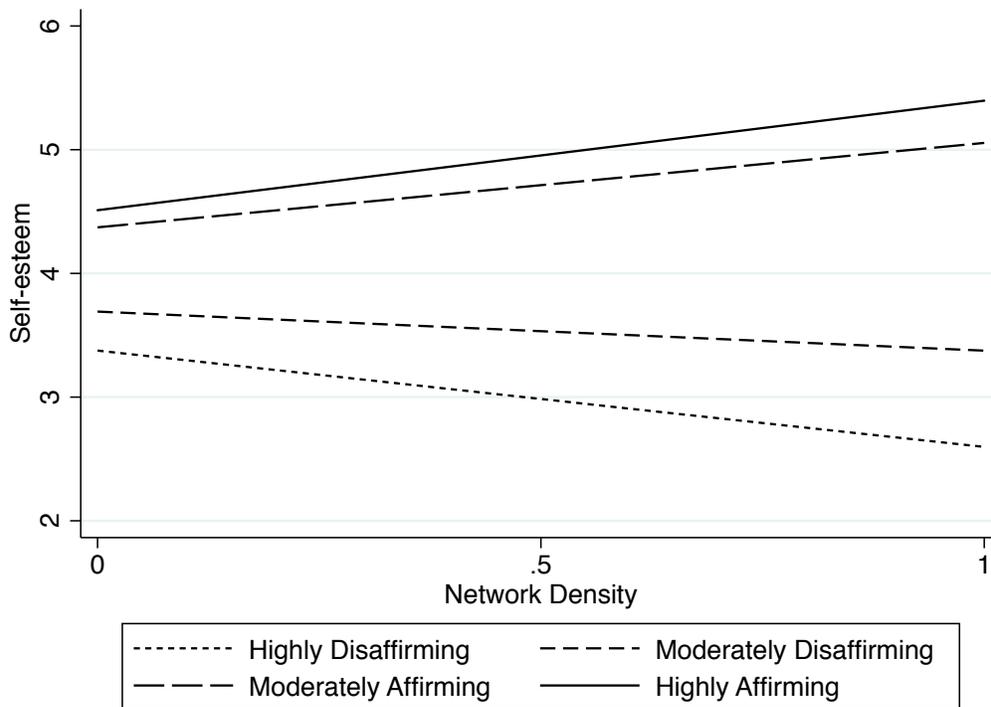
VARIABLES	Esteem		Efficacy	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Self-Affirming Environment	0.367*** (0.041)	0.227** (0.080)	0.351*** (0.039)	0.157* (0.076)
Density	0.160 (0.286)	-0.779 (0.546)	0.020 (0.273)	-1.285* (0.514)
Affirming × Density		0.333* (0.165)		0.462** (0.156)
Female	-0.149 (0.123)	-0.151 (0.122)	0.106 (0.118)	0.103 (0.115)
Age	0.023 (0.036)	0.016 (0.036)	-0.041 (0.034)	-0.051 (0.034)
Parental Income (in \$1000's)	0.002^ (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Education (years)	0.090** (0.030)	0.094** (0.030)	0.058* (0.029)	0.064* (0.028)
Married	-0.100 (0.200)	-0.143 (0.200)	-0.078 (0.191)	-0.137 (0.188)
White	-0.398** (0.130)	-0.395** (0.129)	-0.002 (0.124)	0.003 (0.122)
Network Size	0.006 (0.007)	0.008 (0.007)	0.001 (0.007)	0.003 (0.007)
Avg. Closeness	-0.007 (0.117)	-0.017 (0.116)	-0.069 (0.112)	-0.083 (0.109)
Constant	1.253 (0.920)	1.758^ (0.946)	3.203*** (0.877)	3.906*** (0.891)
Observations	192	192	192	192
R-squared	0.425	0.438	0.355	0.385

Note - Standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , ^  $p < 0.1$  (two-tailed)

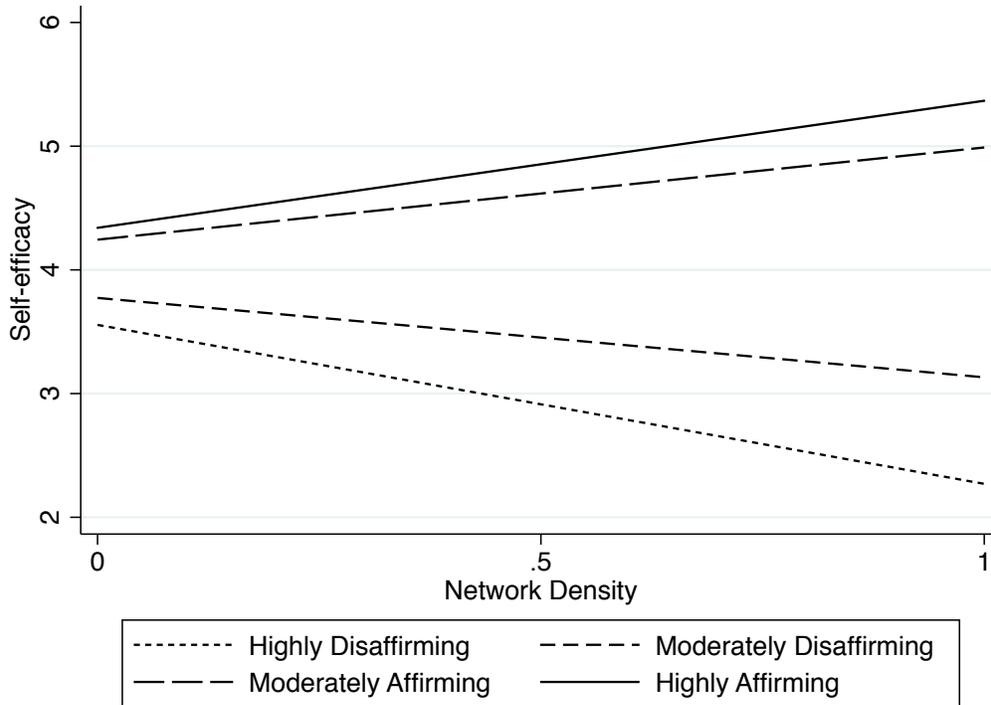
Additionally, when the interaction term is taken into account, the effect of network density on self-efficacy becomes negative and significant ( $p < .05$ ,  $b = -1.28$ ), suggesting that—for individuals with the least affirming social environments (i.e., affirmation=0)—enhanced network density is associated with lower levels of self-efficacy, in line with hypothesis 3b. For individuals with the least affirming social environments, the effect of density on self-esteem is negative, but not statistically significant ( $p = .15$ ,  $b = -.78$ ), providing a lack of support for hypothesis 3b. Additional analyses estimating the marginal effects of density at different levels

of affirmation (not shown) revealed that, for individuals with the most affirming social environments (i.e., self-affirmation=5), network density was associated with increased levels of self-efficacy ( $p<.05$ ,  $b=1.027$ ) and increased levels of self-esteem ( $p=.055$ ,  $b=.886$ ), in support of hypothesis 3a. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 illustrate this effect by plotting the marginal effects of network density at different levels of self-affirmation, indicating that for individuals with highly self-affirming social environments (self-affirmation = 5; the solid line), the effect of network density is positive, but for individuals with the most disaffirming environments (self-affirmation = 0; the short-dashed line) the sign of the effect reverses and becomes negative.



**Figure 4.2. The Impact of Network Density on Self-Esteem at Different Levels of Self-Affirming Environments**

*Note* – Highly affirming environments (the solid line) correspond to the most affirming environments (i.e., self-affirmation = 5; strongly disagree that “I cannot be myself in many situations”), moderately affirming (the long-dashed line) corresponds to a self-affirmation score of one standard deviation above the mean (self-affirmation = 4.39), moderately disaffirming networks (the dashed line) correspond to one standard deviation below the mean (self-affirmation = 1.39), and highly disaffirming (the short-dashed line) corresponds to the least disaffirming networks (self-affirmation = 0; strongly agree that “I cannot be myself in many situations”).



**Figure 4.3. The Impact of Network Density on Self-Efficacy at Different Levels of Self-Affirming Environments**

*Note* – Highly affirming environments (the solid line) correspond to the most affirming environments (i.e., self-affirmation = 5; strongly disagree that “I cannot be myself in many situations”), moderately affirming (the long-dashed line) corresponds to a self-affirmation score of one standard deviation above the mean (self-affirmation = 4.39), moderately disaffirming networks (the dashed line) correspond to one standard deviation below the mean (self-affirmation = 1.39), and highly disaffirming (the short-dashed line) corresponds to the least affirming environments (self-affirmation = 0; strongly agree that “I cannot be myself in many situations”).

## Discussion

Overall, the findings reported here provide consistent support for the claim that the impact of network density on self-efficacy and self-esteem is contingent upon how self-affirming individuals view their social environments. Consistent with theories of social capital and structuralist theories of social integration, network density is positively related to self-esteem and self-efficacy for people in self-affirming social networks. However, for people who view their social environment as disaffirming, network density is negatively related to self-efficacy, and statistically unrelated to self-esteem. Thus, while hypotheses 1 and 2 were strongly supported by this research, hypothesis 3 received only partial support. Specifically, It seems that moderating effect of self-affirmation was more robust for the link between density and self-efficacy than for the link between density and self-esteem. Although I can only speculate at this point, this may be due to the fact that the added weight of social legitimacy that is produced by density for those in

disaffirming networks is better suited to impact self-efficacy than self-esteem. That is, for individuals who belong to disaffirming social environments, network density may be more strongly related to feelings of powerlessness than feelings of social worth.

One key limitation of this research is the measurement of self-affirming social environments. First, given the relatively high correlation between self-affirming social environment and the two outcome variables, there is some concern about the potential overlap between self-affirmation, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. In addition to the fact that the factor analyses outlined in the methods section of this paper suggest that my measure of self-affirming social environments is empirically distinct from the measures of self-esteem and self-efficacy, analyses where I “swap out” self-affirmation with the other measure of psychological well-being, and predict self-affirmation from self-esteem/self-efficacy and other control variables revealed no statistically significant interactions between density and self-esteem or self-efficacy.<sup>37</sup> That is, of all possible combinations of density by self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-affirmation interactions, *only* the self-affirmation  $\times$  density interactions were significant, suggesting some level of distinctiveness between my measure of self-affirmation and the two outcomes.

Additionally, although I argue on theoretical grounds that individual perceptions of the extent to which their social environment is (dis)affirming is indicative of how much their own self-view aligns with that of their social contacts (i.e., self-society alignment), a more direct measure of this construct would be ideal. For instance, future research could query respondents about their own self-view and then ask them how they are viewed in specific segments of their social network.<sup>38</sup> Another potential is to direct future research toward developing a more comprehensive index of self-society (mis)alignment that includes multiple items tapping the experiential component (such as the item used here) as well as items tapping into general reflected appraisals (e.g., “my friends and family do not see me in the same way I see myself”).

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<sup>37</sup> Specifically, I estimated four models: 1) a model predicting self-affirming social environments from control variables, network density, and self-esteem, including a density  $\times$  self-esteem interaction; 2) a model predicting self-affirming social environments from control variables, network density, and self-efficacy, including a density  $\times$  self-efficacy interaction; 3) a model predicting self-esteem from control variables, network density, self-efficacy, and a density  $\times$  self-efficacy interaction; and 4) a model predicting self-efficacy from control variables, density, self-esteem, and a density  $\times$  self-efficacy interaction. None of the interaction effects in these models were statistically significant.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, McFarland and Pals (2005). Also, see Burke and Harrod (2005) for an example of asking about reflected appraisals for specific identities, without referencing specific segments of one’s social network.

While this research highlights the fact that individuals' view of how self-affirming or disaffirming their social environment is conditions the impact of network density on well-being, more research is needed to understand what might cause one to view it that way. At this point it is unclear if this is due to personality, disposition, or one's ability to structure one's social world in a way that is conducive to self-affirmation. Additional analyses did reveal that individuals with self-affirming social environments tended to participate in more roles ( $r = 0.21, p < .001$ ) and they were more likely to define themselves in terms of their social roles ( $r = 0.27, p < .001$ ). Although this aligns with the symbolic interactionist view that role-commitments serve to attach individuals to larger society, further research is needed to directly assess this claim.

A related issue that cannot be addressed in this research is selection into and out of disaffirming social environments. Because I use cross-sectional data, I am unable to observe how individuals get involved in disaffirming social environments in the first place nor am I able to observe why individuals continue to participate in disaffirming social contexts or disengage from disaffirming contexts in order to restore well-being and psychological resources. Future research should employ longitudinal methods in order to fully understand these dynamics.

Additionally, this research focuses on a relatively small sample of childless young adults and does not employ probability-sampling procedures. Thus, while the findings shed light on the potential self and network processes involved in the production of psychological well-being, they are not strictly representative of the population at large. Since this particular demographic group may be more likely to have self-views and social networks that are still in flux, future research is needed to assess the extent to which this moderation effect applies to other demographic groups. Additionally, the relatively small sample size of the data used here makes it difficult to interpret null findings. Specifically, it is unclear if the fact that network density is not significantly related to self-esteem for individuals in disaffirming environments is due to a lack of statistical power or if the negative coefficient is simply due to random variation in the sampling distribution. To be sure, the small sample size only makes my statistical tests of significance, as well as my interpretation of the findings, more conservative. Having said all of this, given that large-scale nationally representative data of this kind are not currently available, this research does provide an important first step in understanding how personal network structure and other qualitative features of social networks can combine to effect well-being.

It is important to note that there are other potential explanations for the mixed findings

regarding the link between network density and well-being that cannot be ruled out by this research. First, it is possible that density impacts depressive symptoms, psychosocial resources, positive psychological functioning, and emotional outcomes differently. Second, the mixed findings could be due to the fact that the research reviewed here focuses on different populations. That is, network density may affect veterans, high school students, widows, and older women returning to school differently. While these arguments are certainly plausible, I would argue that it is important to point to general social processes that might cause the impact of density to vary across populations and outcomes. This research highlights but one possible account of how the impact of density might differ depending upon social context. However, further research is needed to see if these findings hold across different populations and mental health outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

Given the methodological limitations of the current study, these findings should be interpreted as preliminary and suggestive. This research nonetheless provides an important first step in understanding the interplay between social network structure, self-society alignment, and well-being. Using a unique dataset of extensive personal social networks, I find suggestive evidence that belonging to a self-affirming social environment is necessary for the positive returns of network density for well-being. This research echoes the findings of previous work that suggests that the effect of network density on well-being is subject to social and environmental contingencies. Whereas other research highlights the differential effects of density based on individual characteristics (e.g., gender and SES) or contextual factors (e.g., urbanicity of residence), this research highlights how qualitative features of one's social network can shape the value of network density for well-being. Importantly, this research provides a potential explanation for *how* embeddedness in a densely connected personal social network can affect well-being and highlights one relevant factor—the alignment of self and society—that can condition the effect of density on well-being.

Finally, although other scholars have drawn a hard line between the ideational and relational components of social cohesion and social integration (e.g., Moody and White 2003) as well as quantitative and qualitative features of social networks (Berkman et al. 2000), I argue that the structure of individuals' social networks and the meanings that inhere in social relations

*combine* to produce social solidarity and impact well-being. This research also aligns with Freidkin's (2004) point that network effects should be firmly rooted in social process:

It does not suffice to assert that certain network structures foster cohesion in the absence of an explicit model of the social processes that link the network structure to individual outcomes, because similar network structures may have dramatically different implications for individual outcomes depending on the social process that is occurring. *The idea that effects of structure exist, independent of social process, must be abandoned if we are to develop a compelling theory of social network effects.* (p. 422, emphasis added)

Indeed, these findings may suggest that—at least for personal social networks—a “purely structural” approach to operationalizing social integration and social cohesion may ignore important social processes occurring within social networks that may be important for individual well-being. Thus, the implications of personal network density for individuals' well-being and other outcomes may only be interpretable when additional information about the meaning of social ties as well as the overall context of one's social environment are taken into account.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The research presented in this dissertation highlights the importance of identity-meaning structures and the structure of interpersonal social networks for identity processes that impact mental health outcomes. Chapter 2 highlights the fact that participating in role-identities where one can negotiate role-identity meanings that reflect one's core self is important for maintaining mental health. Specifically, a discrepancy between core self meanings and role-identity meanings was strongly associated with increased depression. Chapter 3 takes the notion of discrepancy and applies it to the cultural meanings associated with parental and occupational roles. Specifically, the findings in Chapter 3 suggest that certain occupational and parental role pairings are viewed as incompatible, and the penalty associated with this incompatibility filters down to working parents, thereby reducing well-being. Finally, Chapter 4 highlights how environmental meanings can combine with personal network structure to impact well-being. Specifically, I find that the impact of personal network density is contingent upon whether one is embedded in a self-affirming social environment. For those in affirming social environments, network density is positively associated with self-esteem and self-efficacy, as theories of social capital suggest. However, for those in disaffirming social environments, high network density is associated reductions in self-efficacy and has no statistical relationship with self-esteem.

This research also utilizes the notion of discrepancy from multiple different angles. Specifically, I show how discrepancy in self-held identity meanings, discrepancy in terms of cultural perceptions of incompatibility, and individuals subjective sense of belonging to a self-affirming environment can impact mental health. In general, the findings reported here suggest that the general notion of discrepancy or misalignment in self and environmental meanings may be of use for theories of self and mental health.

### *Implications for Theories of Self and Identity*

In total, this research highlights the importance of taking a more holistic approach to addressing the issue of multiple roles and identities. Future research in identity theory should take care to pay close attention to the interplay between the various identity meanings that individuals hold. For example, one theory that links multiple identities to mental health is identity accumulation theory (Thoits 1983, 1986). Although it was traditionally assumed that participating in multiple roles would enhance the probability of role-conflict and role-overload, research suggests that

role-accumulation is generally positively associated with well-being. Thoits (1983, 1986) argues that this positive association is due to the fact that role-identities are important sources of behavioral guidance and provide individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Although identity accumulation may be positively related to well-being on average, the question still remains as to whether certain identity combinations are more or less beneficial to well-being. Research suggests that the benefits of identity accumulation may be dependent upon the amount of stress experienced in a given role-domain (Thoits 1992). Additionally, voluntary identities, such as club member, volunteer, and friend, are more beneficial to well-being than obligatory identities, such as parent, son, and employee (Thoits 2003). Thoits suggests that this may be due to the fact that voluntary identities are selected for their benefits and can be easily exited if the costs start to outweigh the benefits. Here, I suggest that the mental health benefits of a given role-identity depends on whether or not one is able to negotiate an identity that aligns with other important identities and core-self meanings.

My findings may add to existing research on authenticity because it outlines how a specific feature of the self-structure (i.e., a misalignment between core self meanings and role-identity meanings) can produce a sense of inauthenticity and demonstrates that this feature is associated with depressive symptoms. Although I do not explicitly measure subjective feelings of inauthenticity here, my concept of self-role discrepancy clearly has some overlap with what most researchers mean by the term authenticity. In fact, by comparing role-identity meanings with core self meanings (as in Chapter 2), authenticity can be described as a concrete feature of the self-structure, rather than merely descriptive of behavior. This way of thinking about authenticity reflects lived experience in that individuals can recognize and understand that their behavior in a given situation does not reflect who they truly are (e.g., I was not being myself when I behaved that way), but they can also recognize when the identity they have cultivated in a given role-domain does not reflect who they truly are (e.g., I'm not really myself at work). Further, this notion of self-role discrepancy captures a core characteristic of modern society, which is that institutional pressures often cause people to adopt identities or personas that do not accurately reflect their core self views (e.g., Pescosolido and Rubin 2000). Although I cannot speak to the larger historical argument that theorists who invoke the concept of the "postmodern self" generally make, it does provide evidence that maintaining role-identity meanings that do not align with individuals' view of their "true" self has deleterious effects on mental health.

The findings in Chapter 2 also have potential implications for the substantial body of research in identity theory that examines how the alignment between role-identity meanings and reflected appraisals impacts emotional well-being and mental health. First, the fact that discrepancy between core self meanings and role-identity meanings has implications for mental health suggests that there is another level of discrepancy effects that impacts has been ignored up until this point. This raises a number of potentially important questions for identity theory's model of mental health and emotional distress. Specifically, more research is needed to examine the interrelations between core self meanings, role-identity meanings, and reflected appraisals. If role-identity meanings are "anchored" in core self meanings (as in figure 1.2), then it is possible that the discrepancy between role identity meanings and reflected appraisals are highly correlated with self-role discrepancy. Thus, identity non-verification may be ultimately rooted in the distance between reflected appraisals and individuals' core self meanings, though the nature of this relationship is currently unclear. That is, it could be that a discrepancy between reflected appraisals in role domains and one's core self is what truly produces distress and role-identity meanings are simply situational identities that "split the difference" between core self meanings and situational demands on self-presentation (i.e., reflected appraisals). Future research should directly assess whether it is self-role discrepancy, identity non-verification, or a discrepancy between reflected appraisals that produces negative emotion and psychological distress.

Chapter 2 also takes an important first step in addressing what I view as a key problem for research that links the identity verification process to mental health outcomes. Theories of self and identity that adopt a perceptual control model were designed to predict meaningful behavior and emotional responses in identity-relevant social encounters. As highlighted in Chapter 1, a key feature of these types of models is that they assume that the process tends toward equilibrium (i.e., that self-held identity meanings and reflected appraisals will tend toward convergence). As a cause of this, if identities are viewed as relatively independent of one another (i.e., not rooted in some core self-view or more general personal identities), then identity non-verification should essentially "solve itself" over time. Thus, a theory of self-structure that permits chronic and sustained identity non-verification is needed in order to make the argument that the identity verification process is an important and impactful mechanism for mental health over the life course. Chapter 2 provides a simple and elegant solution to this problem by proposing that individuals do have a sense of who truly are at their core, and providing empirical

evidence that adopting role-identities that do not reflect individuals' core sense of self negatively impacts emotional well-being.

Finally, this research highlights how the human capacity for introspection and self-reflection can have important implications for mental health. Given identity theory's focus on predicting behavior in particular situations, the theory doesn't really attend to how reflecting on one's behavior and identities across social situations and role-domains can impact emotional well-being. The findings reported here may open the door for the possibility that individuals are constantly taking stock of their behavior across multiple situations in order to weave together a coherent self-concept. Thus, behavior that may feel appropriate in the situation may, upon further inspection, be viewed as inconsistent with one's core self, thereby taking a toll on the individual's emotional well-being.

### *Broader Implications*

This dissertation also highlights the fact that identity processes may have important implications for theories that utilize social network analysis. Specifically, Chapter 4 suggests that the (self-) meanings that inhere in social ties may be of importance when interpreting network structural characteristics. Although I only provide a rudimentary analysis of how structure and meaning combine to impact well-being in Chapter 4, the findings do provide suggestive evidence that the impact of network structure can differ substantially, depending on the environmental meanings that characterize individuals' social worlds. Given that this is essentially uncharted territory, future research should examine how the interplay between identity meaning structure and network structure impact well-being and behavior in more detail.

The findings in Chapter 3 highlight the potential for applying social psychological concepts to the issues of work-family conflict. Specifically, the theory and findings outlined in Chapter 3 suggest that conflicts in meaning can add to the psychological toll that allocational work family conflict produces. Taken together with the robust positive relationship between self-role discrepancy and depression reported in Chapter 2, these findings provide strong evidence that participating in self-affirming social roles (i.e., roles with meanings that align with one's core self) is an important ingredient for maintaining positive well-being and mental health. Further, the fact that role-incompatibility is negatively associated with well-being adds to the findings of Chapter 2, in that it highlights how the cultural meanings associated with social roles

can serve as cultural constraints on self-affirmation. Although I do not explicitly demonstrate this here, these findings are consistent with the notion that cultural meanings associated with a role constrain the identity meanings that can be negotiated in role-domains. These constraints filter down to the individual and impact their well-being by producing a discrepancy between core self meanings and role-identity meanings. Thus, this provides a theoretical link between culture, the self, and mental health. Based on this, investigating how identity meanings factor into work-family conflict and other types of role-conflict may be a fruitful avenue for future research.

As highlighted throughout this dissertation, gaining a better understanding of multiple identities is an important issue for sociologists, given that individuals participate in multiple roles in daily life. Although the research that focuses on single role-domains have contributed substantially to our understanding of how individuals interact with social institutions and are impacted by social structure, research that highlights how interrelations between role domains and role-identities may provide important insight. That is, taking a more relational approach that specifically addresses the fact that individuals participate in multiple roles that are embedded in multiple institutions and groups should be utilized when possible.

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## Appendix A. Additional Analyses for Chapter 2

One potential issue with the discrepancy measure used here is that it assumes that the direction of the discrepancy is inconsequential for depression. However, when using difference scores in this manner, it is possible that discrepancy in a given direction may be driving the results. For example, if core self meanings tend to be more positive (i.e., more good/nice, powerful, and active) than self-in-role meanings, then increases in the positivity of role-identity meanings would be equivalent to decreases in discrepancy. Thus, in this case, a role-based self-enhancement effect would be misattributed to discrepancy (see figure A1).

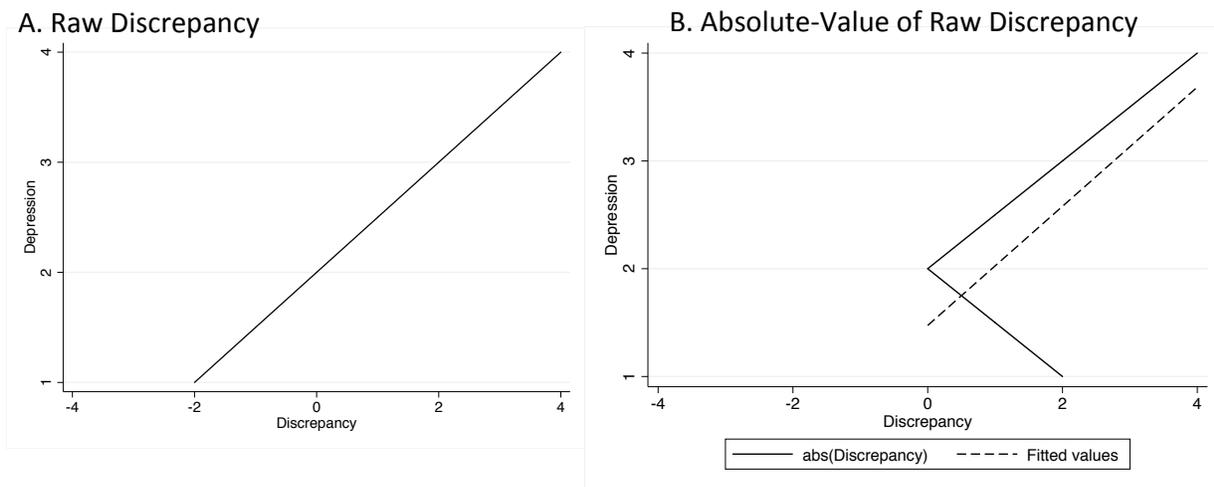


Figure A1. Example of Self-Enhancement Effect Misspecified as Discrepancy

To ensure that my measure of discrepancy is not simply a misspecification of a self-enhancement effect, I examine the overall distribution of the “raw” self-role discrepancies for the individual dimensions of meaning (evaluation, potency, and activity) for the self-student, self-work, and self-friend identity pairings (see table A1). These “raw” discrepancy scores refer to the difference between core-self meanings and role-identity meanings on each dimension of meaning (i.e., role-identity values subtracted from core self values). Thus, a positive raw discrepancy score for self-student evaluation means that one views “themselves as they truly are” as *more* nice/good than they are “as a student” and a negative value means that the core self is *less* nice/good than the student identity. The average discrepancy values for all three dimensions of meaning and role identities are very near zero, which provides strong evidence against the possibility outlined above. That is, since the frequency distribution of discrepancy is relatively

symmetrical and centered around zero (see figures A2-A4), a self-enhancement effect would produce a null discrepancy coefficient, as depicted in figure A5.

Table A1. Raw Self-Role Discrepancy Scores by Meaning Dimension and Role

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Discrepancy: Evaluation					
Student	392	0.03	1.17	-4.68	4.49
Work	247	0.03	1.13	-3.59	5.02
Friend	394	0.02	0.98	-3.54	7.01
Discrepancy: Potency					
Student	392	0.01	1.13	-4.39	4.42
Work	247	0.01	1.12	-3.98	4.33
Friend	394	0.00	1.03	-3.95	3.53
Discrepancy: Activity					
Student	392	0.01	1.15	-4.15	3.80
Work	247	0.03	1.25	-4.21	4.11
Friend	394	-0.01	1.02	-4.03	3.22

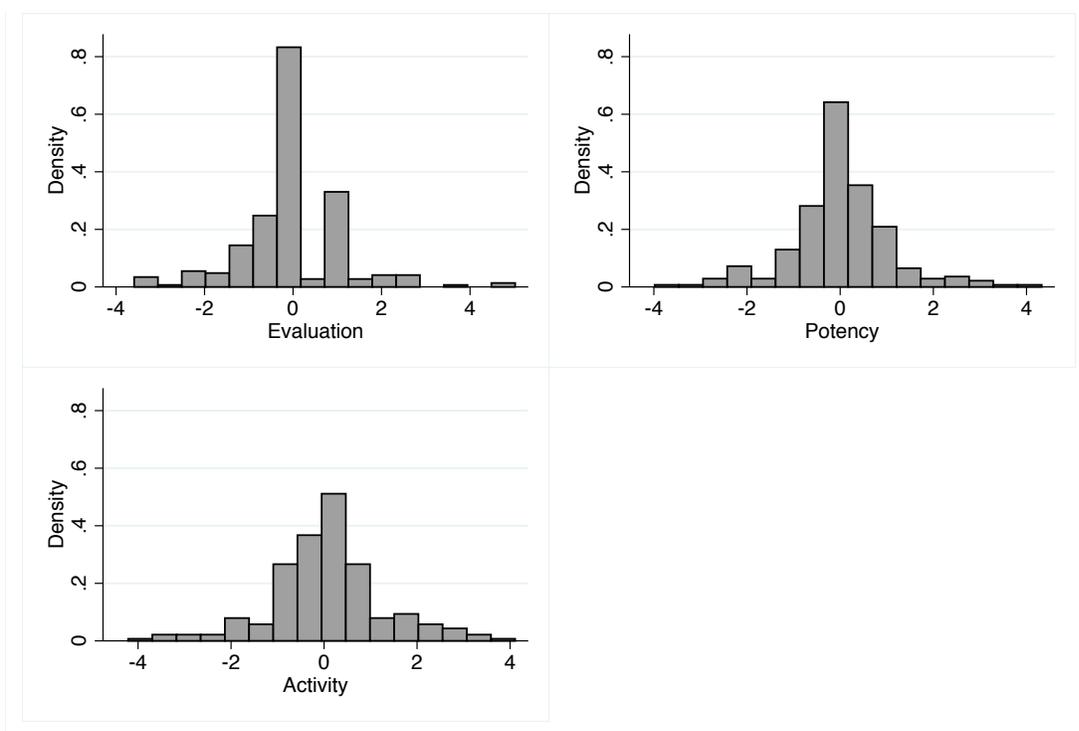


Figure A2. Frequency Distribution of Self-Work Discrepancy

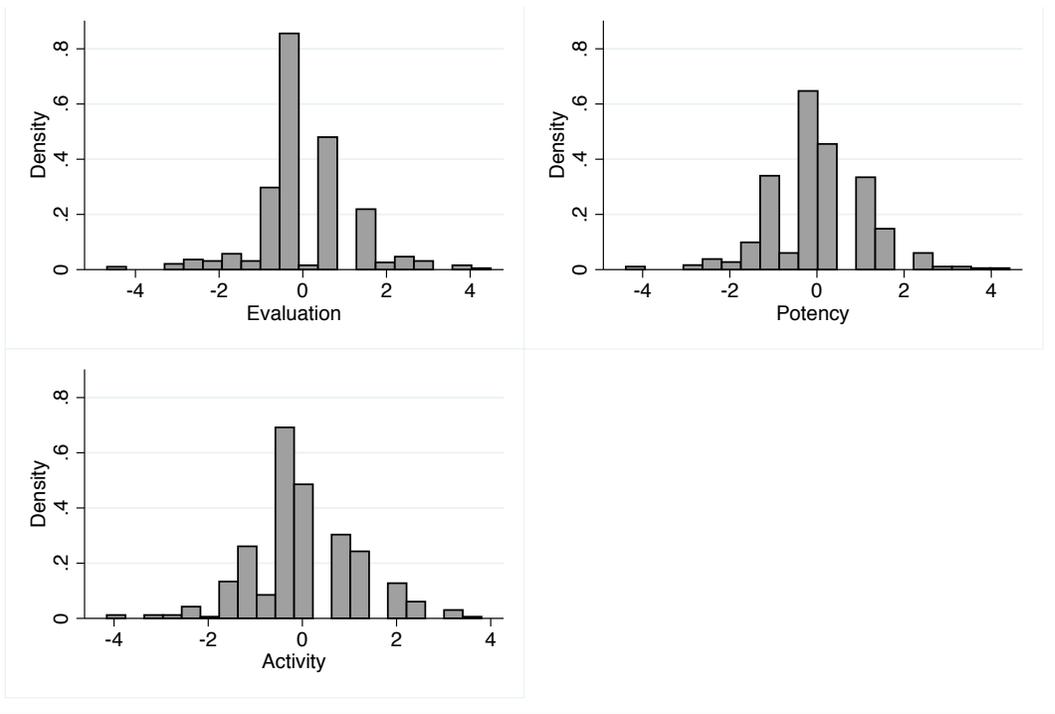


Figure A3. Frequency Distribution of Self-Student Discrepancy.

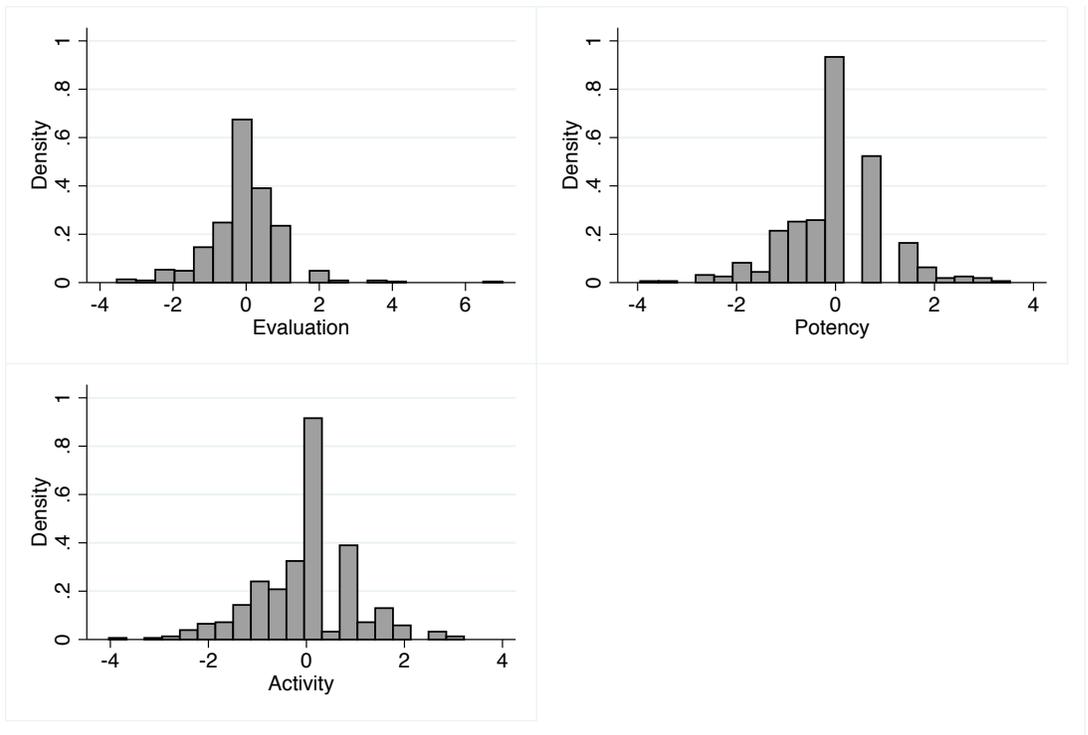
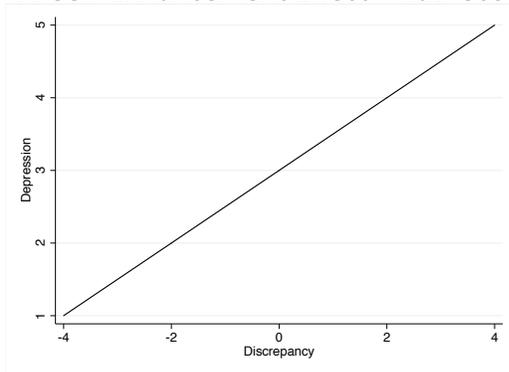
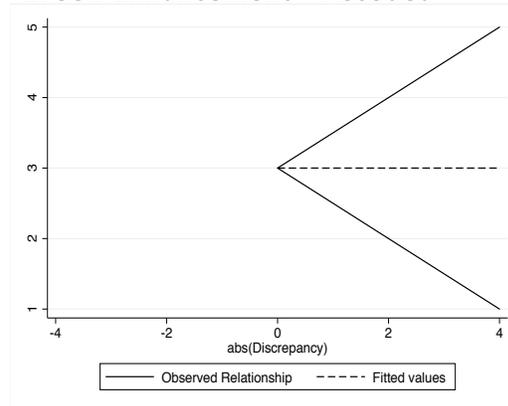


Figure A4. Frequency Distribution of Self-Friend Discrepancy.

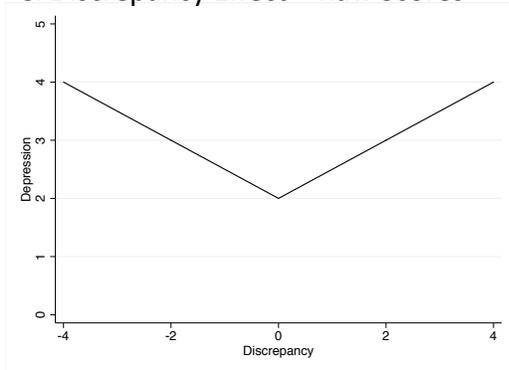
**A. Self-Enhancement Effect – Raw Scores**



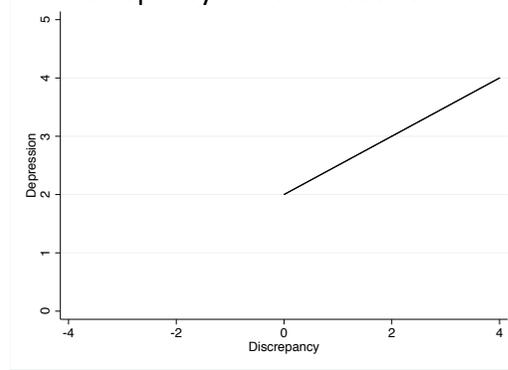
**B. Self-Enhancement – Recoded**



**C. Discrepancy Effect – Raw Scores**



**D. Discrepancy Effect – Recoded**



**Figure A5. Impact of Taking Absolute Value of Raw Discrepancy Scores for Symmetrical Data where Mean=0**

In addition to this, I also examine the extent to which the conditional distribution of depression by discrepancy fits the discrepancy hypothesis by estimating quadratic regression for each dimension of meaning and self-role pairing. The discrepancy hypothesis suggests a relatively symmetrical, U-shaped relationship between raw discrepancy scores and depression. That is, according to my discrepancy hypothesis, depression should increase as role-meanings depart from core self meanings in either direction.

**Table A2. Quadratic Regression: Self-Student Discrepancy**

VARIABLES	Evaluation	Potency	Activity
Linear Discrepancy	0.010 (0.023)	0.023 (0.024)	0.029 (0.024)
<i>Discrepancy</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.049*** (0.010)	0.067*** (0.011)	0.046*** (0.012)
Constant	1.954*** (0.030)	1.937*** (0.030)	1.961*** (0.031)
Observations	392	392	392
R-squared	0.061	0.087	0.043

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05, ^ p&lt;0.1

**Table A3. Quadratic Regression: Self-Friend Discrepancy**

VARIABLES	Evaluation	Potency	Activity
Linear Discrepancy	-0.033 (0.029)	0.004 (0.026)	0.091*** (0.026)
<i>Discrepancy</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.021* (0.009)	0.077*** (0.014)	0.071*** (0.015)
Constant	1.995*** (0.029)	1.934*** (0.030)	1.941*** (0.030)
Observations	394	394	394
R-squared	0.015	0.071	0.077

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05, ^ p&lt;0.1

**Table A4. Quadratic Regression: Self-Work Discrepancy**

VARIABLES	Evaluation	Potency	Activity
Linear Discrepancy	-0.072* (0.028)	-0.014 (0.029)	0.002 (0.025)
<i>Discrepancy</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.032** (0.011)	0.039** (0.013)	0.051*** (0.011)
Constant	1.961*** (0.034)	1.954*** (0.036)	1.926*** (0.036)
Observations	270	267	267
R-squared	0.050	0.032	0.070

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05, ^ p&lt;0.1

As you can see in table A2, all three dimensions of meaning for self-student discrepancy provide relatively unambiguous support for the discrepancy hypothesis. That is, the discrepancy-squared coefficients are all positive and significant ( $ps < .001$ ). Figure A6 provides a visual illustration of this relationship by displaying scatterplots of depression by self-student discrepancy with quadratic regression lines for each dimension of meaning. Further, tables A3 and A4 reveal similar results for self-friend and self-work discrepancy. That is, the discrepancy-squared coefficient is positive and significant for each dimension of meaning. Taken together with the fact that discrepancy is symmetrically distributed with a mean of zero, these findings strongly support the discrepancy approach taken here. That is, as discrepancy between core self meanings and role-identity meanings increase in either direction, depression tends to increase. To be sure, the results above strongly suggest that there is no risk of misattributing a self-enhancement effect to discrepancy in these data.

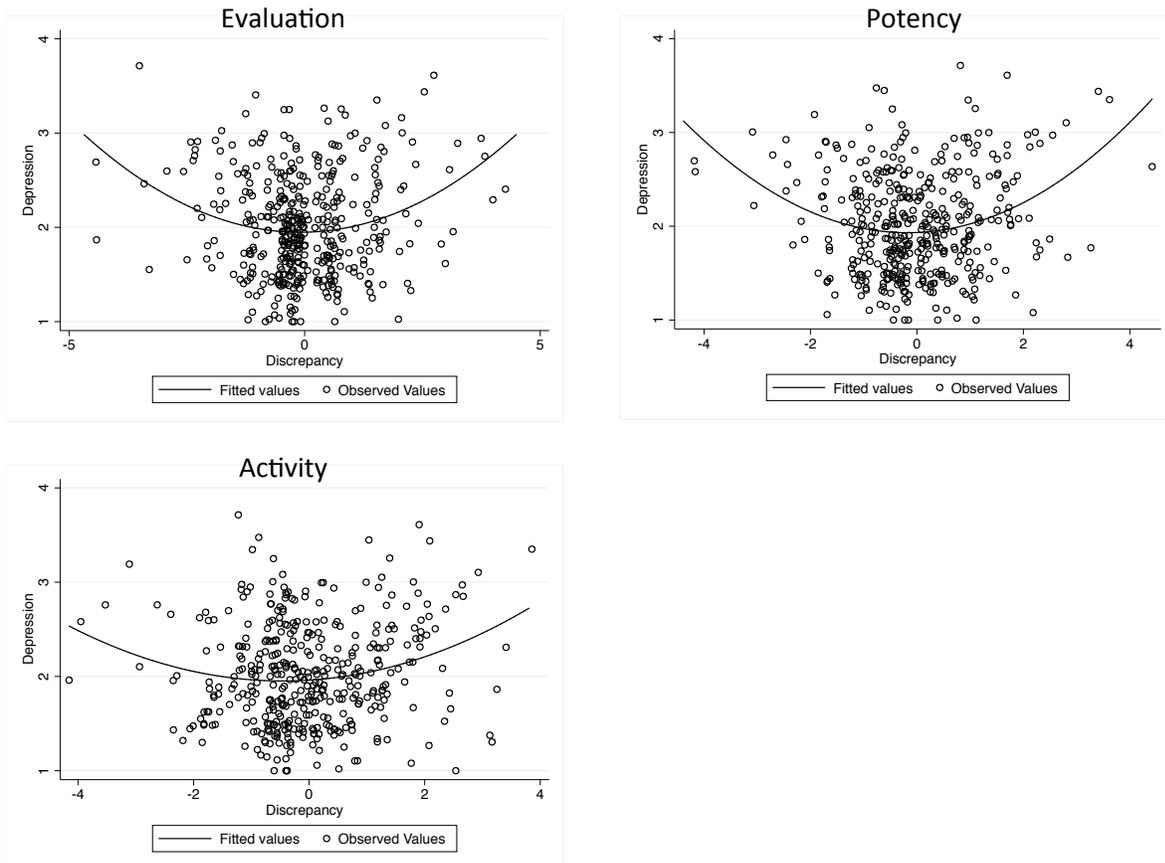


Figure A6. Scatter Plot of Self-Student Discrepancy by Depression

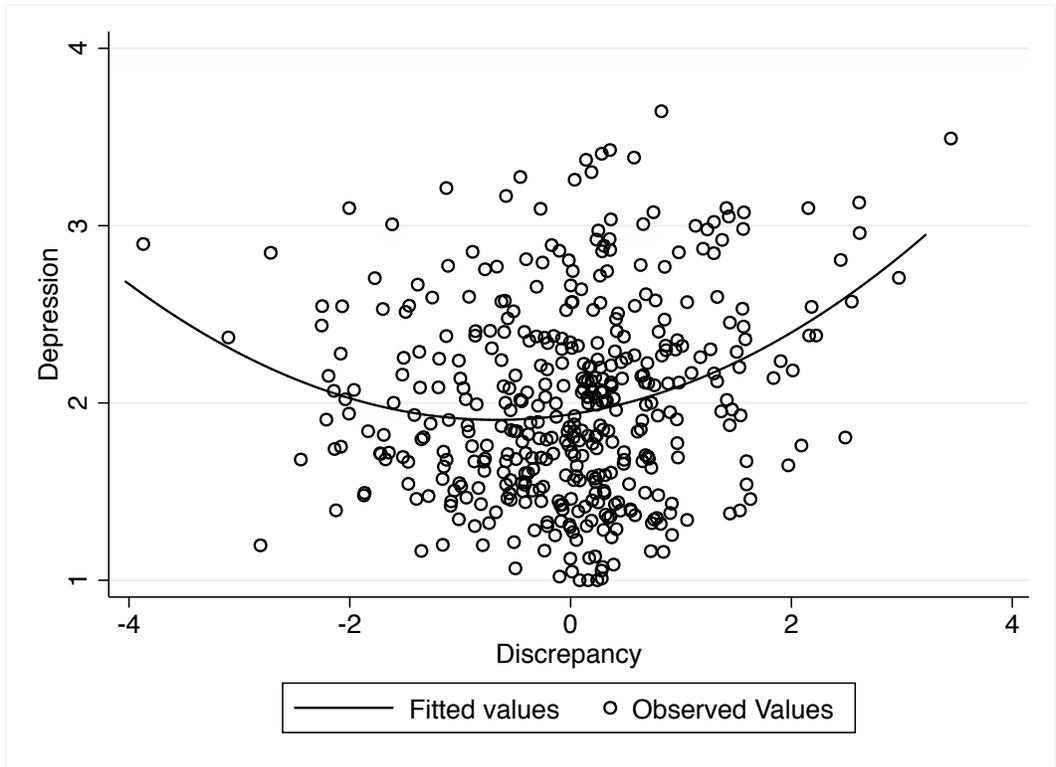


Figure A7. Scatter Plot of Self-Friend Discrepancy and Depression: Activity Dimension.

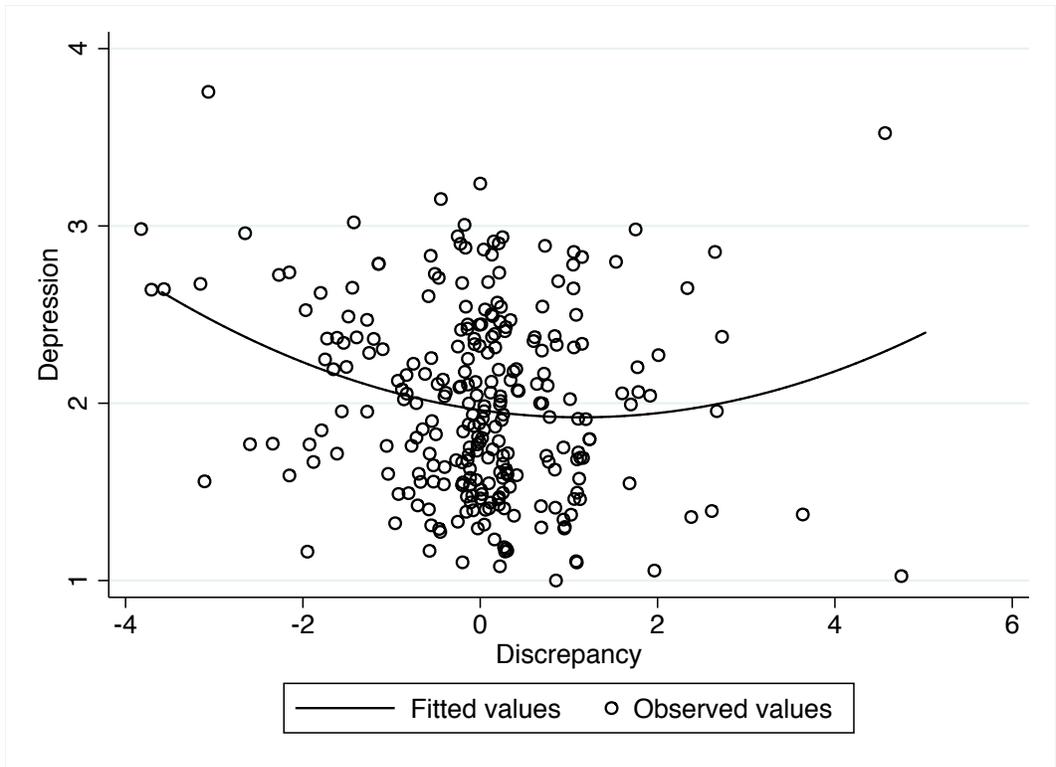


Figure A8. Scatter Plot of Self-Work Discrepancy and Depression: Evaluation Dimension.

## Appendix B. Measuring Third-Order Identity Discrepancy using EPA Ratings

Third-order perceptions of cultural meanings refer to individuals' perceptions of how most people feel about a given identity. Two identities are culturally discrepant insofar as the cultural sentiments associated with one identity are dissimilar from the cultural sentiments associated with the other. The concept of cultural discrepancy is based on the intuition that certain pairs of identities do not "fit" with one another in terms of the sentiments they evoke. For example, most would agree that the identities of *Grandfather* and *Murderer* do not align with one another. This is not because grandfathers are incapable of murder, but rather because the abstract cultural image associated with the term *Grandfather* (e.g. friendly, caring, frail) does not align with the affective sentiment associated with *Murderer* (e.g. nasty and forceful).

To quantify culturally discrepancy for a host of identities, we draw on Affect Control Theory (Heise 1979; Heise and Smith-Lovin 1988; MacKinnon and Heise 2010). In ACT's Evaluation-Potency-Activity (EPA) measurement approach, male and female respondents are asked to evaluate social objects with respect to three dimensions: evaluation (good vs. bad), potency (powerful vs. weak), and activity (lively vs. quiet). We use the EPA ratings from the online dictionary available in INTERACT ([www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ACT/interact/JavaInteract.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ACT/interact/JavaInteract.html)), which are based on sample of 1027 Indiana University students and were gathered during 2002-2003 (Francis and Heise 2006). The dictionary provides EPA ratings for over 1500 social objects (500 identities, 500 behaviors, 300 modifiers, and 200 settings) and distinguishes between male-generated and female-generated EPA ratings. For example, for the role-identity, *Foreman*, the EPA dictionary gives us the average E, P and A score given by males (0.68, 1.19, 1.12) and the corresponding averages for females (0.28, 1.53, 0.81). In this paper, we take the average of the discrepancy values from the male and female perspective, given our interest in identifying overarching cultural meanings.

For any given identity, the EPA rating quantifies the affective sentiment of the identity in terms of a three dimensional metric. The proximity of any two given identities in 3-dimensional space is thus an indicator of how close the meanings of the two identities are to one another. Formally, cultural discrepancy for any two identities is measured as the Euclidean distance between each identity in three-dimensional EPA space:

$$D = \sqrt{(E_1 - E_2)^2 + (P_1 - P_2)^2 + (A_1 - A_2)^2}$$

where  $E_1$ ,  $P_1$ , and  $A_1$  are the evaluation, potency, and activity ratings of the parent identity (i.e., mother or father) and  $E_2$ ,  $P_2$ , and  $A_2$  are the EPA ratings for the respondent's occupation (e.g., physician, laborer, and attorney).

Our survey of incompatibility (see Appendix C) is based on the available occupational identities in INTERACT. We limit ourselves to these identities so that we can test whether perceptions of incompatibility are correlated with discrepancy in meanings calculated from EPA ratings. Finally, to link EPA identities (and our survey-based incompatibility scores) to the occupations of the MIDUS respondents, we develop a cross between the occupational identity labels used in INTERACT and the 1980 occupational codes, which are used in MIDUS (table B1).

Table B1. Crosswalk between EPA worker identities and occupational labels in MIDUS

	<b>A. EPA Identity</b>	<b>B. Discrepancy</b>		<b>C. Coding Scheme</b>
		<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>Occupational Label<sup>a</sup></b>
1	Army Enlistee	1.96	2.09	<i>None</i>
2	Attorney	2.39	2.38	Lawyers
3	Foreman	2.60	2.67	Supervisors, n.e.c. (construction trades)
4	Graduate Student	2.04	2.09	<i>None</i>
5	Gynecologist	3.06	3.02	<i>None</i>
6	Judge	2.41	2.35	Judge <sup>b</sup>
7	Laborer	2.83	2.91	Construction laborers; Laborers, exc. Construction
8	Librarian	4.50	4.54	Librarians; Archivists and curators
9	Lobbyist	2.87	2.95	<i>None</i>
10	Manager	1.99	2.04	Financial managers; Managers, marketing advertising and public relations; Personnel and labor relations managers; Managers and administrators, n. e. c.; Managers, medicine and health; Management and related occupations, n.e.c.; Purchasing managers; Managers, properties and real estate
11	Nursing Aides	1.74	1.88	Nursing aides, orderlies and attendants
12	Pediatrician	1.06	1.11	<i>None</i>
13	Physician	0.90	1.03	Physicians
14	Police Officer	2.87	2.86	Police and detectives, public service; Supervisors, police and detectives
15	Politician	3.28	3.25	<i>None</i>
16	Practical Nurse	0.94	1.11	Licensed practical nurses
17	Principal	1.57	1.65	Administrators, education and related fields

18	Professor	1.58	1.59	Business, commerce and marketing teachers; Biological science teachers; English teachers; Engineering teachers; Economics teachers; Postsecondary teachers, subject not specified; Medical science teachers; Education teachers; Mathematical science teachers
19	Psychiatrist	3.06	3.15	None
20	Receptionist	3.06	3.15	Receptionists
21	Salesman/woman	3.03	3.69	Sales workers, shoes; Sales counter clerks; Sales workers, apparel; Sales workers, radio, tv, hi-fi and appliances; Sales workers, motor vehicles and boats; Insurance sales occupations; Sales workers, hardware and building supplies; Sales representatives, mining, manufacturing, and wholesale; Sales workers, other commodities; Securities and financial services sales occupations; Real estate sales occupations; Sales occupations, other business services; Sales workers, parts; Street and door-to-door sales workers; Advertising and related sales occupations; Supervisors and proprietors, sales occupations
22	Scientist	2.14	2.22	Chemists, except biochemists; Science Technicians, n. e. c.; Biological technicians; Physicists and Astronomers; Biological and life scientists
23	Secretary	3.36	3.44	Stenographers; Secretaries; Typists
24	Server	2.77	2.96	Miscellaneous food preparation occupations; Cooks, except short order; Waiters/waitresses assistants; Kitchen workers, food preparations; Supervisors, food preparation and services; Food counter, fountain and related occupations; Waiters and waitresses; Bartenders
25	Sheriff	2.19	2.22	Sheriffs, bailiffs and other law enforcement officers

26	Supervisor	1.95	1.98	Supervisors, mechanics and repairers; Supervisors, general office; Supervisors, production occupations
27	Surgeon	1.03	0.84	<i>None</i>
28	Teacher	0.70	0.76	Secondary school ; Special education; Teachers, n. e. c.; Prekindergarten, kindergarten; Elementary school

<sup>a</sup> The detailed occupational labels are based on the 1980 census occupational codes.

<sup>b</sup> There were no judges in our analytical sample.

## Appendix C. Survey Instrument for Chapter 3

The following is an abbreviated version of the questions and instructions given in the online experiment. The items are presented here in the same order they appeared in the experiment Notes about the survey, including possible response categories, are presented in brackets. Line breaks indicate changes in screens and the section headers (e.g., Part 1, Part 2) are given for organizational purposes and do not appear in the actual experiment.

Subjects were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: MOTHER, FATHER, WOMAN, and MAN. In each condition, respondents were asked to respond to various gender- and parent-occupation combinations. For example, in the MOTHER condition, respondents were asked to rate a mother working in a given occupation (e.g., “Someone who is both a MOTHER and an ATTORNEY”) whereas those in the FATHER condition were given father-occupation pairings (e.g., “Someone who is both a FATHER and an ATTORNEY”). The order that parent/gender and occupational identities appear was counterbalanced, such that respondents were randomly assigned to see either the parent identity first (e.g., “Someone who is both a FATHER and an ATTORNEY”) or the occupational identity first (e.g., “Someone who is both an ATTORNEY and a FATHER”) for all role-combinations. Demographic information was collected at the end of the survey. All subjects were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk, and were paid \$1.00 for their participation in the study. Data were collected in March 2014.

### PART 1. INTRODUCTION

In the following section you will be asked to rate how you feel about a number of different things.

There is no right or wrong answer to these questions.

The purpose of this exercise is to understand how people feel about things, so you should rate the way *you feel* based on your first impressions.

For example, what are your feelings about a **TORNADO**?

- Do you think a TORNADO is **bad/awful** or **good/nice**?
- Do you think a TORNADO is **little/powerless** or **big/powerful**?
- Do you think a TORNADO is **slow/inactive/quiet** or **fast/active/noisy**?

Researchers find that many view a tornado as infinitely bad, infinitely powerful, and infinitely loud, as indicated below.

## PART 2. ROLE COMBINATIONS

[The role combinations section is repeated for 16 out of a possible 28 randomly selected occupations, which are summarized below.]

1. Attorney	11. Principal	21. Surgeon
2. Foreman	12. Professor	22. Psychiatrist
3. Judge	13. Receptionist	23. Politician
4. Laborer	14. Saleslady/Salesman	24. Pediatrician
5. Librarian	15. Scientist	25. Lobbyist
6. Manager	16. Secretary	26. Graduate student
7. Nursing Aid	17. Server	27. Gynecologist
8. Physician	18. Sheriff	28. Army enlistee
9. Police officer	19. Supervisor	
10. Practical Nurse	20. Teacher	

1. What are your feelings about... Someone who is both a **MOTHER** and an **ATTORNEY**

	Infinitely	Extremely	Quite	Slightly	Neutral	Slightly	Quite	Extremely	Infinitely	
Bad Awful	<input type="radio"/>	Good Nice								

[Respondents are then queried about seven more bipolar adjectives using the same format as above.]

2. inactive, quiet...active, loud
3. little, powerless/big... powerful
4. unlikable ...likable
5. uncommitted to work...committed to work
6. incompetent ...competent
7. untrustworthy ...trustworthy
8. insincere ...sincere.

9. How **likely** do you think this role combination is? [very unlikely, unlikely, somewhat unlikely, somewhat likely, likely, very likely]
10. How **similar** do you think this person's behavior at work is to their behavior at home? [extremely different, different, somewhat different, somewhat similar, similar, extremely similar]
11. How **difficult** do you think it is to combine the roles of MOTHER and ATTORNEY? [very difficult, difficult, somewhat difficult, somewhat easy, easy, very easy]
12. How **natural** do you think it is to combine the roles of MOTHER and ATTORNEY? [very unnatural, unnatural, somewhat unnatural, somewhat natural, natural, very natural]

[Questions 1-13 are repeated for 15 more occupations...]

## Appendix D. Measures – Chapter 3

### Panel 1. Self-Acceptance and Environmental Mastery

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. [1=Strongly Agree, 7=Strongly Disagree]

#### *Self-Acceptance*

I like most parts of my personality.

When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.

In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.

#### *Environmental Mastery*

The demands of everyday life often get me down.

In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.

I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life.

### Panel 2. Perceived Constraint

Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. [1=Strongly Agree, 7=Strongly Disagree]

There is little I can do to change the important things in my life.

I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.

Other people determine most of what I can and cannot do.

What happens in my life is often beyond my control.

There are many things that interfere with what I want to do.

I have little control over the things that happen to me.

There is really no way I can solve the problems I have.

I sometimes feel I am being pushed around in my life.

### Panel 3. Allocational Conflict Index

Allocational Conflict [1=Never, 5=All of the time]

Your job reduces the effort you can give to activities at home.

Stress at work makes you irritable at home.

Your job makes you feel too tired to do the things that need attention at home.

Job worries or problems distract you when you are at home.

Responsibilities at home reduce the effort you can devote to your job.

Personal or family worries and problems distract you when you are at work.

Activities and chores at home prevent you from getting the amount of sleep you need to do your job well.

Stress at home makes you irritable at work.