

# Self-event connections in life stories, subjective well-being, and age

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## Introduction

The life story is an internalized, evolving story of the self that each person creates to provide his or her life with purpose and meaning.<sup>1</sup> A central process through which the life story is created is autobiographical reasoning, in which self-event connections are made.<sup>2</sup>

Self-event connections refer to causal connections between events and the self, and may address stability or change in the self. Both stability and change connections may be positive or negative<sup>3</sup>, and this may be associated with the individual's experience of subjective well-being (SWB), defined as greater life satisfaction, more positive affect, and less negative affect<sup>4</sup>.

One of the most consistent findings on SWB, is the strong association between personality traits and SWB<sup>5</sup>. In this study, we focused on the role of Extraversion and Neuroticism<sup>6</sup>.

Type of self-event connections may also be associated with age. While young adulthood is a period of change, later periods of life are associated with more stability.<sup>7</sup>

## Aims

To examine:

- 1) The relation between type/valence of self-event connections, traits, and SWB
- 2) Whether type/valence of self-event connections explain variance in SWB beyond the effects of personality traits
- 3) Age differences in type/valence of self-event connections

## Results

Table 1. Correlations between event valence, type/valence of self-event connections, and traits and SWB

	SWLS	WHO-5	CMDQ-depression	CMDQ-anxiety
Pos.valence	.37**	.34**	-.27**	-.24**
Neg.valence	-.32**	-.30**	.31**	.29**
Pos.stability	.32**	.31**	-.23**	-.22**
Neg.stability	-.29**	-.34**	.35**	.36**
Pos.change	.29**	.35**	-.24**	-.21**
Neg.change	-.36**	-.42**	.44**	.38**
Extraversion	.38**	.42**	-.34**	-.26**
Neuroticism	-.54**	-.60**	.66**	.70**

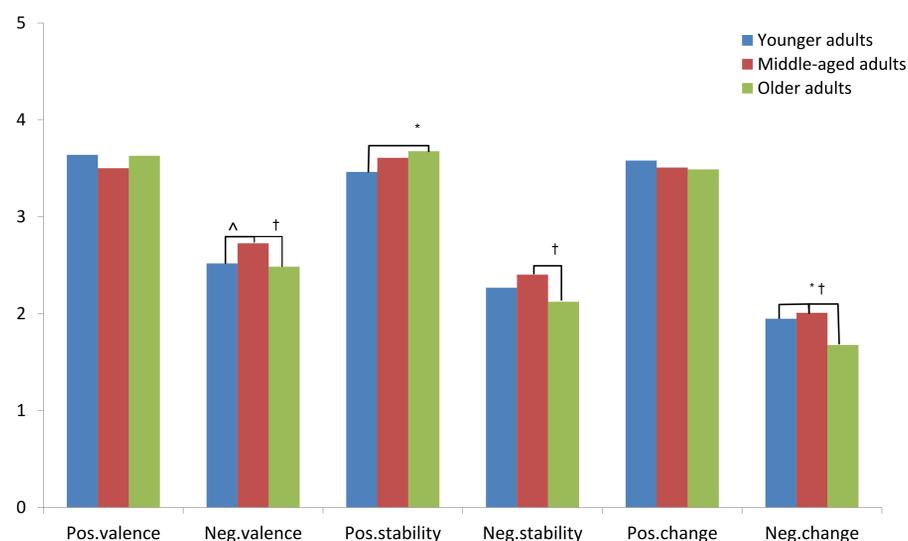
\*\* $p < .01$

Table 2. Regression models predicting SWB

Variables entered	SWLS (adj. R <sup>2</sup> =.34)	WHO-5 (adj. R <sup>2</sup> =.42)	CMDQ-depression (adj. R <sup>2</sup> =.45)	CMDQ-anxiety (adj. R <sup>2</sup> =.45)
	Beta	Beta	Beta	Beta
Pos.valence	.19**	.14	-.03	-.03
Neg.valence	.01	.04	.06	.08
Pos.stability	.01	.05	-.07	-.07
Neg.stability	-.10	.06	.09	-.01
Pos.change	.06	.17**	-.09	-.05
Neg.change	-.15*	-.19**	.20**	.06
Extraversion	.07	.09	.00	.12*
Neuroticism	-.41**	-.44**	.57**	.66**

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Figure 1. Age differences in event valence and type/valence of self-event connections



^ Younger adults compared with middle-aged adults,  $p < .05$   
 \* Younger adults compared with older adults,  $p < .05$   
 † Middle-aged adults compared with older adults,  $p < .05$

## Methods

101 younger adults (aged 20-25), 81 middle-aged adults (aged 45-56), and 88 older adults (aged 62-76) described up to ten chapters and up to ten specific memories in their life story and rated these on event valence, positive and negative stability connections, and positive and negative change connections. We calculated mean positive and negative valence, mean positive and negative stability connections, and mean positive and negative change connections across chapters and specific memories.

SWB was measured using four self-report indicators: The Satisfaction With Life Scale<sup>4</sup>, The WHO-5 Well-being Index<sup>8</sup>, and the subscales of depression and anxiety from The Common Mental Disorder Questionnaire.<sup>9</sup>

Traits were measured using the Danish version of the NEO-FFI.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusions

- 1) Positive self-event connections were related to higher SWB and negative self-event connections were related to lower SWB.
- 2) Only negative change connections predicted SWB beyond the effects of traits
- 3) Older adults did not consistently emphasize stability connections above change connections compared with younger and middle-aged adults. Rather they tended to construct more positive life stories than the younger groups by emphasizing positive stability and de-emphasizing negative valence, negative stability, and negative change.

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