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Examining sources of self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments

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ABSTRACT

This study examined sources of self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments. Pairs of participants (92 dating couples, 145 friendship pairs) provided self-ratings and informant ratings of life-satisfaction and domain satisfaction in five domains (family, health, academics, friends, and weather). Key findings were (a) significant self-informant agreement for life-satisfaction and all five domain satisfaction ratings, (b) significantly higher agreement for domain satisfaction than for life-satisfaction judgments, (c) discriminant validity of domain satisfaction judgments, (d) a top-down effect of general satisfaction on domain satisfaction, and (e) self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments was fully explained by bottom-up effects of family satisfaction, health satisfaction, and academic satisfaction on self-ratings and informant ratings of life-satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

Accurate knowledge about oneself and others is important to set attainable goals and to avoid negative events in the future. A large literature has examined how individuals form perceptions of others and how accurate these perceptions are (Funder, 1995). These studies typically demonstrate that personality ratings by knowledgeable informants show moderate convergent validity with self-ratings of personality (Connolly, Kavanagh, & Viswesvaran, 2007). Informant ratings also tend to predict objective behaviors above and beyond self-ratings (Vazire & Mehl, 2008).

Relatively few studies have examined the accuracy of well-being judgments (i.e., judgments of life-satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, and negative affect; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Schneider & Schimmack, 2009), although inaccurate perceptions of others' well-being have considerable practical and theoretical implications. Suicides are probably the most dramatic example of costly failures to recognize low well-being in others. Relatives of individuals who committed suicide sometimes experience guilt because they failed to notice that somebody close to them suffered from severe depression (Cleiren, Grad, Zavanik, & Diekstra, 1996). Inaccurate perceptions of others' well-being can also have serious consequences for social relationships. For example, it is not uncommon for spouses to assume that their partners are happily married, only to find out one day that their partner was actually having an affair for several years (Kingston, 2008). Even self-perceptions of well-being can be error prone. For example, people may focus too much on a salient aspect of their lives or they may

use denial and other defense mechanisms to boost self-perceptions of well-being. A better understanding of biases in self-ratings and informant ratings of well-being requires a closer examination of the cognitive processes underlying these judgments (Schimmack, Diener, & Oishi, 2002).

Another reason for studying these processes is that self-ratings of life-satisfaction are often used to examine the determinants of well-being (Diener, Lucas, Schimmack, & Helliwell, 2009; Schimmack, 2009). Many key findings in well-being science rest on the assumption that self-ratings of life-satisfaction are valid (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Unfortunately, it is difficult to examine the validity of life-satisfaction judgments because well-being is by definition a subjective construct (Diener et al., 2009; Schimmack, 2009). The most widely used validation criterion for self-ratings of life-satisfaction have been informant ratings of life-satisfaction by knowledgeable informants (see Schneider and Schimmack (2009), for a review). In these studies, it is commonly assumed that the shared variance between self-ratings and informant ratings reflects valid variance in well-being. In contrast, the nature of unique variance in self-ratings and informant ratings is less clear. This variance may reflect rater specific biases (Anusic, Schimmack, Pinkus, & Lockwood, 2009) or it may reflect valid information that is not shared across raters (Vazire & Mehl, 2008). So far, the sources of self-informant agreement and disagreement in well-being judgments have not been systematically examined. A better understanding of these sources can provide helpful information about the validity of well-being judgments.

One study examined whether even brief video clips contain valid information about well-being (Yeagley, Morling, & Nelson, 2007). The evidence was mixed with significant self-informant correlations for male targets, but not for female targets. Overall

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agreement was considerably lower than agreement in studies with well-acquainted informants (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). Moreover, we have demonstrated that self-informant agreement increases with length of relationship (Schneider, Schimmack, Petrican, & Walker, *in press*). These findings suggest that information about others' well-being is acquired slowly over time. The main purpose of this article is to reveal the sources of agreement in self-ratings and informant ratings of well-being. Our study focused on life-satisfaction judgments for several reasons. First, life-satisfaction judgments are conceptually the closest indicator of well-being (Diener et al., 2009). Second, life-satisfaction judgments are the most widely used indicator of well-being. Third, life-satisfaction judgments produce higher self-informant agreement than affective indicators of well-being (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). Finally, bottom-up theories of life-satisfaction judgments suggest that life-satisfaction ratings are based on information about satisfaction with specific life domains (Schimmack, 2008; Schimmack et al., 2002). Thus, we could rely on domain satisfaction as a set of potential cues that produces self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments.

1.1. Domain satisfaction as a potential source of agreement

We used satisfaction with various life domains as potential sources of agreement in life-satisfaction ratings. To control for the problem of systematic measurement error in the assessment of domain satisfaction, we measured domain satisfaction as the shared variance between self-ratings and informant ratings of domain satisfaction. This multi-method approach reduces the problem of shared method variance between ratings of life-satisfaction and domain satisfaction by the same rater (Anusic et al., 2009; Campbell & Fiske, 1959). In our model, a life domain that contributes to self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction has to have three characteristics: (a) it has to predict self-ratings of life-satisfaction, (b) it has to predict informant ratings of life-satisfaction, and (c) both raters have to agree in their rating of domain satisfaction. For example, if satisfaction with academic performance contributes to self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments, self-ratings of satisfaction with academic performance should show convergent validity with informant ratings of satisfaction with academic performance, and the shared variance between these two judgments should predict self-ratings and informant ratings of life-satisfaction (Fig. 1). This pattern of correlations would provide evidence for bottom-up effects of satisfaction with life domains on global life-satisfaction ratings.

Our model also allows for top-down effects of a general disposition to be more easily satisfied on domain satisfaction. This assumption is based on the well-established finding that self-ratings of satisfaction with various domains tend to be positively cor-

related with each other (Schimmack, 2008). However, shared variance between self-ratings of domain satisfaction may reflect rating biases as well as top-down effects (Schimmack, 2008). Our multi-rater design allows us for the first time to separate top-down effects from rater-specific method variance. Whereas rater biases produce only correlations among domain satisfaction ratings by one rater, top-down effects should also produce correlations of domain satisfaction ratings by different raters. This prediction is similar to the logic of multi-trait–multi-method studies of personality, in which the presence of higher-order factors is inferred from cross-rater–cross-trait correlations (Anusic et al., 2009). In short, our model allows us to examine the contribution of domain satisfaction to self-informant agreement in ratings of life-satisfaction, and it allows us to examine bottom-up and top-down effects independent of the effects of rating biases.

1.2. Empirical predictions

This is the first study that uses a top-down bottom-up model with self and informant ratings to examine sources of agreement in life-satisfaction ratings. As a result, it is impossible to make a priori predictions on the basis of prior findings. However, we were able to make predictions for some parts of the model on the basis of theories of life-satisfaction judgments and prior findings in the well-being literature. First, we predicted moderate self-informant agreement for global life-satisfaction judgments based on a meta-analysis by Schneider and Schimmack (2009) of self-informant agreement in well-being judgments.

Second, we predicted that there would be self-informant agreement for judgments of domain satisfaction because a few studies have reported agreement for a limited number of domains. For example, Heller, Watson, and Ilies (2006) reported self-informant agreement for spouses' informant ratings of marital satisfaction and job satisfaction. Another study found self-informant agreement for judgments of health satisfaction (Pruchno, Lemay, Field, & Levinsky, 2006).

Our third prediction was that self-informant agreement for domain satisfaction would be higher than self-informant agreement for global life-satisfaction judgments. This novel prediction was based on two assumptions. First, we assume that it is common for people to share information about satisfaction with life domains with close others. Based on our personal experience, we think it is more common to talk about satisfaction or dissatisfaction in specific life domains than to talk about life in general. If our assumption is correct, informants would have more accessible information about domain satisfaction than about satisfaction with life in general. Second, we assume that judgments of domain satisfaction are simpler than judgments of life as a whole. As a result, fewer things can go wrong in a judgment of domain satisfaction.

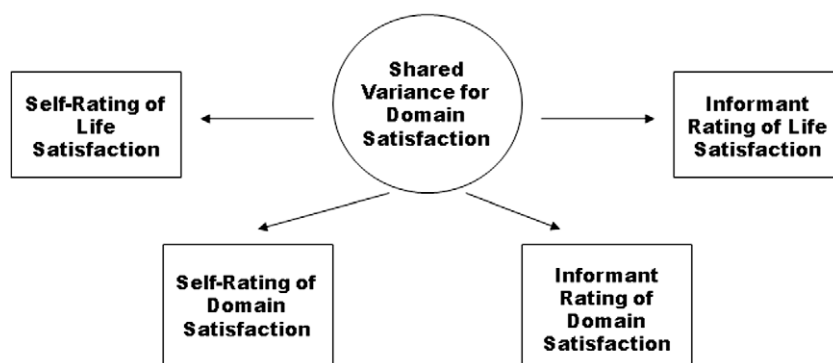


Fig. 1. The shared variance from self-ratings and informant ratings of domain satisfaction influences self and informant ratings of global life-satisfaction.

For example, to judge whether Ann is satisfied with the weather, it is sufficient to know her preferences for temperature and a few other aspects of weather. In contrast, Ann's life is a lot more complex, and it is much more difficult to know all of the relevant information and to integrate this information.

Our fourth prediction was that domain satisfaction judgments would show discriminant validity. That is, self-informant correlations for the same domain should be higher than self-informant correlations for different domains (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). This prediction is based on the finding that self-ratings of different domains are only moderately correlated and differ in their prediction of global life-satisfaction (Schimmack et al., 2002). Moreover, we find it plausible that informants have knowledge about domain specific determinants of satisfaction. For example, John may know that Peter is dissatisfied with his academic performance and satisfied with his romantic relationship.

Fifth, we predict that top-down effects contribute to domain satisfaction; that is, not only domain satisfaction judgments by one rater, but the shared variance between domain satisfaction judgments of both raters. This prediction is based on extensive evidence that personality dispositions like neuroticism influence life-satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999; Schimmack et al., 2002) and satisfaction with specific life domains (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Schimmack, 2008). A top-down model predicts positive correlations across raters and across domains (e.g., self-ratings of academic satisfaction and informant ratings of health satisfaction).

Sixth, we predict that satisfaction with life domains at least partially accounts for self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments. The main reason for this prediction is that both judgments are at least partially based on chronically accessible information about satisfaction with important life domains (Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). It seems likely that both raters agree at least somewhat on the importance of various domains, if only because some domains are in general more important than others (e.g., health is more important than weather; Schimmack et al., 2002). In sum, we make six predictions about self-informant agreement in judgments of global life-satisfaction and domain satisfaction, and only one of these predictions is a replication of prior studies.

2. Method

The data for this study were taken from two dyadic studies of life-satisfaction conducted at the University of Toronto Mississauga. The first sample included 92 dating couples, with 183 participants completing all measures of interest. The mean age of the sample was 19.3 (SD = 1.9), and the average relationship length was 1.6 years (SD = 0.9). The second study involved 145 same-sex friendship pairs (78% female) from the same student population. Two-hundred eighty-nine of these participants completed the measures of interest. The mean age of the sample was 19.1 (SD = 1.4), and the average friendship length was 4.2 years (SD = 4.4). Both members of the dyads served as targets and informants to increase the sample size and statistical power of our analyses based on 472 observations. Although the observations are not independent, the intraclass correlation (i.e., similarity between friends and dating partners in life-satisfaction) was moderate (.38), suggesting that our design considerably boosted power over a traditional design with 236 independent participants and informants. The relatively high power of our study is needed to test the significance of our more complex hypotheses that predict relatively weak correlations (e.g., cross-rater cross-domain correlations).

Participants were seated in separate rooms and completed a variety of tasks and measures. The first measure of interest for this

analysis was a three-item life-satisfaction scale based on the first three items of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). This three-item measure has good reliability (alpha self-ratings = .81, informant ratings = .79). These estimates are only slightly lower than those for the full five-item scale (alpha = .87, Diener et al., 1985). This small difference in reliability has a negligible effect on correlations with domain satisfaction measures. For example, a true correlation of .3 would yield an observed correlation of $r = .28$ with the five-item scale and $r = .27$ with our three-item scale. To arrive at these estimates it is necessary to use the square root of the reliability coefficient because reliability coefficients express reliability in terms of the amount of reliable variance in a measure. Moreover, analyses with Item Response Test models suggest that the first three items have better item characteristics than the last two items (Oishi, 2006). For this reason, we think the shorter three-item measure is preferable to the slightly more reliable five-item scale (Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). We assessed domain satisfaction with single-item indicators. The items were based on the satisfaction item of the SWLS (i.e. I am satisfied with the weather, I am satisfied with my academic life, I am satisfied with my health, I am satisfied with my friendships, I am satisfied with my relationship with my parents). The response format for all ratings was a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. We used single-item measures for three reasons. First, single item domain satisfaction judgments have reliabilities of approximately .6, which is sufficient to obtain reliable parameter estimates in large samples (Schimmack, Krause, Wagner, & Schupp, 2010). Second, we relied on two raters to measure domain satisfaction. Thus, we actually measured domain satisfaction with two items, namely one rating by two raters rather than two ratings by one rater. The Spearman Brown formula predicts a satisfactory reliability of .75 for a two-item measure if each item has a reliability of .6. Finally, we used structural equation modeling to control for random and rater-specific error variance in domain satisfaction judgments. As a result, our parameter estimates fully adjust for the unreliability in domain satisfaction judgments. The main limitation of single-item measures is that lower reliability reduces the observed amount of shared variance which reduces the statistical power of our analyses. However, our relatively large sample size compensates for this limitation. In short, the main implication of using single-item measures of domain satisfaction is that null-results might reflect a type II error due to low statistical power. To address this problem, we report parameter estimates with confidence intervals and avoid the common fallacy of interpreting null-results as evidence for the null-hypothesis.

3. Results

We used MPLUS5 (Muthén & Muthén, 2008) for our data analyses. To account for the dependency of dyadic data we used the cluster function, which estimates the intraclass correlation and adjusts standard errors and fit indices accordingly. Results are evaluated in terms of standard fit indices for structural equation models. According to Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, and Müller (2003), acceptable model fit can be determined with a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) greater than .95, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) smaller than .06, and a Standard Root Mean Residual (SRMR) smaller than .08.

We first examined the observed means, standard deviations (variances), and pattern of correlations for dating couples and friendship pairs (Table 1). We tested mean difference by constraining the means of both groups to be equal. The constrained model did not fit the data, chi-square ($N = 472$, $df = 12$) = 138.09, CFI = .872, RMSEA = .211, SRMR = .067. Inspection of the means

Table 1
Cross-rater cross-measure correlations.

	LS	Weather	Academics	Health	Friends	Family	iLS	iWeather	iAcademics	iHealth	iFriends	iFamily
LS	–	.17	.38	.34	.44	.49	.18	.18	.17	.10	.12	.19
Weather	.27	–	.27	.07	.01	.16	.10	.10	.14	.12	.05	.04
Academics	.53	.21	–	.30	.24	.22	.13	.12	.30	.09	–.03	.06
Health	.42	.20	.36	–	.19	.24	.04	.05	.06	.23	–.03	.09
Friends	.36	.18	.39	.24	–	.33	.01	.13	.02	–.01	.32	.10
Family	.48	.28	.40	.41	.30	–	.17	.05	.09	.08	.17	.46
iLS	.16	.10	.16	.17	.02	.29	–	.02	.35	.40	.26	.40
iWeather	.18	.27	.11	.17	.09	.19	.28	–	.09	.19	.13	.12
iAcademics	.14	.02	.36	.05	–.01	.07	.35	.16	–	.34	.27	.37
iHealth	.16	.04	.10	.38	.10	.15	.41	.26	.25	–	.16	.36
iFriends	.07	.08	.02	.03	.11	.09	.46	.21	.32	.32	–	.41
iFamily	.11	.11	.10	.11	.07	.37	.48	.26	.19	.25	.24	–
M_{friend}	4.88	4.71	4.47	5.23	5.85	5.37	5.01	4.67	4.83	5.41	5.87	5.26
SD_{friend}	1.33	1.73	1.69	1.56	1.15	1.64	1.17	1.66	1.47	1.46	1.08	1.60
M_{dating}	5.57	3.70	4.75	5.69	5.76	5.75	5.02	3.79	4.70	5.25	5.38	5.25
SD_{dating}	.95	1.93	1.61	1.43	1.32	1.31	1.25	1.94	1.72	1.68	1.47	1.75
M_{total}	5.15	4.32	4.58	5.41	5.81	5.52	5.01	4.33	4.78	5.35	5.68	5.25
SD_{total}	1.24	1.87	1.67	1.52	1.22	1.53	1.20	1.82	1.57	1.55	1.27	1.66

Notes: Self-informant correlations highlighted in bold type. Above the diagonal represents the cross-correlations for dating couples. Below the diagonal represents cross-correlations for friendship pairs. LS is an aggregated measure of the first 3 items of the Satisfaction With Life Scale. $N = 289$ for friendship pairs, $N = 183$ for dating couples, $N = 472$ for the entire sample.

revealed the most notable differences in self-rated life-satisfaction, self-rated weather satisfaction, and informant rated weather satisfaction. We also compared the variances using the same approach. Again, the model with constrained variances did not fit the data, chi-square ($N = 472$, $df = 12$) = 77.52, CFI = .933, RMSEA = .152, SRMR = .164. The main differences were observed for variances in self-rated life-satisfaction and informant ratings of satisfaction with friends. Finally, we compared the correlation matrices. A model with constrained correlation coefficients, free means, and free variances did fit the data, chi-square ($N = 472$, $df = 66$) = 108.741, $p = .003$, CFI = .963, RMSEA = .047, SRMR = .080. Overall, these results suggest that the two samples differ in means and variances, but provide similar structural information about the relation among satisfaction measures. Subsequently, we combined the two samples because our main focus was on the structural relations among satisfaction ratings.

We first examined the observed agreement for life-satisfaction and average domain satisfaction. For this comparison, we averaged the five domain satisfaction judgments. As predicted, self-informant agreement of life-satisfaction judgments was significant, $r = .16$ [95% confidence interval .05|.26], although agreement was lower than expected based on the meta-analysis by Schneider and Schimmack (2009). We also found significant agreement in our average measure of domain satisfaction, $r = .30$ [.21|.40]. We next tested the hypothesis of higher agreement for domain satisfaction than for life-satisfaction by constraining these two coefficients. This produced a significant decrease in fit, chi-square ($N = 472$, $df = 1$) = 7.39, $p = .007$, and an unacceptable RSMEA value of .116. Thus, we found support for our hypothesis of significantly greater agreement for domain satisfaction judgments than for life-satisfaction judgments. We also examined whether self-informant agreement varied across domains. However, a model with a single parameter had acceptable fit, chi-square ($N = 472$, $df = 4$) = 8.97, $p = .06$, CFI = .992, RMSEA = .051, SRMR = .027. The estimated agreement for individual domains was similar to the agreement for average domain satisfaction $r = .29$ [.24|.35].

Our next analyses examined the discriminant validity of domain satisfaction ratings. For this purpose, we constrained self-informant correlations of different domains (e.g., self-ratings of weather satisfaction and informant ratings of health satisfaction) to be equal. Again, this model had acceptable fit, ($N = 472$, $df = 19$) = 14.50, $p = .75$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, SRMR = .026.

The parameter estimate showed weak, but significant cross-rater-cross-domain correlations, $r = .07$ [.03|.12]. A combined model confirmed that the cross-rater-same-construct correlation of $r = .29$ was significantly larger than the cross-rater-cross-construct correlation of $r = .07$. This pattern shows convergent and discriminant validity of domain satisfaction judgments (Campbell & Fiske, 1959).

We then fitted the observed covariance matrix to the model in Fig. 2. Model fit was acceptable, chi-square ($N = 472$, $df = 33$) = 58.314, $p = .004$, CFI = .973, RMSEA = .040, and SRMR = .048. To simplify the figure, the measurement model for domain satisfaction factors is not shown. The loadings of self-ratings and informant ratings on the domain satisfaction factors were constrained to be equal based on other findings that self-ratings and informant ratings tend to be equally valid (Anusic et al., 2009). Loadings ranged from .45 to .62. Squaring these loadings reproduces the observed self-informant correlations for domain satisfaction judgments shown in Table 1. Fig. 2 also does not show correlations among the residual variances of ratings by the same rater (self-self and informant-informant ratings). Most of these correlations were significant and positive. Positive correlations among residuals of evaluatively consistent ratings by a single rater are common in multi-trait-multi-rater studies (Anusic et al., 2009). The model in Fig. 2 also fixed paths from unimportant domains like weather to life-satisfaction to zero because these domains do not produce bottom-up effects (Schimmack et al., 2002). As predicted, important life domains like health, family, and academic satisfaction were significant predictors of self-ratings and informant ratings of life-satisfaction. Initially, we also allowed for direct effects of the general satisfaction factor to the prediction of life-satisfaction judgments. However, these paths were not significant. We also allowed for an additional correlation between the residual variances of the life-satisfaction judgments. This correlation was not significant. This finding implies that agreement in the judgments of satisfaction with health, family, and academics fully explains the observed self-informant agreement in our study. Indeed, the reproduced correlation of the model in Fig. 2 closely matched the observed correlation (reproduced $r = .17$ vs. observed $r = .16$).

In sum, the parameter estimates confirm our sixth hypothesis that satisfaction with important life domains contributes to self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments. It would also

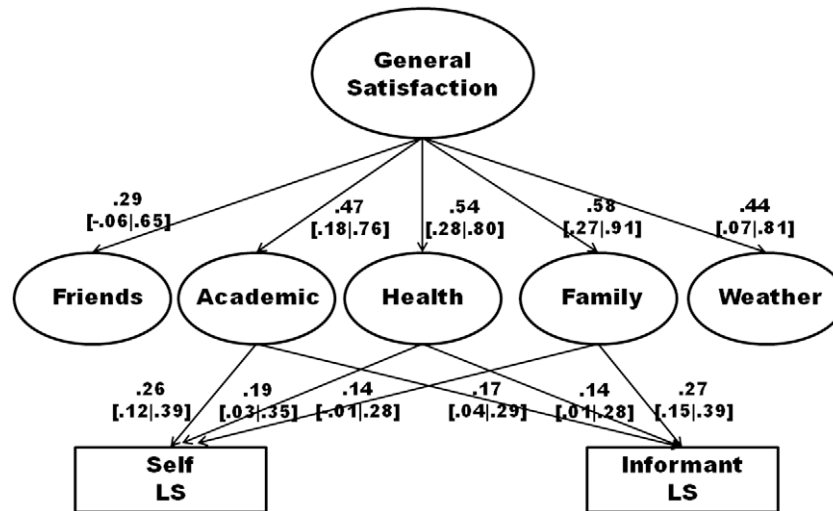


Fig. 2. Top-down bottom-up model. Measurement model of domain satisfaction factors and correlations between same-rater residuals are not shown.

be interesting to examine whether raters weigh domains differently in self-ratings or in informant ratings. However, the wide and overlapping confidence intervals indicate that our study did not have sufficient power to detect significant differences in the weights of the three important domains.

4. Discussion

As predicted, the study found significant self-informant agreement for life-satisfaction judgments and judgments of satisfaction with specific life domains. The study also confirmed the prediction of higher self-informant agreement for domain specific judgments than for global judgments. Judgments of satisfaction with domains also showed clear evidence of discriminant validity. We also demonstrated top-down effects on domain satisfaction using a multi-method approach. Finally, agreement in ratings of satisfaction with health, family, and academic life explained self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments. We briefly discuss the main implications of our findings and then point out limitations and directions for future research.

4.1. Implications

One contribution of our study was to demonstrate the convergent and discriminant validity of domain satisfaction judgments. Informants have access to information about satisfaction with specific life domains and are able to detect differences in satisfaction with different domains. This finding suggests that informant ratings of domain satisfaction provide valid and useful information about individuals' well-being, because well-being is defined as satisfaction with important domains of life. Domain satisfaction judgments are also promising indicators of well-being because they showed higher convergent validity than global ratings of life-satisfaction. Schimmack (2009) showed that a simple average of satisfaction in a few life domains was highly correlated with a life-satisfaction rating and that both well-being indicators correlated similarly with objective predictors of well-being such as unemployment, income, and divorce (Lucas, 2005; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004). This finding suggests that life-satisfaction and domain satisfaction judgments are both sensitive to top-down effects of personality and to bottom-up effects of life circumstances on well-being (Brief, Butcher, George, & Link, 1993). However, personality psychologists have often emphasized top-down effects, presumably because only top-down effects are of interest to per-

sonality psychologists. We think this is an unnecessary restriction. Even domain satisfaction is likely to be influenced by personality characteristics. For example, neuroticism can influence health satisfaction (Brief et al., 1993) and excitement seeking influences well-being in interaction with situational factors (Oishi, Schimmack, & Diener, 2001). To obtain a richer understanding of the contribution of personality to well-being, personality psychologists should include domain satisfaction measures more often in their studies.

A second contribution of our study was to examine top-down processes using a multi-method approach. Most of the support for top-down models has been based on mono-method studies. The main limitation of this approach is that mono-method studies make it difficult to distinguish the effects of global traits from shared method variance (Anusic et al., 2009). We demonstrated substantive correlations among levels of domain satisfaction even though domain satisfaction was assessed with multiple methods. This finding provides multi-method support for the hypothesis that global dispositions produce cross-domain consistency in satisfaction with specific life domains.

The third contribution of our study was to examine the sources of self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction ratings. As predicted, satisfaction with important life domains predicted self-ratings and informant ratings of life-satisfaction. Specifically, we found that satisfaction with health, family, and academic life fully explained self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction, which is consistent with the finding that these domains are rated as important by college students (Schimmack et al., 2002). This finding addresses concerns that life-satisfaction judgments are biased because respondents tend to focus on irrelevant or salient life domains (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2006). Although this may be the case occasionally, our results suggest that respondents use the same domains as informants and that these domains are also rated as more important. The convergence of findings across methods suggests that these domains are important determinants of well-being.

4.2. Limitations and directions for future research

One limitation of our study was the low self-informant agreement for life-satisfaction judgments. Low self-informant agreement reduces the power of our study and made it difficult to find reliable differences in the contribution of domains to life-satisfaction judgments. Future research needs to replicate our study in a

larger sample with more knowledgeable informants to see whether some domains are weighted differently in self-ratings and in informant ratings. Another important question for future research is to determine the reasons for low self-informant agreement in our study. One possible explanation could be low motivation of our participants to provide accurate ratings. However, informants tend to be motivated to be accurate (Vazire, 2006). Moreover, agreement for ratings of domain satisfaction was higher and more consistent with typical findings in the literature. A more likely explanation could be the relatively low average length of relationship in our study. Consistent with this hypothesis, we found in a related study that self-informant agreement is moderated by length of relationship (Schneider et al., in press).

Another limitation of our study was the reliance on a single informant. Using multiple informants makes it possible to relax our assumption that self-ratings and informant ratings are equally valid. A promising approach to obtain data from multiple informants is a round robin design in which everybody serves as a target and informant for all other group members. This approach is particularly promising given recent advances in statistical methods to deal with the problem of interdependent data (Muthén & Muthén, 2008).

A final limitation of our study is the ambiguous nature of rater-specific variance. Rater-specific variance in life-satisfaction judgments may reflect rater biases or valid information that is not shared across raters. For example, targets may have access to unique information about their well-being that is not accessible to informants. A multi-trait–multi-method design does not distinguish between these sources of rater-specific variance. To address this limitation, future studies should include measures of rater biases and objective predictors of well-being.

The limitations of our study should not overshadow its positive contribution. The first study of self-informant agreement in well-being judgment was published 75 years ago (Hartmann, 1934). Nevertheless, our study is the first study that examines the sources of agreement and disagreement in these judgments. The main finding is that self-informant agreement in ratings of important life domains explains self-informant agreement in life-satisfaction judgments. This finding provides support for the use of life-satisfaction judgments as global indicators of well-being (Diener et al., 2009). At the same time, the modest agreement suggests that more valid measures are needed to make progress in well-being research.

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