SELF-IDEAL CONGRUENCE AND SELF COMPLEXITY: THE CONSTRUCTS, THEIR POSITIVE ROLE FOR ADULT EGO DEVELOPMENT AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract
The constructs of Self-ideal congruence and self-complexity are key concepts in the psychological literature of the self, with a variety of theoretical foundations and operational definitions. Strongly impacted by psychoanalytic psychology’s emphasis on ego pathologies, past literature has often focused in linking these two constructs with problematic conditions in the self, in need of therapeutic intervention. As a result there is a very limited theoretical and empirical research examining the role of the two constructs as related to positive self processes. After a brief theoretical review of both constructs in the related literature, I am citing theoretical and empirical evidence that the constructs have a positive role with regards to an adult’s level of psychosocial maturation and development. To support this proposition I am drawing from the constructivist theory on adult ego development (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kegan, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; 1988; Perry, 1999;), adult self-concept structure research (Campbell et al., 2003; Higgins, 1987; Linville, 1985; 1987) and research on adult self-directed learning and intentional change (Boyatzis, 2006; Boyatzis & Kolb, 1969; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & al., 1968; Kolb and Boyatzis, 1970;) in organizational behavior . Supporting this literature with recent empirical research (Akrivou, 2008;), I propose that a positive relationship between self-complexity and self-ideal congruence may signify an adult’s progression towards higher psychosocial development stages of the ego, a core proposition of the constructivist adult development theory. Some
applications for professional, personal and leadership development are offered accordingly.

**Keywords:** Self-Ideal Congruence, Self-Integration, Ideal self, Self-complexity, Self Awareness, Intentional Change Theory, Self-directed Learning.
THE CONSTRUCTS OF SELF-IDEAL CONGRUENCE AND SELF COMPLEXITY AND THEIR POSITIVE ROLE FOR ADULT EGO DEVELOPMENT

The constructs of Self-ideal congruence and self-complexity are key concepts in the psychological literature of the self. A variety of theoretical foundations and definitions are available for each of the constructs in the psychological literature of the self, ranging from psychoanalytic (for example Freud, 1961; Kohut, 1977) to social (Baumeister, 1986; 1998 a, b; ) and developmental psychology (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Erikson, 1950; 1968; Kegan, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; 1988; Perry, 1999). Strongly impacted by psychoanalytic psychology, psychological literature has overemphasized relationships between the constructs and problematic conditions of the ego, in need of therapeutic interventions. For example, the traditional psychoanalytic / clinical research line focused on the study of idealization as a defensive function of the self (Schecter, 1974). Also, self-complexity, or multiplicity in the self, has been the last decades of the 20th century a “demonized” concept in psychology, as much of the theory on the psychology of the self was built on the notion of a “monolithic self-concept” (Power, 2007; Dimaggio et al. in press). As a result there is a very limited theoretical and empirical research examining the role of the two constructs as positive conditions in the self.

In addition, the implicit assumption of a monolithic self-concept that constitutes a “single experiential self” in current (in Power, 2007) and foundational psychological literature on the self (for example, James, 1890) had as consequence that research in a number of lines of psychology of the self often assumed that there is an a priori negative relationship between the two constructs, i.e. they were thought of as antithetical conditions in the self. This paper is focused in showing evidence on a positive role of each construct and that when the constructs are positively related this is an indication of an adult’s level of psychosocial maturation, based on the constructivist theory on adult ego development (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kegan, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; 1988; Perry, 1999; ) and self-concept structure theory (Campbell et al., 2003; Higgins, 1985; 1987; Linville, 1985; 1987) and research on adult self-directed
learning and intentional change (Boyatzis, 2006; Boyatzis & Kolb, 1969; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & al., 1968; Kolb and Boyatzis, 1970;) in organizational behavior.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

SELF-IDEAL CONGRUENCE & AND THE CONSTRUCT OF IDEAL SELF

The construct of self-ideal congruence in the broader psychological literature

Self-ideal congruence is the extent to which a person’s real self image is in harmony with their ideals (Akrivou, 2008).

The degree of discrepancies (or congruence) between the actual (i.e., Real Self) and the person’s Ideal Self have been extensively discussed in the broader literature of psychoanalytic, clinical, social and developmental psychology, as it was seen linked with unique emotional and behavioral consequences (Boldero et al., 1999). This work was based on Rogers (1951, 1961) emphasis on the criticality of the discrepancy between a person’s self-concept and their ideal-self concept as a source of vulnerability.

In another stream of research, the adult self-concept structure research tradition Higgins’s self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987; 1989; Higgins et al. 1985; 1986) focuses extensively on the construct of self-ideal congruence. Higgins specifically focuses on the actual, ought and ideal self, as related to different kinds of self-discrepancies. She sees the construct of ideal self as one of the three different “domains of self” (Higgins, 1987; Higgins et al. 1986; 1988), defining the construct as simply a person’s self-definition of their self as he/she would like to be ideally.

Self-ideal congruence is based in the notion of a person’s ideal self. Psychoanalytic psychology, and especially the work of Freud and Kohut cited earlier, are the foundations, or the origins of construct of the Ideal Self (for a broader review of all psychological literature on the construct, refer to Akrivou, 2004).

Ideal Self
The ideal self is a core psychological component in the self (Baumeister, 1986; 1998, b) partially conscious and partially unconscious. As the capacity for cognitive-affective Ideal Self formation “is more strongly rooted in some personalities than in others” (Schecter, 1974) and it is both privately formed and socially constructed (in Nasby, 1997; Schecter, 1974). Strongly impacted by psychoanalytic psychology that idealization is a defensive function of the self, in need of therapy (in Schecter, 1974), the construct of ideal self has not been examined in theoretical and empirical research on positive self processes; only recently theories in positive psychology promoted the positive effects and role of the ideal self for self-motivation, regulation and affect (for more on this refer to Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

A comprehensive definition of the construct of ideal self can be found in Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2006). Based on a model by Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) it is proposed that the Ideal Self is composed of three major components:

“The Ideal Self contains imagery of a desired future (a Novel one, or one existing over time, or one continually forming and revisited). This image is the articulation or realization of the person’s dreams, aspirations, and fantasies. It is of cognitive nature yet, fuelled by the affect resulting from one’s passion, dreams, and values. Specifically, we believe the person’s Dreams of the Desired Future/State are a function of his/her sense of calling or purpose in life; driven by their passion, values and operating philosophy; and stage in life or one’s career. Secondly, the Ideal Self is emotionally fuelled by hope. Although the psychological processes related to hope are still under research, most researchers agree that hope is caused by the degree of the person’s optimism. Also, it is the expression of their degree of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy determines their perceptions of possibilities— to differentiate this component from “pie in the sky” or false hope (Groopman)…. The third component of the Ideal Self is the person’s core identity. This is relatively stable, and likely unconscious set of enduring individual characteristics, like his/her unconscious motives and traits, as well as roles adopted consistently in social settings. In this manner, the core identity is the personal context within which underlies the historical and continuing aspects of a person’s Ideal Self and one’s deeply seated autobiographical themes that make a vision coherent and intense”.

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The notion of self-ideal congruence and its positive role in the adult ego development literature

Self-ideal congruence is a key variable for ego development theories, seen as one of the self development processes manifesting the progression to higher development stages of the ego\(^1\). *Constructivist theories of adult ego development*, is the theory line among ego development theory that study the evolution in the individual’s conceptual frames of reference from more simple, to superior forms of knowing; they opine that the fundamental human need for communication and meaning drives a person to form conceptual frames of reference that allow the clustering, analysis and subsequent integration into them of every phenomenon they encounter (Akrivou, 2008). Constructivist theory of adult development is interested in the progression of a person’s “ways of knowing” following specific stages, each being a different way of how people understand reality and make meaning, or a different epistemology, worldview, or “way of knowing” (Cook-Greuter, 1999).

All constructivist adult development theories agree on a sequence for adult psychosocial and cognitive maturation, starting from acquisition of more simple forms/skills of meaning making, to an increase in their complexity in meaning making, through the (conventional) adaptation to social demands and roles, towards higher self-maturation stages that allow for creativity, freedom, authenticity, self-actualization and impact to society (Akrivou, 2008). These theories posited that the ability of an adult to bring about congruence between their actual and ideal self(ies) - i.e. self-ideal congruence- was the sign of developmental progression in higher psychosocial development stages. This reference to self-ideal congruence is particularly evident in the work of Piaget (1948) and Rogers (1951; 1954; 1961).

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\(^1\) Ego adult development theory is based on Fingarette’s definition that the ego is the fundamental mechanism that strives for meaning and integration in humans (Fingarette, 1963).
Especially, the so called “conventional view” of adult psycho-social development, based on Piaget’s influence from The Moral Judgment of the Child (1948), sees self-ideal congruence as a sign for (conventional) adaptation and development. The Piagetian view of highest ego development stage is his “formal operational thinking stage”, referring to the formation of an autonomous and independent self, where a person thinks and feels his/her identity as separate and feels responsible and autonomous in one’s choice of action. The Piagetian view emphasizes a stage of mental reasoning on moral situations that is characterized by the actual congruence between the real or, social self and the ideal self. It describes the integrated self as a free of conflicts in the ego sphere, and the ability of a person to act in the world based on their ideals and values - or in psychological terms to harmonize between their ideal and real self.

In Rogers’s earlier theory on selfhood (Rogers, 1951), self-ideal congruence is defined as the ability of a person to achieve congruency among his/her real-social and inner (or ideal) self. He defined conventional self-integration, as congruence with a person’s real-social and inner (or ideal) self. The notion of congruence between one’s self-concept and one’s ideal self-concept was central to client-centered theory of personality and personality change. Rogers (1961) distinguished between the “as of now self” and the self “a person would like to be”, i.e. the ideal self. In his definition, Rogers emphasized an allowance for a person’s purely internal locus for evaluation of choices and decisions (or evaluative judgments). This was distinguished from a person looking to others for approval and disapproval, or for standards to live by.

Perry emphasized the ability of commitment and orientation in a relative world. Humanistic psychology influenced Perry’s scheme on ethical and intellectual development (Perry, 1999), in conceiving self-integration as commitment to a

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2 This reference to self-ideal congruence is seen as the “conventional” view, or the “modernity” view of what a self-integrated adult is (Kegan, 1994; Taylor, 1989), because it trusts that a rational, scientific approach is adequate to answer all the questions on the self. Furthermore, it supposes that the person is able to control and drive his/her life towards congruence between their real and ideal self, thus achieving self-actualization. Such a conception of self-integration has been reviewed by post-conventional theorists as favoring a view of the integrated person as “a clearly separate self-contained system and other human beings as such systems in their own right” (Cook-Greuter, 1999). Piaget, himself, also saw his formal operations stage as a prototype for the mature functioning of modern society in his times and place.
person’s ideal self. More dense, abstract and less straightforward definitions of what self-ideal congruence exist by adult ego development researchers that are known as post-Piagetian, or post-conventional constructivist ego development theorists (Cook-Greuter, 1999). Among them, Loevinger (1976) defines the construct as closely related to her *integrated ego state*, as having an “integrated sense of unique identity, in which ‘one’s precious life’s work’ is regarded as inevitable simultaneous expression of self, principle and one’s humanity”.

Finally, Kegan (1994;) captures the construct of self-ideal congruence in his fourth order of consciousness in his theory. In Kegan’s work the notion of self-ideal congruence is synonymous with the construct for *self-authorship*, characterized by striving for identity, individuation and autonomy. The value of self-actualization and reaching wholeness is this form of identity consolidation. For Kegan, the key motivating mechanism for reaching self-ideal congruence is striving for goals related to self-actualization and self-completion. Kegan views that self-ideal congruence is not the end of the developmental process, but instead it is just the beginning of the later, highest phase of development marked by the need to move from seeing oneself as a “perfect, finished product” (Kegan, 1994) towards forming an entirely open, undefensive and interactive way of being in the social reality.

SELF-COMPLEXITY; DEFINITIONS AND ITS ROLE IN THE SELF

The notion of differentiation and complexity of self in psychology

The construct of self-complexity is embedded in the notion of *differentiation* is a key concept for a broad number of research lines in developmental psychology (Akrivou, 2008), such as psychoanalytic theory (for example, Adler, 1964; Mahler et

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3 Definitions:

“differentiate v.
1 distinguish, discriminate, contradistinguish, separate, contrast, oppose, set off or apart, tell apart: They must learn how to differentiate one species from another.
2 modify, specialize, change, alter, transform, transmute, convert, adapt, adjust: All organisms possess the power to differentiate special organs to meet special needs.

*Oxford Dictionary.*
al. 1975), object relations theory (for example, Kernberg, 1976), self-psychology on identity, development and adjustment (Block, 1961; Erikson, 1950; 1968; Blasi & Glodis, 1995); theories of cognitive development in childhood, adolescence and adulthood (for detailed references, read Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Cook-Greuter, 1999; Erikson, 1950; 1968; Blasi & Glodis, 1995); and among them for constructivist adult ego development theory (Kegan, 1982, Lahey, 1986; Loevinger, 1966, 1976, Piaget, 1962; Perry, 1999). All of these fields use separate terminologies to describe each construct and their relationship as seemingly structurally similar phenomena of psychic organization (Johnson, 2000).

Although there are commonalities in the abstract conception of differentiation there is not a consistent use of the term. Psychoanalytic theory views the increasing complexity of the self as distinct stage or phase (Mahler et al. 1975). On the other side, constructivist adult ego development theory (Kegan, 1982, Lahey, 1986; Loevinger, 1966, 1976, Piaget, 1962; Perry, 1999), object relations (Kernberg, 1976) and self-psychology (Kohut, 1977) all agree in their view of differentiation as a core process for human growth and development (Johnson, 2000). Another inconsistency is related to the extent to which differentiation is viewed as an end state of psychosocial maturation in adulthood (Erikson, 1968), or a stage of development that begins in infancy and is completed in childhood (Mahler et al., 1975).

The construct and positive role of self-complexity in the adult ego development literature

Developmental psychology has been profoundly influenced by biological observations of evolution - viewing the growth and development of every living organism is lying in its ability to differentiate itself from its surrounding and other organisms. As a result, differentiation has been viewed as a key mechanism for adult psychosocial development and learning (Kolb, 1984), based on biological observations of evolution, arguing that by increasing an organism’s ability for specialization in order to serve a special function or purpose. Differentiation is viewed as having two aspects, being (1) an increasing complexity of units and (2) a decreasing interdependence of parts (Akrivou, 2008; Cook-Greuter, ; Johnson, 2000).
In adult ego development theory higher, or the highest ego growth stages are seen coming about after an increase in self-complexity, thus the progressive increase in an adult’s self-complexity is seen as the major developmental phenomenon underlying the whole process of adult development. Its most encompassing definition as a developmental phenomenon originates from Werner’s (1948) orthogenic principle, stating that “growth proceeds from a state of relative globality to one of greater complexity. It is also defined by Mahler’s 1968 use of the term to refer to a child’s ability to see herself/himself as complex internally and distinct from the others (Johnson, 2000).

All constructivist adult development theories agree on a sequence for adult psychosocial and cognitive maturation, starting from acquisition of more simple forms/skills of meaning making, to an increase in their complexity in meaning making and the self, through the (conventional) adaptation to social demands and roles, towards higher self-maturation stages that allow for creativity, freedom, authenticity, self-actualization and impact to society (Akrivou, 2008). This theorized increase in self-complexity or self-multiplicity is seen by ego development theory as a key variable that in other words is seen as manifesting, or underlying a person’s ability to move towards higher abilities of ego and cognitive maturation. (Akrivou, 2008).

The construct of self-complexity and its positive role in the adult self-concept structure research

Applied and social psychology, especially the self-concept structure line of theory and research have been impacted by the centrality of the construct of differentiation / complexity of self in the psychoanalytic and developmental psychology. Self-concept research has exploded during the last twenty years. Theory on the self-concept has focused on the content of the adult self-concept (Campbell et. al.; 2003). In self-concept research, self-concept structure is a relatively new field of research, using the construct of self-complexity. Self-concept structure researchers focus on the underlying dynamics in the structure of the adult self-concept; the structure of self-concept refers to how content within the self-concept is organized.
This line of work is very heavily influenced by the work of Markus on concepts of self and schemata in social psychology (Markus, 1977, Markus et al. 1985; 1986 a, b), and her idea that individuals are free to create any variety of possible selves.

Among the self-concept structure researchers the complexity or multiplicity researchers are exploring the role and positive effects of self-complexity in the self, arguing that greater complexity (or pluralism) in the self-structure enhances psychological well-being, arguing that self-complexity allows the person to possess numerous specialized identities that allow them to show situational and contextual adaptability (Akrivou, 2008). They reason that greater complexity allows for faster and better responses to changing circumstances and various audiences / social roles / groups they encounter. Among the researchers whose work dealt with self-complexity, prominent are Linville, with her work on self-complexity (Linville, 1985), and Showers’ (1992) research on compartmentalization.

Linville’s work on self complexity (Linville, 1985, 1987) is a very good operational definition for the construct because it is very congruent with the notion of differentiation in psychology which is described earlier in this article, based on Akrivou, 2008. Self-complexity is defined as “having more self-aspects and maintaining greater distinctions among self-aspects” (Linville, 1987, p. 664), and “the numbers of self-aspects that a person utilizes to represent his/her self internally, and the degree of redundancy between these self-aspects” (Linville, 1982; 1985). Linville’s conceptualization of self-complexity focuses on a person’s ability to possess numerous specialized identities. Thus, this conceptualization assumes that the self-concept consists of multiple “self-aspects” or cognitive categories (Campbell et al, 2003; Campbell et al. 1991) and it focuses on self-identity complexity. Linville proposed that self-complexity is a necessary higher level mechanism of self-regulation and positive coping that keeps negative experiences and affect in some self-aspects and domains from “spill over” into global self-esteem and the affective experience of the person. Linville, in her conceptualization, hypothesized that high degrees of self-complexity buffer stress by preventing negative events that occur in one self-aspect from “spilling over” and negatively affecting other self-aspects. This

Showers (1992) defines the construct of self-complexity as compartmentalization of a person’s self-concept; compartmentalization refers to the degree to which a person separates positive or negative information and knowledge about the self into separate, uniformly valenced self-aspects. She hypothesized that there is an interaction between compartmentalization and the differential importance of a person’s negative and positive self-aspects that affects psychological adjustment. Specifically, she hypothesized that when greater importance is given to positive self-aspects, rather than to negative self-aspects, compartmentalization should result in higher levels of adjustment (Campbell et al. 2003). Showers uses a measure of fragmentation that requires first completion of Linville’s trait sorting measure and subsequently processing it statistically in a different way.

Donahue et al. (1993) defines self-concept differentiation as the degree to which a person is differentiated among different social roles. Thus, in this definition of self-complexity the focus is on consistency of behavior across roles is salient. They offered a measure of self-concept differentiation (SCD), capturing the degree to which one has dissimilar traits across roles, which is the operational definition of self-complexity they offer.

**DISCUSSION**

As shown, the constructivist literature on adult development discussed extensively in theory the construct of **self-ideal congruence**, as a sign for adult psychosocial and cognitive maturation in the higher stages of adult development (Akrivou, 2008), highlighted especially in the work of Rogers (1951) and Piaget (1962).

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4 Despite their work and measure on self-concept differentiation, Donahue et. al. are not included in the “complexity” or “multiplicity” researchers in the self-concept structure literature. As their work primarily seeks to support the argument on a positive role of unity of self-concept structure and the negative effects of differentiation, literature (Campbell et al., 2003) classifies them as unity self-concept structure researchers.
Unfortunately this literature has not empirically explored the theorized (positive) role of self-ideal congruence as linked to higher stages of ego growth.

The positive role of self-ideal congruence in the self was explored empirically within the self-directed Learning Theory (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1969; Kolb & al., 1968; Kolb and Boyatzis, 1970). Based on the related theory of Rogers (1951; 1961) the reduction of the discrepancy between a person’s actual and ideal self images (or selves) was seen by these researchers as a direction for behavior change interventions; it was proposed that an increase in self awareness can be utilized as a mechanism for increasing the degree of congruence in the actual and ideal concepts of self. One of Self-directed Learning Theory’s main hypotheses was that self-directed change lies in the self-regulation mechanisms that motivate dissonance-reduction. This motivation is caused by experienced discrepancy between a person’s real and ideal self images, goals and ideals, in line with Festinger’s (1957) theory on cognitive dissonance. In studies of successful self-directed change efforts, change was indeed proved to be a function of a person’s ability to maintain awareness of the dissonance between a person’s ideal and current self (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1969; Winter et al. 1968; Kolb & Boyatzis, 1970).

Also, the positive role of self-ideal congruence in the self has been the focus of the work of Higgins and colleagues, a self-concept structure research theorist. Specifically, Higgins showed that self-ideal congruence in linked to psychological health and adjustment. They are following classic work on the importance of self-unity in allowing continuity and psychological stability in changing life circumstances, phases and roles, such as Block’s (1961) and Rogers’ (1959).

The literature on the role of self-complexity in the self was heavily impacted by James’s, in 1890, who defined self-complexity as maladaptive behavior requiring clinical treatment, or the Block tradition, which saw complexity as the opposite of coherence and hence as the cause of psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and physical symptoms (Block, 1961; James, 1902; Rogers, 1959). Thus, the majority of psychological literature has often assumed that an increased self-complexity has a negative role in the self.
Only recently literature in psychoanalytic and clinical cognitive psychology has started to explore positive effects of self-complexity in the self. Current researchers such as Dimaggio et al. (in press) and Powers (2007) focus on exploring when/how increased complexity of the self can be positive if it does not hinder that at the same time the self is operating like a harmonious whole, which is the self-integrated person (Akrivou, 2008). In regards to this matter, Power mentions (2007) that “the self (is) as a symphony orchestra, when the different parts of the orchestra play in harmony with each other, then the overall experience is of an integrated whole……. Indeed, this same experience of integration can be apparent when one or more sections of the orchestra is silent or absent. Alternatively, there can be a discordant sense of disintegration if the different orchestral parts do not coordinate with each other, for example if each part were to play a different tune”. In this work, one can see that emphasis is now attributed in the clinical psychology of the self to the notion of false, versus true integration of the self, irrespectively of how complex vs. how unified (non complex) the self is. Based on this latest school of clinical research, a person with high self-complexity who is able for true integration, is seen as more psychologically stable and healthy, compared to a person with low self-complexity with “false integration”, or a person with “confused disintegration” (Power, 2007).

Now, coming to the question of when self-complexity/differentiation plays a positive developmental role in the self, As summarized earlier, the self-concept structure literature, accomplished on measures of complexity also focuses empirical research in exploring the positive effects of self-complexity in the self. Self-concept structure researchers that investigate the positive role of self-complexity in the self concept of adults enhances psychological well being, coping and adjustment. A summary of this research can be found in the work of Campbell (Campbell et al., 2003).

As to the positive role of self complexity for adult psychosocial maturation, I draw from adult psychosocial development theory and particularly the work on differentiation, or complexity of self done by Johnson (2000). With her research she
showed that the concept of differentiation is fundamentally linked to the construct of adult psychosocial growth and development. I will discuss this role of self-complexity

The (positive) relationship between self complexity and self-ideal congruence, as sign of an adults psychosocial ego maturity.

To my knowledge there is very limited research exploring the theorized (positive) relationship between the constructs of self-ideal congruence and self-integration in the literature. Within self-concept structure theory there is an assumption that self-complexity and self-ideal congruence in the self concept of adults represent antithetical conditions in the self concept of adults - the first representing differentiation and the second representing unity in the adult self-concept - thus, they are (should be) negatively related variables (Campbell et al., 2003). The theory assumes that they are negatively related concepts. Therefore, it can be implied that high levels of congruence in a person’s ideal-real self concepts should be seen with low levels of complexity. This theoretical view is based on the different basic assumptions of self-coherence and self-integration. However, the few existing empirical studies in the self-concept structure research line show the two variables as unrelated (Campbell et al., 2003).

Constructivist theory of adult ego development a positive association between the two constructs may be evidence for an adult’s psychological maturation in higher ego states. The progression towards higher and the highest ego development states was seen from constructivist ego development theory as the combination of high levels of (a) cognitive complexity in the self, or self complexity (b) self-ideal congruence and (c) the ability for more fluid, and contextual forms of knowing, a relational and process-oriented self view. (Akrivou, 2008). For example, Loevinger saw as a sign of both the Autonomous and Integrated stages”, the combination between high levels of self-complexity and the achievement of self-ideal congruence, as she was primarily concerned with how individuals approach inner conflicts throughout the developmental progression. In Kegan’s theory on subject-object development (Kegan, 1994) an increase in complexity of self is seen as a pre-cursor
for the ability of a person to also achieve self-authorship because the ability for increased complexity in a “person’s structures of knowing” (regarding both the self and other “objects” outside the self) was seen as allowing the person to become less embedded, or egocentric, and able to take broader, more complex and more integrated perspectives in the “object world” (Johnson, 2000).

Thus, based on constructivist theory on adult ego development (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kegan, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; 1988; Perry, 1999; ) there is plenty of theoretical evidence, but very limited empirical evidence on the (positive) relationship between complexity and integration of self, which are by nature longitudinal processes in the self. This is because most research that is accumulated in this literature is data from cross-sectional studies, used to inform theory on this matter indirectly. It is not easy to capture the relationship in existing literature without longitudinal designs. In support of this theory a recent cross-sectional study conducted by the author of this article showed that self-complexity and self-ideal congruence are positively related variables, (Akrivou 2008;). The exploration of the relationship between self-complexity and self-ideal congruence was only one of the three research questions of this study.

Data was collected from 198 individuals. Three quarters of the sample consisted of middle and senior level managers in three large multinational companies and a medium sized organization, based in the Midwest United States. The remaining one quarter of the sample were individuals in managerial or professional careers in multinational or professional service firms, and most of them were alumni in graduate degree professional programs in a research university in the Midwestern United States. The sample was fairly well balanced in terms of gender, with 43.6 percent males (82 participants), and 56.4 percent females (106 individuals). In terms of education, it was a fairly well educated sample – as expected, given the fact that mainly this study recruited participants who work mainly in medium and higher rank management roles in global and/or complex industries. Accordingly, 38 individuals had secondary degrees (20.2 percent), 74 hold a University degree (39.4 percent), 64 have earned a Masters degree (34 percent) and 12 individuals had a doctoral degree (6.4 percent). Eighty five percent of the sample was Caucasians. The
sample age representation was very balanced between young, middle aged and mature professionals.

The data collection took place through a relatively long web-based survey. A set of psychological and survey instruments were used. Among them, the construct of self-complexity was captured based on Linville’s (1987) operational definition and test - The measure is patterned after one developed by Scott, 1969 and Scott et al., 1979 (in Linville, 1985). The concept of self-ideal congruence was captured using the use of Higgins et al. (1985; 1986) self-discrepancy test – it was based in one of the independent sub-scores of this test.

Supporting the related hypotheses, a positive significant relationship between Self-complexity and Self-Ideal Congruence was found in the Akrivou study. This study comes to fill the gap seen between the good amount of theory and the limited empirical research investigating the positive role and relationships between the constructs of self-complexity and self-ideal congruence in the self. The results of this research are based in a very good sample size and the use of well validated measures to capture the constructs outside the adult development literature – existing measures to capture one or both of the constructs in this literature have face validity only.

The confirmation of the hypothesis that self-complexity and self-ideal congruence are positively related is an important finding, because it contests an often “common sense” and long established view that the more complex a person, the less congruency can be found between their actual and ideal selves. Also the positive relationship found is some empirical support for the related theory in the constructivist adult development literature that self complexity facilitates the achievement of higher psychosocial ego development stages, as manifested in a person’s ability to bring congruency in their ideal-real selves. Following the development of language in childhood this evolution in the meaning making abilities of an adult occurs via the experience

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5 For more details on the sample and measures, refer to Akrivou, 2008
6 Beta and adjusted R square are at .2 and at .042 (p=.002). Standard error is at .17 and t value is at 3.08 (N=197). After controlling for age, it was found that this relationship was much stronger for females than for males in the group.
of increasing multiplicity and relativism in a person’s self-identity, which is an increase in self-complexity. The increase in the ability of the person to experience different selves in turn facilitates the further growth of a person’s ability to distinguish between the self and the world as it is opening up developmental processes of dialectical forms of knowing. On the other hand, the study shows that Self-complexity may be important, but it is not sufficient for the achievement of self-ideal congruence, as the magnitude of the effects found showed small effect sizes. This points to the need for more research investigating other variables that are related to self-ideal congruence.

The evidence of this study informs on the assumption that self-complexity as the most effective or, the highest form of self-identity by the early and latest post-modern literature on the self (for example, Gergen, 1991). This finding may be useful for the argument that self-multiplicity is an effective personal ability, but it may be a rather limited individual cognitive and emotional resource. In addition to the positive effects of self-complexity discussed in the literature related to coping with stress and adjustment (Campbell, et al. 2003; Linville, 1985; 1987) this study shows that there is potentially an even more beneficial role of self-complexity: its use for the achievement of self-integration (since it is shown in this study that the two variables are positively related).

Finally, results of the Akrivou study may point evidence to show that a positive association between the two constructs does not occur always, but when it occurs it may be evidence for an adult’s maturation and his/her progression towards higher psychosocial development stages of the ego, based on the constructivist adult development literature. “Nothing can be sole and whole that has not been rent”, as Yeats writes; constructivist developmental theorists posit that the more evolved and internally differentiated individuals become, the more elements from more diverse sources and at higher order of synthesis they can simultaneously process and integrate into a coherent system of meaning (Akrivou, 2008). Of course in this case, additional longitudinal research would be needed to explore if self-complexity is causally linked to (or, an antecedent of) self-ideal congruence.
CONCLUSION AND APPLICATIONS

This article discussed the constructs of self-ideal congruence and self-complexity in the literature emphasizing theoretical and some empirical evidence on their positive relationship and role in the self. Besides its value in supporting the related theory lines it is drawing from, such positive discussion of the constructs and their role in the self is part of a contribution to positive psychology (Seligman et al., 2000). Also, it intends to further support theory building, empirical research and applications in the field of adult development.

In the field of adult development, applications related to professional and leadership development are ones that can be more clearly connected with adult constructivist ego development theory. This article offers a direction and framework for human development that aims in increasing a person’s self-complexity and self-ideal congruence, and working with individuals to establish a positive association between the two constructs through behavioral change and an increase in self awareness. In relationship to personal, professional and leadership development work, if one agrees with the view that individuals indeed can develop psychosocially and behaviorally, or that leaders are made rather than born, then what becomes critical for personal, group, organizational and societal change is how they develop (for example, see Rooke & Torbert, 2005). An interesting path for development is the one that focuses in the development of both self-ideal congruence and self-complexity. I would like to end by adding that this proposed developmental path should be seen as complementary to work on adult learning and change that aims in increasing a person’s self awareness and an increase in a person’s intentionality and ability for self-direction (for example, Boyatzis, 2006; Boyatzis & Kolb, 1969; 1999), as they are all “grounded in theory on how adults learn and change”, which has been described by Collins, & Holton (2004) as an important prerequisite of adult development applications.
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