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**Adults' use of role models: Relations with general self-efficacy
and satisfaction with life**

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Abstract. A lot is known about role model influence and how it affects children's attitudes in important life decisions. Yet the same field is virtually unexplored regarding adults. This study conducted multiple regression analyses on a sample of adults ($N = 219$) to examine if role model influence within two areas in life, studies/work and love/family, would significantly predict general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. The study also examined adults' need for authority in a role model as well as whether a same-sex or non-same-sex figure would be the most influential role model type. Results confirmed that role model influence within studies/work was significantly associated with general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. It also showed that role model influence within love/family was significantly associated with satisfaction with life. Furthermore, adults preferred same-sex role models as well as role models on an equal authoritarian level. The conclusions were that adults, similar to children, used role models and that this influence was significantly connected to positive psychological mechanisms as hypothesized.

A role model can be described as “someone to whom individuals look or to whom they turn for social and emotional support and affirmation or from whom they seek to learn something (Mertz, 2004, p. 552) or someone whose life and activities influenced the respondent in specific life decisions” (Basow & Howe, 1980, p. 559).

Role model influence has been thoroughly examined in previous research literature (Bandura, 1971, 1977; Tumangday, 1977) and therefore we know they have great impact on children and adolescents. We also know they represent important mechanisms that help young people find support and guidance in life and, as an effect, moderates their well-being (Ruggeri, Luan, Keller & Gummerum, 2018). Furthermore, social learning has been established to be a powerful instrument for sharing knowledge and steer young people's attitudes towards constructive positions (Tumangday, 1977). Until now, however, most research has been focused on children and adolescents with the result that theories about adult's possible use of role models have been left fairly unexplored. The focus on young people is presumably a result of the established assumption that mainly children and adolescents are in the process of shaping their identities by exploring questions such as who they are, what their values look like and which their overall goals in life will be. In the process of forming their identities they also face higher moral uncertainties which makes them more inclined to rely on external support to maintain and understand moral and social norms (Ruggeri et al., 2018).

The importance of role models has been documented in various literature and research has established that role model influence had impact on young people's decision-making, attitudes, actions and well-being. Role model influence was, for example, proven to affect young people's goals and self-efficacy in relation to studies and work (Akbulut, 2016; Austin & Nauta, 2016; Young, Rudman, Buettner & McLean, 2013) and their

overall attitudes towards conscientious events such as speeding (Møller & Hausein, 2013), use of cosmetic surgery (Sharp, Tiggemann & Mattiske, 2014), and alcohol consumption (Trim & Chassin, 2008). No similar studies has been done with adults and as a result we still know very little about what kind of influence role models can have on adults' attitudes and decision making. The studies that did focus on adults were mainly focused on career-related contexts where mentorship has been found to be a productive influence that was associated with higher salaries (Whitely & Coetsier, 1993) and more satisfaction (Fagenson, 1989). A mentor can be described as "an experienced employee who serves as a role model, provides support, direction and feedback regarding career plans and interpersonal development" (Day et al., 2003, p. 77). Day et al. (2003) examined 125 men and women who worked in an American municipality. They found that having a mentor was associated with higher levels of career motivation, performance, and career self-efficacy.

The predominant focus on career development has, in any case, left gaps in the research field with open questions such as to which extent do adults benefit from role model influence in contexts outside of the professional arena? For this reason, the current study intended to examine at least one more context. Family/love life was chosen as it is a context where the majority of adults probably struggle from time to time to find balance, progress and meaning. In accordance, previous research has shown that studies/work and having meaningful and supportive relationships were two areas with great impact on people's well-being (Diener, 2021). It is therefore feasible that role model influence would be a significant contributor for adults' decision-making and well-being also within the love/family arena.

Another important question is whether the concept of role model influence can be applied to adults in the same way as on children and adolescents? For example, one study (Ruggeri et al., 2018) suggested that the need for authority shifted during adolescence and that adults do not depend on authoritarian guidance in the same way that children do. The experimental study examined how attitudes towards fairness (give half or nothing) differed between children and adults depending on type of role model (peer or adult). The study ($N = 365$) included participants from Italy and Singapore and the role model influence was stated explicitly by the randomly assigned role model, for example: "*If I were you, I would give half of them*". The results showed that role model influence did affect the participants in intended direction, regardless of age, and that children were more affected by adults whereas adults were more affected by peers. These findings corresponded with other research that also found that adults did not prioritize authority in a role model in the same way that children did, but rather an equal such as near-peers, colleagues, and co-residents (Foss, 2017; Kivnick, Driessen, Wardwell & Duncan Davis, 2019; Sternszus, Cruess, Cruess, Young & Steinert, 2012). By influencing the participants to split rewards, either selfishly or unselfishly, Ruggeri et al. (2018) could also show correlations between pro-social decisions (sharing unselfishly) and feelings of happiness which was an important finding as it indicated that role model induced behavior was correlated with general well-being. For this reason it is important to continue to do research on adults with the same curiosity as on young people, both in terms of effects and contexts. By doing so, appropriate measures can be taken to benefit as much as possible from this important type of interaction, especially since Ruggeri et al. (2018) could show relationships between role model induced behavior and generic happiness/well-being.

Social learning theory

This study used the framework from the social learning theory (Bandura 1971, 1977) as it, in accordance with the theory, emerged from the idea that knowledge and attitudes are primarily transmitted via social interactions. Bandura (1977) described the social learning process as a combination between cognitive processes and performance-based procedures. By this he meant that it is not enough to only tell someone about a successful attitude or behavior, but to make sure it is properly internalized it also needs to be exhibited by a role model repeatedly. By doing so the role model enables the other person to understand, approve and eventually identify with the attitude or behavior that is presented. Hence, Bandura (1971) identified four intertwined subprocesses: Attentional process, Retention process, Motoric reproduction process and Reinforcement and motivational process. In short, the first three processes means that role model behavior needs to be repeated and accepted, needs to be accessible over time and needs to be demonstrated in order to be effective. The fourth process means that the behavior also needs to be positively reinforced. As these conditions are similar to what you would normally expect to find in a parent – child relationship (emotional closeness, accessibility and cultural similarity) it is often hypothesized that parents, and same-sex parents in particular, are the strongest influencing role models. For this reason, Basow and Howe (1980) conducted a study on 62 adolescents (understudy graduates) with the intention to examine relationships between gender of the role model and how much influence would be transmitted depending on if the recipient was male or female. The results showed that female students were most influenced by their mothers and female teachers whereas the male students were most influenced by their fathers and male teachers. The findings supported the idea that children and adolescents find most inspiration in authorities and that same-sex role models are the most influential role model types.

When explaining the Social Learning theory, Bandura (1971) also discussed the unique impact that was transmitted from role models exposed via television as he thought of media profiles as being especially effective in drawing attention to themselves. Being charismatic was another important characteristic for a role model as research showed that some people were more imitated than others and that people seemed to unconsciously choose who they wanted to take influence from (Gibson, 2003; Tumangday, 1977). Several studies confirmed that role models in media had a strong influence on its followers (Gladding & Villalba, 2014; Sharp et al., 2014; Yazici & Aslan, 2011). For instance, one study (Sharp et al., 2014) examined media exposure and its influence on women's attitudes towards cosmetic surgery. The study found that exposure to appearance-focused advertisements and television shows such as *Sex and the City* correlated significantly with positive attitudes towards cosmetic surgery.

Role models and self-efficacy

Bandura (1977) also described the close connection between role model influence and individuals' *self-efficacy*, here defined by him as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcome” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). The overall idea was that having a role model who could explain, demonstrate and encourage an attitude or a behavior would give the person a higher self-efficacy in

regard to that specific task. This relationship was for example explored in research where 15 women within the mathematic field were interviewed about their experiences from pursuing their careers (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). The women clearly expressed that having role models in everyday life and from an early age had been a strong contributing factor for the women's self-efficacy in their professional careers. The role models (parents, relatives, siblings and teachers) had reinforced the women in different ways, such as included them in mathematic problem solving, encouraged them verbally, explained things in understandable ways and had not made difference between boys and girls in their teaching. By having these positive role models, the women experienced high levels of self-efficacy in the mathematic field which made them resilient, persistent and eventually successful in their career pursuits. This outcome resonated with statements from Bandura (1977) as he found that level of self-efficacy would predict how long a person would persist when facing obstacles and setbacks. Role models' positive effect on self-efficacy has also been examined in quantitative, correlational studies where role model influence was found to be associated with women's entrepreneurial intentions (Austin et al., 2016).

Role models and satisfaction with life

Research has also shown that having a role model may be associated with overall well-being, for instance the feeling of being satisfied with life (Lian, Sun, Yang & Zhou, 2018). One explanation is that people who have role models can be inspired to do more pro-social actions which has been associated with well-being (Ruggeri et al., 2018). Another explanation comes from closely related research fields like impact from social support. It was for example found that social support, ie. receiving positive feed-back, getting confirmation, and relational certainty predicted higher satisfaction with life (Lian et al., 2018). This study did not use the term role model but it operationalized social support in a similar way as in previous studies of role model support (Akbulut, 2016; Austin et al., 2016; Young et al., 2013). Social support was also one out of two themes in the Influence of Others on Academic and Career Decisions Scale (IOACDS) which was used to measure role model influence in this study (Nauta & Kokaly, 2001). Based on the fact that social support is associated with higher satisfaction with life, and that social support and role model influence are connected, one may assume that also role model influence may have a relationship with satisfaction with life.

Purpose of this study

The overall idea is that role model influence has been shown to be helpful for individuals in providing direction, solutions and meaning in challenging phases and areas of life. By focusing on children and adolescents the contexts has naturally revolved around moral issues but has, as a result, excluded important contexts for adults. This study will examine two contexts, namely studies/work and love/family as research has shown that these areas have a great impact on people's well-being (Diener, 2021). The purpose of this study was to examine if findings from role model research on children and adolescents would apply to adults and if role model interaction would be associated with positive psychological mechanisms for adults such as general self-efficacy and

satisfaction with life. The study also intended to examine what type of role model would be most influential for adults and if the data would replicate the established finding among children and adolescents, that the most influential role model figure was of the same sex. Finally, on the basis of literature such as Basow and Howe (1980), this study also examined whether or not adults preferred role models with the same level of authority or if they would prefer higher level of authority (parents, teachers, managers) like children and adolescents do.

Hypothesis 1: Same-sex role models will be the most influential role model figures for adults within the areas of studies/work and love/family

Hypothesis 2: Adults will prefer role models with the same level of authority

Hypothesis 3: Role model influence within studies/work will have a significant and positive correlation with general self-efficacy

Hypothesis 4: Role model influence within love/family will have a significant and positive correlation with general self-efficacy

Hypothesis 5: Role model influence within studies/work will have a significant and positive correlation with satisfaction with life

Hypothesis 6: Role model influence within love/family will have a significant and positive correlation with satisfaction with life

Method

Participants

The sample ($N = 219$) consisted of participants from different parts of Sweden. The mean age was 38,1 years ($SD = 11,3$) ranging from 18 - 65 years. No other demographic data was collected.

Procedure

A Qualtrics internet survey was distributed via social medias (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) and in some cases sent directly via e-mail or Facebook messenger. The survey primarily targeted *adults* although this was not explicitly stated anywhere. It was however implied in the overall approach as the survey was only distributed in social media communities with a mature average age. Apart from age, with 18 being minimum, it was decided to exclude participants who completed less than two of the scales in the survey. No other exclusion criteria was set as the sample aimed to mirror the real life cohort as much as possible, looking to establish high external validity. Hence, a total of 145 respondents (39,8%) were excluded for not entering enough data. No age exclusions were done as all respondents were 18 years or above.

The survey can be considered to have been distributed through convenience- and waterfall sample (contacts sharing to their contacts and so on) as a consequence of how social medias are structured. The survey was first published on March 3rd 2022, generating approximately 100 responses. A reminder was sent out one week later,

generating another 264 responses. The target was to collect at least 200 survey responses so once this number was reached no more reminders were sent out.

The survey introduction informed that participation was voluntary and that the answers would be handled anonymously. It also stated that all data would be processed according to the Law on ethical review (Lagen om etikprövning) as well as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) article 4.2. Participants consented by conducting the survey and no extra measures were taken regarding ethical or legal practice.

Measures

Role model influence was measured using the IOACDS which was compiled and validated by Nauta et al. (2001). The scale was based on the Social learning theory (Nauta et al., 2001) and consisted of 15 items related to role model influence. The first seven items reflected support/guidance and the last eight items reflected inspiration/modelling. The items were formulated in statements, such as, "There is someone I can count on to be there if I need support when I make career choices" (Det finns någon jag kan lita på ska finnas där när jag gör studie/arbetsrelaterade val). The statements were to be estimated on a 1-5 Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* (Stämmer inte alls) to 5 = *strongly agree* (stämmer helt och hållet). Five items (4, 7, 10, 12, 15) were formulated in reversed order and had to be reversed later in SPSS. Worth mentioning is that item nr. 7 was not marked with R (Reverse) in the Nauta et al. (2001) study but was assumed to be handled in the same way as an R-item as the construct of the wording was such. To measure role model influence within studies/work the IOACDS was used in its original form whereas the role model influence within the love/family context was inspired by the scale but adapted in such way that it would capture the love life/family life dimension, "There is someone who helps me consider my choices regarding love life/family life" (Det finns någon som hjälper mig överväga mina val gällande kärleksliv/familjeliv). The scale was translated from English to Swedish to avoid misinterpretations of the items due to language barriers. The translation was overseen by an English/Swedish speaking person. The two IOACDS versions had high reliability (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011): Cronbach's α studies/work = .87 and α love/family = .92. Three additional items were added in direct relation to each of the two IOACDS versions:

1. "Who is your most influential role model when it comes to your studies/work life?" (Vem är din mest inflytelserika förebild när det gäller ditt studie/arbetsliv?) Respondents chose one of the following alternatives: *A parent, a teacher, a manager, a friend, a colleague, a sibling, a famous person, other person, I don't have any role model when it comes to studies/work life* (En förälder, en lärare, en chef, en vän, en kollega, ett syskon, en känd person, annan person, jag har ingen förebild när det gäller studie/yrkesliv).
2. "If you chose the option "other person" as your most influential person when it comes to your studies/work life, please state who the person is, for example a saga figure" (Om du valde alternativet "annan person" som din mest inflytelserika person när det gäller ditt studie/arbetsliv, vänligen ange vem personen är, tex. en sagofigur).
3. "Is your most influential role model when it comes to studies/work life of the same sex as you?" (Är din mest inflytelserika förebild när det gäller studie/arbetsliv av samma kön som du?) Respondents chose one of the following alternatives: *Yes, no, I*

have no role model when it comes to my studies/work life (Ja, nej, jag har ingen förebild när det gäller studie/arbetsliv). The same three questions were repeated in relation to the IOACDS love/family life version.

General self-efficacy was measured using the New General Self-Efficacy scale (NGSE) which was developed and validated by Chen, Gully and Eden (2001). This scale was based on eight items where respondents were asked to estimate statements such as “I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself” (Jag kommer klara av att uppnå de flesta av de mål jag har satt upp för mig själv) on a 1 – 5 Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* (stämmer inte alls) to 5 = *strongly agree* (stämmer helt och hållet). The translation from English to Swedish was overseen by the same English/Swedish speaking person. Cronbach’s α was .86.

Satisfaction with life was measured with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) which was developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985). This scale was available in various languages, including Swedish so no translation was needed. The scale was based on five items where the respondents were asked to estimate statements such as “In most ways my life is close to my ideal” on a 1-7 Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Cronbach’s α was .84.

Pilot sample

A pilot study was first conducted with the purpose of finding and mitigate possible sources of error such as item-, response- or administration related issues. For that purpose the participants were asked to go through the survey with critical eyes and to note down any unclarities, questions or comments around the items and the construct as a whole. Apart from some minor spelling corrections the most relevant comments from the pilot were that some of the IOACDS items were interpreted as referring only to past choices made in connection with the choice of studies or career and that it made the questions seem irrelevant. This was corrected by adding one explanatory sentence to the item description: “The situations refer to where you are today in your studies/working life and choices you are faced with in these contexts” (Situationerna avser där du är idag i ditt studie/arbetsliv och val du ställs inför i dessa sammanhang). This was important to clarify as the study aims to reflect perceived support/guidance from role models in the everyday navigation and not only in one isolated situation. The other feedback was related to wording and resulted in the word *career* (karriär) being changed to *working life* (arbetsliv) to make the items seem more mundane and relatable and the word *reflecting* (reflekterar) was changed to *describes* (beskriver) in the item description. The pilot study used a convenience sample with four people being directly approached. Out of those four, a total of three persons finalized the pilot study.

Data analysis

Data analyses were conducted to test the hypothesized relationships between role model influence (studies/work and love/family), general self-efficacy and with life. Apart from descriptive analyses, the tests were performed using Pearson’s product-moment correlation method and two separate multiple regression analyses. Both role model

contexts were tested within the same regression models, which meant that they were analysed whilst controlling for one another. The basic assumptions for regression analysis were tested (linearity, normal distribution, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity) and no issues were found. Binomial analyses were conducted to test non-parametric data.

To be able to analyse the second hypothesis the role model types were organized in two new groups based on level of authority. Higher level of authority included parent, teacher and manager and same level of authority included friend, colleague and sibling. Famous person was not included in any group as no research was found to support that famous role models were to be regarded as either higher or same level of authority. However, a total of 36 answers could be derived from the item response *other person*. These were the answers that could undoubtedly be included in either one of the two authority groups. Examples of role model types added to the higher level of authority group were grandparents, mentors and parents-in-law. Out of these, nine answers were added to studies/work and six answers were added to love/family. Examples of role model types added to the same level of authority group were cousins, spouses and ex-partners. Out of these, 12 answers were added to studies/work and nine answers were added to love/family. All data was analysed in IBM SPSS statistics, version 28.0.1.1.

Results

Characteristics of role models

Table 1 describes the distribution of role model types within the sample. The majority of respondents stated that they did have a role model (82,6% within studies/work and 68,1% within love/family). The difference between “having” and “not having” a role model within studies/work was significant $p<.001$ and estimate of .83 and 95% CI[.77, 87]. The difference between “having” and “not having” a role model within love/family was significant $p<.001$ and estimate of .68 and 95% CI[.62, 75].

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics of most influential role model*

	Studies/work		Love/family	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
A parent	29	13,2	42	19,2
A teacher	10	4,6	1	0,5
A manager	24	11,0	1	0,5
A friend	25	11,4	58	26,5
A colleague	37	16,9	6	2,7
A sibling	2	0,9	13	5,9
A famous person	22	10	7	3,2
Other person	32	14,6	21	9,6
I don't have a role model in this field	38	17,4	69	31,5
Missing			1	0,5
Total	219	100	219	100

H1 was confirmed as the majority of the participants who answered that they did have a role model also stated that the most influential role model was of the same sex (68,7% within studies/work and 75,7% within love/family). The difference between “same-sex” and “non-same-sex” within studies/work was significant $p < .001$ and estimate of .69 and 95% CI [.61, 75]. The difference between “same-sex” and “non-same-sex” within love/family was significant $p < .001$ and estimate of .76 and 95% CI [.68, 82].

H2 was partly confirmed as adults, contrary to previous research on children and adolescents, preferred role models with the same level of authority. This preference was barely noticeable within the studies/work context (51% same level of authority, and 49% higher level of authority) but was more distinguished within the love/family context (63% same level of authority and 37% higher level of authority). The percentage distribution was derived by comparing the two authority groups against each other. The difference between “higher level of authority” and “same level of authority” within studies/work was not significant $p = .81$ and estimate of .49 and 95% CI [.40, 57]. The difference between “higher level of authority” and “same level of authority” within love/family was significant $p < .05$ and estimate of .37 and 95% CI [.29, 46].

The descriptive statistics also showed that adults were most used to think of role models in the studies/work context compared to other areas of life as the percentage of *I don't have a role model* was almost twice as high for love/family as it was for studies/work.

Relations between role model scales, general self-efficacy, and satisfaction with life

Table 2 shows the descriptive distribution for all four scales. Table 3 shows correlations between the two role model scales, general self-efficacy, and satisfaction with life. Role model influence (regardless of type) correlated significantly with satisfaction with life. Role model influence within studies/work correlated significantly with general self-efficacy whereas role model influence within love/family did not.

Table 2

Participants, means, standard deviation and range for the measurements

Scale	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Role model studies/work life	215	3,44	0,70	1,53	5,00
Role model love life/family life	210	3,45	0,80	1,53	5,00
General self-efficacy	212	4,04	0,55	1,50	5,00
Satisfaction with life	214	4,90	1,22	1,20	7,00

Table 3. *Correlation matrix for role models, general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life*

Scale	1	2	3	4
1. Role model studies/work	-			
2. Role model love/family	,411**			
3. General self-efficacy	,167*	-0,029		
4. Satisfaction with life	,349**	,326**	,406**	-

* $p < .05$. (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$. (two-tailed)

Two multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to predict relationships between the predictors (role models within studies/work and role models within love/family) and the dependent variables (general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life).

H3 was confirmed as shown in Table 4 with role model influence significantly predicting general self-efficacy; ($F(2, 197) = 4.214, p < .05$). This meant that participants who experienced higher level of role model influence within studies/work also experienced higher levels of general self-efficacy. However, H4, role model influence within love/family did not significantly predict general self-efficacy.

Table 4

Regression analysis model 1 (Role model influence and association with general self-efficacy)

Role model scales		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>
Studies/work	$R^2 = .41$.17	.06	.22	2.84**
Love/family		-.09	.05	-.13	-1.70

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

H5 and H6 were confirmed as shown in Table 5 with role model influence significantly predicting satisfaction with life; ($F(2, 199) = 22.176, p < .01$). This meant that participants who experienced higher level of role model influence within studies/work and within love/family also experienced higher levels of satisfaction with life.

Table 5

Regression analysis model 2 (Role model influence and association with satisfaction with life)

Role model scales		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>
Studies/work	$R^2 = .18$.47	.12	.28	3.95**
Love/family		.36	.11	.23	3.32**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not adults were inspired by role models in the same way young people are and if so, were there any significant relationships with positive psychological mechanisms, such as general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life? The study also examined if adults would prefer authoritarian role models, what type of role figure would be most influential for adults and if adults would prefer same-sex role models as children and adolescents do.

In general, the results supported the idea that parallels could be drawn from earlier role model research on children and adolescents and be adapted to research on adults. It was, for example established that the majority of adults did use inspiration from role models when making decisions within everyday contexts such as studies/work and love/family.

The first hypothesis (same-sex role models will be the most influential role model figures for adults within the areas of studies/work and love/family) was supported as adults preferred same-sex role models within both role model contexts. This result was aligned with previous results on adolescents (Nauta et al., 2001) where male students had 58% same-sex peer role models (13% opposite-sex) and female students had 51 % same-sex peer role models (13% opposite-sex). This finding suggests that gender of a role model continuous to play an important role in the process of identifying with this persons' values, attitudes and behavior.

The second hypothesis (adults will prefer role models with the same level of authority) was partially supported as adults, contrary to previous research on children and adolescents, preferred role models with the same level of authority. This result was aligned with previous literature on peer versus parent influence where it was observed that there was a clear shift of influence source in the ages between 9 to 15 years (Berndt, 1979). This meant that children were mainly influenced by their parents up to 15 years but shifted focus to their peers after that. The study was supported by Ruggeri et al. (2018) whose findings also showed a discrepancy between children taking most influence from adults and adults taking most influence from peers. Findings similar to this suggests that adults are less cognitively dependent on others than children are and therefore primarily look for things such as encouragement and valid examples of accomplishments to be inspired by (Foss, 2017; Kivnick et al., 2019) rather than authority. This finding also implies that leadership of any role model type for adults (parents, managers, politicians, coaches etc.) should be focused on person-oriented styles rather than traditional authoritarian characteristics. Such change of focus, from an authoritarian to a transformational approach is, for example, often discussed within leadership contexts (Schaubroeck, Lam & Cha, 2007).

The third hypothesis (role model influence within studies/work will have a significant and positive correlation with general self-efficacy) was supported as role model influence within studies/work was significantly associated with general self-efficacy. This finding corresponded with previous research on role model influence within the academic- and career context (Austin et al., 2016; Fried & MacCleave, 2009; Zeldin et al., 2000). One explanation for this relationship is that role models within this context (for example, teachers, managers, mentors) are often well established and knowledgeable within their specific fields. They are therefore perceived as credible role models who could elevate the confidence and expectations of being successful in the same field (Fried et al., 2009).

The fourth hypothesis (role model influence within love/family will have a significant and positive correlation with general self-efficacy) was not supported which means that the data could not support the idea that role model influence within love/family was associated with general self-efficacy. One reason for this could be that people tend to fear or avoid situations they do not feel that they can manage (Bandura, 1977). If the assumption is that role model influence within studies/work was associated with general self-efficacy because the role models were very knowledgeable within specific areas or tasks, then this might not have been entirely true for the context of love/family. Within this context there are no generic methods to measure success such as test scores, grades, promotions or benefits. There are also no concrete goals or definition of success. Hence, the thought of someone's perfect dating experiences or family life might not have been so useful in relation to general self-efficacy as it did not provide concrete instructions on how to achieve similar success.

The fifth and sixth hypotheses (role model influence within studies/work and love/family will have a significant and positive correlation with satisfaction with life) were supported as both role model influence types were associated with satisfaction with life. This relationship was aligned with previous research which has found that social support was a significant indicator for well-being and that social support was an important contributor from role model interactions (Lian et al., 2018; Nauta et al., 2001). This suggests that role model influence is associated with satisfaction with life because of the supportive characteristic of the interaction. Because of the correlation between general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life found in this study it is also possible that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between role model influence (regardless of context) and satisfaction with life.

Limitations

There were a few limitations in the current study. First of all the study aimed to examine adults' use of role model influence, hence the term *adult* was crucial. Still, no specific definition was done except for the legal definition of 18 years meaning that the data analyses included everyone from 18 years and above and by doing so, mixed several potentially diverse phases (in the context of the research question) of the lifespan. A broad sample does not have to be an issue. Future research might, however, want to examine possible differences in attitudes towards role model guidance in different stages of the adult lifespan. For example, are adults more or less inclined to search guidance by role models in the early or the late phases of adulthood and will the role model influence be impacted by one's own, growing, life experiences?

Even if the research literature offered some variations of how to measure role model influence, most of the constructs were assembled for the purposes of the specific studies and did not offer established and validated instruments. For that reason the IOACDS scale was chosen. This scale was validated by its originators and measured both support/guidance and inspiration/modelling. It also allowed respondents to include role models they did not know personally such as public people, influencers and celebrities. Feed-back from respondents in the pilot study was, however, that the scale was perceived as difficult to use because of its wording. Although some adjustments were made to reduce possible sources of errors, such as adding explanatory instructions to the scale introductions, similar feed-back was later repeated in the actual distribution. Hence, the

loss of 39,8% of participants might have been an effect of the scale being too difficult. This suspicion was further strengthened as the data showed that a large portion of the participants who logged in gave up in the early part of the IOACDS scale. For this reason, future research might want to consider the order of the scales but also consider using a more accessible instrument altogether.

The study as a whole would have benefited from collecting more demographic data, such as gender. As a lot of the literature focus on women's use of role models in typical male-dominated contexts it would, for example, have been interesting to compare variances between gender and role model influence as well as the association with general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. However, in accordance with the hypotheses of the current study, sex was only examined in the specific question "Is your most influential role model when it comes to studies/work of the same sex as you?". This meant that sex could not be used as a stand-alone variable in any tests.

In terms of design it was a limitation that this was a cross-sectional study, meaning that no conclusions could be drawn about causal effects between role model influence (within studies/work and love/family) and general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life. Future research would therefore benefit from examining role model influence on adults in experimental studies as well as longitudinal.

Future research

As indicated in the current study, role model influence was associated with positive psychological mechanisms for adults. Future research should therefore explore what this could imply for the overall research field of well-being. Could findings about adults' needs and preferences in the context of role model influence encourage people to search for learning-opportunities in mundane relationships and could this help develop methods for how to improve health-related factors like personal well-being and feeling of meaning in life? What if simple things like a doctor's advice or informative media would encourage adults to search for a role model and to actively take inspiration from it.

This is especially important since comments from the survey showed that being able to think of a role model when asked directly was not the same thing as actively using a role model in the everyday endeavours. Instead reactions to the survey was that this was a very hard and mind-blowing topic to take on. Participants responded, both in the survey's feed-back section and directly in the social medias where it was distributed, that the items had made them think about this for the first time in their lives and that it had been very difficult to see themselves as using/needing/wanting role models. This was a finding that could be culturally conditioned but one of the attitudes that shone through was that as an adult, it almost felt forbidden to think of oneself as needing influence from someone else. Even in the reflections from a participant who was pro role models and had mature ideas about his own use of it, it came through that in some aspects he thought of it as a sign of weakness: "I think about them often and in what ways they inspire. I can think it is a bit silly at times, but [I] really think it has helped me". This discrepancy between wanting/needing role model guidance and not being able to see oneself as a person who would want/need a role model makes this a difficult topic for adults. Another participant who reached out said that before taking the survey, she, as an adult, had only thought of role models as sports coaches and job mentors. However, when thinking about

it she realised how much peer-input she actually relied on in her everyday life. To make it easier for adults to see themselves as a person who wants/needs a role model and to acknowledge the benefits from having such influence in life it is also suggested that future research aims to find relationships between role model influence on adults and positive mechanisms in all contexts (such as religion, sports and aging) and not only within studies/work and love/family. By doing so, research could, in time, provide non-provocative concepts around role model influence on adults which could mean that more adults would feel comfortable discussing such mechanisms and maybe even pursue a role model as an active attempt to improve well-being.

Finally, future research should seek to complete the research-field of role model influence on adults by examining the concept from an intersectional perspective as multiple factors could affect adults' susceptibility to role model influence. Factors like age, socioeconomic status, cultural similarities and differences might, for example, make a difference in the effectiveness of role model transmittance.

Conclusions

The findings of this study supported the idea that adults did use role models when dealing with issues in everyday life contexts such as studies, work, love life and family life. Colleagues were the most common role model figures within studies/work and friends were the most common role model figures within family/love life. It was also revealed that adults preferred role models at the same authoritarian level and with the same sex as themselves. Furthermore, role model influence within studies/work was significantly associated with general self-efficacy and satisfaction with life whereas role model influence within love/family was significantly associated with satisfaction with life. The connection to positive psychological mechanisms gives incentives to continue to explore relationships between adults' use of role model influence and positive relationships with generic well-being. Concrete findings on this topic could, for instance, be helpful for the large number of adults who struggle with low personal well-being. Hence, influential roles such as managers, politicians, therapists and teachers could support this development by consciously addressing benefits from role model interactions and to encourage such relationships.

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