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# Concurrent and Prospective Relationships Between Social Engagement and Personality Traits in Older Adulthood

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The current research examined the longitudinal relationship between social engagement and personality traits in older adults. Specifically, the present research examined how engagement in family and community roles related to conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability in a sample of 100 Illinois residents age 60–86 years assessed twice over a period of 2.5 years. Social engagement and personality traits were related in three ways. First, concurrent relationships during Wave 1 suggested that agreeable older adults are more socially engaged. Next, Wave 1 standing on both personality traits and social engagement predicted respective change over time. In addition, changes in engagement and personality traits covaried over time. The specific patterns presented in this study suggest that although some relationships were consistent with research findings in young adulthood and midlife, role investment in old age may have a distinctly different meaning than role investment earlier in the life span. These patterns suggest that personality traits can both inform our understanding of engagement during older adulthood and that personality traits may be meaningful outcomes of the aging experience in their own right.

*Keywords:* social engagement, personality traits, aging

During older adulthood, individuals typically deinvest in social roles such as work and parenting while transitioning into new social roles such as being involved in community activities and pursuing hobbies. The aging literature suggests that those individuals who remain socially engaged during older adulthood have better physical health (Tucker, Schwartz, Clark, & Friedman, 1999) and cognitive functioning (for a current comprehensive review see Hertzog, Kramer, Wilson, & Lindenberger, 2008). A similar line of research has shown that certain personality traits are related to better functioning in old age. For example, personality traits are linked to physical health (Hill, Turiano, Hurd, Mroczek, & Roberts, 2011; Mroczek & Spiro, 2007) and cognitive function (Duberstein et al., 2011; Williams, Suchy, & Kraybill, 2010) in old age.

Despite parallels between social engagement and personality traits in their ability to predict important life outcomes, little is known about how these individual differences are related in older adulthood. This is a particularly important issue to address because the current literature on personality trait development has sug-

gested that not only do social role changes occur in older adulthood but personality traits also undergo meaningful, normative changes during the aging process (Mroczek & Spiro, 2003; Small, Hertzog, Hulstsch, & Dixon, 2003; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). However, normative change is only that—a general characterization of change in the population as a whole—and aging research has a strong history of addressing not just normative change but also individual differences in change (i.e., Baltes & Nesselroade, 1973; Small et al., 2003) and the importance of individual differences in change as meaningful predictors in their own right (i.e., Mroczek & Spiro, 2007). The present research builds on recent findings that have suggested the occurrence of major life events can both be predicted by personality traits and can themselves predict individual differences in personality trait change over time in adulthood (Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). Specifically, the current research addressed how personality traits prospectively relate to engagement in social roles and, conversely, how engagement in social roles prospectively relates to personality trait change during older adulthood.

## The Current Research

The current research investigated the relationship between social engagement and personality traits during older adulthood within a randomly selected sample of 100 Illinois residents age 60–86 years assessed twice over a 2.5-year period. The present study focused on how traits most consistently linked to social engagement relate to subjective commitment to roles central to the lives of many American older adults. Specifically, evidence from broad ranges of age groups has suggested that three traits from the Big Five personality trait taxonomy—agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability—are linked to engagement in

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romantic relationships, children, and community (Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007).

To date, few studies have linked social engagement to personality traits in a longitudinal sample of older adults. Accordingly, we tested the relationship between these two domains using a dual-score latent change model to examine all aspects of the longitudinal relationship. At Wave 1, we examined correlations between social engagement and personality traits. Then, we tested the prospective associations between Wave 1 standing and change over time. Specifically, we used Wave 1 personality to predict Wave 2 social engagement while controlling for Wave 1 social engagement to create an indicator of the extent to which personality trait level at Wave 1 predicts change in social engagement between the two waves of assessment. Likewise, we tested the relation between Wave 1 social engagement and change between Wave 1 and Wave 2 personality traits. Finally, we linked changes over time in social engagement with changes over time in personality traits to determine whether changes covary over time. Although some researchers have emphasized the significance of cross-lagged effects in panel designs, we contend that both lagged and contemporaneous analyses of the prediction of change are important and relevant (Roberts & Bogg, 2004). Lagged paths indicate that antecedent standing propagates forward in time, like a cascade model. Simultaneous or contemporaneous correlations of change reflect the idea that change is more transactional over time and that changes may reciprocate. That said, neither lagged nor contemporaneous predictors of change afford causal inferences, because the data structure of longitudinal research remains correlational.

### Specific Hypotheses

In terms of Wave 1 correlations and prospective predictions, we hypothesized that individuals are likely to become engaged or to become increasingly engaged in a given social role if it is congruent with their personality (Roberts & Caspi, 2003). This may be as simple as selecting one role over another, or as complex as changing individual daily experience over time. For example, conscientious and emotionally stable individuals have longer, more stable relationships with lower divorce rates (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Roberts & Bogg, 2004; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002) and prosocial, helpful individuals volunteer more and are highly committed to their volunteer activities (Clary et al., 1998; Finkelstein, Penner, & Brannick, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Therefore, we expected conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability not only to correlate with engagement, but also to predict increases in engagement over time.

Similarly, we expected social engagement to predict changes in personality over time. The developmental relationship between social engagement and personality traits should be in keeping with the corresponsive principle of personality development that “the effect of life experience on personality development is to deepen the characteristics that lead people to those experiences in the first place” (Roberts & Wood, 2006, p. 19). Specifically, it is our hypothesis that being socially engaged will foster higher levels of the same traits that predict greater social engagement. Finally, we expected change in social engagement to correlate with change in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability over time.

## Method

### Participants

The present research examined the data of a subsample of participants included in the Health and Aging Study of Central Illinois (HASCI; Jackson et al., 2009; Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2010; Lodi-Smith et al., 2010), a multisample research study designed to investigate the relationship among personality traits, lifestyle, and health across the life span. The subsample of interest for the present research consisted of the 66 men and 93 women ( $N = 159$ ) over 60 years of age who participated in the first wave of the statewide cohort of HASCI. Participants' ages ranged from 60–86 years, with a mean of 72.40 ( $SD = 7.51$ ).

Between December 17, 2003, and June 19, 2004, participants in the statewide cohort of HASCI were contacted by interviewers from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Survey Research Lab in their homes and asked to complete the HASCI survey on a laptop computer. The sample was collected using a multi-stage, age-stratified sampling technique. In the first stage, nine Illinois counties were sampled with probabilities proportionate to size (PPS), where the measure of size was the adult population. PPS sampling gives more populous counties a higher probability of selection, while still ensuring that all counties have some probability of selection. In the second stage, five census tracts were sampled from each of the sampled counties. In the third stage, four blocks were sampled from the sampled census tracts. Census tracts and blocks also were sampled PPS. Once blocks were selected, interviewers listed all households on the sampled blocks and completed interviews with five households selected to meet HASCI enrollment quotas. Response rate, calculated by dividing the number of completed surveys by the total number initiated but not completed, refusals, noncontact of eligible respondents, and a proportion of households whose eligibility status was unknown, was 18.5%. Total refusal rate was 21.5%. Participants were given a \$15 gift card as reimbursement for their participation.

Participants described in the present study were primarily middle class (67%), with more lower- (24%) than upper- (9%) class participants (measured by a composite index of educational attainment, job prestige coded per Hauser and Warren, 1997, and annual income). Participants were primarily White (74%), with 26% of other ethnic descent. This is representative of the both the general Illinois (79% White; 12% below poverty level) and U.S. (80% White; 13% below poverty level) populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

From June 14 to December 3, 2006, interviewers from the University of Illinois at Chicago Survey Research Lab contacted participants to obtain the second wave of assessments. The average interval between assessments was 2.46 years. One hundred older adult participants (38 men and 62 women) completed the second wave of assessment; the group had an average age at this assessment of 73.76 years ( $SD = 7.59$ ). Participants who completed both waves of assessment did not differ significantly from participants who only completed the first wave of assessment on age, sex, socioeconomic status, physical health, psychological well-being, or any of the variables described below.

## Materials

Participants were assessed on the same measures in both Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the study. All social engagement measures and personality trait measures were rated on a 1- (*strongly disagree*) to-5 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale. For the social engagement measures, participants at each wave of assessment who did not complete the measure and indicated they were not engaged in the role at the time of assessment were given a score of 1 on the measure to indicate that that role was not currently an important aspect of their identity.

**Engagement in romantic relationships.** Engagement in romantic relationships was assessed by collapsing across measures of nonmarital romantic relationships and marital relationships. No participants completed both measures. Romantic relationship engagement was assessed using a seven-item measure of commitment adapted from a measure of marital investment (Adams & Jones, 1997). Participants completed items such as “I am completely devoted to my partner.” The 46% of the Wave 1 sample and the 48% of the Wave 2 sample who did not answer the questionnaire and who reported that they were not in a committed relationship were given scores of 1 on the romantic relationship engagement measure. Reliability was .84 for Wave 1 and .70 for Wave 2.

**Engagement with children.** Engagement with children was assessed with a seven-item measure adapted from a measure of family involvement (Misra, Ghosh, & Kanungo, 1990). Participants indicated their engagement with their children by answering questions such as “My children are central to my life.” Scores of 1 were assigned to 15% of the Wave 1 sample and 11% of the Wave 2 sample because they did not answer the questionnaire and indicated that they did not have children or they were not the primary caregivers for any children. Alpha reliability was .88 and .87 for Waves 1 and 2, respectively.

**Engagement in community.** Engagement in community activities was assessed by averaging a seven-item measure of commitment to a religious community (“The most important thing in my life is religion”) with a seven-item measure of commitment to civic groups such as a volunteer organization, Rotary club, and so forth (“I feel a sense of responsibility to my civic organization”). Both measures were adapted from the Family Involvement Index (Misra et al., 1990). For the measure of religious commitment, 38% of both the Wave 1 and the Wave 2 samples were given a score of 1 on the religious engagement measure because they did not complete the measure and indicated that they were not involved in a religious community. One individual in Wave 1 did not respond to any questions about religion. His data were treated as missing. For the measure of civic involvement, 84% of the Wave 1 sample and 75% of the Wave 2 sample were given a score of 1 because they did not complete the measure of civic engagement and reported they did not have any current affiliations with any civic groups. Average reliability for the two measures was .92 for Waves 1 and 2.

**Overall engagement.** A composite index of social engagement was computed by averaging the engagement measures using the item-to-construct balancing technique described below.

**Personality traits.** Personality was measured with an abridged version of the AB5C (Goldberg, 1999). The AB5C is based on the Abridged Big Five Dimensional Circumplex (Hof-

stee, de Raad, & Goldberg, 1992) with scales assessing the principle axis of each trait that capture fundamental aspects of the associated higher-order Big Five trait. Although the full AB5C has scales assessing the two dimensional circumplex relationships between each possible trait pair, to accommodate time constraints in the design of the in-home assessment of the statewide cohort of HASCI, participants only completed the principle axis scales rather than each possible circumplex combination in the AB5C for all Big Five traits except conscientiousness. To maintain a parallel level of assessment for each trait in the current study, we only focused on the principle axis data for each of the traits addressed in the present research. In the case of conscientiousness, the principle axis (conscientiousness, III+/III+) is measured using a 13-item index that includes items such as “Do things according to a plan” (Wave 1  $\alpha = .83$ , Wave 2  $\alpha = .76$ ). The principle axis of agreeableness (understanding, II+/II+) was measured using a 10-item index of items including “Respect others’ feelings” (Wave 1  $\alpha = .80$ , Wave 2  $\alpha = .84$ ). Ten items such as “Keep my cool” were used to measure the principle axis of emotional stability (stability, IV+/IV+; Wave 1  $\alpha = .79$ , Wave 2  $\alpha = .82$ ).

## Analysis

To evaluate the relationship between social engagement and traits over the two time points of assessment, we used AMOS to model a dual-score latent change structural model in the 100 seniors who participated in HASCI during both waves of the study. To optimize model fit, the trait and engagement items were parceled using an item-to-construct balance technique (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). In the item-to-construct balance technique, each item for a construct is entered into a principle components analysis. Items are then assigned to a given parcel based on their loading on the first component such that lower loading items pair with higher loading items for a parcel. Using this rubric, items were averaged together to form a parcel representing manifest variables used to construct the latent variables in the model. Specifically, for engagement variables, Parcel 1 was the average of the highest and lowest loading items from the principle components analysis, Parcel 2 was the average of the next highest and lowest loading items, and Parcel 3 was the average of the three middle loading items. For conscientiousness, Parcel 1 contained five items (the two highest, two lowest, and middle loading items), Parcel 2 contained four items (the two next highest and lowest), and Parcel 3 contained the four remaining items. Finally, for agreeableness and emotional stability, Parcel 1 contained the two highest and two lowest loading items, Parcel 2 contained the next highest and lowest and the middle loading items, and Parcel 3 contained the remaining three items. To compute the parcels for the measure of overall engagement, we averaged each parcel across the domains of engagement. That is, the first parcels were averaged, as were the second and third in each domain.

Before developing the complete dual-score latent change model using these parcels, we tested measurement invariance of the parcel structure between the two waves of assessment for each domain of engagement and each personality trait. Model comparisons between Wave 1 and Wave 2 demonstrated strong measurement invariance with an average  $\chi^2/df$  ratio for weights of .95

(range: 0.02–5.02,  $df = 2$ ), intercepts of .69 (range: 0.11–2.12,  $df = 5$ ), and covariance of .63 (range: 0.33–1.77,  $df = 6$ ).

Figure 1 provides a sample of the dual-score latent change model used in the analyses reported below with the underlying measurement model represented. As shown in Figure 1, all models controlled for sex, ethnicity, and age by adding paths from each demographic variable to both level and change latent variables in the model. So that it broadly characterizes the model examined within the current study, we did not provide specific loading estimates in Figure 1. The model fit the data well, with an average

$\chi^2/df$  ( $df = 66$ ) ratio of 1.15 (range: 0.15–1.53), comparative fit index of .99 (range: 0.97–1.00), and root mean square error of approximation of .05 (range = .00–.07).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for average level, or intercept, and average change of the scores estimated from the

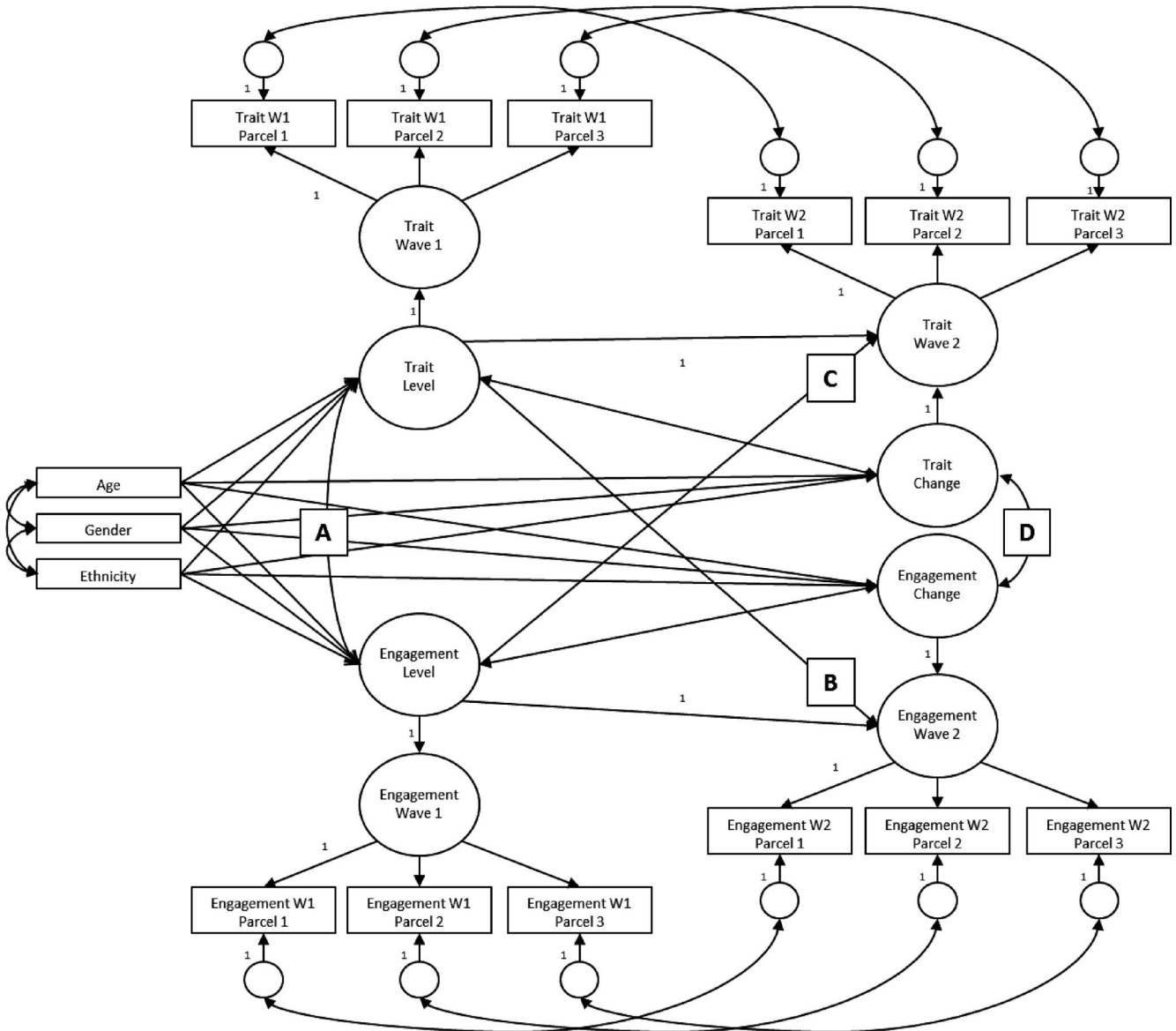


Figure 1. An example of the dual-score latent change measurement and structural model with key estimates highlighted: A = the correlation of engagement and personality at Wave 1, B = the prospective relation of personality at Wave 1 and change in engagement over the two time points of the study, C = the prospective relation of engagement at Wave 1 and change in personality over the two time points of the study, and D = the correlated change between the two variables over time. For each analysis reported, specific estimates for the paths in Figure 1 can be found in Table 2, with the letter at the top of each column in Table 2 corresponding to the letters on the associated pathways in Figure 1. W1 = Wave 1; W2 = Wave 2.

Table 1  
*Mean and Variance Estimates for Variables in the Latent Change Model, Correlations Between Level and Change Parameters, Stability Coefficients, and Mean-Level Change Effect Sizes*

	Level		Change		Level–change ( <i>r</i> )	Stability ( <i>r</i> )	Mean-level change effect size ( <i>d</i> )
	<i>M</i>	Variance	<i>M</i>	Variance			
Social engagement							
Romantic relationships	2.71	.41*	1.05	.16*	–.26*	.86*	.22
Children	1.33	.22*	2.75	.42*	–.47*	.71*	.26
Community	1.93	.28*	.12	.18*	–.42*	.67*	.26
Composite engagement	.35	.05*	.13	.02*	–.35*	.87*	.22
Personality traits							
Conscientiousness	.19	.05*	.15	.04*	–.24	.56*	.07
Agreeableness	.30	.06*	.17	.04*	–.33	.65*	.14
Emotional stability	.26	.07*	.18	.06*	–.31	.59*	.29

Note. *N* = 100.

\* *p* < .05.

latent change model. As indicated in Table 1, both social engagement and personality traits demonstrated substantial rank-order stability across the two waves of assessment. There were no significant mean-level changes in either social engagement or personality traits across the two waves. However, the variances for both levels and change estimates were significant for all variables. Significant variances indicate that there were valid individual differences both in level and in change estimates. Thus, testing the correlations between levels, between levels and change, and between change and change estimates was permissible.

### Dual-Score Latent Change Model of Relationships Between Social Engagement and Personality Traits

The dual-score latent change model depicted in Figure 1 generated four primary indices—regarding the relationship between

social engagement and traits. Table 2 lists the parameters for each combination of engagement and trait variables examined. Significant effects are detailed below.

**Wave 1 correlations.** As shown in Table 2, the cross-sectional relationships between personality traits and social engagement indicate that agreeable seniors were more socially engaged. Specifically, agreeable individuals reported high levels of commitment to their community and had high overall levels of engagement.

**Prospective relations.** Wave 1 standing on both personality traits and social engagement predicted respective change over time. Wave 1 standing on conscientiousness predicted changes in engagement with children ( $\beta = .24, p < .05$ ) and overall levels of engagement ( $\beta = .26, p < .05$ ). Similarly, Wave 1 agreeableness predicted changes in engagement with children ( $\beta = .31, p < .05$ ) and overall levels of engagement ( $\beta = .28, p < .05$ ).

Table 2  
*Estimates From Latent Change Path Models*

Trait–engagement pairing	A	B	C	D
	Concurrent relationship ( <i>r</i> )	Personality traits → change in engagement ( $\beta$ )	Engagement → change in personality traits ( $\beta$ )	Correlated change ( <i>r</i> )
Conscientiousness				
Romantic	.04	.15	.25	–.22
Children	.01	.24*	.07	–.23*
Community	.22	–.02	.18	.03
Overall	.13	.26*	.25*	–.23*
Agreeableness				
Romantic	.05	.16	.29	–.35*
Children	.19	.31*	–.32*	–.11
Community	.39*	–.03	–.01	–.18
Overall	.30*	.28*	–.05	–.35*
Emotional stability				
Romantic	.07	.11	.13	.07
Children	.09	–.05	.04	–.04
Community	.23	–.14	.07	–.13
Overall	.19	–.06	.13	–.10

Note. *N* = 100.

\* *p* < .05.

Social engagement at Wave 1 predicted changes in personality traits over time in two instances. Specifically, overall level of social engagement at Wave 1 predicted change in conscientiousness over time ( $\beta = .25, p < .05$ ). Contrary to our expectations, engagement with children at Time 1 was negatively associated with changes in agreeableness over time ( $\beta = -.32, p < .05$ ).

**Correlated change.** The patterns of correlated change present in the current models was, surprisingly, in contrast with the expectation that change in social engagement would correlate positively with change in prosocial personality traits. Specifically, changes in engagement with children and overall engagement were negatively related to changes in conscientiousness ( $\beta = -.23, p < .05$ ). In addition, changes in romantic relationship engagement and overall engagement were negatively related to changes in agreeableness ( $\beta = -.35, p < .05$ ).

### Discussion

The present research examined the relationship between personality traits and engaging in social roles within a longitudinal sample of 100 adults age 60 years and older assessed twice during a 2.5-year period. The current findings present evidence suggesting that individual differences in traits predict individual differences in change in engagement and vice versa. Surprisingly, some of the findings were contrary to findings in younger populations, such as the negative relation between engagement with children and changes in agreeableness.

In keeping with previous findings from young adult and midlife samples, we hypothesized that the prosocial personality traits of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability would predict increases in social engagement over time because these individuals would both choose to engage in these activities more and have lived lifestyles that facilitate continued engagement and increasing engagement in social roles. As expected, being conscientious and agreeableness at the beginning of the study corresponded to changes in commitment to children and overall engagement during the course of the study. This is particularly interesting because the majority of "children" being referenced in the measures of commitment to children are actually adults working on establishing independent lives of their own. Thus, prosocial seniors continue to see their adult children in particular and social roles in general as integral parts of their identity and increase commitment to these important roles over time.

Traditionally, the potential impact of social roles on personality change is largely attributed to attaining social roles during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1959; Havighurst, 1972; Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005). However, the present research indicates that social roles may also be important for understanding certain patterns of personality trait change in older adulthood. Specifically, although there were no mean-level changes in personality traits within the sample, overall engagement related positively to changes in conscientiousness over time. This finding suggests that social engagement may serve as a buffer against potential declines in conscientiousness. Individuals who are committed to social roles have expectations, opportunities, and affordances to behave in a conscientious manner. The unengaged individual may have little reason to "plan ahead" and "accomplish my work on time" but ample excuses to be "late" and "put off unpleasant tasks" (Goldberg, 1999).

The finding that social role engagement is linked to change in conscientiousness over time could be particularly important for gerontologists because conscientiousness has been closely linked to health outcomes (Hampson, Goldberg, Vogt, & Dubanoski, 2007; Lodi-Smith et al., 2010), including mortality (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007) as well as both clinically significant and normative cognitive declines during aging (Wilson, Schneider, Arnold, Bienias, & Bennett, 2007). In addition, recent work has suggested that these effects may occur, at least in part, because conscientious individuals regularly engage in healthy behaviors such as eating well and exercising (Hampson et al., 2007; Lodi-Smith et al., 2010). Thus, it may be that commitment to social roles is in part beneficial to long-term health because social engagement can serve as a protective factor against potentially harmful declines in conscientiousness and, therefore, can help promote better health and longevity.

Surprisingly, the other prospective effect of engagement on personality trait change was not in keeping with expectations. Specifically, seniors who were highly committed to their children during Wave 1 became more disagreeable over the course of the study while those who were less committed to their children became more agreeable. Patterns of correlated change were also inconsistent with expectations. Specifically, change in engagement with children was inversely related to change in conscientiousness. It may be the case that the meaning of engagement with children changes as people age. It is possible that increasing engagement with one's children in old age may represent some important third factor, such as an increase in dependence on one's children because of the vagaries of declining health and functioning in old age. Future research should examine the meaning of investing in one's children in old age more thoroughly to test these ideas.

It was also the case that changes in engagement in romantic relationships showed an inverse relation to changes in agreeableness. We can only speculate about this finding. Like the effect for children, increasing investment in one's romantic relationship at this age may be a facsimile for a spouse who is in greater need of care, which may increase stress and thus decrease agreeableness. Like the effect for children, this finding highlights the possibility that role investment in old age may have a distinctly different meaning than role investment in young adulthood or middle age.

Regardless of the direction of the findings, we want to stress that the present findings suggest that social roles can be important mechanisms of personality trait change during older adulthood and that, at the level of the individual, personality traits are malleable even into the retirement years. Some theories of personality development claim that there is little meaningful personality trait change after young adulthood that results from life experiences (McCrae et al., 2000; Terracciano, McCrae, & Costa, 2010). However, the current findings suggest that social roles experiences may influence individual differences in personality trait change even in older adulthood.

### Study Limitations and Future Directions

The current study had several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the present research only examined 100 individuals at two time points, 2.5 years apart. Although this is a fine start for a first examination of the longitudinal relationship of engaging in

various social roles to personality traits, it should also serve as a call for further investigations of these important relationships. Second, the attrition rate of approximately 35% for the longitudinal sample was less than ideal. It is possible that at least part of the attrition in the second wave of assessment may have been due to changes in social environments, such as retiring or widowhood. Thus, the Wave 2 assessment may have oversampled those individuals who retained a stable social environment and thus impaired the ability of the current longitudinal study to accurately detect change both in social engagement and, possibly, in personality traits over time.

Next, the current research characterized social engagement as a subjective investment in a given role rather than just a dichotomous marker of role status or a quantitative index of time spent engaging in a given role. However, the way this was operationalized in the present study suggests some future work that can be done in conceptualizing social engagement. Specifically, an individual who did not have a given role was given a score of 1 on the social engagement index. However, this does not capture the reasons underlying the lack of a role. A newly divorced woman who just escaped a long, abusive marriage may be reveling in her single status, whereas a recently widowed man may find his new single status to be a source of great distress. That both these individuals receive a score of 1 on the investment scale in this research points to the need for future work to develop more nuanced understanding not just of role status in individual lives but also of the meaning of a role or lack thereof to a person's identity.

In addition, the present study only encompassed a small subset of the mechanisms through which traits change in older adulthood. Future research should address the importance of other roles that may be central to individual identity, such as grand parenting, caregiving, leisure activities, political activism, and mentoring. In addition, social engagement is likely not the only way personality traits change in adulthood. For example, internal nonsocial experiences, such as changes in physical health or cognitive function, may impact both personality and role engagement (Roberts, O'Donnell, & Robins, 2004; Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2010). In addition, life-span development theory suggests that not only do normative age-graded experiences influence development but history-graded and nonnormative experiences also can play a critical role in development (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 2006). Future research should integrate multiple mechanisms of change to understand the full spectrum of how personality traits change in older adulthood.

Finally, it was somewhat surprising that the present data provided no explicit evidence for the presence of the corresponsive principle of personality development, wherein engagement fosters change in the personality traits that initially lead to the selection of engagement roles (Roberts & Wood, 2006), within an older adult sample. That said, the wealth of data supporting the corresponsive principle has been derived from studies of young adults. It may be that the conditions of old age bring a different set of relations and that the corresponsive principle no longer applies to personality development at this stage of life.

## Conclusion

The present study tested the longitudinal relations between social engagement and personality traits in old age. Correlations at

the initial stage of the study conformed to expectations that agreeable adults would be more engaged in social roles. In contrast, the longitudinal patterns showed that although prosocial traits predict changes in engagement over time, participation in social roles was associated with change in engagement largely opposite of what has been shown in young adulthood and middle age. It is our hope that this preliminary investigation will serve as a catalyst for future research tracking these patterns and mechanisms across the life span in this emerging area of personality development. Longitudinal research is poised not only to capture how demographic role changes impact personality over the life span but also to assess how changes in role commitments impact the broader identity and vice versa.

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