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Introducing Self-Permission: Theoretical Framework and Proposed Assessment

Nico Rose
nico.rose@bertelsmann.de

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Abstract

The term self-permission refers to a belief about the self that a person can hold, to a stronger or weaker extent. Self-permission, in short, is the answer an individual gives oneself when asking about their perceived allowance to reach overarching long-term objectives, such as having a fulfilling career or enjoying a lasting and gratifying relationship. At a broader level, the question is whether a person allows him or herself to lead a happy and rewarding life. This paper describes the concept of self-permission, explores its nomological network and possible antecedents and consequences, proposes a corresponding self-permission scale (SPS), and suggests a study for assessing 1) the psychometric properties of that scale, 2) its relationship with conjectured adjacent constructs, and 3) its relationship with psychological functioning. Considering how important it seems to be to most individuals to make the best out of their lives and to live up to a deeply felt sense of purpose, a better understanding of self-permission could significantly benefit the psychological well-being of many people who do not allow themselves to thrive.

Keywords

Self-Permission, Self-Efficacy, Beliefs, Personality, Life Goals, Flourishing, Satisfaction with Life, Subjective Well-Being

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Introducing Self-Permission: Theoretical Framework and Proposed Assessment

Nico Rose

University of Pennsylvania

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Advisor: Margaret L. Kern

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The term self-permission refers to a belief about the self that a person can hold, to a stronger or weaker extent. Self-permission, in short, is the answer an individual gives oneself when asking about their perceived allowance to reach overarching long-term objectives, such as having a fulfilling career or enjoying a lasting and gratifying relationship. At a broader level, the question is whether a person allows him or herself to lead a happy and rewarding life. This paper describes the concept of self-permission, explores its nomological network and possible antecedents and consequences, proposes a corresponding self-permission scale (SPS), and suggests a study for assessing 1) the psychometric properties of that scale, 2) its relationship with conjectured adjacent constructs, and 3) its relationship with psychological functioning. Considering how important it seems to be to most individuals to make the best out of their lives and to live up to a deeply felt sense of purpose, a better understanding of self-permission could significantly benefit the psychological well-being of many people who do not allow themselves to thrive.

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Introduction

People have goals. We are constantly on to something: places to go, people to meet, things to do. It is strikingly odd trying to imagine a healthy person that does not have any goals, however small they may be. But if having personal goals and striving to reach them play such an important part in all of our lives, why does fulfilling those goals so often go wrong? When people set goals, why do they run out of motivation along the way? Why does their self-regulation fail them? Many people never reach their personal (life) goals or, alternatively, are not able to sustain a desired personal change after the initial inception. I believe that this is the case not because of a lack of information, but rather because something critical is missing from the academic and practical discussion: the concept of self-permission.

Why should a person believe she is not allowed or entitled to reach her life goals – or maybe not even allowed to lead a happy life? The goal of this paper is to provide some answers to this question. More precisely, the following issues will be covered: What is the nature of self-permission? Why should different persons vary in their levels of self-permission? And what is its relationship to similar psychological constructs? Finally, a proposal for the measurement of self-permission is presented, along with suggestions for assessing its relationship to other similar constructs and life outcomes such as human flourishing and satisfaction with life.

What is Positive Psychology?

In 1998, Martin Seligman was elected president of the American Psychological Association (APA). Looking back on an already extraordinarily fruitful career in research and teaching, mostly in clinical psychology with a focus on the causes and treatment of depression (Seligman, 1975), he had an epiphany that led to the formulation of a societal need for *positive psychology*, a branch of psychology that would investigate a wide array of positive phenomena

in human life, such as love, character strengths, high achievement, and psychological well-being and human flourishing in general (Seligman, 2011). He proposed positive aspects of life should be investigated with the same scientific rigor that psychology has applied to negative phenomena (such as depression, anxiety, aggression) for the first century of its formal existence as an academic discipline. A rigorous scientific approach was meant to distinguish positive psychology from the extant self-help literature that partly expounds similar topics of interest (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to the "founding manifesto" of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), the objective of positive psychology is:

> To begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities. The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experience: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (past), hope and optimism (future), and flow and happiness (present). At the individual level it is about positive individual traits -- the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future-mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (p.5)

The field has attracted the attention of a multitude of researchers and practitioners alike, making it one of the fastest growing sub-domains in psychology over the first years of the 21st century (Seligman, 2011; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011). In his recent book, Seligman (2011) gives an account of what he believes to be the "state of the art" of positive psychology: a theory of human flourishing, which he terms the PERMA framework. PERMA is an acronym composed of the first letters of the terms positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning,

and accomplishment. Positive emotions comprise the beneficial effects of experiencing feelings

such as love, joy, and happiness. It plays a dominating role in Fredrickson's (1998; 2011)

"broaden and build" theory of positive emotions. Similarly, Huppert and So (2013) include

positive emotion as a primary component of flourishing. Engagement, at its highest level, can

best be subsumed as the concept of flow, which is a state of being deeply immersed in an

ongoing activity, forgetting about the time and surroundings, and being completely at one with

what one does (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989). Experiencing close

relationships are equally important for human flourishing, as feeling close to others has several

positive consequences. For instance, married couples are happier than singles or divorced women

and men on average, and they also tend to live longer, especially longer than divorced and

bereaved people (Fredrickson, 2013; Peterson, 2006). Similar results have been found for long-

lasting friendships (Demır & Weitekamp, 2007; Myers, 2000). And loneliness is a prime

predictor of poor health outcomes (Cacioppo, Hawkley, & Berntson, 2003). Meaning is

concerned with favorable effects of experiencing a sense of direction, connection to something

greater than oneself, and purpose in life. For instance Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, and Lorentz

(2008) found that the presence of meaning in life is associated with a sense of relatedness, self-

acceptance, environmental mastery, and perceived personal growth. Finally, accomplishment is

concerned with success and achievement. It can be defined in an objective sense through awards

and honors earned, or subjectively as a sense of mastery, competence, and personality traits

leading to success in life. An early contribution was made by Bandura in describing the concept

of self-efficacy (1977), long before the official formulation of positive psychology, in which he

was able to show that self-efficacy beliefs decidedly impact the extent to which people engage in

coping behaviors in the face of stressful events (for instance, phobic persons being exposed to

fear-inducing stimuli), and how much effort they exert to change their behavior in a desired

direction in these kinds of situations. A more recent development is the research on the

personality trait of grit, which can be characterized as a passion for long-term goals and the

development of extraordinary perseverance in pursuit of those goals, and most likely is an

important precursor of accomplishment (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007;

Duckworth & Seligman, 2005).

Researchers in the emerging field of positive psychology have amassed a considerable

body of empirical research, most of which tries to narrow in on the questions of what makes and

keeps an individual happy and satisfied (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Researchers also examine,

for instance, what positive psychology has to say on what makes for a formidable school

(Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009), a thriving business organization

(Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), a community that is worthwhile to live in (Prilleltensky,

2012), and how it can influence the practices of psychotherapy (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks,

2006) and sports (Magyar-Moe, 2011).

In terms of individual well-being, one area of interest has been the question of to what

extent happiness and satisfaction with life can be directly influenced by human agency, versus

what lies beyond our sphere of control (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). A rather

influential (but not undisputed) answer to that question has been provided by Lyubomirsky

(2008); she posits that some 50% of our individual happiness is determined by our genes and

10% is influenced by external living conditions such as the country we live in, or the amount of

money we earn. That leaves a solid 40% of our happiness under our personal control. The author

argues that those 40% can best be "activated" by adopting certain mindsets or engaging in

intentional activities that can benefit reports of individual happiness. Among those intentional

activities is choosing the right goals, be they short-term or long-term – where "right" means

goals that display a high level of fit with the individual's belief and value system (Sheldon &

Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon, Kasser, Smith, & Share, 2002). This notion of choosing the right

goals provides an important foundation for this paper.

Self-Permission Defined

Having goals may be one of the central defining elements of our human nature (Austin &

Vancouver, 1996; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). We have been called the "knowing man" (*Homo*

sapiens; e.g., Gärdenfors, 2003), the "playing man" (*Homo ludens*; Huizinga, 1955), and even

the "story-telling man" (*Homo narrans*; Niles, 1999), among many other expressions. In one

of his latest works, Martin Seligman and some colleagues (2013) posited that we are the

"envisioning man" (*Homo prospectus*). The authors argue that this is a fitting portrayal based on

the fact that we always seem to be "drawn by the future". We are also drawn by our future

selves; there is always an upgrade, a need to create a "Me 2.0". From this perspective, it is hard

to imagine a person that has stopped trying to become something else (Seligman et al., 2013).

Many researchers agree that reaching goals is a cornerstone of a life well-lived, since it is a

gratifying experience and makes us happy at the end of the day (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990;

Deci & Ryan, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995; Seligman, 2011; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

But if having personal goals and striving to reach them play such an important part in all

of our lives, why does fulfilling those goals so often go wrong? When people set goals, why do

they run out of motivation along the way? Why do does their self-regulation fail them? After all,

advice on how to reach goals – be they small and short-term, or large and long-term – is readily

available. The question on how to set proper personal goals and how to follow through with them

has been an integral part of academic psychology for decades (e.g. Ajzen, 1991; Gollwitzer,

1999; Locke & Latham, 1990; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 2001). Related constructs, such as

motivational processes, behavioral regulation, perseverance, and willpower, have received

considerable research attention (e.g. Bandura, 1986; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice,

1998; Duckworth, & Seligman, 2005; Maslow, 1954; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Additionally, this

knowledge has been made available to the general public (more or less appropriately) via

thousands of books, websites, and training courses. Therapists, coaches, and motivational

speakers of countless proveniences offer an endless variety of services to people who seek out

help (McGhee, 2005; Salerno, 2006). One of the most successful (but also most controversial)

among them is Anthony "Tony" Robbins, whose work is largely based on the framework of

neuro-linguistic programming (Robbins, 1992). Among the more "academically-minded"

authors, Heath and Heath (2010) and Halvorson (2010) have seen recent successes in the market.

Yet even with all this support that is potentially available, many people still do not reach their

personal (life) goals or, alternatively, are not able to sustain a desired personal change after the

initial inception.

I believe this is the case not because of a lack of information, but rather because

something critical is missing from the academic and practical discussion: the concept of *self-*

permission. The term self-permission as used in this paper refers to the answer a person gives to

herself (at least implicitly) when asking: "Am I *allowed* to reach my life goals?", where life

goals are conceived of as overarching long-term objectives, such as having a fulfilling career or

enjoying a lasting and gratifying relationship (Emmons, 1986; Emmons & King, 1988). It is a

belief about the self that a person can hold to a stronger or lesser extent. At a broader level, the

question is: am I allowed to lead a happy and rewarding life (according to criteria such as

included in Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework)? To make the concept of self-permission

(precisely: the *lack of* self-permission) more concrete, consider the following example: [1]

> *Gregory is about to finish high school. He desperately wants to pursue a life as a*
> *professional classical pianist. He loves music more than anything else, commands*
> *sufficient talent, and is equally willing to engage in the necessary practice hours – as he*
> *has done all through his childhood. On that note, he has already successfully applied for*
> *a renowned conservatory to finish his musical education. Yet, his father, grandfather, and*
> *great-grandfather all have sought successful and very rewarding careers as medical*
> *doctors. His father has at times conveyed that – while valuing Gregory's musical talent*
> *and ambition – he would very much like to see him stick with the "family tradition" and*
> *become a doctor as well. After several rather emotional discussions with his parents,*
> *Gregory decides to dismiss his father's appeal and enrolls at the academy of music. After*
> *doing well for a couple of months, he begins to feel more and more stressed. He starts to*
> *skip practice sessions, delivers flawed performances on important rehearsals, and*
> *gradually loses much of his enjoyment in performing the music he once loved. About two*
> *years later, he's admonished to leave the conservatorium, due to diminishing prospects of*
> *success. Inconsolable, Gregory moves in with his parents again to sort out what to do*
> *with the rest of his life. He looks at the homepages of some pre-medical schools, but*
> *cannot make up his mind to enroll. Currently, he makes some money by giving piano*
> *lessons to children in the neighborhood and is considerably happy doing that – but deep*
> *inside, he feels like some part of him has died.*

In this case, although Gregory had the desire and drive for a successfully musical career, he did

not allow himself to embrace his passions, leading to failure at school and lack of contentment in

his life. This case drastically shows how the lack of self-permission can keep a person from

pursuing his life goals and severely diminish psychological well-being in the long run. Here, a

conflict between parents and their son led to misery, as the son was not able to reconcile his own

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[1] 'This case is a fictional yet prototypical example, based on several real-life clients that visited the author's
 coaching practice between 2008 and 2014. A similar case study is presented in Rose (2012).

needs with those of his parents. The son sacrificed his own well-being in order to ensure his parent's "mental peace".

The "need to belong" is one of the strongest motives that drive people's decisions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gerber & Wheeler, 2009; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). It is reasonable to assume that such compromises happen quite often and are fairly independent of socio-cultural differences. For instance, Gregory could as well be the first-born son of an indigene people's chieftain in the Amazonas area refusing to take on his legacy of becoming the next chieftain, or a Japanese girl refusing to become a traditional housewife and instead pursuing a corporate career. Of course, there may be other reasons that lead to lack of self-permission, some of which will be explored later in the paper. Yet I believe that perceived conflicts with significant others are among the key determinants of non-permission.

As such, self-permission bears some similarity to the concept of autonomous functioning (Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2012). Consistent with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985a; Ryan & Deci, 2000), autonomy is defined as regulation by the self. When acting autonomously, people experience their behaviors as self-endorsed and consistent with their values and interests. Autonomy can be contrasted with other-control, in which one's behavior is regulated by powers experienced outside of the self, such as external contingencies and social pressures (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This is why I use the term *self*-permission. Ultimately, the permission to pursue one's life goals has to come from *inside of* the individual in order to exert a beneficial effect on well-being. It is part of the process of individuation/self-actualization (Maslow, 1954; Ryff, 1989). Returning to Gregory, this means that as a more self-actualized individual, Gregory would not seek the approval of his parents, or at least not attach as

much importance to their approval as he actually does – a notion that is also in line with self-

concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998; 1999).

Note that in order for a dynamic such as in Gregory´s case to unfold its calamitous

effects, it is more or less irrelevant whether the perceived disagreement is real (where both sides

feel there actually *is* a conflict), or if the conflict is simply perceived as a product of unverified

assumptions about another person's motives (where only one side believes there is a conflict). To

that effect, it does not make a difference if Gregory's *father really wants* him to become a doctor

(and says so), or if Gregory just firmly *believes* his father wants him to become a doctor, while in

reality, the father thinks Gregory should do whatever he pleases. This is a result of the so-called

Thomas theorem that states "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"

(Thomas & Thomas, 1928, pp. 571-572).

Self-Permission as a Variable in (Life) Coaching Processes

Since 2008, I have worked as a life coach in Germany and coached several hundred

clients over that time. Before that, I had taken part in more than 2,000 hours of training in several

different schools of coaching and related techniques for supporting people in personal change

projects, such as systemic coaching (Cavanagh, 2006), transactional analysis (Newton & Napper,

2010), and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP; O'Connor & Lages, 2004), among others. A

coaching process can be depicted as a self-regulatory cycle that begins with the formation of a

goal, the articulation of an action plan, and participation in an ongoing reflective cycle based on

activities that are carried out between coaching sessions. Whereas goals are clear-cut and

obvious for some clients, for others, the goals are not. Coaching can help to resolve concerns

such as not being sure what goals to set, struggling to attain goals set by other people, and

dealing with fluctuations in motivation (Spence & Grant, 2007; Spence & Oades, 2011).

A standard procedure in NLP-based coaching interventions is the so-called *ecological check* (eco check) that occurs towards the beginning of a coaching process. The eco check serves to assess the ecological validity of the client's goal; that is, the congruence between the client's internal system (e.g., her motives, values, potentially competing goals) and external system (e.g., the motives and goals of important people in her life). It is a technique that uncovers potential undesired consequences and/or side effects of goal attainment (Bandler & Grinder, 1982). For instance, after the initial formulation of the goal the coachee wants to work on, the coach will ask the client to engage in an introspective process. Typical questions could be: "Are you sure that you really want to reach that goal – or may there be parts in you that would be unhappy if you really got what you want?" Or: "Think of those people in your life that are important to you. Now, is there potentially anyone that would be decidedly unhappy if you really got what you want?" The objective of this discussion is to identify potential stumbling blocks on the road to goal-attainment. Sometimes, a client will be able to directly articulate such concerns, but a coach is also advised to look for incongruence between verbal and non-verbal behavior (Burdett, 1998). For instance, the coachee might negate the above-mentioned questions – but do so with a pronounced frown or a shaking voice. In that case, the coach should continue asking questions along the same lines, based on the assumption that the incongruence might point towards "ecological" problems.

There is another more specific way of carrying out the ecological check – although decidedly less commonly used. This procedure directly tries to identify the extent to which a client has self-permission with regards to a certain goal. The coach will first help the client to establish the goal she wants to work on. Once that goal is formulated, the coach will help the coachee to engage in goal-related imagery (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Oettingen, Pak, &

Schnetter, 2001). More specifically, the coach asks the client to imagine, on the audio-visual and

kinesthetic level (and potentially even on olfactory or gustatory levels), what it would be or feel

like to already have reached the goal. For instance, if the client's goal is to transition from the

status of being employed in a large company to being self-employed or the founder of her own

company, the coach will say something like: "OK, I'd like you to pretend that you have already

reached your goal. Now, you are self-employed as X/Y/Z. What does that look like? What do

you see in that image? Or is it a short film, maybe? What do you hear? And how does it feel

seeing what you can see right now? Can you even smell or taste something?" The client will then

verbalize what she sees, hears, and feels while engaging in that imagination process (e.g., being

in her own office, talking to customers or clients, and earning money via doing what she does). If

that "vision" is unambiguously attractive and alluring to the client, the coach is typically able to

perceive changes in the client's physiological state, such as smiling, slight flushing, an altered

breathing pattern, and an increase use of gestures. Basically, the client's overall "energy level"

rises considerably (Schultheiss & Brunstein, 1999). The coach can also ask the client directly if

she really likes what she perceives in that moment. After having established that the goal is truly

attractive for the client, the coach will interrupt the imagery process and directly ask the coachee

on the status of her self-permission. I tend to say something like: "OK, that seems to be a really

attractive goal for you, right? Now, please answer this question: Are you *really* allowed to reach

that goal?" Alternatively: "Do you think you have permission to reach that goal?" I will then

look at the client openly and silently and wait for the response. In my experience, there are three

ways that clients typically react, with varying degrees of intensity:

1. The client might say "yes", and while doing so, sustain the high energy level that was
   built up during the goal imagery process. In that case, it is reasonable to assume that

the coachee indeed *has* self-permission to reach her goal. The coaching process can then continue "as usual", for instance by breaking down the larger life goal into more manageable sub-goals.

2. After some consideration, the client might consciously say "no". The coaching process would then continue by further exploring the client's internal and external ecology in order to identify the reasons for the lack of self-permission. Once identified, those reasons can be tackled from different angles. For example, with Gregory, the coach could try to prepare him for a confrontation with his father to rectify the situation. If the lack or self-permission is not backed by objective facts, the coach could try to use techniques based on re-framing (Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006) and cognitive re-structuring (Grant, 2003).

3. The client might answer something like "I don't know", "I'm not sure"; or say "yes", but do so in an incongruent manner (e.g., with a weak voice, a visible frown, or a shake of the head). This implies that the coachee lacks self-permission without consciously knowing so. The coach would first address the assumed condition, making the lack of self-permission visible to the client. Then, the coach would proceed in a way that is comparable to the case where the client is consciously aware of his inner struggle.

From my personal experience, addressing the aspect of self-permission is crucial for sustainable life coaching procedures. Failure to do so seems to result in overlong coaching processes that are characterized by frequent backslides and unsatisfactory results in general.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the next section will try to clarify the nature of self-permission and explicate its relationship to adjacent psychological concepts. Next,

a self-permission scale is introduced, accompanied by a study proposal aimed at 1) assessing the

psychometric properties of that scale, 2) clarifying its relationship with adjacent constructs, and

3) investigating its relationship with several outcome measures of psychological functioning. The

paper ends with some concluding remarks and a proposal for future research endeavors on the

concept of self-permission.

The Nomological Network of Self-Permission

The following section aims at further explicating the concept of self-permission. What is

its "nature"? How does it fit with extant psychological theories? And why should it play a role

for an individual's well-being and psychological functioning? As visualized in Figure 1, self-

permission sits within a network of related constructs, with various antecedents and

consequences.

Self-Efficacy

As stated above, I conjecture that self-permission is a belief about the self that a person

can hold, where believing that one *has* self-permission will lead to more favorable results than

believing one does *not have* self-permission. While I use the term "have/have not", I conceive of

self-permission is something one can have to a stronger or lesser extent, that is, it is a continuous

variable, and different individuals can vary considerably in their level of self-permission.

Further, the level of (perceived) self-permission can change over a person's life. As such, I

suggest that self-permission shares some conceptual similarities with self-efficacy (Bandura,

1986), but is also a distinct construct.

Self-efficacy is the degree or strength of an individual's belief in his or her *ability* to

successfully complete certain tasks and eventually reach his or her goals (Bandura, 1986). It

affects which goals an individual chooses to pursue, positively influences persistence and self-

regulatory efforts, and ultimately, impacts the skill level achieved for the task at hand (Bandura, 1993). In short, self-efficacy is about "believing you can" (Maddux, 2005, p. 277). This belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Eden & Aviram, 1993). Self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to enhance performance in work-related settings (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998), education (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991), health outcomes (Holden, 1992), and sports (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack, 2000), among others domains.

Self-permission bears some resemblance to self-efficacy, but whereas self-efficacy is concerned with the belief in one's own *ability* to complete specific tasks and reach certain goals, self-permission is concerned with the feeling of having *approval* to pursue the goal in question. The question could also be framed as follows: "Is it *OK* if I pursue and reach my (life) goals?" I posit that self-efficacy and self-permission are fairly unrelated dimensions of an individual's belief system. In that sense, one can have high self-efficacy but low self-permission, as in Gregory's case. Such a person believes she knows *how* to reach a goal, and also believes in her ability to take the necessary steps, yet at the same time feels that she is *not free* to move in the desired direction (at least not all the way). This results in low goal attainment, and ultimately affects different aspects of psychological well-being, such as satisfaction with one's life. A person could also have high self-permission and low self-efficacy, or any other combination.

While self-efficacy beliefs were initially theorized as domain-specific (Bandura, 1977), it was later conjectured that self-efficacy encompasses everything a person does, that it is a global coping ability among a wide range of demanding situations (Scholz, Doña, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002; Shelton, 1990; Sherer & Adams, 1983). In this vein, I propose that self-permission also exists in both a narrower (e.g., am I allowed to pursue and achieve a specific life goal?) and broader (e.g., am I allowed to be happy and fulfilled?) sense, and that narrow and broad concepts

are intertwined.[2] That is, the feeling that one is not allowed to pursue and reach a specific goal may generalize over time to a wide array of contexts. Further, I assume that perceived self-permission develops over time, first and foremost in the countless interactions with primary and secondary caretakers, similar to the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1981; Schunk & Pajares, 2002), and then further evolving throughout development.

Even though self-permission and generalized self-efficacy beliefs capture different aspects of a person's self-concept, I predict they will be at least moderately positively correlated with one another. While it is possible that an individual will display high self-efficacy and low self-permission for a specific life goal, it is more likely that the two concepts will influence each other over time to affect the person's general approach toward and perspective of life. Coming back to the case of Gregory, while he may have started his studies at the conservatorium displaying high self-efficacy, feeling that he should not be there in the first place will have him ruminate over his situation, leading in turn to worse performances, lowered self-efficacy, less effort, lower performance, and so on.

Mastery and Optimism

Mastery (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978) is another concept that helps define what self-permission is and is not. Similar to internal locus of control (Twenge, Zhang, & Im, 2004), mastery refers to the perception that one has control over the events in one's life. High mastery involves a strong sense of positive expectancy for the future that is tied to personal agency (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), but in a more generalized sense than self-efficacy. I propose

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[2] The scale that is described in a later section of this paper is meant to capture self-permission in a general sense.

that the relationship of self-permission and mastery can be compared to that of self-permission and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy deals with ability, mastery is concerned with (perceived) control, and self-permission deals with (perceived) approval. It could be argued that lack of self-permission is a special case of lack of control, but within the concept of mastery, control is understood in terms of *personal* agency. Self-permission takes on a broader perspective, taking into account the larger system(s) that a person is a part of.

A related construct is optimism. Over time, optimism has been conceptualized in different ways. In psychology, optimism is most typically defined either as an explanatory style (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995; Seligman & Schulman, 1986) or as a disposition (Andersson, 1996; Scheier & Carver, 1992). From the first perspective, optimism refers to how an individual explains the causes of good and bad events in his or her life. Those who describe bad events in terms of external, unstable, and specific causes are seen as optimistic, whereas those who favor internal, stable, and global causes are labeled as pessimistic (and vice-versa for good events). From the second perspective, optimism is seen as a personality variable, precisely, the overall expectation that beneficial events will be abundant in the future, while bad events will be comparably rare. As such, trait-optimism (as well as trait-pessimism) is not domain-specific, and it is not concerned with the concrete mechanisms that lead to the (un-)favorable outcomes. So while a lack of self-permission could be framed as specific sub-domain of pessimism, I posit that it something conceptually different. Self-permission is very much concerned with the cause of the (potential) unfavorable outcomes in the future. As stated above, it especially takes into account the systemic influences that affect an individual.

Relying on the same rationale as with self-efficacy, I expect the constructs of self-permission and mastery and trait optimism to be correlated in a positive direction. In the

proposed study, I will not investigate the effect of explanatory style, but this could be a

worthwhile endeavor for future research. In fact, a lack of self-permission shares common

ground with the concept of learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978;

Seligman, 1975), and very well may be an antecedent of helplessness (e.g., why should I even try

if it is not allowed anyway?).

Autonomy

The concept of autonomy or autonomous functioning is of uttermost importance in self-

determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000). An increasing body of research suggests that

the extent to which behavior is autonomous (and therefore regulated by the self rather than by

external contingencies) is associated with a diverse set of positively experienced events and

behaviors (see Ryan & Deci, 2004 for an overview). More autonomous behavior has been

associated with greater vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), lower stress and higher subjective

well-being (Weinstein & Ryan, 2011), more engaging learning experiences (Roth, Assor, Kanat-

Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007), and an increased level of fulfillment in relationships (Knee,

Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005), among other desirable outcomes.

When acting autonomously, we experience our behavior as self-endorsed and congruent

with our innermost values and interests. Autonomy contrasts with a condition of being

controlled, in which our behavior is regulated by forces external to the self, such as social

pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Notably, autonomy can be distinguished

from independence, as autonomy is the choice of being dependent or independent from others.

We can *choose* to be autonomously dependent on others, or we can be *forced* into relying on

others (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005). Although our relative

autonomy in a given situation is typically directly influenced by contextual variables (La Guardia

& Ryan, 2007), many interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences across our life frame our unique developmental pathway, thereby shaping individual differences with regard to autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985b).

I expect a substantial amount of overlap between a person's level of self-permission and his or her extent of autonomous functioning. Yet although self-permission captures a similar aspect of the self, if differs from autonomous functioning in that it is more comprehensive and overarching. Self-permission takes on a perspective that focuses on long-term goals and one's overall life evaluation, thereby abstracting from the emphasis on day-to-day actions and experiencing autonomy "in the moment".

Measured autonomy has been broken into three sub-domains: authorship/self-congruence, and susceptibility to control, and interest-taking. Based on the empirical findings that were gathered in the process of describing the nomological net of these sub-scales (Weinstein, Przybylski, & Ryan, 2012), I expect a positive correlation between self-permission and the authorship/self-congruence, and a negative correlation between self-permission and susceptibility to control. The domain of interest-taking will not be part of the projected study as I conjecture it to be more or less independent from self-permission.

Need to Belong

The need to belong is a particularly strong intrinsic motivation to affiliate with, be socially accepted, and even loved by other people (Leary & Baumeister, 1995). Our need to belong is what drives us to pursue lasting relationships, and motivates us to engage in social activities such as sports teams and religious groups. One study found that the need to belong positively correlates with neuroticism, anxious attachment, and rejection sensitivity (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013). The authors concluded, albeit cautiously, that a distinctly

high level of need to belong could be a correlate of an anxious, even maladaptive interpersonal orientation. People particularly high in need to belong may vigilantly look for signs of social rejection and then try to cope by inappropriately removing the (perceived) distance. I posit that the need to belong will be negatively correlated with self-permission. While this cannot be addressed in the projected study, it is possible that need to belong in fact is an antecedent to self-permission, where people high in need to belong display lower scores for self-permission, for instance, as a preemptive means of avoiding interpersonal conflict.

Self-Esteem

Even though some researchers question the beneficial outcomes of having high self-esteem (e.g., Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003), it has generally been shown to be associated with high subjective well-being and other measures of psychological functioning (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Judge, & Bono, 2001). Self-esteem can be defined as an individual's overall self-evaluation of his or her competencies, but can also incorporate element of self-liking as a more affective component (Rosenberg, 1965) – although researchers argue about the exact nature of self-esteem (see Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004 for an overview). The proponents of sociometer theory theorize that self-esteem has an interpersonal quality, in that it is depicted as a system that monitors others' reactions to one's own actions and alerts the individual to the possibility of social exclusion (Leary et al., 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998). As such, self-esteem is high or rises when we feel that we belong and our need for relatedness is satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2000). So from a different angle, high self-esteem can be regarded as the (relative) absence of (perceived) interpersonal conflict.

I expect to find some overlap between self-permission and self-esteem, yet the two constructs are distinct. Self-esteem is the result of an overall evaluative process that comprises the whole person; self-permission is more specific in that it focuses on the (perceived) consent to behave or feel in a specific way. Despite this conceptual difference, it is reasonable to expect a substantial correlation.

Conflicting Motives and Goals

While this aspect will not directly be investigated in the proposed study, beliefs about self-permission will most likely be influenced by potential conflicts between one person's goals and underlying motives and those of important people in that person's life (Laursen & Collins, 1994). They will also be affected by intrapersonal discrepancies (Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, & Wade-Benzoni, 1998). As people decide which goals to pursue in life, they have to reconcile these with goals of other people, especially people that are close and/or important. To that effect, the person can either assert themselves against others in their life, comply with what the others want, or try to find a compromise (Burrell, Allen, Gayle, & Preiss, 2014). Frequent sources of such conflicts are the relationship between parents and their children (Robin & Foster, 1989) and between coworkers and/or employees and their superiors (Frone, 2000).

Although conflict is often conceived as external, it can also arise within the person, leading to (perceived) stress, impaired well-being, and lowered performance (Baumann, Kaschel, & Kuhl, 2005; Emmons & King, 1988; Riediger & Freund, 2004). For example, Kehr (2004a, 2004b) finds that conflict between managers' implicit and explicit motives (e.g., discrepancies between implicit and explicit power motives) leads to lowered effort and self-regulatory behaviors. Another class of common intrapersonal conflict is perceived discrepancy between our inner angels and demons – what we should and want to do (Milkman, Rogers, & Bazerman,

2008; O'Connor et al., 2002) – which can be the consequence of prior interpersonal conflict. On the positive side, several researchers have shown that goal congruence (i.e., fit between a person's goals and his or her personality) as well as goal coherence (i.e., fit between different goals and their underlying motives) can foster well-being and goal-related performance (Durik & Harackiewicz, 2003; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

I presume that lack of self-permission is associated with prior experiences of severe interpersonal and/or intrapersonal conflict, especially for individuals high in need to belong and/or low autonomy. Associations between self-permission and conflict also suggest an interesting link to cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT; Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery, 1979) and rational-emotive behavioral therapy (REBT; Ellis, 1962). A central tenet of both modes of psychotherapy is the detection and disputation of irrational thoughts that are seen as harmful to psychological functioning (Bridges & Harnish, 2010). In CBT, especially deep-rooted and over-generalized (negative) beliefs are sometimes called icebergs, as a person may not be aware of the full magnitude (and antecedents and consequences) of such a belief (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). In some ways, the lack of self-permission could be conceived as an irrational belief. For example, consider the possibility that Gregory's father does not really oppose his son's plan to become a professional musician, but rather Gregory *incorrectly* believes that his father does not approve of his career choice. Gregory's belief is then irrational, in that the belief does not match the reality.

At a broader level, from a purely rational point of view, a person should feel that he or she is allowed and entitled to do whatever he or she pleases, as long as it is not prohibited by law and/or harming other persons. In this spirit, techniques from CBT and REBT (such as the ABC

model; see Reivich et al., 2011 for an example from a non-clinical population) could provide valuable interventions for fostering self-permission.

The Big Five Theory of Personality

Happiness researchers such as Lyubomirsky (2008) argue that a considerable amount of our psychological well-being can be explained by our personality. The Big Five model, in which personality is organized into five factors (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience), provides a well-accepted model for thinking about links between personality and self-permission. Numerous factors, including genes, the early environment, and experiences throughout life, influence a person's personality, which in turn impacts behaviors, social relationships, and health and well-being outcomes (Friedman & Kern, 2014). Overall, there is a general consensus that extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability (low neuroticism), and conscientiousness relate to greater self-reported happiness and satisfaction with life (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener & Lucas, 1999; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008).

As personality has an impact on many aspects of life, it is reasonable to assume that it also relates to self-permission, although how each personality factor relates to self-permission is unknown. Therefore, it is important to include measures of Big Five personality to consider how the factors relate to and may influence self-permission. I conjecture that self-permission is positively related to extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experience, with unknown associations with agreeableness and conscientiousness.

With this conceptual network of similar constructs defined, I now turn to a detailed discussion of a potential empirical investigation of self-permission, including a proposed

measure of self-permission, tests of convergent and predictive validity, as well as some

information on possible samples and anticipated data analyses for evaluation.

Proposal for an Empirical Investigation of Self-Permission

I previously conducted preliminary empirical research on self-permission (Rose, 2012).

Using a convenience sample of 1,158 German-speaking people that were recruited via social

networking platforms, a correlation of $r = .48$ was found between an initial self-permission scale

and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985). Additionally, self-permission

displayed a moderate but significant correlation with self-reported income. The project proposed

here will build upon and extend this earlier work.

Despite a considerable sample size, the prior study was limited in various ways. It was

carried out in a non-academic, "quick and dirty" setting, and lacked the carefully-researched

conceptual underpinnings defined here. Being convinced that the concept of self-permission

constitutes a valuable addition to the positive psychology literature, as well as to research on

personality variables in general, I now propose a study to further validate the construct. The

goals of such a study are threefold: 1) develop and assess the psychometric properties of a self-

permission scale; 2) quantify its relationship to convergent personality variables such as

optimism and self-efficacy; and 3) assess the relationship between self-permission and important

outcome variables such as satisfaction with life and overall well-being. Figure 1 illustrates the

general framework for the study. The proposed study will include a select element of the

constructs involved.

Developing a Measure of Self-Permission

A principal objective of scale development is to create a valid measure of an underlying

construct. The prior study created a preliminary measure, but to develop the Self-Permission

Scale (SPS) into a useful and valid instrument, proper scale development is of uttermost importance (Clark & Watson, 1995). For purposes of developing a valid measure, the following 14 items should be included, with testing and refinement occurring as part of the study. Response options range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). Items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, and 12 point towards *a lack of* self-permission and should therefore be reverse-coded when calculating the composite score.

1. I do *not* have the permission to reach my life goals.

2. I have full approval to live a life full of purpose.

3. I am *not* permitted to pursue those things in life that I really cherish.

4. I am *not* granted to live up to my full potential.

5. I deserve to be everything that I can possibly be.

6. I have "carte blanche" to reach my life goals.

7. In general, I am *not* allowed to lead a rewarding and fulfilling life.

8. I do *not* have full endorsement to reach my life goals.

9. I have full consent to make the best out of my life.

10. I do *not* have sanction to lead an accomplishing and meaningful life.

11. I am free to live my life to the fullest.

12. I am *not* allowed to reach my life goals.

13. I have leave to pursue a life of contentment and joy.

14. In general, I have permission to lead a happy and gratifying life.

The items are designed to try and capture self-permission in the context of reaching one's life goals, as well as in the broader sense of being allowed to lead a rewarding worthwhile life. While some researchers doubt that adding negatively phrased items are beneficial to the

psychometric properties of a scale (e.g., DiStefano & Motl, 2006), it seems advisable to include

such items in the process of scale development. Although I expect self-permission to be a uni-

dimensional construct, it is possible that the *presence* of self-permission and the *absence* of self-

permission are somewhat independent variables. Therefore, including only positively or

negatively phrased items in the initial scale would render it impossible to detect such a pattern.

Antecedents

In line with the theoretical discussion on the role of personality variables for subjective

well-being presented in the preceding section, it will be crucial to include a corresponding

measure in the study. I intend to employ the ten-item personality inventory (TIPI) as described

by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann Jr. (2003). Additionally, the participants will be asked to

provide demographic variables such as age and gender.

Convergent Constructs

As noted above, I expect self-permission to correlate with a wide array of adjacent

variables. In order to keep the projected questionnaire at a reasonable length, not all potential

convergent constructs can be included in a single study. Appendix A provides an overview of the

constructs I plan to employ. Appendix B summarizes several research streams that will be

worthwhile to explore in the future, such as self-acceptance (MacInnes, 2006) and self-

handicapping (Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001).

In line with the theoretical deliberations provided earlier, I propose to first assess the

relationship of self-permission and general self-efficacy as measured by Chen, Gully, and Eden's

(2001) new self-efficacy scale, optimism as measured by the revised life orientation test (LOT-R;

Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), and self-esteem using the single-item self-esteem scale

(SISE; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001). Additionally, I intend to explore the relationship

of self-permission and mastery as measured by the scale introduced by Pearlin and Schooler

(1978), need to belong using the eponymous scale by Leary et al. (2013), and finally autonomous

functioning as introduced by Weinstein, Przybylski, and Ryan (2012).

Outcome Variables

       I conjecture that lack of self-permission affects an individual in most of his or her life

domains. To that effect, when assessing the connection of self-permission and measures of

psychological functioning, the latter should be "broad" in nature, capturing an individual's well-

being and functioning on a general level, rather than in specific life domains. For that reason, I

propose including two general measures of psychological well-being. First, the Satisfaction with

Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larson, & Griffin, 1985) was developed to "assess satisfaction

with the respondent's life as a whole. The scale does not assess satisfaction with life domains

such as health or finances but allows Ss to integrate and weight these domains in whatever way

they choose" (Pavot & Diener, 1993, p. 164). It is considered the most commonly used measure

of psychological functioning (Diener, Ingelhart, & Tay, 2012) and was also utilized in the

aforementioned preliminary research on self-permission (Rose, 2012). Second, the newly

developed PERMA-Profiler (Butler, & Kern, 2014) is a multidimensional scale that assesses an

individual's level of psychological functioning according to Seligman's (2011) integrative

PERMA framework of human flourishing. As I expect self-permission to influence an individual

in most of his or her life domains, all subscales of the PERMA profiler should be positively

related to self-permission. Finally, I intend to include the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Short

Depression Scale (CES-D 10; Andresen, Malmgren, Carter, & Patrick, 1994) to assess the

potential pathological effects of a lack of self-permission. Appendix A details the items that

assess these dependent variables.

Samples

I intend to administer the questionnaire to two different samples: adult U.S. citizens acquired via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) crowd sourcing service, and a convenience online sample where I will try to recruit participants via online networking sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Mturk is a crowdsourcing platform that enables its users or to co-ordinate the use of human intelligence to carry out tasks that computers are currently unable to do. Research with Mturk has been shown to yield samples that are at least of equal data quality as regular Internet samples, and most likely more representative than typical undergraduate samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). The two separate samples will be valuable for assessing the generalizability of the estimated results.[3]

Data Analyses

A first major part of analyses will involve establishing the psychometrics of the self-permission scale. The items were derived from a larger item pool and have undergone several revisions. During this process, they were discussed with several experts in personality psychology, positive psychology, and research methodology. Based on earlier research efforts, I expect the scale to display high internal consistency, and that all items will load to a single factor (uni-dimensionality). To test this, the sample will be randomly split into two groups. With the first group, exploratory factors analyses will test the dimensionality of the items and determine any poor fitting items. Cronbach's alpha will be used to test item reliability. Once the best items

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[3] A useful next step could be running the same study with a German sample, or with other cultures and languages. As of now, several of the scales are unavailable in the German language, so translation issues will need to be addressed.

for the scale are determined, the resulting structure will be confirmed in the second group, using confirmatory factor analyses.

Once the scale is established, data analyses will be straightforward. The relationship of self-permission with the other constructs will be assessed using correlational analyses. Then, to evaluate if self-permission is able to explain variance in the well-being measures above and beyond the Big Five personality measure and the presumed convergent constructs, hierarchical linear regression analyses will test self-permission as a predictor of life satisfaction, well-being (PERMA) and depression, after controlling for the other variables.

Future Directions and Concluding Remarks

The objective of this paper was to introduce the concept of self-permission to the academic community. Self-permission can be described as the feeling of being allowed or entitled to reach one's life goals, and ultimately to lead a rewarding and fulfilling life. This paper described the concept of self-permission, clarified its background in the practice of coaching, explored its nomological network, made a proposal for a self-permission scale (SPS), and proposed an empirical study for assessing 1) the psychometric properties of that scale, 2) its relationship with adjacent constructs and personality antecedents, and 3) its relationship with several outcome variables of psychological functioning.

I believe that the construct of self-permission will be an important extension of the positive psychology literature, as well as the psychology of individual differences in general. Additionally, this projected stream of research could influence the practice of coaching and counseling, as well as clinical psychology. The proposed study provides a starting point for investigating self-permission. Subsequent studies should further explore and clarify the antecedents, correlates, and consequences, as detailed in Figure 1.

The next step would be to actually carry out the proposed study described above. In case the results of this study turn out as conjectured, there are numerous ideas for follow-up studies. First, it would be valuable to carry out a similar study using a longitudinal design, in order to be able to make some tentative statements about the causal effects of self-permission on measures of psychological functioning, and how the antecedents and consequences unfold over time. Second, additional research projects could try to shed additional light on the antecedents and the formation of self-permission during childhood and adolescence. Third, studies could describe and test interventions to develop self-permission in individuals. Fourth, it might be insightful to study self-permission from a cultural perspective, for instance, using Hofstede's (1980, 1991) cultural dimensions. It seems likely that beliefs about what is allowed or not allowed for an individual will be influenced by societal perceptions – which should vary at least somewhat between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Finally, it could be a worthwhile endeavor to explore the question if self-permission also exists on a collective level, as a kind of "shared belief", such as in business organizations, or even a whole country.

To close, let me return to the questions from beginning of this paper. Why do so many people fail to reach their (life) goals? Why do they run out of motivation? Why do they not get "the life they want"? I believe that the concept of self-permission is a "missing link" that can help to solve this puzzle. Considering how important it seems to most individuals to make the best out of their lives, to live up to a deeply-felt purpose, to "seize the day" and build a meaningful life with those days, exploring self-permission could significantly benefit the psychological well-being of a large group of people on this planet.

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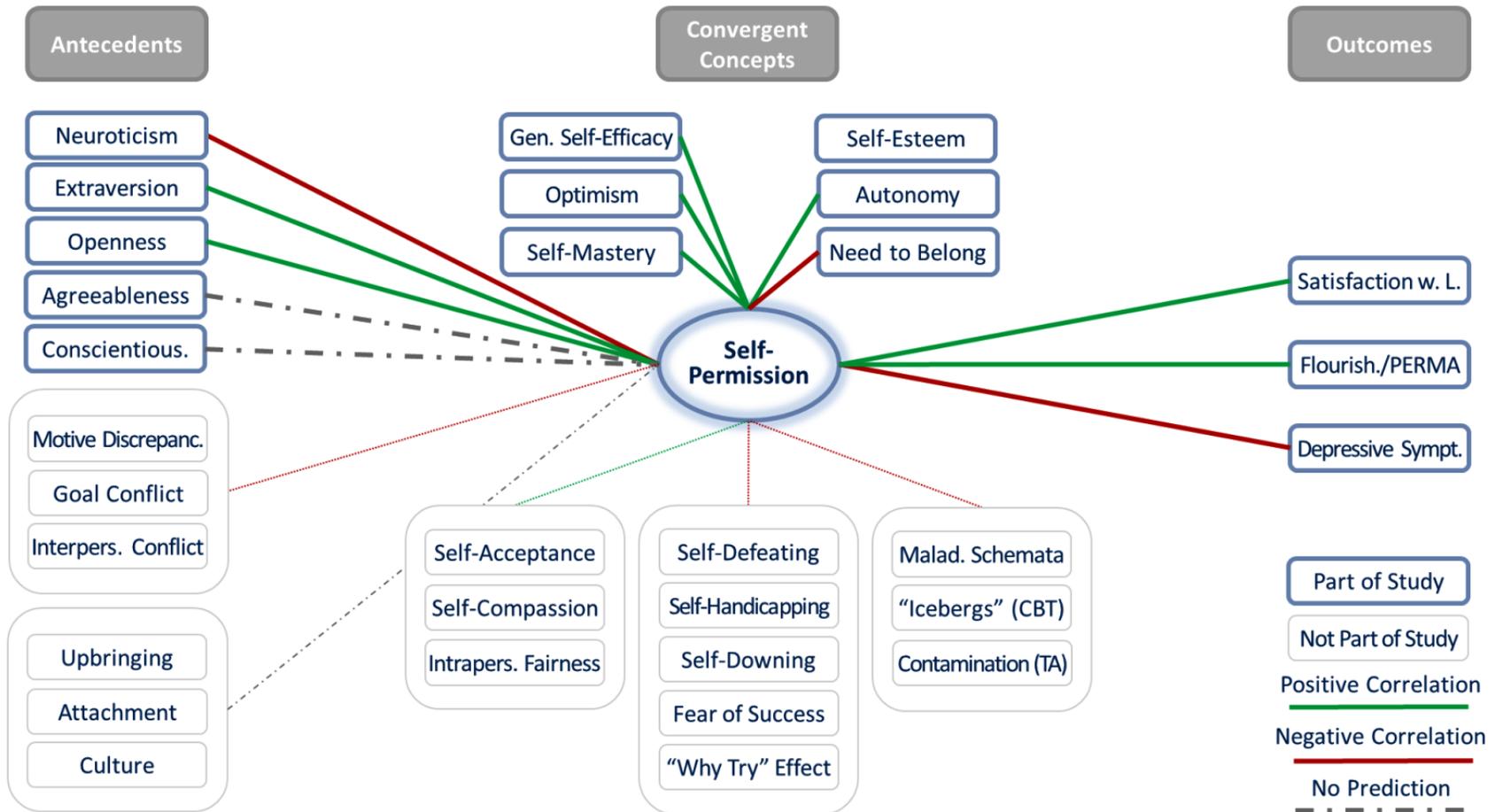
Figure 1. The nomological network of self-permission and outline for the proposed study.

Appendix A: Description of Scales to be included in the Empirical Investigation

Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI)
This is a short scale to assess personality according to the Big-Five model taken from Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann Jr. (2003). Response options range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). TIPI scale scoring ("R" denotes reverse-scored items): Extraversion: 1, 6R; Agreeableness: 2R, 7; Conscientiousness; 3, 8R; Emotional Stability: 4R, 9; Openness to Experiences: 5, 10R.

I see myself as:
1. Extraverted, enthusiastic.
2. Critical, quarrelsome.
3. Dependable, self-disciplined.
4. Anxious, easily upset.
5. Open to new experiences, complex.
6. Reserved, quiet.
7. Sympathetic, warm.
8. Disorganized, careless.
9. Calm, emotionally stable.
10. Conventional, uncreative.

New General Self-Efficacy Scale
This scale is a revised scale for the measurement of general self-efficacy taken from Chen, Gully, and Eden (2001). Response options originally are: from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) but will be changed to 1 to 7 to allow for more variance and consistency with other measures.

1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself.
2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.
3. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.
4. I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.
5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.
6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.
7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.
8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.

Index of Autonomous Functioning (IAF)
The IAF was introduced by Weinstein, Przybylski, and Ryan in 2012. It is designed to measure different aspects on a person's autonomous functioning – the feeling that one is in control of one's thoughts and corresponding actions. The construct consists of three subscales: Authorship/self-congruence, susceptibility to control, and interest-taking. In this study, only the first two scales are used. Response options originally are: from ''not at all true'' (1) to "completely true" (5) but will be changed to 1 to 7 to allow for more variance and to be consistent with other measures. For the first subscale, higher values denote a higher level of

autonomous functioning. For the second scale, the opposite is true; therefore, these items should be reverse-coded.

Subscale. Authorship/Self-Congruence:
1. My decisions represent my most important values and feelings.
2. I strongly identify with the things that I do.
3. My actions are congruent with who I really am.
4. My whole self stands behind the important decisions I make.
5. My decisions are steadily informed by things I want or care about.

Subscale. Susceptibility to Control:
1. I do things in order to avoid feeling badly about myself.
2. I do a lot of things to feel ashamed.
3. I try to manipulate myself into doing certain things.
4. I believe certain things so others will like me.
5. I often pressure myself.

Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R)
The LOT-R (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994) is a revised version of the original Life Orientation Test (LOT; Scheier & Carver, 1985). It is comprised of three items measuring optimism (1; 3; 6) and three items measuring pessimism (2; 4; 5). The regular version contains four additional filler items that are not related to optimism and pessimism; these are not used here. While Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994) originally proposed all six items should load on one factor, subsequent research suggest optimism and pessimism should be treated as separate dimensions (e.g., Herzberg, Glaesmer, & Hoyer, 2006; Kubzansky, Kubzansky, & Maselko, 2004). Response options originally ranged from "strongly disagree" (0) to "strongly agree" (4) but will be changed to 1 to 7 to allow for more variance and for consistency with other measures.

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
2. If something can go wrong for me, it will.
3. I'm always optimistic about my future.
4. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.
5. I rarely count on good things happening to me.
6. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale (SISE)
The SISE (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001) measures self-esteem and consists of only one item: "I have high self-esteem." Response options originally are: from "not very true of me" (1) to "very true of me" (5) but will be changed to 1 to 7 to allow for more variance.

Mastery Scale
Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) Mastery scale is used to measure a person's level of sense of mastery. This is characterized by the extent to which the person regards her own life-chances as being under her own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Response options are: from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7).

1. I have little control over the things that happen to me.
2. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems that I have.
3. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.
4. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.
5. Sometimes I feel that I am being pushed around in life.
6. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.
7. I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do.

Need to Belong Scale (NTBS)
The NTBS (Leary et al. 2013) measures a person's need to be socially accepted by other people. Response options originally ranged from "not at all" (1) to "extremely" (5) but will be changed to 1 to 7 to allow for more variance and for consistency with other measures. Items 1, 3, and 7 are to be reverse-coded.

1. If other people don't seem to accept me, I don't let it bother me. (R)
2. I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me.
3. I seldom worry about whether other people care about me. (R)
4. I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need.
5. I want other people to accept me.
6. I do not like being alone.
7. Being apart from my friends for long periods of time does not bother me. (R)
8. I have a strong "need to belong."
9. It bothers me a great deal when I am not included in other people's plans.
10. My feelings are easily hurt when I feel that others do not accept me.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)
This is the original satisfaction with life scale as introduced by Diener et al. (1985). Response options range from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7).

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

PERMA Profiler
The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2014) is a newly developed scale that assesses different aspects of a person's level of flourishing according to Seligman's PERMA framework (Seligman, 2011; comprised of positive emotions (P); engagement (E); relationships (R); meaning (M); achievement (A)). Moreover, the prevalence of negative emotions (N) and the individual's perception of his or her health are assessed (H). Finally, there is one question on perceived loneliness, and on overall happiness. Response options are: "not at all" (0) to "completely" (10) for items 1, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 22, 23; never" (0) to "always" (10) for items 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 20, 21; terrible" (0) to "excellent" (10) for items 4 and 18.

1. In general, to what extent do you lead a purposeful and meaningful life? (M)

2. How much of the time do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your goals? (A)
3. How often do you become absorbed in what you are doing? (E)
4. In general, how would you say your health is? (H)
5. In general, how often do you feel joyful? (P)
6. To what extent do you receive help and support from others when you need it? (R)
7. In general, how often do you feel anxious? (N)
8. How often do you achieve the important goals you have set for yourself? (A)
9. In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do in your life is valuable and worthwhile? (M)
10. In general, how often do you feel positive? (P)
11. In general, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in things? (E)
12. How lonely do you feel in your daily life? (Lonely)
13. How satisfied are you with your current physical health? (H)
14. In general, how often do you feel angry? (N)
15. To what extent do you feel loved? (R)
16. How often are you able to handle your responsibilities? (A)
17. To what extent do you generally feel you have a sense of direction in your life? (M)
18. Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health? (H)
19. How satisfied are you with your personal relationships? (R)
20. In general, how often do you feel sad? (N)
21. How often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy? (E)
22. In general, to what extent do you feel contented? (P)
23. Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? (Happy)

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Short Depression Scale (CES-D 10)
The CES-D 10 (Andresen et al., 1994) is a shortened version of the CES-D (Radloff, 1977) and measures the prevalence of depressive symptoms in the general population. Response options are: "**R**arely or none of the time (less than 1 day); "**S**ome or a little of the time" (1-2 days); "Occasionally or a moderate amount of time" (3-4 days); "All of the time (5-7 days)".

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.
2. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.
3. I felt depressed.
4. I felt that everything I did was an effort.
5. I felt hopeful about the future.
6. I felt fearful.
7. My sleep was restless.
8. I was happy.
9. I felt lonely.
10. I could not "get going."

Appendix B: Other Related Research Streams

There are several other streams of research that might be able to inform our understanding of self-permission. They will not be part of the projected empirical study that is described in the main section of this paper. Nonetheless, I will briefly summarize them here, as other researchers might want to investigate their connection to self-permission in more detail in the future.

"Why Try" Effect

The *"why try" effect* is typically examined in the context of clinical psychology, as it can be observed in people with mental disorders. It is assumed that people who are labeled as having a mental disorder might internalize this label, which in turn can lead to self-stigmatization. This then leads to lowered levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and perception of empowerment, ultimately resulting in a lowered activation level and engagement with regard to trying to reach one's life goals (Corrigan, Larson, & Ruesch, 2009; Corrigan, Watson, & Barr, 2006). The same mechanism may be at work at a sub-clinical level via appraisals coming from caretakers, teachers, or superiors later in life.

Fear of Success

The concept of *fear of success* was introduced to academic discourse by Horner (1972), and then developed further by other researchers (e.g., Monahan, Kuhn, & Shaver, 1974). Horner investigated stereotypes and biases that discouraged both men and women from pursuing careers in non-traditional occupations. In her study, Horner specifically studied stereotypes and biases that kept women from pursuing a career in medicine, which at the time was a customarily male-oriented occupation. She reasoned that women have "a motive to avoid success" out of fear of potential negative consequences for succeeding in traditionally masculine domains. As such, Horner identified fear of success as a psychological blockade to women's advancement in the workforce and in society in general. While she examined fear of success in a gender-specific context, it is likely that there are other factors that instill a similar fear, thus making it a more common phenomenon. Thus, fear of success might also have to say something on lack of self-permission.

Self-Defeating Personality Disorder

While it has never been officially admitted to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), some researchers believe in the existence of a specific syndrome of *self-defeating personality disorder*, sometimes also called masochistic personality disorder. It is characterized as a pervasive pattern of self-defeating behavior, which begins by early adulthood and appears over a variety of different contexts. The person often avoids or undermines pleasurable experiences, is drawn to situations in which he or she will suffer, and prevents others from helping him or her. Diagnostic criteria include rejecting or rendering ineffective the attempts of others to help him or her; reacting with depression, guilt, or painful behavior after experiencing positive personal events; rejecting opportunities for pleasure or is reluctant to acknowledge enjoying himself or herself (despite having adequate social skills and the capacity for pleasure); failing to complete tasks crucial to his or her personal objectives despite confirmed ability to do so (e.g., helps fellow students write papers, but is unable to write his or her own); and engaging in unnecessary self-sacrifice that is unwanted by the intended recipients of the

sacrifice (Schill, 1990; Widiger, 1995). Berglas and Baumeister (1993) suggested that there might be a milder, sub-clinical form of self-defeating personality disorder, which could play an important role in lack of self-permission.

Self-Handicapping and Defensive Pessimism

There is considerable empirical evidence that people regularly engage in a wide array of *self-handicapping* behaviors (Berglas & Jones, 1978). Self-handicapping is conceptualized as a cognitive strategy by which people evade the exertion of effort in the hope of keeping possible failure from damaging one's self-esteem. Self-handicaps are hurdles created or claimed by the individual in expectation of inadequate performance. Self-handicapping can be seen as a way to preserve self-esteem, but it can also be used for self-promotion and impression management. This preservation or amplification of self-esteem is due to changes in causal attributions for success and failure (Baumeister & Scher, 1988). Self-handicapping is often investigated in the context of academic performance. Procrastination and more or less intentionally lowering one's effort in preparing for exams or assignments are common self-handicapping strategies in this domain (Beck, Koons, & Milgrim, 2000; Urdan & Midgley, 2001).

Another common strategy is *defensive pessimism*, a cognitive strategy that entails setting unrealistically low expectations and thinking through worst-case scenarios for an upcoming performance situation. It has been suggested that setting low expectations serves to prevent a loss of self-esteem in case of failure (Elliot, & Church, 2003; Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001). Similarly, displaying low self-permission could also be a strategy of preserving one's self-esteem. If a person does not allow herself to pursue a goal, not reaching the goal at all removes the possible threat to the ego.

Self-Downing (Irrational Thinking)

A core concept in rational-emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) is *irrational beliefs*, which are more or less automated evaluative cognitions about objective events in one's life. As a consequence of holding irrational beliefs, people develop unhealthy emotions, dysfunctional behaviors and, ultimately, a lack of self-acceptance. More rational and realistic ways of thinking, on the other hand, yield healthier emotions and behaviors and greater acceptance of the self as well as other people (Bridges & Harnish, 2010; Dryden & Neenan, 2004). Based on content and structure, several different categories of irrational beliefs have been identified in REBT: demandingness, awfulizing (or catastrophizing), low frustration tolerance, and self-downing (David, Schnur, & Belloiu, 2002; Davies, 2008). In the future, it may be worthwhile to further investigate the relationship between self-permission and the self-downing category, as this signifies engaging in global negative evaluations about the self.

Unconditional Self-Acceptance

Unconditional self-acceptance is another key concept in REBT, at least as conceptualized by Albert Ellis (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). Self-acceptance is defined as accepting oneself unconditionally, irrespective of whether one behaves adeptly or appropriately and whether others are likely to express agreement or respect. As such, it can be juxtaposed to self-evaluative behavior, self-rating, and "hunting" for self-esteem (MacInnes, 2006). Ellis (1977) advised people to abandon the quest for self-esteem and the self-rating process that comes with it. In his own words, unconditional self-acceptance means that "the individual fully and unconditionally

accepts himself whether or not he behaves intelligently, correctly, or competently and whether or not other people approve, respect, or love him" (p. 101). As self-permission entails cognitions and feelings about not being allowed or not deserving to reach one's life goals, and ultimately, to be happy, I reason there is some similarity between the two concepts. After all, an individual that displays a high amount of self-acceptance should feel entitled to do whatever he or she wants – as long as it is legal and does not hurt other people.

Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is characterized as being touched by and being open to one's own suffering, not evading or disengaging from it, producing the wish to alleviate one's suffering and to heal oneself with gentleness. Self-compassion also entails offering non-judgmental understanding to one's pain, shortcomings, and failures, so that one's own life is seen as part of the larger human experience (Neff, 2003; Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005). A high level of self-compassion has been shown to be positively associated with several outcomes of psychological functioning, but it is different from personality variables such as self-esteem and self-efficacy (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007; Neff & Vonk, 2009). As such, it is possible that self-compassion and self-permission are somewhat related, where a lack of self-compassion is accompanied by a lack of self-permission.

Intrapersonal Fairness

Prilleltensky (2012) describes how our perception of *fairness/justice* may influence our psychological well-being. In doing so, he differentiates between different levels of fairness: fairness on the community level (e.g., the distribution of wealth in a city), fairness on the organizational level (e.g., how well employees are treated in a company), and fairness on the personal level (e.g., how we interact with family and friends in terms of impartiality). The latter can be split into interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives. Interpersonal level deals with doing injustice to other people, whereas intrapersonal fairness is concerned with acting/feeling unfair towards the self. The author argues that intrapersonal injustice can cause serious physical and psychological harm. In this spirit, it can be argued that lack of self-permission and intrapersonal injustice are conceptually related, as feeling that one is not allowed or does not deserve to be happy in life is most likely a case of intrapersonal unfairness.

Maladaptive Schemata (Schema Therapy)

Schema therapy is an integrative therapy approach employed to treat mostly personality disorders, character issues, and numerous other individual and couples' problems (Young, 1990). Schema therapy evolved from cognitive therapy to integrate facets of cognitive therapy, behavioral therapy, object relations, gestalt therapy, constructivism, attachment models, and psychoanalysis. Schemas are internal phenomena that impact external behavior through the development of coping styles. *Early maladaptive schemas* (EMS) are comprehensive, self-defeating patterns that begin in childhood and are continuously repeated throughout a person's existence. EMSs comprise memories, emotions, cognitions, and bodily sensations. They determine how a person conceptualizes the self and also how a person relates with other individuals (Martin & Young, 2010). Eighteen different schemata have been distinguished in the literature on schema therapy (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Out of those, several might relate to self-permission, and could potentially explain how a lack of self-permission comes into

being in the first place, precisely: defectiveness/shame, enmeshment/undeveloped self, subjugation, self-sacrifice, and negativity/pessimism.

Contamination (Transactional Analysis)

Transactional analysis (TA; Berne, 1961; Harris, 1967) is an integrative approach to psychology and psychotherapy that combines elements of psychoanalytic, humanist, and cognitive approaches. According to TA, humans experience and manifest their personalities through an amalgam of behaviours, cognitions, and emotions. More precisely, TA distinguishes three so-called ego-states: 1) "parent" (exteropsyche), in which a person acts, feels, and thinks according to a (more or less unconscious) simulation of how his or her parents (or other caretakers) acted, or how he or she interpreted those actions; 2) "adult" (neopsyche), a state which is often compared to a computer processing information and making predictions without being "disturbed" by strong emotions; and 3) "child" (archaeopsyche), a state in which a person acts, feels, and/or thinks similarly to how he or she did in childhood. Strengthening the adult state is a key objective of TA, since a person is most likely engaging in an objective and therefore healthy appraisal of reality in that state. The child state is often depicted as the foundation of emotions, creativity, impulsiveness, and intimacy. A key feature of the ego state model is the idea that each ego state can be "contaminated" by the others. Typically, the ability for logical thinking, reasoning, and discernment (the key feature of adult) is temporarily overwritten either by memories of historic incidents in childhood and the corresponding emotions (i.e., the child state), or imperatives and proscriptions derived from interactions with the primary caretakers (i.e., the parent state; Clarkson, 1992; James & Jongeward, 1971). Similarly, lack of self-permission could be conceptualized as a persistent contamination of the adult ego state, since the choice and pursuit of life goals should be regulated by emotions and cognitions from the present, and not by shadows from the past.

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