



# Dispositional mindfulness and life satisfaction: The role of core self-evaluations



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to test the model of relationships between dispositional mindfulness, core self-evaluations and life satisfaction in a sample of Chinese adults. Three hundred and ten participants with an age range of 18–50 years completed the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), the Core Self-evaluations Scale (CSES) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). The results indicated that mindfulness significantly predicted core self-evaluations and life satisfaction. Path analysis supported the full mediating role of core self-evaluations of the link between mindfulness and life satisfaction. Moreover, a multi-group analysis indicated that the paths in the mediation model were not moderated by gender. These findings highlight a previously unidentified mechanism to explain the relationship between mindfulness and life satisfaction. Implications for future research and limitations of the present findings are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

Mindfulness has been conceptualized as a receptive attention to and awareness of internal and external experiences as they occur (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). It involves paying sustained attention to ongoing sensory, cognitive and emotional experience, without judging or elaborating on that experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Although mindfulness levels can be increased through meditation or mindfulness-based training (e.g., Baer et al., 2008; Falkenström, 2010), mindfulness may also be defined as a dispositional trait that refers to the tendency to be mindful in everyday life, in which individuals may differ from one another (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

The extant literature suggests that mindfulness is beneficial for life satisfaction which refers to people's global cognitive evaluation of the satisfaction with their own lives as a whole (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Correlational studies have demonstrated that measures of trait mindfulness are associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of psychological distress, e.g., depression, stress (e.g., Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley, & Orzech, 2009; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Howell, Digdon, Buro, & Sheptycki, 2008; Schutte & Malouff, 2011). Further, mindfulness-based interventions have been developed to increase mindfulness (e.g., Falkenström, 2010). Numerous studies suggest that with an increase in mindfulness through interventions, individuals' well-

being also tended to increase (e.g., Falkenström, 2010; Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008; Zautra et al., 2008).

The relationship between mindfulness and life satisfaction has been well established, but the potential mechanisms that might explain this relationship are still unclear, although some ideas accounting for how mindfulness conveys its beneficial effects for subjective well-being have been raised in the research literature. Several studies have shown that mindfulness may contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, thereby encouraging individuals to accurately perceive emotions and effectively regulate emotions that promote their life satisfaction (e.g., Coffey & Hartman, 2008; Coffey, Hartman, & Fredrickson, 2010; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Wang & Kong, 2013). However, the model is still somewhat unsatisfactory in regard to its ability to explain how mindfulness conveys its beneficial effects for well-being, because empirical evidence is merely in support of the partial mediating role of emotional intelligence. We speculated that there are other potential cognitive processes (e.g., core self-evaluations) that account for the mechanism underlying the mindfulness-life satisfaction relationship.

Mindfulness involves adopting an attitude of non-judgment towards the moment-to-moment unfolding of one's experience and therefore allows one to become less reactive to and more accepting of one's immediate experience (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). In contrast, the absence of mindfulness (i.e., mindlessness) bears some similarity to habitual negative self-thinking which plays an important role in self-evaluative processes (Verplanken, Friberg, Wang, Trafimow, & Woolf, 2007). Therefore, people with high levels of mindfulness tend to accept their thoughts, feelings, and situations, which may lead to higher posi-

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tive self-evaluations. There is some evidence to support the relationship between mindfulness and self-evaluation factors. Previous studies have demonstrated that higher levels of mindfulness is associated with greater self-esteem (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003; Heppner & Kernis, 2007; Rasmussen & Pidgeon, 2011), higher emotional stability (e.g., Barnhofer, Duggan, & Griffith, 2011; Dekeyser, Raes, Leijssen, Leysen, & Dewulf, 2008; Feltman, Robinson, & Ode, 2009; Giluk, 2009), greater self-efficacy (Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Oman, Hedberg, Downs, & Parsons, 2003) and internal locus of control (Bowen et al., 2006).

These four specific traits (i.e., self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control and emotional stability) are (a) evaluation focused, (b) fundamental and basic, and (c) broad and encompassing. Therefore, they indicate a broad, latent dispositional trait, termed core self-evaluations which represent one's appraisal of people, events and things in relation to oneself (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). It is viewed as a bottom-line appraisal of one's own worthiness, effectiveness, and capability. As core self-evaluations define how an individual views her- or himself, they also influence how people perceive and assess situations. Although no research has directly examined associations between mindfulness and core self-evaluations, mindfulness and core self-evaluations should be positively correlated.

On the other hand, research has also found some empirical support for the associations between core self-evaluations and subjective well-being including life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect (e.g., Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998; Song, Kong, & Jin, 2012; Sun, Wang, & Kong, 2013; Tsaousis, Nikolaou, Serdaris, & Judge, 2007). As Judge et al. (1998) noted, it seems reasonable that core self-evaluations could be a valuable cause of judgments of life satisfaction because thinking well of oneself should make one happier. Thus, considering the robust relation between core self-evaluations and life satisfaction and the important role of mindfulness in self-evaluative processes, it is reasonable to assume that core self-evaluations mediate the relation between mindfulness and life satisfaction.

The aim of this study is to test the mediating role of core self-evaluations in the association between mindfulness and life satisfaction through structural equation modeling (SEM). Based on the studies that have shown the relationships of mindfulness with life satisfaction (e.g., Brown & Ryan, 2003; Brown et al., 2009; Falkenström, 2010; Howell et al., 2008; Schutte & Malouff, 2011), and of core self-evaluations with life satisfaction (e.g., Judge et al., 1998; Song et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2013; Tsaousis et al., 2007), it was predicted in this study that core self-evaluations might act as a mediator of the impact of mindfulness on life satisfaction. On the other hand, based on the studies that adopt a trait approach, when controlling for demographic variables, such as gender, people with high mindfulness scores still tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction (e.g., Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009). However, it is unclear whether the potential mechanisms underlying this relationship differ between males and females. This study used SEM techniques to test the moderating role of gender in the relationships among mindfulness, core self-evaluations and life satisfaction. Based on the previous research, we proposed the following hypotheses: (1) Mindfulness may significantly predict life satisfaction. (2) Mindfulness may significantly predict core self-evaluations. (3) Core self-evaluations may significantly predict life satisfaction. (4) Core self-evaluations may mediate the influence of mindfulness on life satisfaction.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants in this study were a convenience sample of 310 adults from Mainland China. The mean age of the sample was

27.40 years (standard deviation = 5.0 years). In the sample, 177 were females and 133 were males. Nearly half of the participants (54.8%) were non-students, the majority of whom had completed university, college or post-graduate studies (93.2%). Participants' education level was classed as junior middle school education ( $n = 7$ ), senior high school education ( $n = 6$ ), undergraduate education ( $n = 94$ ) and post-graduate education ( $n = 203$ ). Each participant volunteered to participate in this study, and had no compensation for their participation.

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Mindfulness

To assess trait mindfulness we administered the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003), which consists of 15 brief statements. Items describe mindless experiences (e.g., "I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until sometime later"). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = almost always, 6 = almost never). The Chinese version of the MAAS has been demonstrated to be a reliable and valid measurement in assessing mindfulness in the Chinese population (e.g., Deng et al., 2012). In this study, the scale was internally consistent and had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .86.

#### 2.2.2. Core self-evaluations

The Core Self-evaluations Scale (CSES; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003) was used to assess Core self-evaluations in participants. The CSES is a 12-item scale developed in order to measure the underlying self-evaluative factor that is present across the four more specific traits of self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control. It includes items such as, "I complete tasks successfully", and "Sometimes I feel depressed". Each item is answered on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The Chinese version of the CSES has been found to be a reliable and valid measurement in assessing core self-evaluations in the Chinese adults (e.g., Song et al., 2012; Sun et al., 2013). In this study, the scale had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .81.

#### 2.2.3. Life satisfaction

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was administered to assess life satisfaction in participants. The SWLS consists of five brief statements. Respondents are instructed to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale. It includes items such as, "I am satisfied with my life" and "In most ways my life is close to my ideal". The Chinese version of the SWLS has been demonstrated to be a reliable and valid measurement in assessing life satisfaction in the Chinese adults (e.g., Kong & You, 2013; Kong & Zhao, 2013; Kong, Zhao, & You, 2012a). In this study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the SWLS was 0.85.

### 2.3. Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire survey consisting of the CSES, SWLS and MASS. The hyperlink to the questionnaire study was distributed through online forums (e.g., emuch.net). Participants needed to click the hyperlink which took them to the consent page. Only those who completed the consent form were gained access to the questionnaires. This method has been used successfully by other studies collecting data online (e.g., Kong, Zhao, & You, 2012b).

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