Resilience and affect balance as mediators between trait emotional intelligence and life satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed to analyze the importance of trait emotional intelligence in life satisfaction and to extend the previous literature by investigating the potential mediating effects of resilience and affect balance in this relationship. To test the study hypotheses, self-report measures of trait emotional intelligence, resilience, positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction were administrated to 263 undergraduates. Correlation analysis indicated that trait emotional intelligence was positively correlated with life satisfaction. Mediational analyses showed that trait emotional intelligence exerted its indirect effect on life satisfaction through the simple mediating effect of affect balance and the three-path mediating effect of resilience–affect balance. In addition, resilience played as a partial mediator between trait emotional intelligence and affect balance. Furthermore, multi-group analyses showed that the mediational model was not moderated by gender. Therefore, this study makes a contribution to the complex nature of the association between trait emotional intelligence and subjective well-being.

1. Introduction

Currently, there are two main approaches to conceptualizing and measuring emotional intelligence (EI): trait EI (or trait emotional self-efficacy) and ability EI (or cognitive-emotional ability; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008; Petrides & Furnham, 2001; Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Trait EI is defined as a constellation of emotion-related self-perceptions and dispositions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Furnham, & Mavroveli, 2007; Petrides, Pita et al., 2007), whereas ability EI is defined as a type of intelligence concerning actual emotion-related cognitive abilities (Mayer et al., 2008). Trait EI is typically assessed via self-report questionnaires (Petrides, Furnham et al., 2007; Petrides, Pita et al., 2007), whereas ability EI is best measured through maximum-performance tests (Mayer et al., 2008). Although they are two different constructs conceptually, methodologically and empirically, trait and ability EI are two complementary rather than oppositional constructs (see Petrides, 2011 for a recent review). In the present study, we followed the trait approach and used a self-report measure to assess EI.

1.1. Trait EI and life satisfaction

Life satisfaction (cognitive well-being) refers to people's global cognitive evaluation of the satisfaction with their own lives as a whole (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Schimmack, 2008). It is an important indicator of a broad range of positive personal, psychological, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal outcomes (see Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2009 for a review). Thus, life satisfaction is often used to evaluate the quality of people's lives and is regarded as an important component of subjective well-being (SWB; Diener et al., 2003; Schimmack, 2008). Various studies have shown moderate positive correlations between EI and life satisfaction (Kong & Zhao, 2013; Kong, Zhao, & You, 2012; Palmer, Donaldson, & Stough, 2002), even after controlling the Giant Three and (or) Big Five personality dimensions (Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Petrides, Pita et al., 2007). Recently, Koydemir and Schütz (2012) and Koydemir, Simsek, Schütz, and Tipandjan (in press) found that EI is linked to life satisfaction in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Thus, the purposes of the current study were to replicate the relation between EI and life satisfaction and to expand previous literature by investigating the potential mediational mechanism underlying this relationship.

1.2. Resilience and affect balance as mediators

Recently, a large body of research has investigated the potential mediators between EI and life satisfaction (for a review, see Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2012). Affect balance (affective well-being), for example, was assumed to be a potential mediator in the relation between EI and life satisfaction in some previous research (Kong & Zhao, 2013; Koydemir et al., in press). As a key

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component of SWB, affect balance refers to a balance between positive and negative affect (Schimmack, 2008). Affective well-being has been found to be particularly important in forming people's life satisfaction judgments (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008; Schimmack, 2008). Considering the robust relation between EI and affective well-being and the role of affective well-being in life satisfaction, it is reasonable to assume that affect balance mediates the relation between EI and life satisfaction. Consistent with this line of reasoning, empirical research has supported this assumption (Kong & Zhao, 2013; Koydemir et al., in press). Thus, this study hypothesized that affect balance functioned as a mediator between EI and life satisfaction.

Furthermore, resilience was assumed to be another potential intervening variable between EI and life satisfaction as well as affect balance. As an important psychological resource, resilience generally represents the capacity to "bounce back" from stress effectively, adapt flexibly and even grow positively in response to the adversity settings (Block & Kremen, 1996; Bonanno, 2004). There is compelling evidence in support of the associations between resilience and both EI (Armstrong, Galligan, & Critchley, 2011; Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002) and SWB (Liu, Wang, & Li, 2012; Mak, Ng, & Wong, 2011; Yu & Zhang, 2007).

With respect to the relation between EI and resilience, Matthews et al. (2002) indicated that EI is antecedent to resilience. Armstrong et al. (2011)'s study revealed that vulnerable individuals have lower EI scores, whereas resilient individuals have higher EI scores. Moreover, the ability to effectively regulate one's own emotions, a core facet of EI, was found to promote individuals' resilience (New et al., 2009; Tugade & Frederickson, 2007). Thus, Armstrong et al. (2011) argued that EI may well be directly connected to resilience.

As regards the link between resilience and SWB, there is strong evidence that resilience is of considerable benefits to people's SWB. Specifically, resilience is firmly found to be positively correlated with life satisfaction and positive affect, and inversely related to negative affect (Liu et al., 2012; Mak et al., 2011; Yu & Zhang, 2007). In consideration of the associations between EI, resilience and two components of SWB, this study hypothesized that resilience exerted as a mediator between EI and both life satisfaction and affect balance.

1.3. The present study

Based on the preceding rationale and the available literature showing that EI is antecedent to resilience (Armstrong et al., 2011; Matthews et al., 2002) and resilience could exert an indirect effect on life satisfaction via affective well-being (Liu et al., 2012), it was hypothesized that EI exerts a significant indirect effect on life satisfaction through the three-path mediating effect of resilience and affect balance (for more details about the three-path mediational model, see Taylor, MacKinnon, & Tein, 2008). Specifically, individuals with higher EI have greater resilience, which, in turn, serves to enhance their levels of affective well-being, and thereby increasing their life satisfaction. The detailed hypothesized model concerning the mediator role of resilience and affect balance in the relationship between EI and life satisfaction is presented in Fig. 1.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 263 undergraduates (119 men, 144 women), aged 18–25 years (M = 22.61, SD = 1.41). The majority (over 97%) of the participants are the Han nationality.

All participants were briefly instructed as to the purpose of the study and then signed a written consent form. Participants were
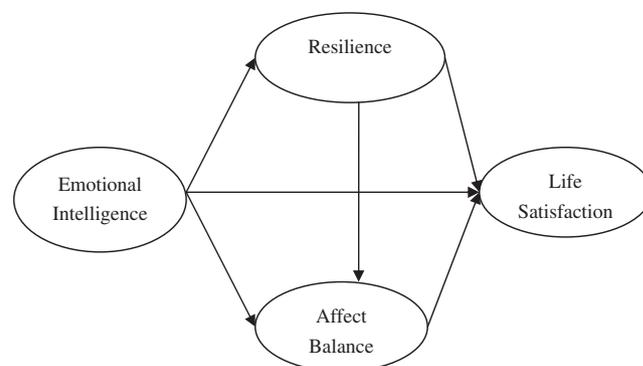

Fig. 1. The hypothesized model concerning the mediator role of resilience and affect balance in the relationship of trait emotional intelligence with life satisfaction.

administered a packet of paper-and-pencil questionnaires measuring EI, resilience, affect balance and life satisfaction. The measures were conducted in the classroom environment by a trained research assistant, who was always available to answer any queries raised by the participants and to ensure their confidential and independent responding.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Trait EI

Trait EI was measured using the widely-used 16-item Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002). The WLEIS scale contains four dimensions: (a) self emotional appraisal (SEA; e.g., "I really understand what I feel."), (b) others' emotional appraisals (OEA; "I am a good observer of others' emotions."), (c) regulation of emotion in one's self (ROE; e.g., "I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally."), and (d) use of emotion to facilitate performance (UOE; e.g., "I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them."). Each of the four dimensions was measured using four items with a seven-point Likert-type response format, ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*). The WLEIS scale demonstrated clear factor structure and good internal consistency reliability (Law et al., 2004; Wong & Law, 2002).

2.2.2. Resilience

The Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003) which comprises of 25 statements (e.g., "able to adapt to change", "best effort no matter what", and "strong sense of purpose") was used to assess resilience. For each statement participants were asked to rate how they generally feel on a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*true nearly all of the time*). The Chinese version of the CD-RISC, translated by Yu and Zhang (2007), was demonstrated to be a reliable and valid measurement in assessing resilience for the Chinese population (Yu & Zhang, 2007).

2.2.3. Affect balance

The balance between positive and negative affect was assessed using the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). This scale consists of 10 affective adjective words for positive affect (e.g., "active", "alert", "attentive") and negative affect (e.g., "afraid", "ashamed", "distressed"), respectively. Participants were asked to indicate how they generally feel on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "very slightly" to 5 = "extremely"). Both Positive Affect and Negative Affect subscales of the PANAS have demonstrated high reliability, and also excellent