



Linking collective self-esteem to well-being indicators of arts therapies students and practitioners: Meaning and engagement as mediators



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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationships between collective self-esteem (CSE), job satisfaction (professional outcome), and subjective well-being (personal outcome) in Israeli creative arts therapies students as compared to practitioners ($N = 233$). Based on self-enhancement theory and conservation of resources theory, the roles of work engagement and meaningful work as two parallel mediators in these relationships were also examined. Analysis of intergroup differences indicated that students scored higher than practitioners on CSE, whereas practitioners scored higher than students on all other variables. The results portrayed a complex picture. For students, only work engagement, but not meaningful work, mediated the relationship between CSE and job satisfaction; there was no spillover effect on students' personal subjective well-being. For practitioners, both work engagement and meaningful work mediated the relationship between CSE and job satisfaction; there was a spillover effect such that professional variables affected practitioners' personal subjective well-being. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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Although research tends to take a disproportionately deficit-oriented perspective by focusing on the negative consequences of therapy work (Clements-Cortes, 2013; Kim, 2012), in recent years there has been a growing interest in factors that contribute to positive outcomes among students and practitioners of healthcare professions (Bamonti et al., 2014; Olson, Kemper, & Mahan, 2015; Samios, Abel, & Rodzik, 2013). However, in the creative arts therapies literature, this line of studies is scarce.

One factor that has been generally associated with both professional and personal positive outcomes is having high collective self-esteem (CSE), which is the self-esteem a person draws from being part of a group (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). CSE is particularly pertinent to creative arts therapists, in Israel and other countries, where the profession has yet to be legislated and licensed unlike other healthcare professions (see Orkibi, 2015). Thus, some creative arts therapists see themselves as professional “outsiders” (Stewart, 2000 as cited in Kim, 2012) or as members of a marginalized field that suffers from a professional culture of shame (Johnson, 2009),

feelings of low power, and even professional envy toward other healthcare professions that are more established and have more political clout (Bouchard, 1998).

The unique experience and marginalized status of creative arts therapists, compared to other healthcare professionals, warrants investigation within the specific context of our field. Thus, the purpose of the present study was twofold. First, we sought to examine the relationships between CSE and two positive outcomes, job satisfaction (professional outcome) and subjective well-being (personal outcome), and the role of two parallel mediators in these relationships: work engagement and meaningful work. Second, we examined differences between creative arts therapies students and practitioners, given the difference in their professional status. The next section provides an overview of the literature on CSE and then reviews the theories and findings on the variables that served as the basis for our model.

Collective self-esteem

Social identity theory posits that people strive not only for a positive personal identity, but also for a positive collective identity (Tajfel, 1981). When a group is valued positively in comparison to relevant comparison groups, the collective identity of a person affiliated with this group is positive (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

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Within this framework, CSE refers to the feeling of self-worth that individuals derive from their evaluations and identifications with the particular group to which they belong, in terms of their perception of the worth, value, and importance of that group (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

Studies have shown that high professional CSE is correlated with professional outcomes such as better relationships with clients and more job satisfaction among mental health counselors (Yu, Lee, & Lee, 2007), as well as with lower professional burnout among school counselors (Butler & Constantine, 2005). In the creative arts therapies literature, music therapists' CSE positively correlated with job satisfaction and negatively with burnout (Kim, 2012). In terms of personal outcomes, higher CSE (in reference to various demographics) positively correlated with psychological well-being (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994), mental health indicators (Detrie & Lease, 2007), personal self-esteem (Simsek, 2013), life satisfaction (Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997; Crocker et al., 1994; Simsek, 2013; Zhang, 2005), and positive emotions (Simsek, 2013). Our literature search revealed no studies that have examined the direct and indirect links between professional CSE and professional and personal positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and subjective well-being, either in general or in the arts therapies field.

Job satisfaction and subjective well-being

Job satisfaction refers to a pleasurable and positive appraisal of one's job experiences (Locke, 1976, p. 1304), which has been positively correlated with better physical and mental health (Faragher, Cass, & Cooper, 2005), a greater sense of accomplishment (Blustein, 2008), and more life satisfaction (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Researchers have suggested three models to account for the relationship between job satisfaction and life satisfaction: *spillover*, where job experiences spill over onto life experiences; *segmentation*, where job and life experiences are balkanized and have little to do with one another; and *compensation*, where an individual seeks to compensate for a dissatisfying job by seeking fulfillment and happiness in his or her non-work life, and vice versa (Judge & Klinger, 2008, p. 404).

A meta-analysis examining the relationship between job satisfaction and subjective well-being (SWB; which includes high life satisfaction and more positive than negative emotions) reported positive correlations between job satisfaction and happiness, life satisfaction, positive emotions, and the absence of negative emotions (Bowling, Eschleman, & Wang, 2010). The researchers concluded that the findings are in line with previous meta-analytic results and are consistent with the spillover hypothesis.

Accordingly, we expected that creative arts therapies practitioners' job satisfaction would correlate positively with their general SWB. In other words, we expected their job experience to spillover into their non-job life experience, given the centrality of practice in the lives of practitioners. In contrast, because students' involvement with practice is limited to their in-training field experience (typically once or twice a week), we expected that their job satisfaction (i.e., fieldwork satisfaction) would be, at least to some extent, balkanized from their general SWB. In other words, we expected to find a weaker, if any, correlation between students' job satisfaction and their general SWB.

In sum, although different studies have established direct positive correlations between CSE, job satisfaction, and subjective well-being, little is known about what underpins these relationships. The present study examined the role of work engagement and meaningful work as two parallel mediators potentially accounting for these relationships.

Work engagement

In the positive psychology literature, Seligman (2002) argued that happiness is strongly related to living an *engaged life*, which refers to experiencing a high level of absorption and flow in satisfying activities, which puts one's positive individual traits and strengths to use. In recent years, much research has been conducted regarding the state of engagement in the work place. The term *work engagement* refers to a positive and fulfilling work-related state, characterized by a sense of vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002). Vigor refers to experiencing high levels of energy and mental resilience while involved in the work. Dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, and challenge. Absorption refers to a flow-like experience, such as being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work so that time passes quickly (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). The latter component of absorption, resembles Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) concept of "flow": "the subjective buoyancy of experience when skillful and successful action seems effortless, even when a great deal of physical or mental energy is exerted" (Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 132). However, flow differs from engagement in that the former refers to a short-term "peak experience" and the latter to a more persistent state of mind that is not bound to a specific activity (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

Generally, studies show a negative correlation between work engagement and employee burnout, distress, depression and anxiety and a positive correlation with employee job satisfaction (Schaufeli, Taris, & Van Rhenen, 2008). A substantial body of research suggests that work engagement is not only predicted by environmental job resources (e.g., social support from colleagues, performance feedback, task autonomy), but also by employees' personal resources (Albrecht, 2010). For example, longitudinal and diary studies have shown that work engagement was predicted by positive self-evaluations such as organizational-based self-esteem, self-efficacy, and optimism (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009a,b). Longitudinal studies indicate that work engagement predicts decreased depressive symptoms and increased general life-satisfaction (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012), as well as mediates the relationship between personal resources and health-related work abilities (Airila et al., 2014).

Based on this literature, we expected professional CSE – which is a personal resource – to link positively to work engagement (another personal resource), which would in turn link to job satisfaction and SWB. We also expected work engagement to link positively to meaningful work (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004), and assumed a covariance between these related variables in our model.

Meaningful work

Meaningful work refers to a subjective experience that one's work has a positive personal significance, facilitates the worker's personal growth in the broader context of life, and that work has a positive impact on others by serving the greater good (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). Among several sources that influence the experience of meaningful work (Rosso et al., 2010), sources related to self and others are most pertinent to the present study. Regarding the *self*, it has been suggested that work can be experienced as meaningful if the individual has strong psychological identification and involvement with it (Brown, 1996), as well as if the work is perceived as a calling (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010). Regarding *others* (i.e., groups and communities), individuals' sense of identification with their professional community influences the levels of meaningfulness they perceive in their

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