



Mediators of the relationship between externality of happiness and subjective well-being



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ABSTRACT

Using two Korean and one Iranian samples, this article provided initial validity evidence for a new scale of externality of happiness beliefs (the view that one's level of happiness is out of one's control and largely depends on external factors). Analyses confirmed the one-factor structure of the scale in both countries. Externality of happiness beliefs was negatively associated with subjective well-being, and this negative association was partially mediated by lower levels of personal growth initiative and psychological resilience.

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1. Introduction

Researchers have identified several important lay beliefs about happiness that are associated with subjective well-being (SWB). For example, fear of happiness (the view that happiness causes bad things to happen, Joshanloo, 2013) and fragility of happiness (the view that happiness is fleeting and fragile, Joshanloo et al., 2015) are negatively correlated with SWB. The present study suggests that another potentially important belief domain concerning the nature of happiness is externality vs. internality of happiness. Individuals' views on the determinants of happiness can vary along a continuum from emphasizing internal factors (e.g., personal will and effort) to external factors (e.g., chance, situation, and fate). Endorsing externality beliefs would indicate a lack of perceived control over one's happiness.

Externality/internality of happiness can be considered as a subdomain of general locus of control or attribution style. These are cognitive dispositions concerning the extent to which individuals perceive their own behaviors as influencing life outcomes (Furnham, 2009; Rotter, 1966). Domain-specific measures of locus of control (e.g., health, parental, and economic locus of control) have been developed for more refined measurements of the externality beliefs across various life domains (for reviews, see Furnham, 2009; Hill, 2011). The present study focuses on people's beliefs about the sources of happiness. Research shows that an external attribution style is negatively predictive of SWB (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Furnham, 2009). Hence, a negative association between externality of happiness and SWB was anticipated.

2. The present research

A 4-item scale of externality of happiness was developed and examined in two exploratory studies. The studies sought to provide preliminary evidence on the validity and utility of the scale in two nations. In addition to investigating the factor structure of the new scale in two Korean samples, Study 1 tested a mediational model in which the effect of externality on SWB is passed through personal growth initiative (PGI; Robitschek et al., 2012). Study 2 used an Iranian sample to test a mediational model in which psychological resilience was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between externality and SWB.

3. Study 1

This study investigated the factor structure of the externality of happiness scale, and its relationships with SWB and PGI. Prior research indicates that an external locus of control could generate feelings of inadequacy to make positive changes in self and life in general (Rothman, Baldwin, Hertel, & Fuglestad, 2004). PGI is defined as intentional engagement in the self-improvement process, involving the motivation to seek out and capitalize on personal growth opportunities (Robitschek et al., 2012). PGI requires a positive attitude towards the possibility of improvement through personal effort. Attributing happiness externally may interfere with hopeful goal-directed planning and sustained effort, disturbing the process of self-improvement. Therefore, externality was expected to be negatively associated with PGI. Given that PGI has been found to be positively correlated with SWB (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009), it was hypothesized that lowered PGI would be one of the mechanisms through which externality affects SWB.

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Table 1
Descriptive statistics, internal consistencies, and correlations.

	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
Study 1							
1. Externality	0.70	2.95	1.05	1.00			
2. Overall PGI	0.95	3.90	0.95	-0.25	1.00		
3. Negative affect	0.89	2.40	0.96	0.30	-0.21	1.00	
4. Positive affect	0.92	2.87	0.90	-0.24	0.36	-0.57	1.00
5. Life satisfaction	0.89	3.64	1.45	-0.21	0.45	-0.41	0.65
Study 2							
1. Externality	0.82	3.12	1.28	1.00			
2. Resilience	0.77	3.34	0.71	-0.33	1.00		
3. Negative affect	0.88	2.35	0.85	0.30	-0.45	1.00	
4. Positive affect	0.90	3.33	0.81	-0.29	0.38	-0.58	1.00
5. Life satisfaction	0.86	4.25	1.32	-0.32	0.33	-0.35	0.40

Note. In Study 1, the alphas for readiness for change, planfulness, using resources, and intentional behavior were 0.87, 0.89, 0.81, and 0.88, respectively. There was no cross-country difference in externality ($t(235.01) = 1.41, p = 0.159$). All correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$.

3.1. Methods

3.1.1. Participants

3.1.1.1. *Pilot sample.* A convenience sample of 316 Korean university students (65.8% females, $M_{age} = 20.63, SD_{age} = 2.65$) was used to investigate the psychometric properties of the externality of happiness scale. Participation was voluntary and compensated with small gifts.

3.1.1.2. *Main sample.* A convenience sample of 338 Korean participants responded to an online survey in Korean (62.4% females, $M_{age} = 26.19, SD_{age} = 5.57$). Participation was voluntary and compensated for by electronic gift certificates.

3.1.2. Measures

3.1.2.1. *Externality of happiness.* Four items were developed by modifying the commonly used items in existing locus of control scales (Hill, 2011) to measure externality of happiness:

1. My happiness is controlled by forces outside my control.
2. It's a matter of fate whether or not someone is happy.
3. My happiness is determined by accidental happenings and luck.
4. I feel that I have little influence over my level of happiness.

The items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

3.1.2.2. *SWB.* The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used to measure life satisfaction. The five items are rated on a scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Table 2
Fit indices.

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	CFI	SRMR	AIC	BIC	RMSEA	90% CI for RMSEA	
								Low	Up
Study 1									
1. CFA of externality scale	3.499	2	0.993	0.019	4578.8	4624.7	0.047	0.000	0.127
2. Initial model	151.291**	57	0.944	0.051	12,868.8	13,048.5	0.070	0.057	0.084
3. Modified initial model	124.619**	56	0.960	0.050	12,844.1	13,027.6	0.060	0.046	0.074
4. Final model (shown in Fig. 1a)	97.883**	40	0.966	0.054	10,247.3	10,388.8	0.065	0.049	0.082
Study 2									
5. CFA of externality scale	2.493	2	0.997	0.016	2060.3	2096.4	0.041	0.000	0.172
6. Initial model	39.387	28	0.969	0.048	4566.2	4677.6	0.052	0.000	0.087
7. Final model (Shown in Fig. 1b)	34.852	24	0.970	0.051	3704.7	3795.0	0.055	0.000	0.092

CFI = comparative fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation, AIC = Akaike information criterion, BIC = Bayesian information criterion.

** $p < 0.01$.

agree (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life”). The Negative and Positive Affect Scale (Joshanloo, 2017) was used to measure affect. The scale includes six items for negative (e.g., nervous) and six items for positive affect (e.g., cheerful). Respondents indicate how much of the time (from 1 = *none of the time* to 5 = *all of the time*) during the past 30 days, they felt each of the affective states.

3.1.2.3. *PGI.* The Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II (Robitschek et al., 2012) was used to assess PGI. The scale has four subscales: readiness for change (4 items, e.g., “I can tell when I am ready to make specific changes in myself”), planfulness (5 items, e.g., “I set realistic goals for what I want to change about myself”), using resources (3 items, e.g., “I ask for help when I try to change myself”), and intentional behavior (4 items, e.g., “I take every opportunity to grow as it comes up”). The 16 items are rated on a scale from 0 = *disagree strongly* to 5 = *agree strongly*.

The affect (Joshanloo, 2017), life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993), and PGI (Robitschek et al., 2012) scales have demonstrated acceptable validity and reliability in prior research.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Pilot study

The four externality items were analyzed using principal axis factoring. Only one factor emerged with an eigenvalue > 1 (eigenvalue = 2.3), with the rest of the eigenvalues being smaller than 0.71. The single factor explained about 59% of the variance in the scores. All of the items loaded strongly (0.54 to 0.82) on this factor ($\alpha = 0.76$).

3.2.2. Main study

The descriptive statistics, internal consistencies, and correlations are presented in Table 1. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model was tested to confirm the unidimensional factor structure of the scale, excluding all other variables. The fit indices of this model (Table 2, model 1) indicate an excellent fit (based on Brown, 2015). Structural equation modeling was used in a separate model to investigate the direct and indirect predictive effects. For all model parameters, 95% non-symmetric bootstrap confidence intervals (with 10,000 resamples) were calculated. Using bootstrap confidence intervals is considered crucial in testing indirect effects (Jose, 2013). The starting model included all possible directional paths between the variables. Externality (predictor), PGI (mediator), and SWB (outcome) were modeled as latent variables. To control for the effects of age and gender, PGI and SWB were regressed on them, whereas externality was specified to covary with them. The fit of the model was satisfactory (Table 2, model 2). However, the modification indices suggested that specifying a covariance between two of the components of PGI (planfulness and readiness) would substantially improve model fit. The modified model fitted the data better (Table 2, model 3). Additionally, considering that age and

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