



# Core self-evaluations are associated with judgments of satisfaction with life via positive but not negative affect

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## ABSTRACT

Core self-evaluations (CSE) are associated with a range of indicators of positive personal and job outcomes. Current research suggests that CSE may be a precursor of judgment of life satisfaction but little is known about the factors that mediate the relationship. Affect is a potential mediator of the relationship and so we investigated whether positive and negative affect mediated the relationship between CSE and life satisfaction in two independent Spanish samples. Three hundred and fifty-two university students (Sample 1) and 520 adults (Sample 2) completed self-report measures of core self-evaluation, positive and negative affect and life satisfaction. In both samples, the association between CSE and life satisfaction was mediated by positive, but not negative affect. If replicated in longitudinal research, these results would provide evidence that CSE is associated with greater positive affect, which might influence life satisfaction judgments. These findings also highlight the importance of CSE and affect components that could take into consideration in positive psychology interventions aimed at increasing well-being.

## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades the core self-evaluations (CSE) construct has received considerable attention from theorists and practitioners. This may be due to the possibility that it has an influence on important personal and organisational outcomes, such as work performance, job satisfaction and life satisfaction, amongst others (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012; Judge & Hurst, 2007). CSE has been conceptualised as a higher order framework representing people's fundamental evaluations of their worth, competence, capabilities and functioning in their environment. According to Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997), CSE is a latent, broad, high-order construct consisting of four well-established lower-order traits: self-esteem, locus of control, emotional stability (as opposed to neuroticism) and generalised self-efficacy. Individuals with a high CSE appraise themselves in a consistently positive manner across situations; they evaluate themselves as capable and in control of their lives, and tend to feel more able to exert control over their work environment than their low-CSE counterparts (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004). Individuals with a high CSE are also more likely to respond to difficult situations with positive emotions and expectations, because they tend to focus on the bright side of a situation, approach the world with confidence and self-assurance and feel in control of their jobs and lives (Judge, Bono, Erez, & Locke, 2005). Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, and Scott (2009) suggested that the

CSE construct might serve as a useful variable in identifying individual differences in coping processes and in cognitive appraisals of life events. It is therefore important to establish the mechanisms underlying associations between CSE and positive outcomes. It is consistent with this view to suggest that CSE may be related to evaluation of life satisfaction on the grounds that a high CSE may modify how one interprets and reacts to stressful events. High-CSE individuals are more likely to be generally satisfied with their lives than their low-CSE counterparts (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998).

Most earlier research looked at the incremental value of CSE in the domain of organisational psychology (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2011), but there is increasing evidence of empirical links between CSE and personal outcomes. In particular, most studies have found that CSE is positively associated with well-being indicators including life satisfaction, happiness and positive affect (Hsieh & Huang, 2017; Piccolo, Judge, Takahashi, Watanabe, & Locke, 2005; Rey & Extremera, 2015). Likewise, people with a positive CSE tend to be satisfied with their lives (Judge et al., 1998). A meta-analytic review of CSE and its four underlying components concluded that they are strongly positively associated with life satisfaction ( $\rho = 0.54$ ) (Chang et al., 2012).

There has been little research, however, into the ways in which high CSE could promote increased well-being or the mechanisms that might underlie the association between CSE and life satisfaction. These include predispositions to positive and negative affect. Theoretically, components of

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CSE such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and locus of control are dynamic beliefs that people construct about themselves and their interactions with their social environment; hence, they may influence mood in everyday life. Although there is evidence CSE is an important predictor of life satisfaction (Chang et al., 2012), CSE does not account fully for variance in life satisfaction, which suggests that there are multiple factors underlying the relationship between both variables. The presence of individual differences in the tendency toward positive and negative affect could account for the observed variability in the CSE-life satisfaction link. Past theoretical and empirical work has examined the associations between affect and life satisfaction (Schimmack, 2008). Research in several nations has demonstrated that positive and negative affect are causally related to life satisfaction, with positive emotions being more strongly related to life satisfaction than the absence of negative emotions (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008). Positive and negative affect are thought to influence life satisfaction either through the influence of current mood on satisfaction judgments (Jayawickreme, Tsukayama, & Kashdan, 2017a, 2017b) or as a result of predispositions to positive and negative affect (Schimmack, 2008).

Similarly, since CSE is an evaluation of one's fundamental worth, competence, and capability it may influence well-being outcomes by influencing the cognition and appraisals related to everyday life events (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). It is in line with these empirical findings to suggest that self-worth might modify appraisals and reactions to life events (Judge et al., 1997), which in turn might alter one's affective balance, leading to a change in life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). Two previous studies of people with disabilities found that while positive affect mediated the association between CSE and life satisfaction (Smedema et al., 2015), negative affect did not (Rey & Extremera, 2016). These results suggest that positive affect may play a fundamental role in the association between CSE and life satisfaction. However, these studies had some limitations to be noted. First, both investigations were conducted on physical and mental disability populations, it thus may be inappropriate to generalise from a narrow database of non-disabled population. For example, results who have compared those with disabilities and the general population have shown that individuals with disabilities report poorer quality of life and well-being (Sheppard-Jones, Prout, & Kleinert, 2005). Second, both studies were conducted on relatively very small samples (Smedema et al., 2015;  $N = 97$ ; Rey & Extremera, 2016;  $N = 134$ ); thus the results cannot be generalised. Third, affectivity includes positive and negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), however, Smedema et al. (2015) did not consider the specific mediating effects of negative affect in explaining the influence of CSE on life satisfaction. Yet, it is not known how CSE relates to affect and life satisfaction in the general population or whether any associations that exist are similar or different between disabled and non-disabled persons. Clarifying this issue may be useful for understanding potential variations in which variables may contribute to greater life satisfaction in general compared with disabled populations and what the underlying mechanisms may be.

Consistent with theory (Chang et al., 2012) and previous research (Judge et al., 1998; Judge et al., 2005) documenting the role of CSE on life satisfaction, there is also some reason to consider a mediation model in which CSE is associated with life satisfaction through affect. First, CSE has showed a causal relationship with both life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2005) and affect (Piccolo et al., 2005). Second, research has provided support for the notion that CSE might have considerable influence on the development of positive and negative affect (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009; Piccolo et al., 2005). Third, there is some evidence to suggest that individuals use their mood as an indicator of their life satisfaction (Kuppens et al., 2008). Therefore, we hypothesised that (a) direct relationships would exist between CSE and affectivity and between CSE and life satisfaction, and (b) affect would operate as a mediator of the association between CSE and affect.

To confirm our findings and enhance their generalisability we subjected data from two independent groups (university students and adults) to the same planned analyses.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants and procedure

Two groups of participants were used. The first group (Sample 1) comprised 352 college students (114 men, 238 women; mean age = 20.96 years,  $SD = 2.49$ ) attending a public university in southern Spain who participated in return for course credit. They were told that the study was about personality and well-being. The second group (Sample 2) comprised 502 adults (226 men, 276 women; mean age = 30.22 years,  $SD = 10.47$ ) working in a wide range of sectors who participated on a voluntary basis. This group was recruited using the snowball technique, a non-probability sampling technique; undergraduate students recruited friends and family members who were in employment. Most participants in this group worked full-time (69.3%). Given that sampling bias is a possible drawback of the snowball technique (Hendricks & Blanken, 1992) each participant was given written and precise instructions. Thus, participants were assured that their involvement would be anonymous, and that their data would remain confidential. Missing data were assumed to be random in both samples and were handled by multiple imputation in SPSS 22 (Cheema, 2014).

### 2.2. Measures

#### 2.2.1. Core Self-Evaluations Scale (CSES; Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003)

The CSES is a 12-item scale developed to measure the underlying self-evaluative factor that is reflected in four more specific traits: self-esteem, generalised self-efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control. The CSE has demonstrated good reliability and validity in Spanish populations under study (Judge et al., 2004; Rey, Extremera, & Peláez-Fernández, 2016).

#### 2.2.2. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988)

Positive and negative affect were measured using the PANAS, a 20-item self-report measure consisting of ten items assessing positive affect and ten items assessing negative affect. Separate positive and negative affect scores are calculated. Respondents were asked to rate how they feel in the last month for each item across a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very slightly) to 5 (extremely). The PANAS has demonstrated good reliability and validity in Spanish samples (Sandin et al., 1999).

#### 2.2.3. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)

This scale comprises five self-referenced statements about global life satisfaction. Participants completed the Spanish version of the SWLS (Atienza, Balaguer, and García-Merita, 2003). There is evidence that both the English and Spanish versions have discriminant validity and adequate internal consistency (Atienza, Balaguer, & García-Merita, 2003; Diener et al., 1985).

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Descriptive analyses

Means, standard deviations and reliability of the various scales are presented in Table 1. As Table 2 shows, CSE was positively associated with positive affect and life satisfaction and negatively associated with negative affect. Positive and negative affect were, respectively, positively and negatively associated with life satisfaction. It is worth noting that in both samples the correlations between positive affect and life satisfaction (Sample 1:  $r = 0.30$ ; Sample 2:  $r = 0.36$ ) were stronger than those between negative affect and life satisfaction (Sample 1:  $r = -0.14$ ; Sample 2:  $r = -0.20$ ) (for Sample 1,  $z = 5.95$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; for Sample 2,  $z = 9.15$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

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