



Affective mediators of the influence of neuroticism and resilience on life satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The primary goal of this study was to explore the influence of neuroticism and resilience on life satisfaction and investigate the mediating effects of positive and negative affect on this relationship. A total of 282 participants were administered a battery of questionnaires that assessed neuroticism, resilience, positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction. Results from path analyses (AMOS) revealed that positive affect partially mediated the association between neuroticism and life satisfaction. Furthermore, the association between resilience and life satisfaction was fully mediated by positive affect. These findings highlight the mediational role of positive rather than negative affect in the relationships between neuroticism, resilience and life satisfaction. Results elaborate on the earlier findings connecting neuroticism and resilience to life satisfaction. Limitations of the study are considered and implications of the results for promotion of individuals' life satisfaction are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Life satisfaction is generally defined as a global cognitive evaluation of an individual as to the satisfaction with her/his own life as a whole (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). As numerous studies indicate, life satisfaction is a key indicator of quality of life. Life satisfaction is found to be correlated with a vast array of positive personal, psychological, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal outcomes (for a review see Proctor, Linley, & Maltby, 2009). For example, people who are higher in global life satisfaction achieve better life outcomes, including financial success, academic achievement, self-esteem, self-efficacy, mental health, supportive relationships, effective coping, and even physical health and longevity (Gilman & Huebner, 2006; Proctor et al., 2009; Suldo & Huebner, 2006). In contrast, people who are lower in life satisfaction have higher levels of anxiety and depression, and more experiences of emotional and behavioral problems (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Therefore, life satisfaction is an important positive indicator of people's psychological and social well-being.

Since the domain of life satisfaction is of immense importance to the quality of life of an individual, psychologists have made numerous attempts to find the correlates and predictors of people's life satisfaction. Research has consistently shown that personality traits tend to be among the foremost predictors of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2003; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). For example, neuroticism, as a risk factor for quality of life, has been found to have a detrimental effect in life satisfaction. In contrast, resilience,

as a protective factor for quality of life, has been found to be important in increasing life satisfaction. An alternative line of research has confirmed the role of positive and negative affect (PA and NA) in influencing life satisfaction (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008; Lucas et al., 1996; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). The purpose of the current study is to incorporate these two lines of research to investigate the processes underlying the associations between neuroticism, resilience and life satisfaction. Specifically, this study is focused on the possible mediating effects of PA and NA on the relationships between neuroticism, resilience and life satisfaction.

1.1. Neuroticism and life satisfaction

Trait neuroticism refers to a stable propensity to respond with negative emotions to threat, frustration, or loss (Goldberg, 1993; Lahey, 2009). Lahey (2009) suggested that neuroticism is a psychological trait of broad and considerable importance to public health, not merely because it is robustly correlated with a wide range of adverse outcomes, including both mental and physical health problems, but also because it is inversely associated with many positive life outcomes, including self-esteem (Watson, Suls, & Haig, 2002), resilience (Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006) and perceived availability of social support (Swickert & Owens, 2010).

As a risk factor for quality of life, neuroticism is also negatively associated with life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2003). DeNeve and Cooper (1998), for example, conducted a meta-analytic review of 137 personality traits and found that neuroticism was one of the strongest predictors of life satisfaction. Similarly, a recent meta-analysis of 347 samples conducted by Steel et al. (2008),

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reexamining the role of personality in subjective well-being, found that neuroticism was a significant negative predictor of life satisfaction. In an Iranian Muslim undergraduate sample, [Joshanloo and Afshari \(2011\)](#) also found that neuroticism was one of the strongest predictors of life satisfaction. There is also evidence that neuroticism is a negative predictor of life satisfaction among a Chinese undergraduate sample ([Zheng, Wang, & Qiu, 2003](#)). Taken together, the association between neuroticism and life satisfaction has received good support in both Western and non-Western cultures. This may be because individuals high in neuroticism tend to see events and situations in a more negative light, are more responsive to negative feedback, tend to overestimate difficulties they encounter, and have a cognitive and behavioral style of a ruminative focus on negative experiences ([Diener et al., 2003](#); [Lahey, 2009](#)).

1.2. Resilience and life satisfaction

Resilience has been characterized by the capacity to “bounce back” from stress effectively, adapt flexibly and even grow positively in response to the ever-changing situations, especially disadvantage, trauma, and adversity ([Block & Kremen, 1996](#); [Bonanno, 2004](#)). Resilient individuals have optimistic, zestful, and energetic approaches to life, are curious and open to new experiences, and tend to have high positive emotionality that can help people buffer against the effects of negative experiences ([Block & Kremen, 1996](#); [Klohn, 1996](#)). Consistent with the above strengths of resilience, a large empirical literature shows that resilience is related to a range of important life outcomes: psychologically healthier and better adjusted ([Bonanno, 2004](#); [Davydov, Stewart, Ritchie, & Chaudieu, 2010](#)), better interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustment across the life span ([Klohn, 1996](#)), higher levels of self-esteem ([Benetti & Kambouropoulos, 2006](#)), faster cardiovascular recovery from experimentally eliciting negative emotions and more positive meaning found in negative circumstances ([Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004](#)), and less depression and more thriving in the face of adversity ([Davydov et al., 2010](#)) or after some environmental hazards and even a real-world tragedy (e.g., the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; [Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003](#)).

As a protective factor for quality of life, resilience can also help people enhance their life satisfaction ([Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway, 2009](#); [Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008](#)). For example, [Abolghasemi and Varaniyab \(2010\)](#) demonstrated that psychological resilience predicted increased life satisfaction in the students of both success and failure. Similarly, [Haddadi and Besharat \(2010\)](#) showed that resilience was positively associated with psychological well-being and negatively associated with psychological distress, depression and anxiety. [Fredrickson et al. \(2008\)](#) also found increments in personal resources (e.g., resilience) predicted increased life satisfaction and reduced depressive symptoms. These findings indicate the importance of resilience in promoting people’s life satisfaction. This may be because people with high resilience are more likely to effectively meet the challenges of their lives, flexibly adapt to the stresses of their lives, and even become successful, healthy, and happy in future ([Bonanno, 2004](#); [Cohn et al., 2009](#); [Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006](#)). Overall, resilience has a beneficial effect on life satisfaction.

1.3. Positive and negative affect as mediators

Most previous studies examining the neuroticism–life satisfaction and resilience–life satisfaction relations have primarily focused on the direct effects of neuroticism and resilience on life satisfaction. However, there is emerging evidence that neuroticism could also influence life satisfaction through indirect mechanisms. That is, several third variables could intervene between neuroticism and

life satisfaction. Self-esteem, for example, has been suggested by numerous studies (e.g., [Joshanloo & Afshari, 2011](#); [Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997](#)) to play an intervening variable role in the relationship between neuroticism and life satisfaction. However, no study has been encountered to examine the possible mediator effects of PA and NA on the association between neuroticism and life satisfaction. Similarly, the influence of resilience on life satisfaction may be mediated by PA.

There is substantial evidence that neuroticism is linked with positive and negative affective states. Indeed, neuroticism has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of affect ([Howell & Rodzon, 2011](#)). A large number of studies have demonstrated that neuroticism is positively associated with NA (e.g., [DeNeve & Cooper, 1998](#); [Gross, Sutton, & Ketelaar, 1998](#); [Howell & Rodzon, 2011](#)). Both the affect-level and affect-reactivity models, two extensions of the temperament model, can explain this relation. According to the temperament model, neurotic individuals report more NA in all situations (i.e. affect-level) and react more strongly to negative situations (i.e. affect-reactivity) than those emotionally stable individuals ([Gross et al., 1998](#); [Howell & Rodzon, 2011](#)).

However, the relation between neuroticism and PA is complex and inconsistent. Though the negative correlations between neuroticism and PA are often insignificant, [Ng \(2009\)](#) argued that they are not completely independent under all circumstances, and even the relation is not necessarily weak and insignificant in some situations (e.g., unpleasant). Indeed, as some research indicates, while neuroticism was much more highly associated with NA rather than PA, it is nonetheless correlated with both positive and negative affective states ([Ng, 2009](#); [Steel et al., 2008](#)).

In contrast, resilience has been consistently associated with PA. Indeed, numerous studies have shown that PA is a source or an active ingredient of resilience ([Fredrickson et al., 2003](#); [Zautra, Johnson, & Davis, 2005](#)). A large empirical literature shows that resilience achieves its beneficial effects on people’s lives primarily by employing PA. For example, when faced with a stressor, people high on resilience experience more positive emotions than do their less resilient peers, even though they experience negative emotions at comparable levels. The difference in positive emotions accounts for their better ability to “bounce back” from aversive experiences, ward off depression, and continue to grow ([Fredrickson et al., 2003](#); [Ong et al., 2006](#); [Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004](#)). Similarly, [Benetti and Kambouropoulos \(2006\)](#) found that resilience increased feelings of PA which in turn bolster self-esteem. There is also evidence that resilient individuals may employ PA to achieve their well-being ([Fredrickson et al., 2003](#); [Ong et al., 2006](#); [Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004](#)).

Taken together, both neuroticism and resilience are related to affective states. Although life satisfaction and affective experiences are two interrelated components of subjective well-being, they are not identical ([Kuppens et al., 2008](#); [Lucas et al., 1996](#)). Regarding the relation between the affective and cognitive components of subjective well-being, research has shown that PA and NA have a causal influence on life satisfaction judgment. Moreover, empirical evidence has shown that the experience of positive emotions was more strongly related to life satisfaction than the absence of negative emotions ([Kuppens et al., 2008](#); [Lucas et al., 1996](#); [Suh et al., 1998](#)). This finding is well consistent with the principles of positive psychology. According to the advocates of positive psychology, positive affective experience is an important route to greater life satisfaction ([Fredrickson et al., 2008](#); [Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005](#)).

1.4. The present study

Based on the preceding rationale and the available literature that has shown the associations of PA and NA with neuroticism

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