



Social cognitive and self-construal predictors of well-being among African college students in the US ☆, ☆, ☆

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ABSTRACT

We examined social cognitive and cultural predictors of academic satisfaction in African students studying at American universities. In addition to predictors drawn directly from the social cognitive model of work and educational well-being (Lent, 2004; Lent & Brown, 2006, 2008), self-construal was included in the predictive model as a culture-specific variable with potential relevance to academic satisfaction. Self-construal refers to the way in which one's thoughts, behaviors, and feelings are guided by one's relationship to self and others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The findings indicated that the model, with some modification, fit the data well and accounted for 59% of the variance in academic satisfaction. The findings also suggested that the three indicators of self-construal (personal, relational, and collective) do not relate directly to academic satisfaction but rather operate through mediated pathways. Implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed.

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The recently developed social cognitive model of domain-specific well-being highlights the joint roles of social, cognitive, behavioral, and personality factors in promoting people's adjustment to different life roles and contexts (Lent, 2004), particularly in occupational and educational settings (Lent & Brown, 2006, 2008). Subsequent research has thus far examined the model's utility in predicting teachers' job satisfaction in three different countries, the US (Duffy & Lent, 2009), Italy (Lent et al., 2011), and the United Arab Emirates (Badri, Mohaidat, Ferrandino, & El Mourad, 2013). Studies have also used the model to predict domain satisfaction and other aspects of well-being among college students in the US (Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt, & Schmidt, 2007; Lent et al., 2005), Portugal (Lent, Taveira, Sheu, & Singley, 2009), Taiwan and Singapore (Sheu, Chong, Chen, & Lin, 2014), and Angola and Mozambique (Lent et al., 2014).

Studies of the social cognitive model within different countries represent a useful effort to examine the range of the model's applicability across different cultures (Sheu & Lent, 2008). However, it is also valuable to assess how well the model may account for cultural variations in well-being within countries. Several studies have applied the model to racial/ethnic minority college samples in the US, including Latino/a (Flores et al., 2014; Ojeda, Flores, & Navarro, 2011) and Asian American students (Hui, Lent, & Miller, 2013).

The current study was designed to test the model's relevance to the academic experiences of African students studying at American colleges, a group that has received relatively little attention in the academic and career development literatures (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Kamy, 1997). We use the term "African students" to include those who were either born in an African country and migrated to the US after high school (1st generation), migrated before high school (1.5

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generation), or were born in the US but have at least one parent who was born in Africa (2nd generation) (Awokoya & Harushimana, 2011). African students may differ from their Black/African-American counterparts in the closeness of their ties to their African heritage and African cultural values (e.g., emphasis on respect for authority and family solidarity, education as an obligation rather than a choice) (Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007). The social experiences of African students in U.S. schools may also differ in several ways from their African-American peers, with implications for their sense of well-being in academic settings (Awokoya & Harushimana, 2011).

Academic satisfaction, or enjoyment of the academic part of college life, plays a key role in the overall college experience for most students (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Though academic satisfaction is important in its own right (i.e., as a reflection of how satisfied students are with a key domain of their lives), it is also a valuable predictor of other outcomes, such as intended persistence with particular majors (Lent, Singley, Sheu, Schmidt and Schmidt, 2007; Lent et al., 2013). Therefore, it is valuable to examine the possible antecedents of academic satisfaction. Such research could inform the design of interventions to aid the college adjustment of particular groups of students.

Many writers have noted the relevance of culture to subjective well-being (e.g., Cantor & Sanderson, 1999; Christopher, 1999). For example, culture can be reflected in the personal goals people set for themselves, in the values they seek to fulfill, and in the activities they voluntarily pursue. In proposing an integrative social cognitive approach to well-being, Lent (2004) noted the importance of studying both pancultural and culture-specific aspects of domain and life satisfaction. Most of the subsequent research on Lent's framework has involved participants from Western cultures. There is a need, therefore, to examine the extent to which the general model may fit the experiences of persons from non-Western cultures as well as to identify culture-specific variables that may complement the model's more pancultural elements, both in testing the model abroad and within US sub-cultures.

Although Africa consists of many distinct countries and cultural groups, for many African students, particularly those who migrate to the US or who are children of African immigrants, a great emphasis is placed on the value of higher education (Amayo, 2007). African students typically learn about their roles and expectations from their family and community members, with a common emphasis on the individual assuming responsibility for the well-being, status, and security of their family (Francis, 2000). Further, as the African familial structure tends to emphasize the extended family over the nuclear family, many African students are encouraged to view their behavior as having consequences for their extended community of kinsmen, and not only for their immediate family or for themselves as individuals. Therefore, in studying the experiences of African students at US colleges, it may be valuable to assess how this interdependent orientation may be linked to students' academic satisfaction. Self-construal, the cultural variable we selected for inclusion in this study, provides a way to index students' affinity for individually-oriented as well as for more collective (e.g., family, community) values.

1. Social cognitive model of domain satisfaction

The social cognitive model posits that domain and life satisfaction can be predicted by environmental supports and resources, self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations, goal progress, as well as by personality traits and affective dispositions (Lent, 2004). Based partly on Bandura's (1986, 1997) general social cognitive theory, the satisfaction model incorporates the assumption that "... by engaging in self-efficacy-building and valued life activities, setting and making progress at meaningful personal goals, or seeking out needed social resources, individuals have the opportunity to partly steer themselves toward happiness" (Sheu & Lent, 2008, p. 49).

Self-efficacy refers to confidence in one's ability to successfully perform particular behaviors or courses of action. Outcome expectations involve individuals' beliefs about the consequences of pursuing a specific course of action. Goal pursuit refers to people's

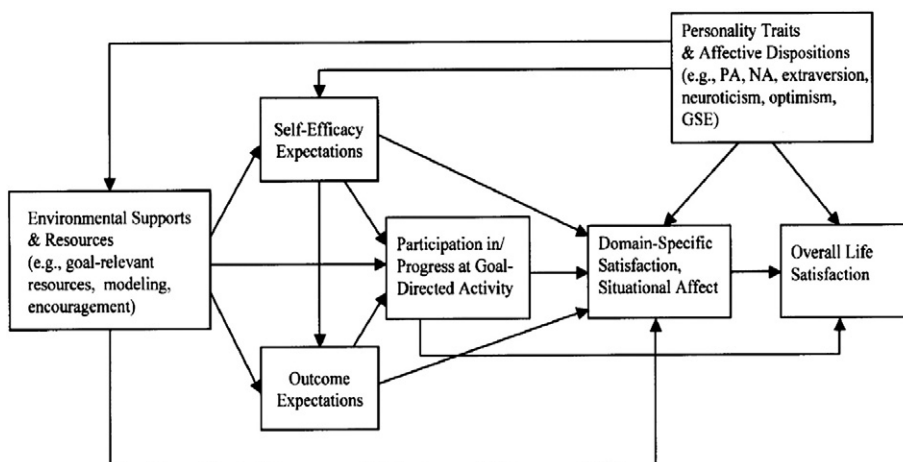


Fig. 1. Social cognitive model of normative well-being.

From Lent, R. W. (2004). Toward a unifying theoretical and practical perspective on well-being and psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 51 (4), 482–509.

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