



Affect and self-esteem as mediators between trait resilience and psychological adjustment



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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine the potential sequential mediation effects of affect and self-esteem on the association between trait resilience and psychological adjustment, as indexed by life satisfaction and psychological distress. A total of 412 undergraduate students completed a packet of questionnaires that assessed trait resilience, positive and negative affect, self-esteem, life satisfaction and psychological distress. Mediation analyses showed that self-esteem mediated the relation between trait resilience and life satisfaction. In addition, positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem were found to intervene between trait resilience and psychological distress. Furthermore, the sequential mediation effects of affect–self-esteem on the relations between trait resilience and life satisfaction as well as psychological distress were confirmed. Results are discussed in light of previous findings. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are briefly discussed.

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1. Introduction

The concept of resilience in research has evolved over the last four decades, but agreement relating to its definition has been less unanimous (Bonanno, 2004; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2007; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer, 2003). In the extant theoretical and research literature, most definitions generally fall under one of three categories: outcome, process, and personality trait. From the outcome perspective, resilience can be defined as an outcome characterized by successful adaptation despite risk, acute stressors, and chronic adversities (Masten, 2007; Olsson et al., 2003). From the process perspective, resilience can be defined as a dynamic process of adaptation to a risk setting that involves interaction between risk factors and protective resources (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2007; Olsson et al., 2003). Although resilience has been defined broadly, for the purposes of this study, it is defined as a positive personality trait that enables individuals to bounce back from adversity, and to adapt, thrive and mature in the face of adverse circumstances (Block & Kremen, 1996; Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2003; Klohnen, Vandewater, & Young, 1996). Resilient individuals are typically characterized by internal locus of control, positive

self-image, optimism, active coping, hardiness, and self-efficacy (Block & Kremen, 1996; Wagnild & Young, 1990). These positive characteristics are associated with better psychological adjustment, as reflected in higher life satisfaction and lower psychological distress.

1.1. Resilience and psychological adjustment

Trait resilience has been consistently found to be particularly relevant for people's life satisfaction, a positive indicator of psychological adjustment. A growing number of studies have revealed a concurrent positive relation between trait resilience and life satisfaction (Liu, Wang, & Li, 2012; Mak, Ng, & Wong, 2011; Yu & Zhang, 2007). Some longitudinal studies robustly showed that trait resilience in Time 1 prospectively predicted life satisfaction in Time 2 (Klohnen et al., 1996; Siu et al., 2009). On the other hand, resilience is repeatedly found to be negatively associated with psychological distress, a negative indicator of psychological adjustment (Friborg et al., 2003; Mak et al., 2011; Pinguart, 2009). Klohnen et al. (1996)'s and Siu et al. (2009)'s longitudinal studies also demonstrated trait resilience in Wave 1 prospectively predicting psychological distress in Wave 2.

Recently, some researchers have investigated the mediation mechanisms underlying the relationship between resilience and psychological adjustment. For example, Mak et al. (2011) revealed a cognitive mediation mechanism, such that trait resilience

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enhanced life satisfaction and reduced depression through a positive cognitive triad: positive views towards the self, the world, and the future. Likewise, Burns, Anstey, and Windsor (2011) found that positive and negative affect mediated the relation between resilience and psychological distress as indexed by depression and anxiety. In the current study we considered positive and negative affect and self-esteem as potential mediators between trait resilience and psychological adjustment, because both affect and self-esteem are significantly associated with resilience and psychological adjustment.

1.2. Positive and negative affect as mediators

In settings of everyday life, resilient individuals are more likely to use humor, creative exploration, relaxation, and optimistic thinking as ways of coping (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Resilient individuals have also been found to report more positive meaning within negative emotional experiences (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Thus, resilience is found to be associated with facilitating positive affect and alleviating negative affect (Benetti & Kambouropoulos, 2006; Liu et al., 2012). Furthermore, existing research demonstrated a positive association between positive affect and life satisfaction and an inverse association between negative affect and life satisfaction (Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008). On the other hand, there is mounting evidence that positive affect is negatively, and negative affect is positively related to psychological distress (Chang & Sanna, 2007; Kafetsios, 2007). Considering the associations between positive and negative affect and resilience, life satisfaction and psychological distress, it seems plausible to assume that positive and negative affect mediate these associations.

1.3. Self-esteem as a mediator

Trait resilience, associated with facilitating positive affect and alleviating negative affect, is demonstrated to promote individuals' self-esteem (Benetti & Kambouropoulos, 2006; Yu & Zhang, 2007). As a fundamental psychological need, self-esteem serves an important adaptive function in psychological adjustment. There is ample evidence to suggest that self-esteem is among the strongest predictors of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). On the other hand, self-esteem was found to be inversely correlated with psychological distress, in the form of anxiety, depression, interpersonal problems and the general severity index of symptom disorders (Marcussen, 2006; Park, Heppner, & Lee, 2010). Accordingly, self-esteem is of particular importance to people's psychological adjustment.

Self-esteem is not only a robust predictor of life satisfaction, but also an intervening variable between personality traits and life satisfaction (Kwan et al., 1997). However, to our knowledge, no study has been encountered to examine the mediation effect of self-esteem on the relationships between trait resilience and life

satisfaction as well as psychological distress. In light of the bivariate correlations between self-esteem with resilience, life satisfaction and psychological distress, it was predicted that self-esteem mediated the relationship between resilience and psychological adjustment.

1.4. The three-path mediating effect of affect and self-esteem

Regarding the relation between affect and self-esteem, extant research indicated that positive affect is positively, and negative affect is inversely related to self-esteem (Benetti & Kambouropoulos, 2006). Moreover, there is evidence that positive affect mediated the association between trait resilience and self-esteem (Benetti & Kambouropoulos, 2006). Thus, the present study was to replicate the mediator role of positive and (or) negative affect in the association between resilience and self-esteem.

Based on the preceding rationale and previous findings, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that the relations between trait resilience and life satisfaction as well as psychological distress were sequentially mediated by affect and self-esteem among Chinese college students in the normal situations as some prior studies (e.g., Benetti & Kambouropoulos, 2006; Burns et al., 2011; Mak et al., 2011). As emerging adults, college students are away from their parents and live independently and thus usually feel lonely and homesick. They also have to bear the heavy burden of studies and the high stress of part-time job and future career orientation. Consequently, college stage is a period full of stress for many students even in the normal situations. Thus, the current study might shed light on the potential psychological mechanism in improving college students' psychological adjustment. The detailed hypothesized model concerning the three-path mediating effect of affect and self-esteem on the relationship between trait resilience and psychological adjustment is presented in Fig. 1.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Four hundred and twelve undergraduate students (247 females and 165 males) were recruited from introductory psychology classes in a large university located in Northwestern China. Mean age of the sample was 20.7 years ($SD = 1.8$). All participants signed a written consent form. Participation was anonymous and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003)

CD-RISC, one of the most widely used scale for measuring trait resilience, was used to assess resilience. The Chinese version of

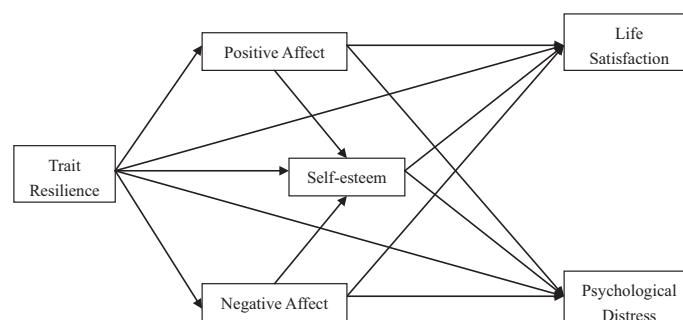


Fig. 1. The hypothesized model concerning the mediator role of affect and self-esteem in the relationships of trait resilience with life satisfaction and psychological distress.

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