



# Making the Grade? The Moderating Effect of Contingencies of Self-Worth – Academic Competence on Collectivist Orientation and Satisfaction with Life



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## Introduction

- Satisfaction with life (SWL) is correlated with emotional experience significantly less strongly in collectivistic cultures versus individualistic cultures (e.g., Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998).
- Academic motivation based upon a desire to demonstrate one's competence to others has been shown to be higher in cultures which emphasize more social connectedness (e.g., Dekker & Fischer, 2008).
- However, self-worth based on academic achievement might be more malleable and externally based, and may lead to lower SWL.
- Examining collectivism along with contingencies of Self-Worth based on Academic Competence (CSW-AC) may be helpful to clarify the effects on SWL.
- Little research has studied the association between collectivism and self-worth gained from academic achievement, and to our knowledge no study has examined the effect of these variables together with SWL. Thus, this study investigates the effect of a collectivist orientation on SWL as moderated by CSW-AC.

## Measures

**Satisfaction With Life.** SWL was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The unidimensional 5-item scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ) is answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

**Contingencies of Self-Worth – Academic Competence.** CSW – Academic Competence was assessed using Crocker and colleagues' measure of contingencies of self-worth (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). This 35-item measure scores seven dimensions (five items each) that may be important to sense of self, though the current study uses only the Academic Competence scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Respondents answer each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

**Individualism/Collectivism.** The Individualism-Collectivism Scale (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) measures feelings of individualism and collectivism using 16 items. It produces 4 scales (i.e., horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, vertical individualism, vertical collectivism). We used the horizontal collectivism scale in our analysis.

## Method

### Participants & Procedures

- Participants were 1094 undergraduate students (Mean age = 22.52,  $SD = 5.30$ , 7, 82.4% female) from a large, southern university.
- The sample was racially and ethnically diverse (38.6% Caucasian, 20.2% Asian American, 19.6% African American, 0.8% Native American/American Indian, 0.6% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 5.2% Multiracial; Hispanic ethnicity was reported by 32.7%).
- All study materials were completed online in a single session, as part of a larger multi-part study.

## Hypotheses

**H1:** There is a main effect of collectivism, such that individuals with higher collectivism show less SWL.

**H2:** There is a main effect of CSW-AC, such that individuals with more CSW related to academics will have lower SWL.

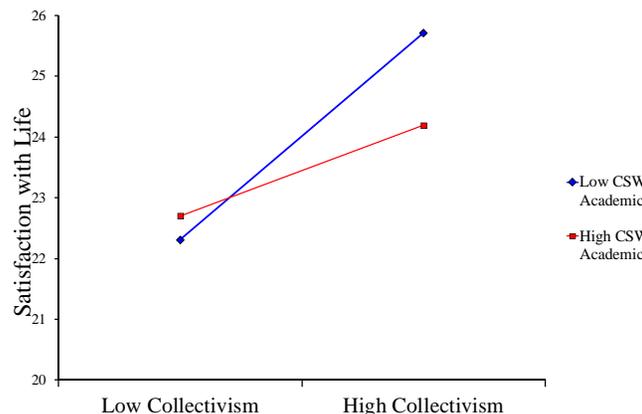
**H3:** CSW-AC will significantly moderate the effect of a collectivist orientation on SWL such that those who are higher in collectivist orientation are more likely to have lower SWL when CSW-AC is high.

## Results and Discussion

- CSW-AC did not significantly predict SWL, although the effect was in the expected direction.
- Contrary to expectations, results indicated that possessing a higher collectivistic orientation was associated with higher SWL.
- This latter result did not support our original hypothesis, however, this may have been due to the fact that these data were collected from individuals living in an individualistic society. That is, the collectivistic items may have been perceived as relating to more to belongingness by individuals currently living in an individualistic society versus a truly collectivistic culture.
- As hypothesized, CSW-AC moderated the relationship between collectivistic orientation and SWL such that the positive association between collectivist orientation and SWL was more pronounced for those low in CSW-AC.
- Furthermore, those high in collectivist orientation seemed more satisfied with life if they were not as strongly motivated by CSW-AC.
- Overall, high collectivism appears to have a positive effect on SWL; however, high CSW-AC motivations may attenuate this relationship.
- These results have potential implications for working with young adults with collectivist orientations, particularly around academic stress and anxiety.

Figure 1.

*The interaction between contingencies of self-worth-academic competence and level of collectivism on satisfaction with life*



## References

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