

INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL AS A MODERATOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN EXTRINSIC ASPIRATION FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTAL
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Research on Self-Determination Theory suggests that the pursuit of extrinsic aspirations (e.g. to be rich) can have negative consequences on well-being. Yet little research has examined whether holding extrinsic aspiration for other people evidences similar relationships. The current research examined how holding extrinsic aspirations for one's children (AFC) is related to parents' own psychological well-being. I expected endorsing extrinsic AFC might also bear negatively predict parental psychological well-being. However, I contended that the strength of relationship might vary according to interdependent self-construal. To the extent people's self-construal is interdependent, they might attach different meaning to extrinsic AFC (e.g. as a way to be responsible and competent parents). These additional meaning could neutralize or even reverse its negative implication over parental psychological well-being.

Two studies (one within-culture and one cross-cultural) were designed to test these hypotheses. Parent participants completed individual difference measure of self-construal, extrinsic AFC and parental psychological well-being. The results generally confirmed the hypotheses.

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The Chinese data analyzed for Chapter III was provided by Professor Hong Zhang of the Department of Psychology at Nanjing University. The analyses in Chapter III was conducted with the assistance of Dr. D. Angus Clark, Department of Psychiatry at University of Michigan. All other work conducted for the dissertation was independently completed by the student.

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NOMENCLATURE

SDT	Self-Determination Theory
AFC	Aspiration for Children
ITD	Interdependent self-construal
IND	Independent self-construal

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern consumeristic societies often emphasize monetary success as a pathway to happiness (Derber, 1979; Ownby, 1999). According to a survey conducted by Pew Research Center (2007), most people born between 1981 and 1988 identified wealth and fame as two of the most important goals for their generation. Despite the ostensible desirability of wealth, fame and popularity, theories and empirical research have suggested a dark side of pursuing these values. Specifically, Self-Determination theory (SDT; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000) contends that placing importance on extrinsic goal-pursuit (i.e., to be rich, famous and attractive) can undermine psychological well-being. Existing literature generally supports SDT's contention (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Kim, Kasser & Lee, 2003; Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000; Williams, Cox, Hedberg, & Deci, 2000). However, all of these studies, to the best of our knowledge, focus on the goals one holds for oneself. Little is known about whether the same rationale applies to goals one holds for someone else.

The current research will examine whether holding extrinsic aspirations for someone else, particularly for one's children (AFC) evidences the same negative relationship with psychological well-being that has been empirically documented for extrinsic aspirations for self. I hypothesize that a strong pursuit of extrinsic AFC may indeed be negatively related to psychological well-being. However, I also contend that the strength of this negative relationship may vary by individual differences in interdependent self-construal. The logic of this contention rests on the idea that the interpretation or "meaning" of AFC could differ substantially depending on the extent to which people think of themselves as related to

others (i.e., interdependent) or separate from others (i.e., independent; Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). Although extrinsic AFC may reflect an orientation towards extrinsic, materialistic values, the potential end state implied by the AFC (e.g. a child that ends up being rich) is still what the general society judges as success. In this sense, wishing children to be rich may be one way to wish the best of their children and be good, competent parents. Given people high (versus low) in interdependent self-construal think and behave in ways that emphasize relationship quality and group affiliation (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), I hypothesized that the second meaning of extrinsic AFC (i.e. parenthood) will be particularly salient for them. Consequently, the potential negative implications of extrinsic AFC (originated from extrinsic values per se) should be attenuated or even reversed.

In this paper, I would first report the results of one study investigating these ideas within a single culture using individual difference measure (i.e. self-construal). In addition, I report another study that aims to replicate the initial patterns cross-culturally (i.e. America versus China).

I.1. SDT and the Dark Side of the “American Dream”

Aspirations are life goals that involve future desirable states (Emmons, 1989). However, SDT (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits that not all “desirable states” are equally beneficial. Rather, aspirations differentially afford well-being. Some aspirations are theorized to be “intrinsic” because they directly address personal growth and thereby wellness. Examples include self-acceptance, social affiliation and community involvement. Other aspirations (e.g., wealth, popularity and image) are theorized to be “extrinsic” in that they are pursued as a means to some other desirable ends and,

consequently, do not directly address the essentials of human well-being. Valuing extrinsic aspirations more than their intrinsic counterparts can be antagonistic to people's well-being, because it distracts people from pursuing otherwise healthier intrinsic aspirations (e.g., Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Moreover, heightened extrinsic goal pursuit often places people in pressured or competitive settings that work against their well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995).

In support of these predictions, a substantial body of research has found that overly pursuit of extrinsic aspirations predicts lower level psychological well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Kim, et al., 2003; Morgan & Robinson, 2013; Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Romero, Gómez-Fraguela & Villar, 2012; Schmuck, et al., 2000; Williams, et al., 2000). While little is known about the psychological consequences of holding extrinsic aspirations for others (including extrinsic AFC), it is tempting to expect that the same pattern would be evident. Generally speaking, excessive pursuit of extrinsic AFC may simply be highly correlated with excessive extrinsic aspirations for self. Extrinsic AFC also likely reflect an underlying orientation towards materialism (i.e., a set of values that emphasize wealth, Kasser, 2016). People who endorse materialism tend to have lower levels of welfare and social involvement (Bauer et al., 2012; Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kasser, 2002, 2016; Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002). Given these possibilities, I hypothesize that a strong orientation towards extrinsic AFC should be negatively related to parents' psychological well-being.

I.2. Interdependent self-construal, Meaning and Extrinsic AFC

While pursuit of extrinsic AFC may be viewed as reflections of more general orientation towards extrinsic values, it could also reflect a form of social practice (e.g.,

parental involvement, Bloom, 1980). The meaning attached to these practices (i.e. how people think of these practices) varies considerably from culture to culture, and among individuals with divergent beliefs about themselves (Cross, Hardin & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Oyserman, Coon, Kimmelmeier, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989). Pursuit of extrinsic AFC might—at least in some cases—be less harmful.

One way to capture such variations is through the concept of self-construal. Self-construal is defined as “a constellation of thoughts, feelings and actions concerning one’s relationship to others, and the self as distinct from others” (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). Work on self-construal explicates two different types of construal: independent versus interdependent self-construals. While the two types of self-construal have often been treated as two distinct categories that describe different cultures (e.g., Western culture versus Eastern cultures), they can also be conceptualized as two individual difference continuums that fluctuate within cultures (Cross, Hardin & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989). People high in independent self-construal tend to see themselves as autonomous entities, separate from others and social contexts. Meanwhile, highly interdependent people construe themselves as entities intertwined with others through group affiliation and harmonious interpersonal relationships. The interdependent self-concept is inseparable from the social contexts where it is embedded; rather, social contexts *define* the interdependent self. Thus, for those high in interdependent self-construal, social roles and relationships are defining characteristics of who they are and also the very basis of their well-being.

Built on this line of work, I propose that the pursuit of extrinsic AFC should be less harmful (even in some cases, beneficial) among people high (versus low) in interdependent self-construal. This is because these people should regard extrinsic AFC primarily as ways

to wish the best of their children and fulfill their duty as parents. To elaborate, a major task of parenthood is to assist children in achieving desirable end-states. Compared to other AFCs (e.g., wishing children personal growth), the end state of extrinsic AFC is more overt, tangible and more likely to be recognized as “success” by the general society. Highly interdependent people are attentive to how other people or the society would think of them (Lalwani, Shrum, & Chiu, 2009; Suh, Diener & Updegraff, 2008). They process information in terms of how the information is embedded in the social context (Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001; Kühnen & Oyserman, 2002; Oyserman, et al. 2002). From their perspective, extrinsic AFC could reflect concerns for parenthood (rather than a general preference for extrinsic, materialistic values)—it is a way to help their children to attain success and fulfill socially imposed duty as “good” parents. Given parenthood is a vital component of their self-concept (Bochner, 1994; Kim & Hicks, 2015; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), this additional meaning attached to extrinsic AFC could transform the AFC into relatively “intrinsic” pursuit (involving self-acceptance and relationship). This should to some degree offset the negative implications of pursuing extrinsic values.

Indeed, when extrinsic pursuit serves non-extrinsic, "intrinsic" purposes, its negative implications could wear off. Dunn and colleagues (2008) found prosocial spending on others actually *enhances* happiness. Spending money (i.e. consumption) was conventionally regarded as the core of materialism. However, the potential negative implications are reversed when consumption is saliently directed for the sake of others. In a similar vein, for people who viewed extrinsic AFC primarily in terms of parenthood, the negative implications of extrinsic AFC should be offset. I thus expect among people high (versus

low) in interdependent self-construal, the relationship between extrinsic AFC and their own psychological well-being should thus be less negative—or even reversed.

I.3. Overview of the Current Studies

To summarize, I propose that endorsing extrinsic AFC over other AFCs negatively predicts parental psychological well-being. Nonetheless, to the extent one's self-construal is interdependent, the relationship between extrinsic AFC and parental psychological well-being should become less negative.

To test these hypotheses, I conducted two studies. In both studies, I examined primarily parental psychological well-being (i.e. psychological well-being within a specific parent-children context as opposed to well-being in general). This is because, as mentioned earlier, the way people high in interdependent self-construal process information depends heavily on the given context (Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001; Kühnen & Oyserman, 2002; Oyserman, et al. 2002). Therefore, I examined well-being within a context most relevant to AFC, instead of well-being in general. This should allow us to control random errors that arise from other unrelated contexts (e.g., workplace).

As a first step of the project, I had participants complete measures of interdependent self-construal, extrinsic AFC and parental psychological well-being to examine their inter-correlations in Study 1. I also explored potential mediating mechanisms in this second study. Study 2 was a cross-culture study where I tried to replicate the basic findings among both US and Chinese populations. Compared to people from the United States, the Chinese population is often considered as more interdependent in self-construal (Bond & Hwang, 1986). With both a Chinese sample and U.S. sample, I were able to examine (a) whether

culture, as a proxy for interdependent self-construal, produced the same interaction and (b) whether the same interaction replicated within each cultural group.

CHAPTER II

STUDY 1

Study 1 was designed to test (a) whether extrinsic AFC negatively predicts parental psychological well-being and (b) whether this relationship is alleviated by interdependent self-construal self-construal. In addition, I also explored basic needs satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) as a potential mediating mechanism. SDT posit that people possess a need for self-governance (i.e., autonomy), a need to feel capable and worthwhile as a person (i.e., competence), and a need to feel related (i.e., relatedness). These needs are innate and cross-culturally valid; their satisfaction promotes personal growth and optimal functioning (e.g., Chirkov, Ryan & Willness, 2005; Deci, et al., 2001; Gagné, 2003; Kuzucu, & Şimşek, 2013; La Guardia et al., 2000; Tian, Chen & Huebner, 2014; Wei et al., 2005). Of relevance to the current investigation, I hypothesize extrinsic AFC might be an avenue of basic needs satisfaction to the extent people are interdependent in self-construal. According to our rationale, those high (versus low) in interdependent self-construal regarded extrinsic AFC as a way to fulfill parenthood—a pivotal component of who they are. Highly interdependent people are likely to experience themselves as competent parents that are deeply tied to their children in the process of pursuing extrinsic AFC. Pursuit of extrinsic AFC therefore bears the potential to afford some satisfaction of basic needs, especially in terms of relatedness and competence. Hence, I predict that basic need satisfaction should mediate the interaction effect of extrinsic AFC and interdependent self-construal on parental psychological well-being.

II.1. Methods

II.1.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and sixty-four participants (Male = 64, Female = 86), who indicated that they have at least one child, were recruited from MTurk ($M_{age} = 35.19$, $SD_{age} = 10.01$). The sample was predominantly Caucasian (80.4%) and non-Hispanic (92.6%). The average number of children participants had was almost two ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 1.01$); the mean age of their children was 9.20 ($SD = 7.17$). The study was conducted online via Qualtrics software. Participants completed a number of questionnaires in random order. They were then debriefed and compensated with \$1.

II.1.2. Measures

Self-construal. The Self-construal Scale (Singelis, 1994) was used to measure independent ($M = 5.04$, $SD = .86$, $\alpha = .81$) and interdependent self-construal ($M = 4.84$, $SD = .84$, $\alpha = .82$). Responses were on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 = “*Strongly Disagree*”, 7 = “*Strongly Agree*”). I dropped four items (e.g., “I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor”) as they are not suitable for adult subjects, resulting in a 20-item scale. Example items include: “My personal identity independent of others is very important to me” and “It is important for me to maintain harmony within groups I belong to.”

Extrinsic AFC. I adapted the Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) to measure the extent to which people value and pursue both extrinsic and intrinsic aspirations for their children (AFC). The Aspiration Index presents people with a number of life goals one at a time and asks how important each goal is to them. I retained all seven subscales in the original scale (i.e., wealth, fame, image, personal growth, relationships, community and

health). Participants were presented with the 33 life goals¹, one at a time. For each goal, I asked participants to rate how important the goal is to them for their son(s) or daughter(s) on a 7-point scale (1 = “*Not at all*”, 7 = “*Very*”). Sample item for extrinsic AFC is “To be a very wealthy person” and for intrinsic AFC, “To work for the betterment of society.” Reliabilities for each category of AFC were generally satisfactory ($\alpha = .88$, for relationships; $\alpha = .87$, for community, $\alpha = .77$, for personal growth; $\alpha = .87$, for fame; $\alpha = .84$, for image; $\alpha = .85$, for wealth; $\alpha = .88$, for health).

According to developers of the Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996), it is important to compute a relative centrality measure (e.g., correcting the raw scores with a grand mean), because raw scores of the Aspiration Index may be confounded with participants’ general tendency to regard all goals as important. In a similar vein, people could regard all AFCs as important, which could be a potential confound for the current research. To rule out this possibility, I calculated a relative centrality score of extrinsic AFC. Mean-corrected importance scores were computed for each AFC category by subtracting the subject’s grand mean from the category’s mean score. A summary score ($M = -1.39$, $SD = .94$) was produced by averaging the mean-corrected importance scores of the three extrinsic categories (i.e. wealth, fame and image). Higher score indicated stronger orientation towards extrinsic over AFCs in general.

Parental psychological well-being. Parental psychological well-being was assessed in terms of four common indices: parental meaning in life, parental affect, parental life satisfaction and family quality. I assessed parental meaning in life with the Meaning in Life

¹Due to some errors in programing, two life-goal items (“To be relatively free from sickness” and “To grow and learn new things” were not included in Study 1.

Questionnaire (MLQ, Steger et al, 2006). In the current study, I reworded the items of MLQ to measure the perceived meaningfulness of life with one's children ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.07$, $\alpha = .83$). The items were on 1-7 Likert scales (1 = "*Absolutely Untrue*", 7 = "*Absolutely True*"). Examples are "My children provide a satisfying purpose for my life." And "When I think about my children, I understand my life's meaning."

Parental affect was measured via Family Satisfaction by Adjectives Scale (FSAS, Barraca, Yarto, & Olea, 2000; $M = 4.75$, $SD = .85$, $\alpha = .96$). Subjects were asked to rate their feelings (e.g. "unhappy-happy") when they were with their children on a 6-point bipolar scales (1 & 6 = "*Totally*", 2 & 5 = "*Quite*", 3 & 4 = "*Somewhat*"); higher scores indicated more positive than negative feelings experienced with children.

In addition, I adapted the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Larsen & Griffin, 1985, $M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.22$, $\alpha = .91$) to measure parental life satisfaction on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 = "*Absolutely Untrue*", 7 = "*Absolutely True*"). The items were again reworded to fit into parent-children context, for example, "In most ways my life with my child(ren) is close to ideal."

Last, I asked participants to again think about their children and fill in the Family Quality of Life Scale (FQOL, Hoffman, et al, 2006). The scale assesses perception of family quality ($M = 5.59$, $SD = .90$, $\alpha = .94$). Participants filled in the measure on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 = "*Strongly Disagree*", 7 = "*Strongly Agree*"); sample item is "My family members show that they love and care for each other".

Parental basic needs satisfaction. I adapted the Basic Needs Satisfaction in Relationships Scale to measure satisfaction of basic needs within the parent-children relationship (La Guardia et al., 2000). Participants completed the 9-item measure on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 =

“*not at all true*”, 5 = “*very true*”). The questionnaire was composed of three subscales: autonomy ($\alpha = .70$), competence ($\alpha = .79$) and relatedness ($\alpha = .80$). Again, I adjusted the wording of the items to refer specifically to the parent-children context. Sample items are: “When I am with my child(ren), I feel free to be who I am” (for autonomy), “When I am with my child(ren), I often feel inadequate or incompetent” (for competence), and “When I am with my child(ren), I often feel a lot of distance in our relationship” (for relatedness). Given that the three subscales were adequately inter-correlated ($r_s > .69$), I collapsed the three subscales into one composite ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.10$), following prior research (Deci et al., 2001; Gagné, 2003; Kuzucu, & Şimşek, 2013). This score reflects individuals’ general level of basic psychological needs satisfaction within the parent-children context.

II.2. Results

II.2.1. Preliminary analysis

Correlation coefficients for all variables were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients of variables assessed in Study 1.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.IND	-							
2.ITD	.33**	-						
3.Extrinsic AFC	-.30**	-.13	-					
4. Parental meaning in life	.30**	.29**	-.50**	-				
5. Parental affect	.33**	.28**	-.45**	.67**	-			
6. Parental life satisfaction	.34**	.25**	-.26**	.57**	.67**	-		
7. Family quality	.48**	.41**	-.52**	.61**	.71**	.67**	-	
8. Basic psychological needs satisfaction	.31**	.23**	-.50**	.75**	.78**	.69**	.69**	-

Notes. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. $N = 150$. Extrinsic AFC = extrinsic aspiration for children. IND, independent self-construal; ITD, interdependent self-construal.

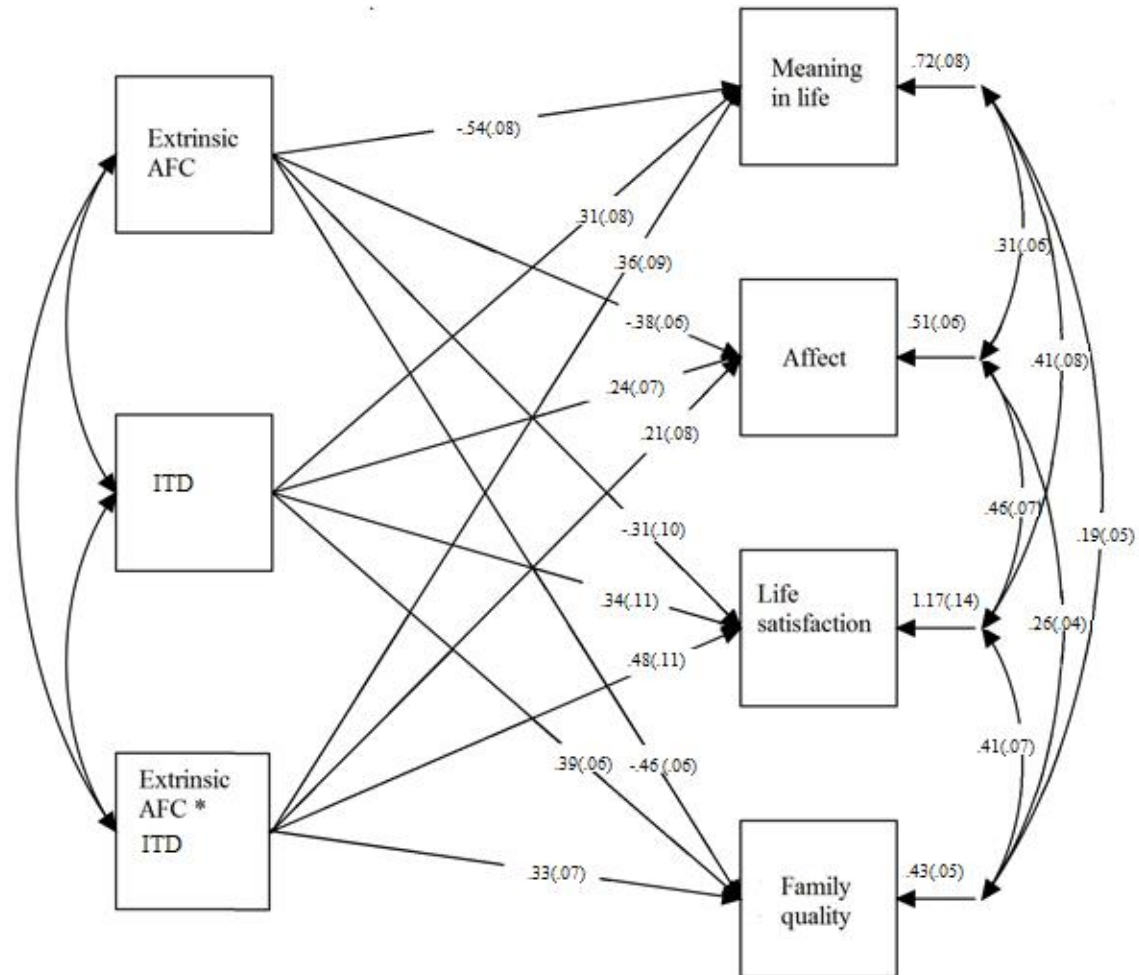
As predicted, placing relative importance on extrinsic AFC was negatively correlated with psychological well-being indicators. In addition, basic psychological needs satisfaction was positively correlated with psychological well-being across all well-being indicators; this is in line with prior SDT research suggesting basic needs satisfaction as basis of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Tian, Chen & Huebner, 2014; Wei et al., 2005).

II.2.2. Primary analysis

I conducted a path analysis² via Mplus version 7.31 (Muthen & Muthen, 2018) to examine the hypothesized effects of extrinsic AFC, interdependent self-construal self-construal (both centered), and their two-way interaction on the four indices of parental well-being (i.e., parental meaning in life, parental affect, parental life satisfaction and family quality). The critical test was to see if the main effect of extrinsic AFC and its two-way interaction with interdependent self-construal were significant. The parameter estimates of each path were presented in Figure 1.

²The results of Study 1 were also analyzed using a regression approach and similar patterns emerged.

Figure 1. Parameter estimates of the full model without mediator (Study 1).



Note. Extrinsic AFC, extrinsic aspiration for children. ITD, interdependent self-construal.

As predicted, extrinsic AFC emerged as a significant main effect predicting psychological well-being indices (all $ps \leq .001$). Overall, the more people endorsed extrinsic AFC, the less psychological well-being they reported. In addition, interdependent self-construal also emerged as a significant predictor of parental psychological well-being (all $ps \leq .001$). These main effects were qualified by significant two-way interactions across the psychological well-being indices (all $ps < .006$).

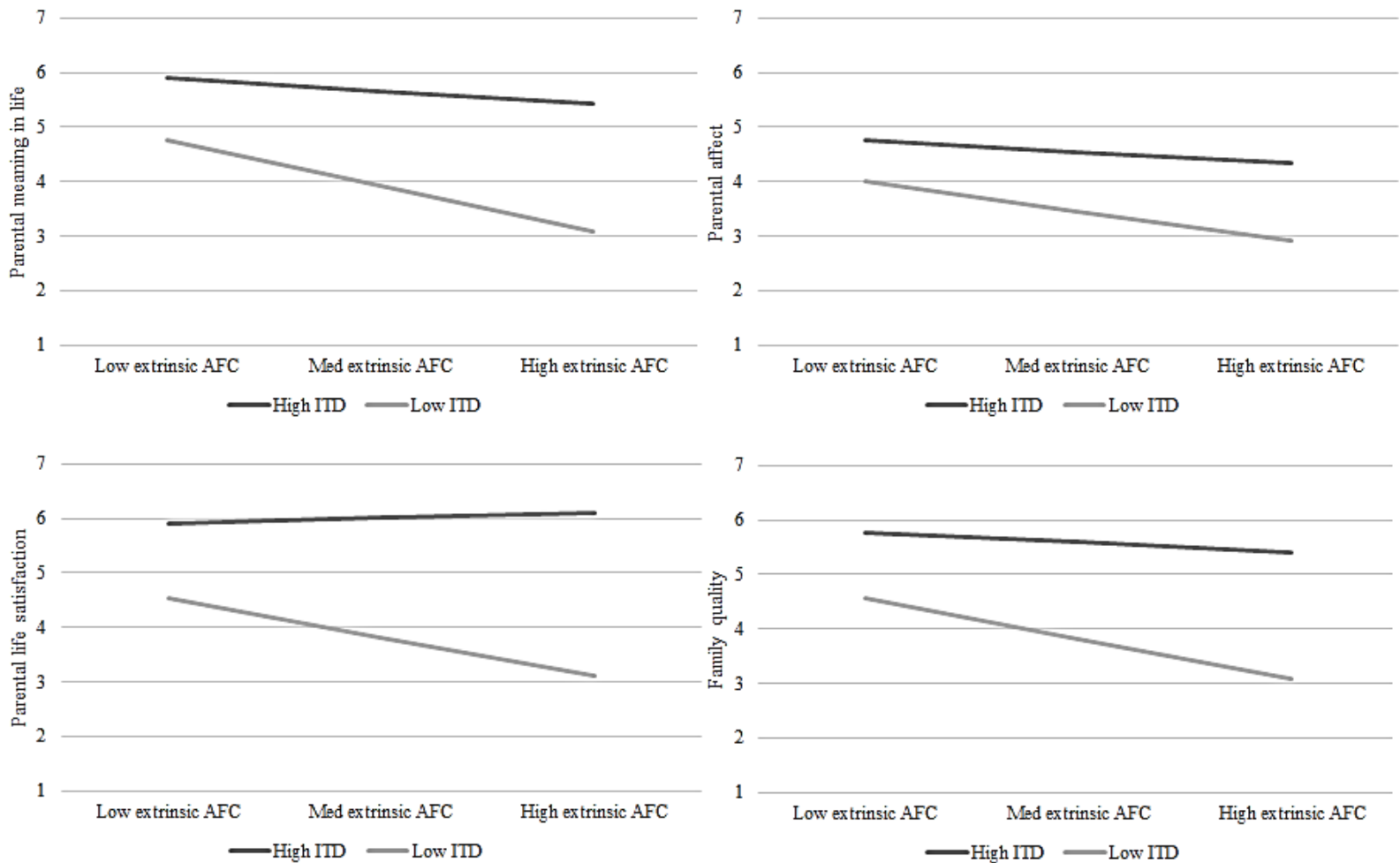
To clarify the interaction patterns, simple effect analyses were conducted. As seen in the Table 2 (as well as in Figure 2), when interdependent self-construal was high (1 *SD* above the mean) as opposed to low (1 *SD* below the mean), extrinsic AFC less strongly predicted psychological well-being. These patterns remain significant even when independent self-construal was controlled as covariate.

Table 2. Predicting well-being indicators from extrinsic AFC at high (1SD above the mean) and low (1SD below the mean) levels of interdependent self-construal (Study 1).

Variable	Low interdependent self-construal (1 SD below the mean)			High interdependent self- construal (1 SD above the mean)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Parental meaning in life	-.85	-7.75	<.001	-.24	-2.23	.03
Parental life Satisfaction	-.71	-5.13	<.001	.10	.71	.48
Family quality	-.74	-8.80	<.001	-.18	-2.20	.03
Parental affect	-.55	-6.03	<.001	-.21	-2.33	.02

Notes. *df* = (3, 146).

Figure 2. Predicting parental psychological well-being indices from interdependent self-construal and extrinsic AFC (Study 1).



Note. Extrinsic AFC = extrinsic aspiration for children; ITD = interdependent self-construal.

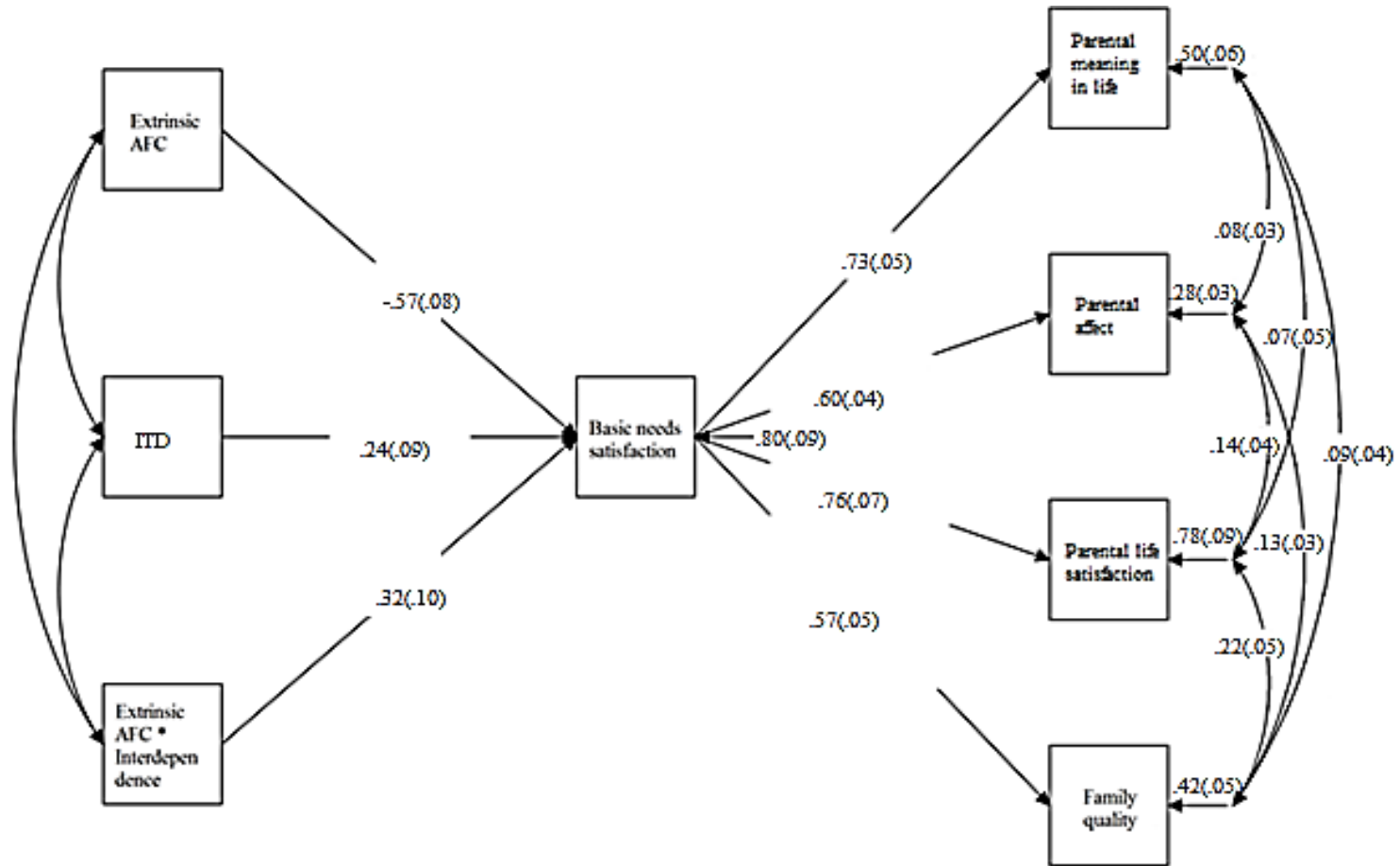
Last, I included basic needs satisfaction into the model and examine whether it mediated the interaction of extrinsic AFC and interdependent self-construal. Estimates of indirect effects were presented in Table 3 (also see Figure 3). Basic need satisfaction did mediate the relationship between the two-way interaction of interest and parental psychological well-being, thus confirming the hypothesis³.

³Empirical tests of mediation based on cross-sectional data can be problematic because they tend to yield biased estimates (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Maxwell, Cole & Mitchell, 2011). Therefore, the following analysis of the moderated mediation model should be deemed at best suggestive or exploratory.

Table 3. Estimates for indirect effects of basic needs satisfaction predicting each well-being indices from the interaction term (Study 1).

Variable	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	95%CI
Parental meaning in life	.17	.05	.001	[.63, .84]
Parental affect	.18	.05	.001	[.52, .68]
Parental life satisfaction	.15	.05	.001	[.63, .89]
Family quality	.16	.05	.001	[.47, .66]

Figure 3. Parameter estimates of the moderated mediation model (Study 1).



Note. Extrinsic AFC = extrinsic aspiration for children; ITD = interdependent self-construal.

Taken together, the results of Study 1 strongly supported the hypotheses; extrinsic AFC negatively predicted parental psychological well-being. Yet, this relationship was weaker among people high (versus low) in interdependent self-construal. In addition, this interaction was mediated by basic psychological need. This finding provide indirect support for our rationale by elucidating the potential mechanisms of how interdependent people maintain their psychological well-being against extrinsic AFC. Overly pursuit of extrinsic values could in general undermine the satisfaction of basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, presumably through viewing extrinsic AFC in different lens (i.e. as ways to fulfill parenthood), highly interdependent people are able to experience themselves as capable parents that are deeply related to their children. That is, they are able to transform extrinsic AFC into an avenue of basic needs satisfaction. Holding relatively strong extrinsic AFC might be thus less harmful for those high in interdependent self-construal.

CHAPTER III

STUDY 2

The findings of Studies 1 provided initial support for the main hypotheses. While extrinsic AFC generally has negative implications for parental psychological well-being, interdependent self-construal attenuated those negative implications. However, Study 1 only involved samples from a western culture and examined interdependent self-construal as a within-culture individual difference variable. Since interdependent self-construal theoretically accounts for differences between Eastern and Western cultures (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994), it is important to examine whether the same rationale holds true, when culture serves as a proxy of self-construal (see Brockner, & Chen, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Suh, Diener & Updegraff, 2008). Hence, in Study 2, I collected samples from both the United States and China (traditionally deemed as higher in interdependent in self-construal, Bond & Hwang, 1986). If interdependent self-construal alleviates the negative implications of extrinsic AFC as I have reasoned, I should observe that (a) extrinsic AFC is less negatively correlated with psychological well-being among Chinese parents compared to among U.S parents; and (b) the basic findings of Study 2 should replicate within both cultural groups.

In addition, Study 2 also had the secondary goal of exploring the implications of parental extrinsic AFC and interdependent self-construal on offsprings' well-being. This should further my investigation by modeling the dynamics of family life associated with both parents and children (offsprings). Given the inter-subjective nature of interdependent people's well-being (Kitayama & Markus, 2000), I predict that to the extent parents are

interdependent, the extrinsic AFC they value should have less negative implication not only over their own psychological well-being but also over the well-being of their offsprings.

III.1. Methods

III.1.1. Participants and Procedure

The study was pre-registered at <http://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=9cy4cw>. I conducted a power analysis to determine the sample size required to test the hypothesis using G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Due to the lack of basis to estimate the effect size for Chinese sample, I only estimated the required sample size for U.S. sample and used it as a guideline for collecting data in China. I expected an effect size of $f^2 = .08$ among U.S. sample, as this was the mean effect size of two-way interactions observed in Study 1. I set power (1- B) at 0.80 and p -value at .01 (two-tailed). The analysis suggested that in order to replicate the two-way interactions between extrinsic AFC and interdependent self-construal in U.S. samples, a minimum of 150 participants was needed. I thereby planned to collect at least 300 parent participants (150 participants per culture).

In general, I recruited parent participants through first approaching the offsprings (i.e. college students for contact information). For recruitment in U.S., 340 college students (100 men, 223 women, 1 not sure, 16 missing; $M_{age} = 18.97$, $SD_{age} = 1.64$) from a large public university in Southern United States participated in the study for extra course credit. They came into the lab and were informed about the upcoming parental survey. Then, they were asked to provide email addresses of at least one of their caregivers (defined as a person who looked after them as a child). Next, they completed a brief survey with measures of their own self-construal and psychological well-being. Later, I distributed an online survey to the parental email addresses attained. The entire procedure (i.e. parent and student survey)

was delivered online via Qualtrics software. The entire procedure was delivered online via Qualtrics software. For recruitment in China, the procedure was similar. I recruited 206 students (45 men, 161 women; $M_{age} = 20.36$, $SD_{age} = 2.74$) from a large public university in East China to obtain their parental contact information (i.e. email addresses) via sojump.com—a platform equivalent to Amazon Mechanical Turk. The students' participation was rewarded with 10 CNY (relatively equivalent to \$1.58).

The final sample was composed of 192 parents (60 men, 114 women, 1 gender nonconforming, 1 prefer not to say, 16 missing) in the U.S. and 206 parents (66 men, 139 women, 1 other) in China. For U.S. participants, a majority of them were self-identified as white (93.1%), non-Hispanic (86.9%) and biological parents of their children (95.4%). Their mean age was 49.87($SD = 6.08$). They received an entry into a random drawing for one of five \$20 Starbucks gift card in compensation for participation. For Chinese parents, their mean age was 45.99($SD = 5.49$). Most of them also reported themselves as biological parents of their children (97.5%). In compensation for their participation, they received an entry into a random drawing of 50 CNY cash reward (relatively equivalent to \$7.92).

The study materials for parental survey were the same as in Study 1, except that I dropped the measure of parental affect and basic needs satisfaction to reduce the burden on the parents who were essentially volunteering to complete the research⁴. The student survey was composed of the same measures (i.e. self-construal, meaning in life, life satisfaction and family quality) as those used in parental survey. However, I instructed the students to think specifically about their listed caregivers when they completed measures of well-being. The

⁴ Off-springs completed the original self-construal scale.

wording of the well-being measures were also adjusted to reflect the offspring's perspective (e.g. "When I think about him/her, I understand my life's meaning." and "I am satisfied with aspects of my life involving him/her."). Both parent and student surveys were translated into Chinese by a native Chinese speaker who was fluent in English and blind with the main hypothesis. The materials were then back-translated by the authors into English and compared to the original version. Minor changes in wording were made to ensure the quality of translation.

III.2. Results

III.2.1. Measurement invariance

Prior to the main analyses, measurement invariance was evaluated in the target scales across Chinese and U.S. participants. A consideration of measurement invariance is important to ensure that any observed group differences do not largely reflect measurement artifacts (Millsap & Olivera-Aguilar, 2012). I specifically used multi-group confirmatory factor analyses (Milfont & Fischer, 2010; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016; also see Clark et al, 2016 for an example) in Mplus version 7.31 to examine configural and metric (i.e., "weak") invariance of the scales across groups⁵. For each scale, I first specified a model in which only the general factor structure was equivalent across groups (i.e. the configural model); for both groups the mean and variance of the latent factor(s) were fixed to 0 and 1, respectively. Then I estimated a second model in which factor loadings were constrained to equality across groups, and one group's factor variance was allowed to freely estimate (i.e., the metric model). The second model was compared to the configural model using the chi

⁵Scalar (i.e., strong) invariance was also examined. However, the primary focus of this study was the covariance matrix (or the correlation matrix; see Millsap & Olivera-Aguilar, 2012), not the mean structure. As such, the results pertaining to scalar invariance are not reported here. Interested readers are encouraged to contact the first author for more details.

square difference test for nested models. If the metric model did not fit significantly worse than the configural model (chi square of $p > .05$), the assumption of metric invariance was supported.

When there was evidence of non-invariance, I followed established procedure (Millsap & Olivera-Aguilar, 2012) and conducted investigations of partial invariance to identify the source(s) of noninvariance. For any scale evincing non-invariance I inspected the rank ordering and absolute magnitude of factor loadings in the configural model to identify the item with the most prominent discrepancy between groups. I considered this item the most overtly noninvariant item and allowed its factor loading to vary across the two groups (the factor loading of the remaining items remained constrained). This partially constrained model was then compared with the configural model. If no significant fit degradation was observed, partial invariance was achieved. If a significant drop in fit was still observed, I would repeat the whole process to find out the next most ostensibly noninvariant item, until fit degradation was no longer significant.

Overall, metric invariance was supported in most of the scales in the study. However, some noninvariance was detected in scales of parent family quality, parent interdependence, children independence and children meaning in life. I identified the most problematic items in subsequent tests of partial invariance, and removed these items from the scales before conducting the primary analyses⁶. Altogether, only a small number of items from each scale were eliminated. No more than two items were dropped for each scale with the exception of the scale for children independence (4 out of 11 items were dropped).

III.2.2. Preliminary analysis and examining culture as a moderator

⁶ The subsequent analyses were also conducted using all items. The general pattern of results remained unchanged.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alphas of all measured variables and Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients.

Table 4. Summary Statistics for the Measured Variables in Study 2.

Variable	U.S. sample			Chinese sample		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Parent IND	5.06	.70	.67	5.02	.64	.65
Parent ITD	4.96	.75	.60	5.20	.73	.66
Parent AFC: Wealth	3.70	1.25	.86	4.55	1.01	.83
Parent AFC: Fame	2.93	1.34	.88	4.27	.98	.78
Parent AFC: Image	3.17	1.33	.85	4.42	.97	.78
Parent AFC: Growth	6.53	.51	.71	6.16	.68	.79
Parent AFC: Health	6.54	.55	.83	6.64	.55	.87
Parent AFC: Relationship	6.67	.49	.76	6.19	.64	.77
Parent AFC: Community	6.20	.77	.90	5.44	.74	.77
Parent extrinsic AFC ⁷	-1.84	.67		-.96	.52	

⁷ Each parental AFC subscale was combined into the extrinsic AFC composite in the same manner as in Study 1. They would no longer be discussed individually beyond this point.

Table 4. Continued.

Variable	U.S. sample			Chinese sample		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>α</i>
Parental meaning in life	6.43	.68	.83	5.85	.85	.70
Parental life satisfaction	5.92	.98	.87	5.20	.93	.77
Parent family quality	6.12	.72	.94	5.86	.63	.90
Offspring ITD	5.33	.69	.74	4.94	.73	.75
Offspring meaning in life	5.96	1.09	.86	5.32	1.05	.80
Offspring life satisfaction	6.13	1.20	.94	4.98	1.09	.85
Offspring family quality	5.93	.87	.93	5.59	.77	.92
Offspring IND	5.14	.71	.61	5.11	.65	.51

Notes. IND, independent self-construal; ITD, interdependent self-construal.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients of variables assessed in Study 2.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Parent IND	-	-.01	-.02	.18*	.16*	.19*	-.02	-.09	-.07	-.10	-.09
2.Parent ITD	.44**	-	.04	.09	.07	.21*	.09	.08	.10	.08	.10
3.Parent extrinsic AFC	-.09	-.06	-	.00	-.01	-.06	.02	.01	.01	-.06	-.12
4.Parental meaning in life	.31**	.22**	-.22**	-	.43**	.44**	.01	.02	.22**	.15*	.15*
5.Parental life satisfaction	.32**	.26**	.00	.34**	-	.57**	.11	.06	.27**	.24**	.24**
6.Parent family quality	.38**	.45**	-.27**	.44**	.39**	-	.17*	.07	.22**	.16*	.30**
7.Offspring IND	.27**	.06	-.09	.21**	.16*	.25**	-	.34**	.28**	.15*	.32**
8.Offspring ITD	.19**	.25**	-.05	-.06	.24**	.17**	.30**	-	.24**	.16*	.25**
9.Offspring meaning in life	.07	.15*	-.17*	.25**	.10	.26**	.15*	.24**	-	.67**	.61**
10.Offspring life satisfaction	.14	.29**	-.14*	.11	.28**	.30**	.15*	.33**	.55**	-	.64**
11.Offspring family quality	.10	.14*	-.19**	.28**	.25**	.43**	.33**	.36**	.60**	.56**	-

Notes. Numbers above the diagonal represent the correlations within U.S. sample and numbers below the diagonal represent correlations within the Chinese sample.

AFC, aspiration for children; IND, independent self-construal; ITD, interdependent self-construal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. N ranged from 175 to 206.

Some similarity emerged between the two cultural groups. For example, the well-being indices (i.e. parental meaning in life, parental life satisfaction and family quality) were positively correlated with each other across two cultural groups. Meanwhile, the results also revealed some potential differences between Chinese and U.S. samples. Much to our surprise—and inconsistent with Study 1—extrinsic AFC no longer negatively predicted parental psychological well-being indicators among the U.S. group. In contrast, the negative implication of extrinsic AFC on psychological well-being indices (i.e. parental meaning in life and family quality) seemed more pronounced among the Chinese group.

These cultural differences were confirmed by more formal analyses based on Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling (SEM, see Green & Thompson, 2012; Millsap & Olivera-Aguilar, 2012). I again used Mplus version 7.31; I grand-mean centered extrinsic AFC and estimated a completely unconstrained model (baseline) predicting the three indices of parental psychological well-being (i.e. parental meaning in life, parental life satisfaction and family quality) from extrinsic AFC across U.S. and Chinese groups. Then, one at a time, I constrained each of the three paths (i.e. from the extrinsic AFC to parental psychological well-being indices) to equality across groups. The three constrained models were individually compared to the unconstrained baseline model. A significance decrease in model fit (chi square difference $p < .02$, Bonferroni adjusted) would suggest constrained model fit significantly worse than unconstrained baseline model. In other words, there were likely meaningful differences between groups on the constrained path.

Consistent with the patterns in simple correlation, significant decrease in model fit was observed, when I constrained the path predicting parental meaning in life, $\Delta\chi^2 = 7.34$, df

= 1, $p = .007$. Marginally significant decrease in fit was observed when I constrained the path predicting family quality, $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.94$, $df = 1$, $p = .03$. Last, constraining the path to predict parental life satisfaction did not result in significant decrease in model fit, $\Delta\chi^2 = .01$, $df = 1$, $p = .91$. I therefore kept the path predicting parental life satisfaction constrained (the remaining two paths unconstrained) and estimated a final model. Table 6 presents parameter estimates of the final model (together with the baseline model).

Table 6. Baseline and final model predicting well-being indices from extrinsic AFC across two cultural groups.

	Baseline model				Final model			
	American		Chinese		American		Chinese	
Outcome variable	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>
Parental meaning in life	.00(.08)	.97	-.37(.11)	.001	.01(.07)	.94	-.37(.11)	.001
Parental life satisfaction	-.02(.11)	.88	.00(.13)	.99	-.01(.08)	.92	-.01(.08)	.92
Family quality	-.07(.08)	.41	-.32(.08)	< .001	-.06(.07)	.39	-.33(.08)	< .001

As can be seen, the relationship between extrinsic AFC and well-being (in terms of parental meaning in life and family quality) varied across Chinese and U.S. population. Nevertheless, the pattern of this relationship within each group provided little support for the idea that culture functions as proxy of interdependent self-construal. If anything, the negative relationship between extrinsic AFC and parental psychological well-being indices was more pronounced among Chinese parents than among U.S. parents in terms of meaning in life and family quality. The pattern of relationship was the direct opposite of what I have predicted.

III.2.3. Primary analysis: examining interdependent self-construal as a moderator

Turning to the second main hypothesis, I expected significant interactions between interdependent self-construal and extrinsic AFC in predicting parental psychological well-being indices. Namely, interdependent self-construal should buffer potential negative implications of extrinsic AFC. I conducted a path analysis to test this hypothesis via Mplus version 7.31. In addition, to examine whether the interactive pattern differed by groups, I again used the Multigroup SEM approach as specified before. I first estimated a completely unconstrained model (baseline) predicting the three indices of parental psychological well-being (i.e. parental meaning in life, parental life satisfaction and family quality) from grand-mean-centered extrinsic AFC, grand-mean-centered interdependent self-construal and their interaction term across U.S. and Chinese samples. Next, I constrained each of the three paths (i.e. from the interaction term to parental psychological well-being indices) to equality across groups one at a time. Then I individually compared the three constrained models to the unconstrained baseline model. A significance decrease in model fit (chi square

difference $p < .02$, Bonferroni adjusted) would suggest meaningful differences between groups on the constrained path.

This procedure revealed that constraining the path predicting parental meaning in life across the two cultures did not result in significant degradation in fit, $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.77$, $df = 1$, $p = .18$. Nor did constraining the pathway predicting family quality resulted in significant degradation in fit, $\Delta\chi^2 = 1.60$, $df = 1$, $p = .21$. Finally, constraining the pathway predicting parental life satisfaction did evidence significant degradation in fit, $\Delta\chi^2 = 6.95$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$. I thereby concluded that the interactions between extrinsic AFC and interdependent self-construal vary between Chinese and U.S. group only in predicting parental life satisfaction; a final model was estimated with this path unconstrained (and the other two paths remained constrained).

Parameter estimates of the final model (as well as those of baseline model) were presented in Table 7. Again, extrinsic AFC predicted parental psychological well-being (in terms of parental meaning in life and family quality) only among Chinese parents. However, I did observe significant main effects of interdependent self-construal (except for parental meaning in life among U.S. sample) as in Study 1. Most of these main effects were further qualified by significant or marginally significant interactions between the two predictors (except for parental life satisfaction among Chinese sample).

Table 7. Model estimates of paths predicting well-being indices from interdependent self-construal, extrinsic AFC and their interaction across two cultural groups.

Pathway	Baseline model				Final model			
	American		Chinese		American		Chinese	
	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>
Extrinsic AFC-parental meaning in life	.03(.08)	.67	-.34(.11)	.002	.03(.08)	.75	-.36(.11)	.001
Extrinsic AFC- parental life satisfaction	.04(.11)	.72	.05(.12)	.68	.05(.11)	.66	-.05(.12)	.68
Extrinsic AFC-family quality	-	.47	-.31(.07)	< .001	-.04(.08)	.61	-.31(.07)	< .001
	06(.08)							
ITD- parental meaning in life	.17(.08)	.04	.27(.11)	.01	.15(.08)	.06	.18(.09)	.04
ITD- parental life satisfaction	.25(.12)	.03	.45(.12)	< .001	.27(.11)	.02	.45(.12)	< .001

Table 7. Continued.

Pathway	Baseline model				Final model			
	American		Chinese		American		Chinese	
	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>	<i>b (SE)</i>	<i>p(two-tailed)</i>
ITD-family quality	.25(.08)	.003	.25(.07)	< .001	.30(.08)	< .001	.29(.06)	< .001
INT- parental meaning in life	.18(.09)	.05	-.06(.15)	.72	.14(.08)	.09	.14(.08)	.09
INT- parental life satisfaction	.32(.13)	.01	-.24(.17)	.15	.37(.12)	.002	-.24(.16)	.14
INT-family quality	.10(.10)	.30	.27(.10)	.006	.19(.07)	.006	.19(.07)	.006

Notes. Extrinsic AFC, extrinsic aspiration for children; ITD, interdependent self-construal self-construal; INT, the two-way interaction term between extrinsic aspiration for children and interdependent self-construal

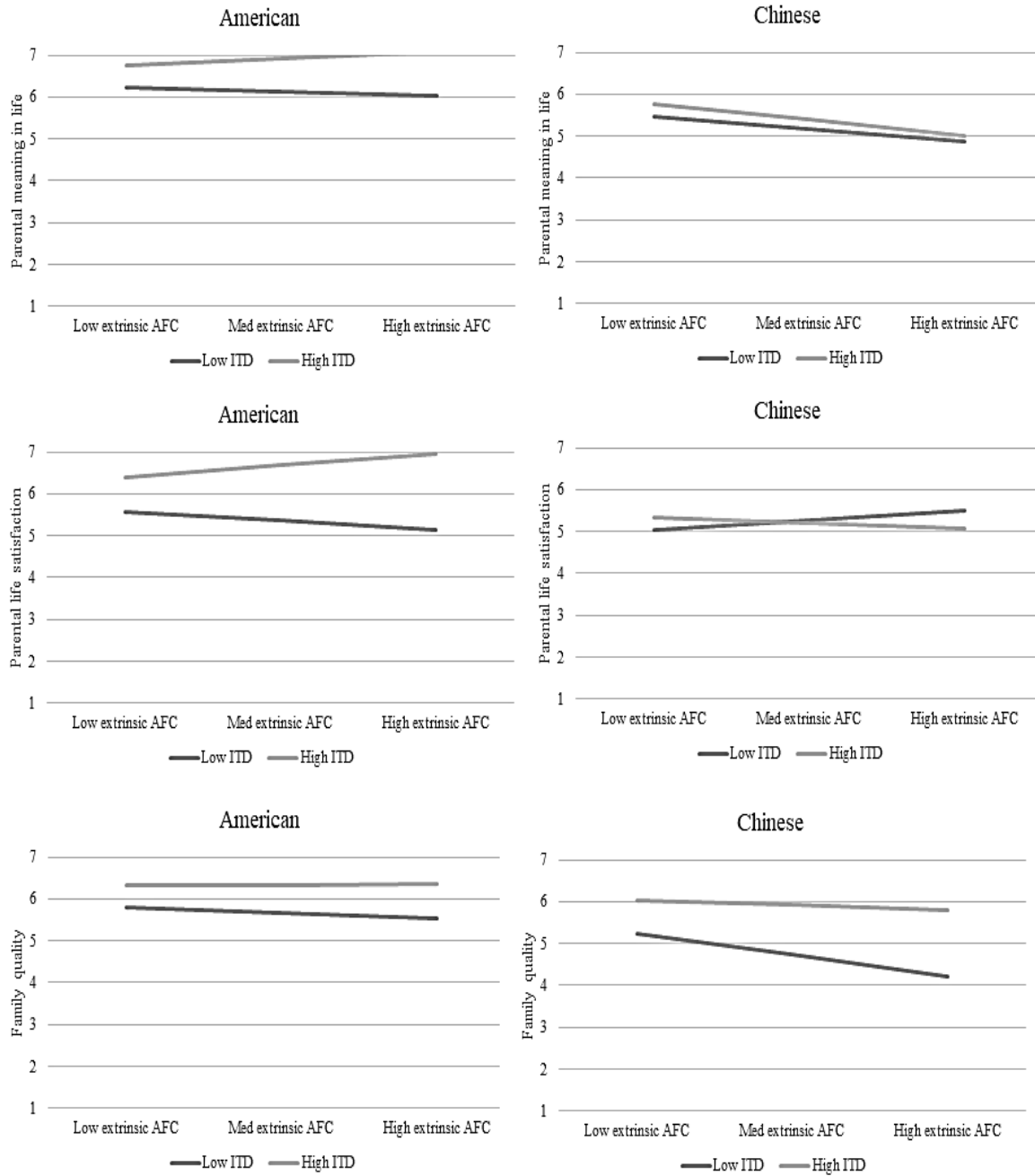
To further examine these interactions within each group, I delineated the interaction and conducted simple slope analyses. The results are presented in Table 8 (as well as *Figure 4*). Among American parents, when interdependent self-construal was low (1 SD below the grand mean), extrinsic AFC was more negative a predictor of well-being compared to when interdependent self-construal was high (1 SD above the grand mean). Though I failed to observe the same negative main effect of extrinsic AFC as in Study 1, this interactive pattern was consistent with our prediction. On the other hand, this pattern was much weaker (especially in terms of parental life satisfaction) among Chinese parents.

Table 8. Predicting well-being indicators from extrinsic AFC at high (1SD above the grand mean) and low (1SD below the grand mean) levels of interdependent self-construal (Study 2).

Variable	American						Chinese					
	High ITD			Low ITD			High ITD			Low ITD		
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Parental meaning in life	.17	1.45	.15	-.10	-1.10	.27	-.38	-2.54	.01	-.30	-1.78	.08
Parental life satisfaction	.28	1.70	.09	-.20	-1.52	.13	-.13	-.79	.43	.23	1.24	.22
Family quality	.02	.13	.90	-.13	-1.37	.17	-.11	-1.10	.27	-.52	-4.67	<.001

Notes. ITD, interdependent self-construal; *df* = (3, 173) for American; *df* = (3, 202) for Chinese.

Figure 4. Predicting parental psychological well-being indices from interdependent self-construal and extrinsic AFC for U.S. and Chinese parent groups (Study 2).



Note. Extrinsic AFC = extrinsic aspiration for children; ITD = interdependent self-construal

These results remained unchanged when independent self-construal was controlled in the model as covariate. The second main hypothesis received partial support (mostly among American parents).

III.2.4. The well-being of off-springs

I applied the same analytic strategy to examine whether and how parents' extrinsic AFC and interdependence could have predicted offsprings' well-being. To repeat, I speculated that highly interdependent parents might be able to project their well-being onto their offsprings. If they are better-off than parents who are low in interdependence, their offsprings should be better-off as well. The analyses, however, revealed that none of the two-way interactions was significant within either group ($ps > .30$). Therefore, data failed to support my hypothesis regarding offsprings' well-being.

III.3. Discussion

To summarize, results of Study 2 provided mixed support for our main hypotheses. On the one hand, I did find, as in study 1, significant general main effect of extrinsic AFC (among Chinese sample) and the moderation of interdependent self-construal (mostly among U.S. sample). On the other hand, some inconsistencies of data was also worth noting, First, Study 2 failed to replicate the negative link between extrinsic AFC and psychological well-being as observed among Americans in Study 1. This might be due to the fact that American parents in this study has elder offspring (i.e. college students) compared to American parents in early studies. Moreover, Culture failed to moderate the relationship between extrinsic AFC and psychological well-being in the way I had expected. The effect was actually the opposite. Among Chinese parents, the relationship between extrinsic AFC and well-being indices were even more pronounced. This unexpected finding may be in line with some of

the criticisms on classical self-construal theory and its operationalization (e.g. Kanagawa, Gross & Markus, 2001; Matsumoto, 1999; Park & Levine, 1999). I will come back to this issue in general discussion.

Nevertheless, the basic pattern of interaction between extrinsic AFC and interdependent self-construal was successfully replicated among the U.S. sample and to a lesser degree, among Chinese sample (in terms of family quality). Together with the results of Study 1, results of Study 2 demonstrated that parents high in interdependent self-construal are psychologically better-off with extrinsic AFC than their counterpart with low interdependent self-construal.

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Goals and values play an important role in well-being (Baumeister, 1991; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001; McGregor & Little, 1999; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). The current research corroborated the importance of aspirations for well-being within a specific parent-children context. Overall, I found some consistent evidence that endorsing extrinsic aspirations for children (AFC) has negative implications over parental psychological well-being. Moreover, evidence across two studies suggested that effect of extrinsic AFC on parental psychological well-being is contingent on interdependent self-construal. To the extent that parents are interdependent in self-construal, their well-being was less negatively affected by their extrinsic AFC (the relationship even got reversed to slightly positive in Study 2 U.S. sample). This interactive pattern was observed and later replicated in two U.S. parent samples (Studies 1-2) at relatively diverse stage of parenthood (as indicated by the mean age of their children reported in Studies 1 and 2). The pattern of relationship also replicated, though to a less degree, among a sample of Chinese parents (Study 2, predicting family quality). Basic needs satisfaction could be the reason behind the phenomenon (Study 2)—although the evidence was suggestive at best.

Interestingly, I found patterns opposite to our predictions when using culture as a proxy of interdependent self-construal in Study 2. Self-construal has been traditionally conceived as underlying differences in self-concepts between people of Eastern and Western cultural groups (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). If interdependent self-construal did attenuate the impact of extrinsic AFC on parental psychological well-being, one would expect culture function similarly as interdependent

self-construal. In the context of the current research, the relationship between extrinsic AFC and psychological well-being should be less, rather than *more* negative among Chinese parents than among U.S. parents. This unexpected finding could echo criticisms of classic Self-construal Theory. For example, Matsumoto (1999) pointed out that differences in self-construal might not adequately mirror cross-nation differences. Admittedly, differences between nations are multifarious (e.g. income, education, social norms etc.). There is also great variety of individual differences within each culture (e.g. urban residents versus rural residents). As such, cross-nation difference in behaviors and thinking style may not be readily reduced to self-construal. Furthermore, culture itself is by nature dynamic and subject to constant change. Hence, the view that Americans are independent while Chinese people are interdependent may be overly simplistic. However, even if the view is actually true, it is possible that measures of self-construal are biased towards Western culture and not adequately capture how Easterners think of themselves (Kanagawa, Gross & Markus, 2001; Levine et al., 2003; Park & Levine, 1999;). Either possibility (or both) might contribute to our failure to find support for the hypothesis using culture as proxy.

The implication for cross-cultural research in general is that researchers should take precaution for their assumptions regarding how particular culture corresponds to proposed construct(s). For self-construal in particular, researchers should be aware that findings established among U.S. populations might not—and in some cases should not—hold true when culture serves as a proxy of self-construal or when one tried to generalize the findings to other cultures. It is safer to assume these findings of validity within U.S. populations. It may also be more encouraging to treat self-construal as within-cultural individual

differences. In this study, I did observe consistency of findings (in terms of the interaction) within American groups.

Despite the nuances across studies, the current research may extend existing research associated with SDT. SDT has provided a cogent theoretical framework for studying goal-pursuit. With the basic idea that not all goals are equally conducive to well-being, research has well-established that pursuit of extrinsic over intrinsic aspirations leads to lower levels of wellness (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Kim et al., 2003; Morgan & Robinson, 2013; Niemiec et al., 2009; Romero, Gómez-Fraguela & Villar, 2012; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000; Williams et al., 2000). Yet, this line of work has been limited in its focus on aspirations for self. It has failed to take into account broader, more interpersonal forms of aspirations. The current research, on the other hand, examined precisely a form of aspiration that one holds for others' sake, aspiration for children. The relatively consistent finding (aside from Study 2 U.S. sample) that extrinsic AFC negatively predicts well-being further validates SDT's theorem. That is, a focus on values that do not directly address human well-being can be harmful—even when one's pursuit is ostensibly for others' (e.g. children) sake and when one is not the direct beneficiary of goal attainment.

On the other hand, the negative impact of extrinsic AFC seemed to be attenuated by interdependent self-construal. This is potentially because extrinsic AFC is yet another form of social practice. Its meaning may not be *fixed*. For some people, wishing children to be rich is just a “side-product” of wishing themselves to be rich. For other people, this may be one way to fulfill parenthood; the latter appears less “selfish”, even if it is characterized with extrinsic, materialistic content. Differences as such might easily be overlooked. Indeed, SDT has regarded pursuit of extrinsic values a maladaptive response that was developed as a

substitute for basic needs satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Kasser & Ryan, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). For a long time, extrinsic pursuits have been portrayed as incapable of providing enduring needs satisfaction and well-being. This position has been called into question, as pursuits of extrinsic values could carry different meaning and purposes depending on the values people endorse (Brdar, Majda & Dubravka, 2009). The possibility that extrinsic pursuit can take on different meanings implies individual or contextual differences that could render extrinsic content less “extrinsic”. By demonstrating that the relationship between extrinsic AFC and parental psychological well-being is contingent on interdependent self-construal, the current research fit into this line of work. Our findings suggested that endorsing extrinsic values (in terms of AFC) might not always be as harmful and maladaptive. For some people (i.e. high in interdependent self-construal), extrinsic AFC might just afford some basic need satisfaction that offset its overall negative implications. Our work thereby provided a specific but concrete case on how individual differences like interdependent self-construal, could attenuate some negative implications acknowledged by existing theories of well-being.

In a broader sense, the current work could inform some ongoing debate within the well-being literature. On one side of the debate are the theories of post-modernists, anthropologists and culture psychologists (e.g. Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989). From this perspective, well-being is “a collaborative project, one can’t experience well-being by one’s self”. (p. 115, Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Wellness is socially constructed, highly dependent on one’s cultural values. Given different culture can differ substantially in ways they approach well-being, a radical relativistic claim from this perspective is that there is no universal underlying

mechanisms behind wellness; everything is a matter of culture and value. On the other side of the debate are classic theories of human well-being, like SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Theorists on this side intend to propose some cross-culturally valid mechanisms that can facilitate or thwart wellness. Findings of the current work actually suggest that both sides have some truth. For example, the moderation I found suggests that cultural psychologists are right in that individuals approach issues of well-being in ways dependent on their self-beliefs. However, these differences do not automatically veto the possibility of cross-culturally valid well-being mechanisms. In fact, I did observe—though limited by the cross-sectional design—basic needs satisfaction mediated the interaction. Basic needs satisfaction is what SDT theorists proposed as universal mechanisms behind human well-being. People with different self-views might attach different meaning to social practice and resort to different pathways towards happiness. Nonetheless, in the end they may converge in the same route towards human well-being.

IV.1. Limitation and Future Directions

The current work has several limitations and future directions to be addressed. First, our rationale is not fully tested out within the design of the current studies. I reasoned that people high in interdependent self-construal should be better off with extrinsic AFC, because extrinsic AFC is a way for them to fulfill parenthood. However, I did not directly test this proposed mediating mechanism (I indirectly tested basic needs satisfaction as mediator). Nor did I test mediation with an adequate design. Study 1 took a cross-sectional design, which is likely to generate biased estimates (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Maxwell, Cole & Mitchell, 2011). A longitudinal design or an experiment manipulating social role fulfillment might shed more light on the phenomena I were after.

Moreover, it remained an open question to what extent the pattern I found could be generalized to aspirations for others in general. Aspirations for children are just one specific type of aspirations people hold for others' sake. Arguably, it is one of the most spontaneous forms of aspirations for others. Parents naturally harbor expectations or goals for their children. Nevertheless, there are other types of aspirations for others. For example, one may have some aspirations for his or her romantic partner, just as one has aspiration for oneself or for one's children. One can wish one's romantic partner to be rich, or one can wish one's romantic partner for personal growth. Will aspiration for romantic partners evidence similar interactions with interdependent self-construal over well-being? Although questions as such are beyond the scope of the current research, I encourage future research to extend our work to more general aspirations for others.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I found relatively consistent evidence that endorsing extrinsic values might be harmful to psychological well-being, even when it takes the form of aspiration for children. Nevertheless, the negative implications of extrinsic AFC seemed attenuated among people high (versus low) in interdependent self-construal. I contend that people high (versus low) in interdependent self-construal attach different meaning to extrinsic AFC. For them, extrinsic AFC are tied to parenthood and therefore less “extrinsic” as it seems. Wish for money may not always be as harmful as some previous research has suggested—provided that such pursuit is held for others (particularly children) and that one has an interdependent self.

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