



Big 5 correlates of three measures of subjective well-being

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Abstract

One hundred and eleven individuals completed the NEO Five Factor Inventory along with three measures of subjective well-being, the Oxford Happiness Inventory, the Depression–Happiness Scale, and the Satisfaction With Life Scale. Regression analysis showed that although Extraversion and Neuroticism best predicted scores on the Oxford Happiness Inventory, it was Neuroticism and Conscientiousness that best predicted scores on the Satisfaction with Life Scale. These results provide further evidence that Neuroticism and Extraversion are dimensions of personality related to subjective well-being. However, the results also suggest that Conscientiousness is an additional dimension of personality relevant to understanding subjective well-being. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

There has been much interest from researchers in what makes people happy (see, Myers & Diener, 1995). Although much interest has focused on demographic and social-economic variables, it is thought that some people are more likely to be happier than others because of their personality.

Early work by Costa and McCrae (1980) showed that happiness was associated with greater Extraversion and lower Neuroticism. Much subsequent research has since confirmed these associations (see e.g. Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby, & Ward, 1995; Chan & Joseph, 2000; Furnham & Brewin, 1990; Hills & Argyle, 2001a,b; Lu & Shih, 1997). However, the other major dimensions of personality have not attracted as much research attention as Extraversion and Neuroticism. In terms of the Big 5 dimensions, McCrae and Costa (1991) suggest that Agreeableness and Conscientiousness should facilitate more positive experiences in social and achievement situations,

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respectively, which in turn increase subjective well-being. Openness to experience, however, should lead a person to experience both more positive and negative emotional states. No direct association should therefore be expected with Openness to experience.

DeNeve and Cooper (1998) in their meta-analysis of single trait measures associated with subjective well being provide evidence consistent with McCrae and Costa's suggestions. In particular, DeNeve and Copper (1998) show that Extraversion and Neuroticism are the strongest Big 5 predictors of happiness and that Neuroticism and Conscientiousness are the strongest Big 5 predictors of life satisfaction. There now remains a need for further investigation to confirm these findings. The aim of the present research was to extend the investigation of personality correlates of happiness to the Big 5 personality dimensions, Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Openness.

2. Method

One hundred and twenty nine residents of Warwickshire and their friends and acquaintances were recruited by personal contact with a variety of social and leisure groups at the University of Warwick. Of these, 111 (36 men, 75 women, mean age = 37.77, SD = 17.45) fully completed a battery of measures, which included: the 60-item NEO Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI: Costa & McCrae, 1992). The NEO-FFI yields scores for Extraversion (E), Neuroticism (N), Openness (O), Conscientiousness (C) and Agreeableness (A). Respondents also completed the 29-item Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI: Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989), the 25-item Depression-Happiness Scale (DHS: Joseph & Lewis, 1998), and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS: Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS assess the cognitive/evaluative aspect of happiness whereas both the OHI and DHS are global measures of happiness assessing cognitive and affective aspects. Higher scores on the OHI, DHS, and SWLS indicate greater subjective well-being.

3. Results

Correlations, with sex and age partialled out, were computed between scores on each of the well-being measures. Scores on the DHS (mean = 51.18, SD = 14.83) and the OHI (mean = 37.77, SD = 17.45) were highly associated ($r = 0.73$, $P < 0.001$), and scores on the SWLS (mean = 24.06, SD = 6.89) were associated with scores on the OHI ($r = 0.56$, $P < 0.001$) and the DHS ($r = 0.61$, $P < 0.001$) confirming that these three measures are all tapping related constructs.

Correlations, with sex and age partialled out, between the NEO personality dimensions and the well being measures are shown in Table 1. Higher scores on each of the subjective well-being measures were associated with greater Extraversion, lower Neuroticism, and higher Conscientiousness.

These results suggest that Conscientiousness, as well as Extraversion and Neuroticism, is a dimension of personality related to subjective well-being. However, Conscientiousness was found to be associated with scores on Neuroticism ($r = -0.39$, $P < 0.001$) and Extraversion ($r = 0.39$, $P < 0.001$) begging the question of whether Conscientiousness had any unique association with happiness over and above what could be accounted for by Extraversion and Neuroticism. To

Table 1

Correlations between Big 5 personality and measures of well being ($n = 111$)

	N	E	O	A	C
DHS	−0.72***	0.56***	−0.15	0.18	0.43***
OHI	−0.61***	0.68***	−0.03	−0.04	0.38***
SWLS	−0.54***	0.42***	−0.15	0.06	0.38***

*** $P < 0.001$ (2 tailed tests).

Table 2

Multiple regression analysis of well-being measures onto personality ($n = 111$)

	DHS		OHI		SWLS	
	Beta	<i>t</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>	Beta	<i>t</i>
Sex	−0.02	−0.27	−0.07	−0.92	−0.08	−0.91
Age	0.10	1.34	0.03	0.35	−0.05	−0.56
N	−0.59	−6.70**	−0.28	−3.00**	−0.41	−3.77**
E	0.12	1.41	0.47	5.17**	0.09	0.86
C	0.15	2.15*	0.10	1.32	0.19	2.09*
Adjusted <i>R</i> Square	0.56		0.50		0.32	

* $P < 0.05$.** $P < 0.01$.*** $P < 0.001$ (2 tailed tests).

investigate this, a series of simultaneous regressions were conducted with Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Conscientiousness entered, along with age and sex, to predict scores on each of the subjective well-being measures (see Table 2).

When we entered Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Conscientiousness to predict scores on each of the subjective well-being measures, we found that scores on the OHI were predicted by greater Extraversion and lower Neuroticism, but not by Conscientiousness. For the OHI, it would seem that there is no unique association with Conscientiousness that can not be accounted for by the inclusion of Extraversion and Neuroticism. However, higher scores on the DHS and the SWLS were now predicted by lower Neuroticism and greater Conscientiousness, but not by Extraversion.

4. Discussion

These results support the findings of DeNeve and Cooper (1998) that personality is an important correlate of subjective well-being. In the present study, personality was found to account for between 32 and 56% of the variance in subjective well-being scores. However, which personality dimension is the strongest correlate of subjective well-being would seem to depend on the operational definition of subjective well-being.

Although Neuroticism was associated with scores on all measures of subjective well-being, Neuroticism was most strongly associated with scores on the Depression–Happiness Scale.

DeNeve and Cooper (1998) suggest that Neuroticism predisposes people to experience negative affect and so it is not surprising that Neuroticism was most strongly associated with scores on the Depression–Happiness Scale. This is because the Depression–Happiness Scale is a statistically bipolar measure in which greater happiness is defined by higher scores on positive thoughts and feelings as well as lower scores on negative thoughts and feelings. We would therefore expect the strongest association with Neuroticism to be with the Depression–Happiness Scale.

In contrast, Extraversion was the best predictor of happiness as measured by the Oxford Happiness Inventory, followed by Neuroticism. In contrast to the Depression–Happiness Scale, the Oxford Happiness Inventory emphasises relations with other people, containing for example items asking about interest in others and warmth towards others, and therefore might be expected to correlate with extraversion given that there is some degree of conceptual overlap.

DeNeve and Cooper (1998) concluded however that the importance of Extraversion as a predictor of subjective well-being had been overstated. We also found that Conscientiousness was a better predictor of life-satisfaction than Extraversion. The Satisfaction With Life Scale emphasises the cognitive/evaluative aspects of subjective well-being. It is understandable how Conscientiousness might be a predictor of the more cognitive/evaluative aspects of happiness. Like DeNeve and Cooper (1998) who emphasise the potential importance of goal strivings in determining happiness, we would suggest that the importance of conscientiousness is because individuals high on conscientiousness are more likely to be able to function effectively in society and to achieve their goals. In turn, goal efficacy leads to greater subjective well-being (McGregor & Little, 1998).

However, although the present research emphasises the role of Conscientiousness as an additional dimension of personality related to subjective well-being, we would not want to rule out the possibility that Agreeableness would also be a major correlate of other measures of subjective well-being. Indeed, it was noted that there was in fact a weak association in the present study between higher Agreeableness and higher scores on the Depression–Happiness Scale.

In conclusion, the present results support the view that some people are more characteristically happy than others. Our results show that the neuroticism-emotional stability dimension is consistently associated with subjective well-being, although which other dimensions of personality are related to well-being would seem to depend on the operational definition of well being, with Extraversion being associated with scores on the Oxford Happiness Inventory and Conscientiousness being associated with scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale.

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