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## The portrait of a hedonist: The personality and ethics behind the value and maladaptive pursuit of pleasure



Masha Ksendzova <sup>a,\*</sup>, Ravi Iyer <sup>b</sup>, Graham Hill <sup>a</sup>, Sean P. Wojcik <sup>c</sup>, Ryan T. Howell <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> San Francisco State University, United States

<sup>b</sup> CivilPolitics.Org, United States

<sup>c</sup> University of California, Irvine, United States

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### ABSTRACT

Hedonism is the prioritizing of pleasure over other life values and is theorized to be independent of well-being. However, popular culture depicts hedonists as unhappy, as well as selfishly unconcerned with others' well-being. Because the current literature has not differentiated between people's value of pleasure and their maladaptive pursuit of it, we examined if these related, but not equivalent, dispositions had different personality and morality profiles. We found that value-based hedonists have a distinct moral profile (i.e., they are less likely to endorse moral foundations associated with social conservatism) and, yet, they differ little from others in regard to personality traits. We also found that people's maladaptive hedonism (i.e., excessive pleasure-seeking) was best predicted by their personality traits (i.e., being less agreeable, less conscientious, and more neurotic) rather than by their conceptions of right and wrong. We discuss how these results contribute to our understanding of hedonism and why some people pursue their value of pleasure into over-indulgence.

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*When everybody else refrained, my uncle Jonny did cocaine.  
[Lyrics from Uncle Jonny by Brandon Flowers]*

### 1. Introduction

One famous fictional hedonist is Oscar Wilde's character Dorian Gray, an impulsive and selfish man whose pleasure-seeking is so excessive that it leaves him deeply unhappy (Wilde, 1931). Hedonism, according to Schwartz (1992), is a person's prioritizing of pleasure as a goal relative to other potentially important goals. That is, a person who scores high on Schwartz's (1992) measure of hedonism values the pursuit of pleasure more than universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, stimulation, and self-direction. However, a point of divergence between popular culture and personality research is that popular culture depicts hedonists as unhappy while there is no empirical evidence of ill-adjustment among people who value the pursuit of pleasure. In fact, Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) theorized that people can achieve happiness through attaining the out-

comes they value, and it is relatively common for positive psychologists to specifically prescribe the intentional pursuit of frequent positive affect, given its many benefits (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Therefore, in theory, a person who values pleasure should feel as happy upon experiencing pleasure, as the person who values power should feel upon gaining power.

Instead, prior findings suggest a negative relationship between well-being and proxies of pleasure-seeking that fit the lay conception of excessive hedonism (i.e., seeking pleasure in activities without caring for the meaning and self-development they may provide; Huta & Ryan, 2010; focusing on present pleasure with little regard for past events or future consequences; Zhang & Howell, 2011). It would seem then that the "Dorian Grays" of the world, or people whose pursue pleasure to their detriment (i.e., maladaptive hedonists), are different from people who, in principle, believe that the pursuit of pleasure is important. Of course, a positive relationship may still exist between maladaptive pleasure-seeking and valuing hedonism; however, these two dispositions may not overlap enough to correspond to the same personality and ethical profile of an individual—that is, there may be important differences between people who value pleasure and people who overdo it. Therefore, this investigation will differentiate between valuing pleasure and excessive pleasure-seeking in order to understand the inconsistencies previously observed between Schwartz's (1992) value of pleasure and personality traits, as well as ethics.

\* Corresponding author at: San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132, United States. Tel.: +1 925 819 1259.

E-mail address: [mksendz@gmail.com](mailto:mksendz@gmail.com) (M. Ksendzova).

### 1.1. Hedonists' personality

Overall, the reported associations between personality traits and the value of pleasure have been inconsistent. For example, while Schwartz (2006) theorized that people's value of pleasure does not necessarily dampen the quality of their social interaction, previous research on valuing pleasure and agreeableness (i.e., kindness, sympathy, and consideration of others; see Rammstedt & John, 2007) has reported both no relationship between valuing pleasure and agreeableness (Olver & Mooradian, 2003) as well as a negative relationship (Luk & Bond, 1993; among Chinese university students). There also exists an inconsistency in the observed relationships between conscientiousness (i.e., extent to which people are dependable, thorough, and vigilant; see Rammstedt & John, 2007) and the value of pleasure. Particularly, some studies have found no relationship (Olver & Mooradian, 2003) and others a negative one (Luk & Bond, 1993). Additionally, although the value of pleasure is theoretically related to the value of stimulation (Schwartz, 1992), previous research (Luk & Bond, 1993; Olver & Mooradian, 2003) has found no relationship between the value of pleasure and liking of social stimulation specifically (i.e., extraversion; Rammstedt & John, 2007).

Further, Schwartz (1992) theorized that people who value pleasure are more open to change than those who do not. However, research on personality traits and values has found no relationship between people's value of pleasure and openness (Luk & Bond, 1993; Olver & Mooradian, 2003), a personality trait manifested in appreciation of adventure and variety (Rammstedt & John, 2007). Yet, another investigation suggested that people who value pleasure are more motivated to approach new experiences (rather than avoid them) and to seek novelty, as opposed to those who do not value pleasure (Athota & O'Connor, 2014). Finally, Athota and O'Connor (2014) reported that people who score high on value-based hedonism also experience more difficulty in managing their emotions than people who score low. Conversely, Huta and Ryan (2010) found that people's tendency to seek pleasure in their activities correlated positively with how carefree they felt on a daily basis, implying that pleasure-seekers should score low on neuroticism (characterized by anxiety and emotional instability; Rammstedt & John, 2007).

Importantly, all this prior research has not examined the relationship between personality traits and maladaptive pleasure-seeking. However, in line with the popular conception of hedonists as selfish and manipulative, we expect people who maladaptively pursue pleasure, compared to those who merely value it, to score lower on agreeableness. Additionally, the lay conception of hedonists suggests that they often give into the impulses (low conscientiousness) and are driven by their unstable emotions and perpetual dissatisfaction (high neuroticism). Finally, an open question remains as to whether people's excessive indulgence in pleasure, not simply their value of it, corresponds to their open-mindedness versus fixation on familiar experiences. Consequently, the present research examines whether a value of pleasure and the tendency to maladaptively pursue it are differentially related to openness.

### 1.2. Hedonists' moral foundations

Yet another important distinction between people who value pleasure over other goals and those who pursue it to excess may be their moral profiles. If maladaptive hedonists are willing to make more sacrifices (e.g., in social relationships or responsibilities) for pleasure than value-based hedonists, they may assign less moral relevance to protecting others' well-being, self-control, and the general following of societal rules. This lay conception of hedonism suggests that maladaptive pleasure-seekers have a different moral compass. However, the potential self-indulgence or careless-

ness of maladaptive hedonists may instead reflect only their personality traits, as opposed to their beliefs of what is right and wrong. If maladaptive hedonistic behavior is merely an extreme manifestation of valuing pleasure, then only value-based hedonism should reflect a distinct moral profile and maladaptive hedonism by itself could be morally "neutral."

Previous research has found inconsistent patterns in regard to the moral profile of pleasure seekers, and this investigation into the moral principles of value-based versus maladaptive hedonists may also speak to these inconsistencies. For instance, Bickle, Schlegel, Fassbender, and Klein (2006) found that people who valued pleasure were more likely to commit white-collar crime than those who prioritized other life values. However, Schwartz found that people's value of pleasure had no relationship with their cooperative behavior (1996) and surprisingly a positive relationship with political activism often oriented toward social justice (e.g., contacting politicians or boycotting products; 2006). These inconsistencies elucidate the need to investigate the moral profiles of value-based hedonists (i.e., the principles through which they conceptualize morality). Also, more research is needed to understand whether people's value of pleasure in itself predicts their concern for others' well-being: are value-based hedonists really selfish or do they simply believe pleasure is important?

### 1.3. Current study

To examine the personality and ethical differences between people who simply prioritize pleasure over other values and those who pursue it maladaptively, the present research aims to assess the latter with a different measure of hedonism—one that correlates negatively with well-being. Such a measure of maladaptive pleasure-seeking should have a moderately strong relationship with the value of pleasure (i.e., Schwartz's hedonism), which itself is predicted to be independent of well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000). Moreover, we intend to assess maladaptive hedonism specifically, as opposed to people's general tendency to act impulsively or their unreliability (i.e., characteristics reflected when self-control is lacking). That is, we aim to demonstrate that maladaptive hedonism, though likely negatively correlated with self-control, is divergent from self-control. After demonstrating that value-based hedonism and maladaptive hedonism are distinct from each other as well as from self-control, we will compare the relationships of valued-based versus maladaptive hedonism with personality traits and moral profiles.

## 2. Study 1

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Sample 1 consisted of volunteer participants who completed one or more surveys on the educational website [BeyondThePurchase.Org](#) (previously used as source of data for published research; see Zhang, Howell, Capriariello, & Guevarra, 2014). Among all eligible participants, we focused on the subsets who completed either (a) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and the Schwartz Value Inventory ( $N = 149$ ), (b) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and the Satisfaction with Life Scale ( $N = 1,038$ ), (c) the Schwartz Value Inventory and the Satisfaction with Life Scale ( $N = 397$ ), (d) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and the Big Five Inventory-10 ( $N = 921$ ), or the (e) the Schwartz Value Inventory and the Big Five Inventory ( $N = 149$ ). The participants who were included ( $N = 1,580$ ;  $M_{age} = 31.52$ ,  $SD = 14.36$ ; 71.0% female; 67.9% Caucasian) were similar in age, gender composition, and ethnic background to the rest of the

website. Sample 2 consisted of paid participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online system of paid survey-takers (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010; for justification of using Mechanical Turk participants in research). These participants ( $N = 97$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 36.64$ ,  $SD = 13.21$ ; 65.1% female; 63% Caucasian) completed the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire, Schwartz Value Inventory, Self-Control Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the Flourishing Scale.

### 2.1.2. Measures

**2.1.2.1. Value of pleasure.** People's value of pleasure was measured using the hedonism subscale from the 58-item Schwartz Value Inventory (SVI; Schwartz, 1992). Participants rated the degree to which each value served as a guiding principal in their lives on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*opposed to my values*) to 7 (*of supreme importance*). Specifically, the value of pleasure was assessed by participants' endorsement of "pleasure: gratification of desires," being "self-indulgent: doing pleasant things," and "enjoying life: enjoying food, sex, leisure, etc." (Sample 1:  $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ,  $\alpha = .77$ ; Sample 2:  $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ,  $\alpha = .73$ ). Higher scores on a subscale, such as hedonism, represented a greater endorsement of that value. It is important to note is that participants were instructed to rate each value's importance relative to the importance of other values (i.e., "choose the [value] that is most important to you and rate its importance... next, choose the value that is most opposed to your values and rate it"). This measurement of value-based hedonism intended to assess people's prioritizing of pleasure over other goals, as a relative value instead of an absolute one.

**2.1.2.2. Maladaptive hedonism.** The measure of maladaptive hedonism, or excessive pleasure-seeking, was developed for this study. First, we prompted participants to name an activity that brought them the most pleasure and to write a brief description of it. Then, participants answered eight questions that prompted them to reflect on the sacrifices they tend to make in order to do the highly pleasurable activity they named (e.g., "To what extent do you avoid your responsibilities?" or "To what extent do you overspend your money?"; see Appendix A). These sacrifices included financial standing, social relationships, responsibilities or general obligations, health, a person's own well-being, life values (e.g., that of one's family or religion), and long-term satisfaction with one's choice to pursue the pleasurable activity. These items were answered using a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). As expected, the average score fell below the midpoint, indicating that the typical respondent was not a maladaptive pleasure-seeker (Sample 1:  $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ,  $\alpha = .78$ ; Sample 2:  $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ,  $\alpha = .81$ ).

**2.1.2.3. Satisfaction with Life.** Subjective well-being was measured with the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Sample 1:  $M = 4.62$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ; Sample 2:  $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ), which assesses people's judgments of how well their lives are going.

**2.1.2.4. Flourishing.** In Sample 2, we also included the Flourishing Scale as another indicator of subjective well-being. The Flourish scales measures the psychological resources and strengths that contribute to the quality of a person's daily life (Diener et al., 2010:  $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ,  $\alpha = .93$ ).

**2.1.2.5. Self-control.** In Sample 2, trait self-control was measured with the 13-item Self-Control Scale (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004;  $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ). This scale assesses people's general capacity for self-discipline, inclination toward deliberate or non-impulsive actions, and reliability.

**2.1.2.6. Big five personality traits.** In Sample 1, we used Rammstedt and John's (2007) BFI-10 Inventory to assess the following personality traits: openness to experience ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .89$ ), conscientiousness ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .87$ ), extraversion ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ), agreeableness ( $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = .86$ ), and neuroticism ( $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ). This short scale contains a total of 10 items, and items are answered using a Likert scale from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). In validating this short measure, Rammstedt and John (2007) have demonstrated that it is sufficient for research, in terms of validity and reliability, in place of the longer 44-item Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999).

## 2.2. Results

### 2.2.1. Value-based hedonism, maladaptive hedonism, well-being, and self-control

As expected, maladaptive hedonism (i.e., excessive pleasure-seeking) had a positive correlation with value-based hedonism (i.e., the value of pleasure; Sample 1:  $r = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Sample 2:  $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These correlations suggest that these two types of hedonism are related; however, they do not appear to represent the same construct. Also, valued-based hedonism had no relationship with life satisfaction (Sample 1:  $r = .01$ ,  $p = .83$ ; Sample 2:  $r = .12$ ,  $p = .25$ ) while maladaptive hedonism negatively predicted life satisfaction (Sample 1:  $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Sample 2:  $r = -.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, in Sample 2, people's value of pleasure had no relationship with their current degree of flourishing ( $r = .08$ ,  $p = .43$ ) while the maladaptive pursuit of pleasure had a negative relationship with flourishing ( $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These divergent correlations highlight the maladaptive nature of excessive pleasure-seeking: those who value pleasure are not more happy or unhappy than those who do not, and yet, people who over-pursue pleasurable activities are generally less satisfied with life and flourish less than people who do not overdo it.

Moreover, in Sample 2, maladaptive hedonism was negatively associated with self-control ( $r = -.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Unlike maladaptive hedonism, self-control was not significantly associated with the value of pleasure ( $r = -.15$ ,  $p = .11$ ). Further, replicating previous research (e.g., Tangney et al., 2004), self-control was positively related to both life satisfaction ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and flourishing ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ), implying a similarity between low self-control and maladaptive hedonism in their well-being profiles. To further investigate the possible overlap between self-control and maladaptive hedonism, we examined the unique predictions of self-control and maladaptive pleasure-seeking for subjective well-being. Our regression analyses indicated that both self-control and specifically maladaptive hedonism predict life satisfaction when entered together into two regression models. First, life satisfaction scores were higher for people with self-control ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and lower for people who tend to maladaptively pursue pleasure ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Second, flourishing was higher for people with good self-control ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .09$ ) while maladaptive hedonism predicted decreased flourishing ( $\beta = -.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These patterns suggest that people's tendency to over-pursue pleasure is related to inadequate self-regulation but remains its own distinguishable construct.

### 2.2.2. Relationships of value-based hedonism and maladaptive hedonism with personality

People's value of pleasure was only significantly (and positively) related to extraversion; however, people's maladaptive pleasure-seeking did reflect a distinct personality profile (see Table 1). Specifically, as predicted, people more prone to excessively pursue pleasure scored higher on neuroticism and lower on agreeableness and conscientiousness. They also scored lower on openness to new experiences. Further, there was no significant

**Table 1**

Pearson correlations between value-based hedonism, maladaptive hedonism, and big five personality traits in Study 1.

Big five personality traits	Value-based hedonism (N = 389)	Maladaptive hedonism (N = 921)
Openness to experience	-.03	-.11**
Conscientiousness	-.07	-.34**
Extraversion	.12*	-.03
Agreeableness	-.07	-.18**
Neuroticism	-.03	.18**

\*\*  $p < .001$ .

\*  $p < .05$ .

relationship between maladaptive hedonism and extraversion—thus, value-based and maladaptive hedonists had unique personality profiles.

### 3. Study 2

Study 2 aimed to conceptually replicate the differential relationships that value-based and maladaptive hedonism have with (a) well-being, using a happiness IAT (with methods similar to [Walker & Schimmack, 2008](#)), and (b) personality traits, using a longer measure of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-44; [John & Srivastava, 1999](#)). Also, and more importantly, we compared the moral foundations of people who value pleasure and those who pursue it to excess.

#### 3.1. Method

##### 3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Study 2 consisted of volunteer participants who completed one or more surveys hosted on the educational website [YourMorals.org](#), which has served as a source of data for many recent articles (e.g., [Glenn, Koleva, Iyer, Graham, & Ditto, 2010](#); [Graham et al., 2011](#); [Koleva, Graham, Haidt, Iyer, & Ditto, 2012](#)). Participants of interest were those who completed (a) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and the Schwartz Value Inventory ( $N = 1,036$ ), (b) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and the Happiness IAT ( $N = 517$ ), (c) the Schwartz Value Inventory and the Happiness IAT ( $N = 818$ ), (d) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and Big Five Inventory ( $N = 1,283$ ), (e) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire, Schwartz Value Inventory, and the Big Five Inventory ( $N = 752$ ), (f) the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire and the Moral Foundations Questionnaire ( $N = 3,886$ ) as well as its supplemental questions ( $N = 164$ ), or (g) the Schwartz Value Inventory and the Moral Foundations Questionnaire ( $N = 1,283$ ) as well as its supplemental questions ( $N = 168$ ). The participants who were included ( $N = 4,079$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 34.85$ ,  $SD = 14.71$ ; 40.9% female; 80.1% Caucasian) were similar in age, gender composition, and ethnic background to the rest of the website.

##### 3.1.2. Measures

**3.1.2.1. Value of pleasure.** People's value of pleasure relative to other values was again measured with the 3-item hedonism subscale of the 58-item SVI ([Schwartz, 1992](#);  $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ;  $\alpha = .84$ ).

**3.1.2.2. Maladaptive hedonism.** Maladaptive hedonism (i.e., excessive pleasure-seeking) was again measured with the Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire employed in Study 1. Again, the mean suggested that the average participant's pleasure-seeking was not maladaptive ( $M = 2.83$ ;  $SD = .98$ ;  $\alpha = .72$ ).

**3.1.2.3. Implicit well-being.** One goal of Study 2 was to conceptually replicate the differential relationships of value-based and maladaptive hedonism with well-being. We assessed implicit

happiness with a happiness IAT (for example, see [Walker & Schimmack, 2008](#)) we developed for this study. During this task, participants categorized text stimuli based on their belonging to four categories: "happy" (i.e., happy, cheerful, content, delighted, elated, glad, joyful, satisfied), "sad" (i.e., sad, gloomy, somber, sorrowful, depressed, unhappy, upset, unsatisfied), "me" (i.e., me, myself), and "not me" (i.e., they, them, others). The process followed the standard procedure that is common in IAT research ([Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998](#)): in seven blocks of categorization trials participants determined whether the stimuli belonged to categories displayed on the left or right side of the screen by hitting buttons on the keyboard. Implicit happiness was assessed using the standard  $d$ -score method outlined by [Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji \(2003\)](#) where higher scores indicated stronger implicit associations between the self and "happy," relative to the self and "sad".

**3.1.2.4. Big five personality traits.** To replicate the relationships between value-based, versus maladaptive hedonism, with personality traits, we employed the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI-44; [John & Srivastava, 1999](#)). Just like the BFI-10 of Study 1, the BFI-44 measured openness to experience ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = .55$ ;  $\alpha = .80$ ), conscientiousness ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = .77$ ;  $\alpha = .86$ ), extraversion ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $SD = .92$ ;  $\alpha = .89$ ), agreeableness ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .70$ ;  $\alpha = .80$ ), and neuroticism ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = .89$ ;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**3.1.2.5. Moral foundations.** We examined the relationships between two types of hedonism and people's moral principles using the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; [Graham et al., 2011](#)). This scale measures the extent to which different principles shape people's view of what is morally relevant (i.e., helps in determine what is morally right or wrong). Specifically, the main five moral foundations assessed by this scale were avoiding harm (i.e., preventing other people's pain and acting with kindness and nurturance;  $\alpha = .73$ ;  $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = .89$ ), fairness (i.e., maintaining justice, individual rights, and autonomy;  $\alpha = .66$ ;  $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = .77$ ), authority (i.e., obeying authority and tradition;  $\alpha = .75$ ;  $M = 2.18$ ,  $SD = .94$ ), loyalty (i.e., patriotism and self-sacrifice for the benefit of one's group;  $\alpha = .72$ ;  $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = .91$ ), and purity (i.e., importance of avoiding experiences that symbolically contaminate the human body;  $\alpha = .85$ ;  $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ). The first two principles are related to a socially liberal political orientation and the following three to a conservative one (see [Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009](#)). Further, we examined universalism (i.e., a concern for well-being in the human society as a whole;  $\alpha = .78$ ;  $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ), liberal purity (i.e., a more socially liberal parallel to the original purity subscale;  $\alpha = .79$ ;  $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), authenticity (i.e., staying true to one's self;  $\alpha = .65$ ;  $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ), preventing waste (i.e., conserving resources;  $\alpha = .85$ ;  $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ), and self-control (i.e., restraining one's impulses;  $\alpha = .60$ ;  $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). The first four foundations speak to a politically liberal moral profile, and the last foundation (i.e., self-control) is tied to social conservatism.

### 3.2. Results

##### 3.2.1. Predicting implicit happiness from value-based and maladaptive hedonism

We conducted a linear regression predicting implicit happiness from value-based and maladaptive hedonism. The overall model was significant,  $F(2, 338) = 4.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $R^2 = .02$ . Specifically, as we hypothesized, while value-based hedonism did not predict implicit happiness ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .41$ ), maladaptive hedonism negatively predicted it ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Again, this confirms a distinction between our two measurements of hedonism: the former is

independent of well-being, and the latter is negatively associated with it.

### 3.2.2. Correlates of value-based hedonism and maladaptive hedonism with personality

Again we found that maladaptive hedonism was positively correlated with neuroticism and negatively correlated with agreeableness while value-based hedonism had no relationship with these personality traits (see Table 2). Also, again, we saw that value-based hedonism was positively correlated with extraversion while maladaptive hedonism showed no relationship with it. However, in Study 2, both value-based and maladaptive hedonism were negatively correlated with conscientiousness. Another difference in the personality profiles of Study 1 and Study 2 was that, in Study 2, maladaptive hedonism did not positively correlate with openness as it did in Study 1—thus, the consistent differentiating personality characteristics were that value-based hedonists were extraverted while maladaptive hedonists were less agreeable and more neurotic.

### 3.2.3. Relationships of value-based hedonism and maladaptive hedonism with moral foundations

Our results indicated that people who value pleasure have different moral principles from people who value other goals (see Table 3). Specifically, we found that value-based hedonists were less likely to ascribe moral relevance to obeying authority, ingroup loyalty, maintaining purity, and self-control. Additionally, value-based hedonists were more likely to endorse fairness as a moral principle.

On the other hand, the continuum of maladaptive hedonism (i.e., excessive pleasure-seeking) had no relationship with any of the ten moral foundations included in the study (See Table 3). These results suggest that people who tend to pursue pleasure maladaptively do not differ in moral principles from individuals without this tendency. Consequently, the moral distinctions of value-based hedonists may depend on the mere value of pleasure, as opposed to the possibility of them engaging in maladaptive pleasure-seeking.

## 4. Discussion

The present study explored the differences between people who value pleasure above other goals (i.e., value-based hedonists) and people whose pleasurable pursuits require sacrifices and come at a cost to their well-being (i.e., maladaptive hedonists). To confirm the proposed difference between these two hedonism constructs, we examined their relationships with both explicit and implicit well-being, finding that only maladaptive hedonism was negatively related to well-being. Moreover, we differentiated maladaptive pleasure-seeking from generally inadequate self-control, discovering that the two constructs independently predict well-being. We then tested for differential relationships of value-based

hedonism and maladaptive hedonism with personality traits and moral foundations. In sum, our research suggests that the excessive nature maladaptive hedonism is not rooted in morality, but only in personality; further, the portrait of a value-based hedonist depicts a socially liberal extravert, rather than Oscar Wilde's (1931) apathetic Dorian Gray.

### 4.1. The personality traits of hedonists

Across two samples, we discovered that the only consistent personality distinction of people who prioritize pleasure over other values is their high extraversion. They did not differ from others in neuroticism, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Oller and Mooradian (2003) provided evidence that people gravitate toward values that complement their personalities (e.g., that people open to new experiences are more likely to endorse values from the "openness to change" section of Schwartz's values circumplex). Perhaps, people's conception of pleasure shares an overlap with the social stimulation enjoyed by extraverts, so extraverted people are more likely to value it. However, the construct of pleasure is nevertheless versatile, so people with varying personality traits may simply value different pleasurable activities (e.g., neurotic individuals may find pleasure in low-risk activities).

Similar to maladaptive hedonists, people who value pleasure also scored lower on conscientiousness (see Section 3). Possibly, both the value and the excessive pursuit of pleasure are more common among less conscientious people, but further research is needed to clarify these relationships. However, it is the portrait of only a maladaptive pleasure-seeker, not the value-based hedonist, which consistently depicts someone who is emotionally unstable, uncooperative, and unreliable. People with such personality traits may be more impulsive in seeking positive affect and experience less immediate concern over the personal and social sacrifices they make to engage in pleasurable activities. Possibly, the value of pleasure by itself is not connected to unfavorable personality traits unless people make a habit of excessively translating that value into behavior.

### 4.2. The moral foundations of hedonists

Moreover, we found that value-based hedonism has deeper roots in morality than personality. Specifically, people's value of pleasure correlated negatively with their endorsement of all included moral principles that have been positively associated with social conservatism: obeying authority, ingroup loyalty, maintaining purity, and the moral relevance of self-control (Graham et al., 2009). Interestingly, value-based hedonism is not related to actual self-control. Further, value-based hedonism

**Table 3**

Pearson correlations of value-based hedonism and maladaptive hedonism with moral foundations in Study 2.

Moral foundations	Value-based hedonism (N = 1082)	Maladaptive hedonism (N = 3886)
Harm	.04	-.03
Fairness	.11	.01
Authority	-.17*	-.02
Loyalty	-.15*	.02
Purity	-.33*	-.02
	(N = 168)	(N = 164)
Universalism	.08	-.05
Liberal purity	.06	-.07
Authenticity	.14	.01
Waste	-.05	-.06
Self-control	-.40*	.09

**Table 2**

Pearson correlations between value-based hedonism, maladaptive hedonism, and big five personality traits in Study 2.

Big five personality traits	Value-based hedonism (N = 752)	Maladaptive hedonism (N = 1283)
Openness to experience	.01	-.05
Conscientiousness	-.20**	-.32**
Extraversion	.09*	.02
Agreeableness	-.06	-.15**
Neuroticism	-.04	.19**

\*\* p < .001.

\* p < .05.

\* p < .001.

correlated positively with the endorsement of fairness as a moral principle, which is more pronounced among self-identified liberals (Graham et al., 2009). However, people's value of pleasure remained unrelated to other markers of social liberalism: prevention of harm and waste, universalism, liberal purity, and authenticity. Overall, the morals of value-based hedonists appear not to be rooted in socially conservative or "binding" principles. Specifically, their moral profile is a generally a distaste of binding moral foundations rather than the endorsement of individualizing ones. These results complement previous research indicating that self-identified conservatives assign less importance to pleasure than do self-identified liberals and libertarians (Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012).

Conversely, maladaptive hedonists appear morally neutral, as the excessive pursuit of pleasure is not significantly correlated with endorsement of any moral foundations. Perhaps, the excessive nature of their pursuits may be rooted not in morality, but only in personality. For instance, maladaptive hedonists tend to have poorer self-control without thinking of self-control as morally irrelevant. Possibly, their inadequate self-regulation is instead linked to their low conscientiousness, rather than moral principles. Likewise, in sacrificing the fulfillment of responsibilities for pleasure, they may deviate from the norms of large societal groups or institutions without distaste for moral principles that bind them to those communities.

#### 4.3. Limitations and future directions

We encourage future research to further clarify the construct of maladaptive hedonism and differentiate it from poor self-control by examining the similarities and differences between pleasure-seeking that is maladaptive (i.e., involves sacrifices detrimental to one's well-being) and pleasure-seeking that is impulsive. Also, given the relatively weak relationship between maladaptive hedonism and neuroticism, we posit that maladaptive hedonists do not merely suffer from rumination over their past behavior. However, future research should examine the role of guilt-proneness in the assessment of excessive pleasure-seeking, to ensure that maladaptive hedonists do not simply believe that experiencing a lot of pleasure is guilt-worthy or inherently bad.

Additionally, although the value of pleasure is a reliable and valid construct (see Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Schwartz, 1992, 1996, 2006, for review), using the Schwartz Value Inventory (SVI) poses some limitations. In particular, the hedonism subscale of the SVI does not differentiate between the ways in which people may differently conceptualize pleasure (e.g., as hedonic, eudaimonic, or social). Possibly, people may value different types of pleasure to different extents, and yet, the SVI does not specify the kind of pleasure people value. Therefore, we urge future research to expand the measurement of value-based hedonism to include the types of pleasure people value, as well their value of different pleasurable experiences.

Moreover, we recommend the continued examination of the relationships between the value of pleasure, maladaptive hedonism, and personality. For example, in across our two studies, value-based hedonism was inconsistently related to conscientiousness, indicating no relationship in Study 1 and a negative one in Study 2. Consequently, it is possible that both the value of pleasure, as well as the excessive pursuit of it, are the result of low conscientiousness. Further, the current research only used the BFI-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007) and BFI-44 (John & Srivastava, 1999) to assess personality; future investigations will benefit from examining the relationships of maladaptive versus value-based hedonism with Big Five facets using the NEO-PI-R (see Costa & McCrae, 2008), where specific aspects of personality can be examined.

## 5. Conclusion

While psychological research has consistently conceptualized hedonism as a value of pleasure, it is important to distinguish people who value pleasure from people who pursue pleasure so excessively that it results in reduced well-being. Our results indicate that the value of pleasure is associated with a distinct moral profile (i.e., a distaste for moral principles associated with social conservatism), whereas maladaptive pleasure-seeking is rooted in personality (i.e., low agreeableness, low conscientiousness, and high neuroticism). Overall, our results differentiated the value pleasure from its excessive pursuit, suggesting that the personality and moral profile of a hedonist is more complicated than Oscar Wilde's unhappy, impulsive, and selfish Dorian Gray.

## Ethical statement

The work described in our submission has not been published previously and it is not under consideration for publication anywhere but the Journal of Personality and Individual Differences. All five authors agree to the order of authorship, to submit the manuscript in its present form, and to all ethical requirements outlined by Elsevier Editorial.

## Appendix A.

### A.1. Maladaptive Hedonism Questionnaire developed for Studies 1 and 2

Please select a type of activity that provides you the most pleasure (intellectual engagement and reflection, taste and touch, social interaction, excitement and thrill seeking, and helping others) and keep it in mind.

What is the activity, specifically? How would you classify it? Please write your answer below:

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In order to do this activity:

To what extent do you overspend your money?

How often do you risk your close relationships with family, friends, or romantic partners?

To what extent do you avoid your responsibilities?

How much do you ignore your health?

Even if you enjoy the activity, how much do you think it hurts your emotional well-being later?

To what extent does this pleasurable activity contradict your life values (e.g., family values, religion)?

How much you do regret this activity after time passes?

How hard is it to wait for this activity?

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The response scale for these items was from (1) Not at all (2) (3) (4) (5) (6) to (7) Very much.

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