The Happy Personality: A Meta-Analysis of 137 Personality Traits and Subjective Well-Being

Kristina M. DeNeve & Harris Cooper
1998

Examined 137 distinct personality constructs as correlates of Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Majority of studies of SWB have focused on biosocial indicators such as sex and age. Several narrative reviews of SWB literature have suggested personality may be one of the strongest influences of SWB.

The purpose of the meta-analysis was to address five questions:

• How important is personality in comparison with other biosocial indicators of SWB?
• Does personality relate differently to SWB depending on the conceptualisation of SWB?
• If the specific personality traits are clustered into homogenous groups, which groups of personality traits relate most strongly with which SWB conceptualisations?
• Which specific personality traits are most closely linked with SWB?
• Are methodological differences among studies associated with differences in the correlations found between SWB and personality?

Theories and predictions

• Top-down theories of SWB assume a global tendency (derived from stable personality traits) to experience life in a positive or negative way.
• Dynamic equilibrium model of SWB also suggests personality is critical for SWB.
• McCrae and Costa (1991) distinguished between the temperamental and instrumental way in which personality traits relate to SWB. (E and N relate to an enduring disposition, while A and C have an instrumental role)
• Gray’s BIS/BAS distinction

Predict personality should be among the most influential factors for predicting SWB

Distinctions among SWB conceptualisations

• Happiness
• Life Satisfaction
• Positive Affect
• Negative Affect

Two predictions – measures that focus on enduring aspects of SWB should relate more strongly with personality than transient measures. Alternatively, if positive and negative affect tap the same underlying stable disposition as personality traits, these two conceptualisations will correlate most strongly with personality

The Big Five and Subjective Well-Being

137 specific personality traits were correlated with SWB. Clustered into homogenous groups

Extraversion/Surgency
Agreeableness
Conscientiousness
Neuroticism/Emotional Stability
Openness to Experience

Predict E leads to positive affect, while N leads to negative affect. Predict O will correlate positively with both positive and negative affect (McCrae and Costa, 1991) Predict A and C have instrumental affects on SWB, and will correlate with Life Satisfaction and Happiness (McCrae and Costa, 1991)

Other predictions were that intelligence would correlate positively but moderately with SWB (Wilson, 1967) and control variables such as locus of control, desire for control, perceived control, would correlate positively with SWB (DeNeve, 1994)

Method

9 literature search procedures suggested by Cooper (1998) to find relevant studies.

To be included, reports had to contain a valid measure of SWB and at least one personality measure. The study had to operationalize SWB as Life Satisfaction, Happiness, or current positive/negative affect.

Coded by DeNeve and a research assistant.

148 studies
1538 correlation coefficients relating personality to SWB
137 distinct personality variables
42,171 respondents to questionnaires
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
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<th>2008 Date of Entry</th>
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Table 3

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<td>29.5</td>
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Results

Overall relationship between personality and SWB
$r = .19$

Q2: Variability existed among SWB conceptualisations. Positive/negative distinction. Conceptualisations of SWB cannot fully explain all of the variation between correlations.

Q3: N and C correlated most strongly. O obtained weakest association
Significant heterogeneity among correlations within each of the five factors

Q4: Average correlation was calculated separately for each trait and SWB. Weighted by sample size. Tables 8 – 12 present weighted and unweighted estimates for each variable correlated with SWB.

Used personality variables theoretically related to each Big Five factor.

Examined the personality variables that were based on 3 or more independent samples.
Most strongly correlated personality variables

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>r</th>
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<td>Repressive-defensiveness</td>
<td>-.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional stability</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of control-chance</td>
<td>-.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for control</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardiness</td>
<td>.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affectivity</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private collective self-esteem</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>.31</td>
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Hypothesis – E and N did not have the strongest positive and negative correlations with SWB.
As predicted, desire for control and locus of control-chance were among strongest correlates. Intelligence was found to correlate moderately (r = .05).

Discussion
Meta-analytic findings have indicated that the most important correlates of Subjective Well-Being are health, personality and socioeconomic status Demographics are of limited value for predicting SWB Psychosocial factors. Goal striving. Daily events.
How personality might influence SWB Specific traits The Big Five and SWB The limits of personality for influencing SWB

The Rank-Order Consistency of Personality Traits From Childhood to Old Age: A Quantitative Review of Longitudinal Studies

By Brent W., Roberts and Wendy F. Daughey

Are Personality Traits Consistent? YES: Assumption that they’re some underlying enduring behavioral disposition. How do you measure traits Consistency?

2 most used definition of trait consistency:
- Mean-Level Consistency: If population index groups show reliable changes in mean-level then personality is inconsistent.
- Changes substantive in nature.
- Relative placement of individuals within a group.
- Assessed through test-retest correlation, or stability coefficients.
- Whether groups of people retain the same rank-ordering on trait dimensions over time.
- Unrelated to whether they show mean-level change, also does not rule out possibility of individual differences in change.
- Intellectual flexibility in sample.
Mechanisms of Personality Trait Consistency

Environment | Genetic Factors | Psychological Factors | Personality Transactions | Identity Structure
---|---|---|---|---
Parental child rearing practices | Twins - 80% personality consistency | Certain trait/ cognitive structure | Reactivate or consolidated identity | “Goodness of fit”
Living in stable environment | Increase or decrease over time | Ego resiliency | Filler information & life experience | “Goodness of fit”
Work experience | "Planful competence" | Certain trait/cognitive structure | Achieved or consolidated identity | "Reactive transactions"
Partner | Fewer novel experience | "Planful competence" | "Reactive transactions" | "Reactive transactions"

Hypothesis 1: What is the relation between chronological age & Trait consistency

Hypothesis 2: At what age does trait consistency peak? - predict middle age

Hypothesis 3: Does trait consistency peak at a level high enough to suggest that traits stop changing at a specific age?

Background:
- Genetic Factors
  - Twins - 80% personality consistency
  - Personality traits should peak at age 20 or 30.
- Psychological Factors
  - Personality traits should peak at age 20 or 30. Some found other type of changes after 30.
- Identity Structure
  - Executive personality: Identity certainty, increased mastery

Findings & Discussion:
- Executive personality: Identity certainty, increased mastery
- Further research:
  - Consistency peak at 50 high enough to support this conclusion.

Background:
- Bloom (1964) & Mc Crae & Costa (1994): Personality traits should peak at age 20 or 30. Some found other type of changes after 30.
- Findings & Discussion:
  - Executive personality: Identity certainty, increased mastery
  - Further research:
    - Consistency peak at 50 high enough to support this conclusion.

For those who're interested...
- Method & Procedure
  - Literature Searches: Reference list, databases, relevant journal articles.
  - 152 satisfy the inclusion criteria.
  - Age: range of ages: 20-30, 30-40 etc. Midpoints used.
  - Analyses: Effect Size estimates, Estimated population correlation.
  - Confidence interval & tests of heterogeneity.

Subjective Well-Being
The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index

Ed Diener 2000

National and Cultural Patterns of Subjective Well-Being

Inglehart (1990) proposed that as basic material needs are met, individuals move to a post-materialistic phase in which they are concerned with self-fulfilment.

This can be seen in the trend of more westernised nations granting greater Subjective Well-Being (SWB) importance.
Table 2 presents the mean levels of life satisfaction for selected nations from the World Values Survey (1994) - conducted with representative samples of approximately 1,000 respondents per nation between 1990 and 1993.

The finding that wealthier nations have higher levels of reported well-being has been replicated several times (see Diener & Suh, 1999).

One reason that wealthy nations may be happier is that they are more likely to fulfil basic human needs for food, shelter, and health, as well as to have better human-rights records (Diener et al., 1995).

A National Index of SWB

Diener proposes that the United States needs indicators of SWB that can be used to track happiness over time.

- Using National ESM Surveys
- To allow comparison across groups: age, region, etc
- Then policymakers might consider SWB in their decisions

Cultural factors influence SWB in several ways:
- Ability of the country to meet basic needs
- Variations in optimism and positivity within the nation
- Social support and coping patterns within the culture

The pervasiveness of societal influences on mean levels of SWB raises the question of how American culture is faring....
Conclusion

Societies need to afford the same importance to SWB as they do now to economics: tracking the phenomenon, supporting research to understand it, and educating people about it. To create a better society where happiness is ubiquitous, a major scientific effort to understand quality of life is needed. If psychologists' institute a national survey to track SWB, it is more likely that it will become an outcome variable that is considered in policy decisions.

Very Happy People

Diener and Seligman (2002)

• Research on unhappy individuals is far more common than research on happy individuals
• Authors complementary beliefs
• Present Study: examined social relationships, personality and psychopathology and other variables (e.g. Religiosity and exercise) that have been correlated with subjective well-being.

Is there a Key to Happiness?

• Examined how the happiest respondents compared with the average and very unhappy ones
• Also looked at patterns of necessity and sufficiency
  – Sufficiency: All persons with that variable should be happy (if X, always happy)
  – Necessary: Virtually everyone with that variable should be happy (if happy, then X)
• Examine moods and emotions of the happiest individuals
  – Euphoric feelings vs. Moderate positive emotions
  – Occasional unpleasant emotions?

Method

• Participants: 222 college students
• Peer reports of affect, global self reports of life satisfaction and affect (collected over a period of months), daily reports of affect (51 days)
• 3 Additional Measures : memory event recall balance, trait self-description, interview suicide measure
• Compared the happiest 10%, unhappiest 10% and the middle 27% on the variables that might affect happiness

Results

• Very happy group scored about 30 on life satisfaction (scale ranged from 5 to 35), had virtually never thought about suicide, could recall more good life events than bad ones, reported more +ve than –ve emotions on a daily basis
• Very unhappy group: rated as dissatisfied by their friends and family and by themselves. Reported equal amounts of +ve and –ve affect on a daily basis
• Average group were somewhere in the middle
Results (2)

- Interpersonal lives
- Psychopathology
- Personality
- Other variables
- Moods and Emotions

Limitations

- Study’s conclusions limited by the sample and the correlational method.
- Need broader samples and longitudinal studies.
- Do not know if rich social lives caused happiness or vice versa, or a 3rd unknown variable.

Structure of Review

- Focuses on two interrelated factors that influence SWB- personality and culture.
- Both have significant influence over SWB and can moderate the factors that correlate with people’s experiences
- Culture can influence personality and vice-versa.

Personality Theories of SWB

- Why are some individuals chronically happier and more satisfied with their lives?
- Temperament theories of personality and subjective well-being- 3 aspects
  - baseline levels of well-being determined by personality- Dynamic Equilibrium Model
  - differences in emotional reactivity- Gray (1970)
  - ways of processing emotional information-Rusting (1998)

Characteristics that influence SWB

- Early SWB research focused on identifying external conditions (e.g. Wilson, 1967) yet found to only have a modest impact.
- Instead, SWB is fairly stable over time, rebounds after major life events and is strongly correlated with stable personality traits- extraversion and neuroticism (e.g. Lucas and Fujita).
- DeNeve and Cooper (1998) have shown that this may oversimplify the pattern of association- agreeableness and conscientiousness moderately correlated with SWB.
- Non-trait features of personality are related to SWB constructs- Emmons (1996).
- Evidence of reverse causal direction.

Personality, Culture, and Subjective Well-Being: Emotional and Cognitive Evaluations of life

Ed Diener, Shiegehiro Oishi, and Richard E. Lucas 2003
### Personality based causes of SWB

- Also likely that there are interactional effects.
- Different events and life circumstances may affect well-being e.g. Kette (1991) extravedted prisoners less happy than introverted prisoners.
- Values play an important role in this interactional effect.

### Culture and SWB

- International surveys show consistent mean levels of life satisfaction across nations.
- Factors:
  - Wealth: Diener et al (1995) large differences in SWB between nations, which correlated with the average levels of income in those nations- more strongly related at low levels of money as increases are likely to be related to inherent human needs. So, SWB results from meeting innate and universal human needs.
  - Self-serving biases and self-enhancement- found to occur less frequently amongst East Asians.

### Culture and SWB

- Tradeoffs that seem inherent in certain societal patterns: cultural strategies that have both costs and benefits. Sacrificing immediate goals for the sake of achieving other valued goals. E.g. Asian-American students happier when in engaging in activity which relates to future goals. Opposite true for Caucasian students.
- Diener (2000) has reported that people in Latin American countries gave higher importance to SWB than other societies e.g. East Asia- more likely to sacrifice positive emotions to achieve other goals.

### Measurement Validity Across Cultures

- Reports of SWB across cultures might be influenced by social desirability or impression management-concluded by Diener et al (1993) to be not a serious problem.
- Measure in Western and non-Western cultures.

### Correlates of SWB across cultures

- Are correlates of satisfied people the same across cultures?
- Diener and Diener (1995) satisfaction with self and global satisfaction found to be strongly correlated individualistic Western nations but not in collectivist nations.
- Suh et al (1998) role of internal attributes differs across cultures. In individualistic nations satisfied people report more positive emotions. This tendency is weaker in collectivist nations.

### Universal Verses Variable Causes of SWB

- Self-determination theory of Deci & Ryan (2000)- 3 basic needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness which are essential for well-being. Found to be related to SWB in diverse nations.
- Universal and cultural specific causes of SWB.
Heterogeneity of Cultural Effects

- Lack of attention in cross cultural research to within culture variation. Assumption that members of cultural group share key experiences that lead to psychological tendencies.
- Hong et al (2000) advocates the dynamic social constructionist approach.
- Eid & Diener (2001) used multigroup latent class analysis to show analyses homogeneity of individual within cultures, also revealing differences across cultures.

Effect sizes of personality and culture.

- Scollon et al (2002) found that differences between individuals within cultures accounted for much more variance in affect than did culture.
- More research is needed in analyzing how cultural change alters average levels of SWB. How cultural change alters SWB.
- E.g. Inglehart & Klingemann (2000) report very low levels of SWB in the former communist nations of Europe and Asia.

Conclusions

- Substantial individual differences in SWB, as well as mean level differences between cultures.
- Also appears that some cultures produce higher levels of SWB than others do and a future research goal could find whether this is due to people differentially value SWB. Some may trade positive emotions in order to obtain other things they value.
- Suggested that everyone all over the world wants to be happy by achieving the things they value.