Predicting future happiness on the basis of personality traits and values

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Personality traits and values are known to be some of the best predictors for happiness, but what is yet to be investigated is whether these also can account for beliefs in future happiness. Using an Mturk sample (N = 317), personal future happiness and global future happiness (the future of the world) were regressed on personality traits (Big Five) and values (Schwartz's 10 Values). The results showed that personality and values predicted beliefs in personal future happiness, but not global future happiness. Personality also accounted for twice the variance compared to values. These findings confirm the well-established literature on personality and happiness.

Keywords: happiness, personality, Big Five, values

Being happy is one of the main goals in human society, according to Gallagher, Lopez, and Pressman (2013). Happy people tend to be optimistic, and being optimistic about the future is considered beneficial for our welfare (cf. Diener & Chan, 2011; Diener, Kanazawa, Suh, & Oishi, 2014). A large portion of happiness is explained by our personality (see meta-analysis by Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). The present study aims to add to this body of research by comparing to what extent personality traits and values relate specifically to beliefs in *future* happiness, both regarding their personal future happiness and the world's future happiness.

Happiness and personality

Happiness is in this study defined as a blanket term covering subjective well-being and perceived quality of life (See a summary by Cummins, 2012). Antecedents of happiness are plenty, but one of the most consistent predictors is found in certain personality characteristics (DeNeve, 1999). Personality is defined in terms of stable characteristics comprising stable affects, cognitions, and behaviors which are expressed over time and situations (Funder, 1997; Wilt & Revelle, 2015).

In general, 50% of the variance in happiness depends on individual, inherent factors (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2009; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004). A meta-analysis by Bartels (2015) demonstrated that over 1/3 is genetic in origin, suggesting stability over the lifespan. Personality traits show strong test-retest stability over time, which is explained both by genetics and by environmental control (Gnambs, 2014; Sheldon & Lucas, 2014). There is evidence for a common genetic base for personality and happiness (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Weiss, Bates, & Luciano, 2008).

Personality traits and values

The most researched conceptualization of personality is the Five-Factor Model (Big Five), comprising Openness (to experience), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1997). All five factors have demonstrated constancy in predicting life patterns across cultures, ages, cohorts, and ethnicities (Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007; Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martínez, 2007).

Personality is interlinked with values (Parks & Guay, 2009; Parks-Leduc, Feldman, & Bardi, 2014). While personality traits account for how people tend to behave, personal values describe what people find important (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). Different from personality traits, values are sets of motivational beliefs with desirable goals (see Grankvist & Kajonius, 2015; Schermer, Vernon, Maio, & Jang, 2011). Values are commonly measured by Schwartz's theory of values (Schwartz, 1994), and have shown validity cross-culturally (Schwartz, 2012).

The present study

There are few studies that have investigated predictors of how we feel about our own future happiness and the world's future happiness (e.g., Møller, 1996; Wenglert, & Rosen, 2000). The present study aims at comparing personality traits and values in predicting beliefs in our personal and global future happiness. The first hypothesis is that personality traits and values predict personal future happiness better than global future happiness, indicating how personal happiness arguably is perceived as more within our control (e.g., Ramezani, & Gholtash, 2015). The second hypothesis is that personality traits account for happiness to a greater

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extent than values do, referring to the strong link (shared genetic base) between personality and happiness (cf. Weiss, Bates, & Luciano, 2008).

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 317 participants (173 women, 117 men)¹, recruited online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The sample ranged in age from 18 to 75 years (M = 32.5, SD = 11.9). Mturk has proven to be a reliable way to acquire data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), providing a range of socio-economic details, which is particularly desirable for value research (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). Participants were compensated with \$1 doing a task that lasted 15 minutes on average, and only participants from the US with an acceptance rate of 97% or more were included. Control questions were used to sort out disingenuous participants (e.g., "Name the current president of the United States?"), and 2 participants were excluded.

Instruments

Personality traits

The Big Five personality factors were measured through self-report using the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI44) (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008). Items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Values

Values were measured using the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ-IV) (Schwartz et al., 2012). This questionnaire is a 40-item self-report instrument that measures personal values on ten dimensions. Items were scored on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not like me at all) to 6 (Very much like me). The 10 dimensions of values (Schwartz, 1994) are: Power (authority, wealth), Achievement (success, ambition), Hedonism (pleasure, enjoying life), Stimulation (exciting life, varied life), Self-direction (creativity, independence), Universalism (social justice, equality), Benevolence (helpfulness, loyalty), Tradition (devoutness, humility), Conformity (obedience, honoring parents), and Security (national security, social order).

Future happiness.

The dependent variable was operationalized by two single items. In order to measure personal future happiness, participants had to respond to the item "The future for me personally looks happy" on a scale running from 1 (Totally disagree) to 7 (Totally agree). Global future happiness was measured by "The future of the world looks bleak", using a scale running from 1 (Totally disagree) to 7 (Totally agree). The scores on the global future happiness scale were reversed. The intention with the present future happiness items was to maximize the contrasts of happiness in one's own life (personal) and that of the world (global).

Method limitations

A limitation of concern was that the dependent variable, future happiness, consisted of only one item, and type II errors are more common with short scales, thus underestimating or missing the true effect (Credé, Harms, Niehorster, & Gaye-Valentine, 2012). However, some research on short scales has also shown support regarding reliability (Fujita & Diener, 2005), as well as validity in person-related characteristics (Thalmayer, Saucier, & Eigenhuis, 2011; Yarkoni, 2010). One noteworthy example is a one-item narcissism scale yielding reasonable predictive validity not unlike the entire original 40-item questionnaire (Konrath, Meier, & Bushman, 2014).

Another limitation in the present study was the self-report method, often criticized for bringing about a host of issues such as lowered reliability, common method variance, social desirability, and responding patterns (i.e., acquiescence or extreme response) (See review by Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992).

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics of the variables used are summarized in Table 1. The internal reliabilities for the scales aligned with meta-analysis on traits and values (Parks-Leduc et al., 2014).

The hypotheses were tested by conducting multiple regression models, one with the five personality factors and one with the ten value dimensions, predicting in turn personal and global future happiness. Hypothesis 1, that personality and values would account for more variance in beliefs in personal than global future happiness, was confirmed. Comparing the explained model variances (R^2) , personality accounted for 32% vs. 4%, while values accounted for 17% vs. 2% in personal compared to global future happiness. Hypothesis 2, that personality traits would be better predictors of future happiness compared to values, was similarly confirmed. Personality accounted for almost double the explained variance (32%) compared to values (17%) in personal future happiness. Similarly, even though not as much, personality accounted for more explained variance than values in global future happiness.

Having confirmed Hypothesis 1 and 2, an exploratory post-hoc regression model, including all personality factors and value dimensions simultaneously, was conducted. The results showed that personality and values together accounted for more than a third of the variance in personal future happiness ($R^2 = .36$). Extraversion ($\beta = .29$) and Neuroticism ($\beta = ..19$) were the best predictors. In the model

¹ The number of respondents (N = 317) were aimed to be beyond "the corridor of stability" (N = 250), after which effect sizes only shows minimal fluctuations around the true value (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). This sample size is also reported to be sufficient for regression analyses (i.e., more than 15 data points per variable) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012).

М	SD	α	Personal Future $r(\beta)$	Global Future $r(\beta)$
			.32***	.04*
3.50	0.67	.67	.14**(.04)	02(06)
3.77	0.66	.79	.26***(.09)	.10(.02)
3.26	0.88	.84	.47***(36)***	.04(03)
3.64	0.68	.86	.35***(.16)**	.16**(.12)*
2.75	0.84	.82	39***(17)**	15**(12)*
			.17***	.02
4.24	0.93	.64	.13*(03)	10(15)
3.39	1.03	.55	.11(.02)	03(.00)
4.09	0.99	.74	.24***(.14)	.00(.08)
4.69	0.87	.69	.26***(.25)***	.00(01)
4.52	0.91	.80	.11(07)	03(.00)
4.71	0.82	.66	.15**(.15)*	02(.03)
3.60	1.13	.71	.14*(04)	05(06)
4.26	1.04	.85	.19***(.09)	05(03)
3.97	1.13	.85	.20***(04)	04(.04)
3.33	1.17	.69	.23***(.24)**	.07(05)
	<i>M</i> 3.50 3.77 3.26 3.64 2.75 4.24 3.39 4.09 4.69 4.69 4.52 4.71 3.60 4.26 3.97 3.33	M SD 3.50 0.67 3.77 0.66 3.26 0.88 3.64 0.68 2.75 0.84 4.24 0.93 3.39 1.03 4.09 0.99 4.69 0.87 4.52 0.91 4.71 0.82 3.60 1.13 4.26 1.04 3.97 1.13 3.33 1.17	MSDα3.500.67.673.770.66.793.260.88.843.640.68.862.750.84.824.240.93.643.391.03.554.090.99.744.690.87.694.520.91.804.710.82.663.601.13.714.261.04.853.971.13.853.331.17.69	MSDαPersonal Future $r(β)$.32***3.500.67.67.14**(.04)3.770.66.79.26***(.09)3.260.88.84.47***(36)***3.640.68.86.35***(.16)**2.750.84.82 $39***(17)**$.17***.17***4.240.93.64.13*(03)3.391.03.55.11(.02)4.090.99.74.24***(.14)4.690.87.69.26***(.25)***4.520.91.80.11(07)4.710.82.66.15**(.15)*3.601.13.71.14*(04)4.261.04.85.19***(.09)3.971.13.85.20***(04)3.331.17.69.23***(.24)**

Table 1. Comparing personality traits and values in predicting beliefs in personal and global future happiness

Note: p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Personality = BFI-44. Values = PVQ-40. Personal future = "The future for me personally looks happy". Global future = "The future of the world looks bleak" (reversed). Standardized beta coefficients are reported in parenthesis.

predicting global future happiness ($R^2 = 7\%$), Agreeableness was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .22$). The most important values in the models were Benevolence and Power (cf. Schwartz' orthogonal circumplex model, 1994; Kajonius, Persson, & Jonason, 2015).

To further conclude, Figure 1 shows how personality in terms of the Big Five factors related to beliefs in personal future happiness. Personal future happiness showed an increasing trend with increases in all Big Five factors, including reversed Neuroticism (Emotional Stability).

DISCUSSION

The current study showed that both personality traits and values had significant relationships with beliefs in personal future happiness, but not with beliefs in global happiness. Personality was a stronger predictor than values. Amongst the personality factors, Extraversion was a particularly strong predictor, known to be characterized by positive emotions and often expressed in sociability and excitement (Steel et al., 2008). Neuroticism was similarly a strong predictor, known to be characterized by negative emotions expressed in emotional instability and general anxiety. Also, the present study showed that Agreeableness predicted both personal and global future happiness. This may be explained by agreeable dispositions to simply wanting to agree and to believe the best about the future. Amongst the value dimen-

sions, Benevolence (self-transcending) and Power (self-enhancing) accounted for most of the variance (cf. Kajonius, Persson, & Jonason, 2015), but only with respect to beliefs in personal future happiness. Helping others (cf. Benevolence) as well as looking after oneself (cf. Power) may carry a sense of direction which is known to be beneficial for hope and feelings of happiness (Fujita & Diener, 2005). None of the value dimensions could predict beliefs in global future happiness.

This study highlighted the importance of taking personality traits and values into account in happiness research. The present operationalization of beliefs in future happiness yielded similar levels of variance accounted for as in other often-cited studies on personality and happiness (> 30%) (cf. Anglim & Grant, 2014; Steel et al., 2008). Theoretically, this could imply that happiness transcends time and that people that are happy now also believe that they will be happy in the future. In other words, people estimate their future happiness based on their personality traits, while the future of the world's happiness relies on other things (cf. Andersson, Persson, & Kajonius, 2021). Implications of these results may extend to situations in which a therapist tries to navigate clients towards an optimistic mindset by using knowledge of personality traits or values (see Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), or to situations in which educators and recruiters aim to steer students and employees towards more positive future career-choices (see Lavigne, Hofman, Ring, Ryder, & Woodward, 2013). Mental health



Figure 1. The relationship between the Big Five factors and beliefs in personal future happiness. Neuroticism was inverted into Emotional Stability for purposes of congruence. BFI-44.

practices and positive coaching could similarly work with this type of findings in creating strategies for increasing beliefs in future efficacy. Future notions of happiness are contingent on own personality traits and values.

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