



Not restricted by their personality: Balanced Time Perspective moderates well-established relationships between personality traits and well-being[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Links between two major personality traits – extraversion and neuroticism – and subjective well-being (SWB) are well-confirmed. Prior research has also shown that SWB is significantly related to the likelihood of adopting a Balanced Time Perspective (BTP). The present paper aims to determine whether BTP moderates relationships between personality and SWB. Results of the study show that 1) BTP predicts SWB after controlling for personality traits, and 2) the personality-SWB relationships are weaker in individuals who report higher levels of time perspective balance, whereas personality is a particularly strong predictor of SWB within those reporting low levels of time perspective balance. It seems that high levels of temporal balance may result in becoming more or less independent from the personality-based pre-determination of well-being. The results are briefly discussed in the light of Time Perspective Theory, taking into account their potential practical applications.

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1. Introduction

The fact that subjective well-being (SWB) is related to personality remains one of the most consistent and robust findings within the field of research on human happiness (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Some studies have even shown that heritable differences in SWB are entirely accounted for by the genetic bases of the Five-Factor Model's personality domains (Weiss, Bates, & Luciano, 2008), indirectly suggesting an inevitability of poorer well-being for individuals with a maladaptive (from the happiness standpoint) personality profile. Although most personality traits reveal significant relationships with SWB (see a review by DeNeve, 1999), the majority of theoretical and empirical work has focused on extraversion and neuroticism, showing that they are both reliably and substantially related to SWB (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). Extraversion is "the dimension underlying a broad group of traits, including sociability, activity, and the tendency to experience positive emotions such as joy and pleasure" (Costa & McCrae, 1992b, p. 5). Neuroticism "represents the individual's tendency to experience psychological distress, and high standing on N is a feature of most psychiatric conditions" (Costa & McCrae, 1992b, p. 5). Naturally, higher levels of neuroticism indicate lower SWB, whereas for extraversion the relationship is opposite. If these links are so stable, one may ask: why do some individuals high on neuroticism and low on extraversion go against this general trend and reveal average or even above average levels of SWB? Hotard, McFatter, McWhirter and Stegall

(1989) showed that some factors do moderate these relationships. Particularly, social relationships proved to be a buffer against the maladaptive influence of the "bad ends" of extraversion and neuroticism. The present results show that individual differences in time perspective (TP), particularly an indicator of Balanced Time Perspective (BTP), also moderate the link between personality and well-being.

Time Perspective Theory provides a comprehensive framework for empirical analysis of human behavior in the context of time (see Stolarski, Fieulaine & van Beek, 2015). Defined as "the often nonconscious process whereby the continual flows of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to those events" (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, p. 1271), TP could be considered both as a process, when analyzed as a continuous framing of present experiences, and as a trait, when understood as a stable, habitual focus on a particular "time horizon", i.e., the past, the present, or the future. Momentary TP focus results mainly from situational factors (e.g., a party will probably foster a focus on the present, a coaching session – on the future, a funeral – on the past), whereas a frequently taken perspective, especially if reinforced by cultural and education influences, may result in relatively stable bias towards one or more time horizons. In their conceptual model of TP Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) distinguished between five TPs: Past Positive, Past Negative, Present Fatalism, Present Hedonism, and Future. In an ideal situation, an individual is able "to switch effectively among TPs depending on task features, situational considerations, and personal resources, rather than be biased towards a specific TP that is not adaptive across situations" (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, p. 1285). This "between-timezone flexibility",

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operationalized as BTP, has proven to be a robust positive predictor of SWB (e.g., Boniwell, Osin, Linley, & Ivanchenko, 2010; Zhang, Howell, & Stolarski, 2013), explaining more than 30% of variance in some SWB measures.

BTP could be then considered as an index of temporal self-regulation that enables an individual to obtain higher levels of SWB (Zhang et al., 2013). If BTP indeed remains so important for well-being, a question arises whether it could protect an individual from the abovementioned maladaptive impact of low extraversion and high neuroticism. One possible argument for such a “buffering moderation effect” is that BTP may counter temperamental tendencies towards low SWB. For instance, the neurotic but balanced individual can respond to negative emotions by adopting the TP that allows for constructive reappraisal of the source of stress (e.g., taking future perspective should facilitate task-oriented coping). Such claim results from theoretical analyses (e.g., Matthews & Stolarski, 2015) and is supported by research showing that BTP is related to emotional intelligence (Stolarski, Bitner, & Zimbardo, 2011) and adaptive mood profile (Stolarski, Matthews, Postek, Zimbardo, & Bitner, 2014), and that clinical interventions aiming in balancing one's TP profile are highly effective in PTSD therapy (Sword, Sword, Brunskill, & Zimbardo, 2014). Therefore, the present study attempts to determine whether BTP acts as a moderator of the relationship between the two personality traits and well-being.

In particular, it was expected that both extraversion and neuroticism are significant and robust predictors of SWB (H1) and that BTP predicts SWB when controlling for these personality traits (H2). Further, it was expected that BTP moderates the associations between neuroticism and SWB (H3), as well as extraversion and SWB (H4) such that on high levels of TP balance these relationships are attenuated, whereas on low levels of balance they are particularly pronounced. It is worth reiterating here that the study is concerned with variation in well-being in nonclinical samples.

2. Method

2.1. Participants & procedure

The sample comprised 265 participants (54% females), aged between 18 and 51 ($M = 22.64$, $SD = 3.65$) completed a set of three questionnaires: NEO-Five Factor Inventory, Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, and Satisfaction With Life Scale. The sample consisted of university students and their families. They were tested in home settings by one of five trained pollsters, psychology students taking part in the author's M.A. seminar in psychology of individual differences. Immediately after test completion pollsters checked for any missing data in the questionnaires and, if necessary, asked a participant to supplement their answers. This allowed to avoid a necessity to handle any missing data. We aimed to reach a sample size of 265, as it would allow for detecting correlations exceeding .20 at the $p < .001$ level. Therefore, we stopped the data collection after this sample size was reached. Data were not screened for outliers.

2.2. Measures

The Big Five personality traits were measured with NEO-FFI questionnaire (Costa & McCrae, 1992a,b) in the Polish adaptation by Zawadzki, Strelau, Szczepaniak, and Śliwiska (1998). It consists of 60 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. Cronbach alphas for the Polish adaptation were .80 for neuroticism, .77 for extraversion, .68 for openness to experience, .68 for agreeableness, and .82 for conscientiousness, and are comparable to those reported by the authors of the original version, where alphas ranged from .68 to .86. Validity of the Polish version, assessed using other well-established personality measures (e.g., EPQ-R, FCB-TI), was satisfactory.

Subjective Well-Being was assessed using Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) in the Polish

adaptation by Juczyński (1999). It consists of five items scored with a 7-point Likert-type response format measuring global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Cronbach's alpha reported by the author of the Polish adaptation was .87 which is perfectly the same as in the original version. Its validity, assessed using a broad set of tools used in health psychology (e.g., Perceived Stress Scale, Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale, PANAS, SHS), was high.

Time Perspective dimensions were measured using the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), in Polish adaptation by Kozak and Mażewski (2007). It comprises five scales: Past Negative (.83), Past Positive (.70), Present Hedonistic (.81), Present Fatalistic (.71) and Future (.80). Alphas for the Polish version (in brackets) are comparable with those from the original version (.82, .80, .79, .74, .77, respectively). Both versions were validated using a broad set of personality measures and behavioral outcomes, including the Big Five Questionnaire, Tridimensional Personality Scale, Beck Depression Inventory, State-Trait Anxiety Scale, Sensation Seeking Scale, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, among many others.

Individual level of BTP was assessed using the Deviation from Balanced Time Perspective (DBTP) coefficient introduced by Stolarski et al. (2011) and further validated by Zhang et al. (2013). It is based on the ZTPI facet scores and is considered the most appropriate indicator of TP balance among method based on ZTPI scores (Stolarski, Wiberg & Osin, 2015). The DBTP is a measure of difference between an individual's actual TP and the optimal time perspective profile as stated by Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) which indicates how ill-balanced the time perspective of each person is. At the root of the DBTP is the assumption that there is an “optimal” point on each of the time perspective scales, allowing an individual to switch effectively between particular time horizons, depending on situational considerations. The main determinant of a BTP is how close an individual is to these optimal points. Following the abovementioned ‘optimal’ points on each TP dimension, proposed by Zimbardo and Boyd (2008), the following formula is then applied in calculating the DBTP:

$$DBTP = \sqrt{(oPN - ePN)^2 + (oPP - ePP)^2 + (oPF - ePF)^2 + (oPH - ePH)^2 + (oF - eF)^2}$$

where: oPN – ePN is (optimal Past Negative) – (an individual's empirical Past Negative); this procedure is repeated for each time perspective dimension. Thus, the root of the sum of squared deviations of individual's scores from the optimal points on each ZTPI dimension is calculated. DBTP values close to zero indicate almost perfectly Balanced Time Perspective (the theoretical ideal) whereas large positive values indicate that an individual's time perspective is “out of balance” (and is expected to be maladaptive) (see Stolarski, Wiberg, et al., 2015, for exhaustive reasons for this method for calculating balance). One may ask why is DBTP based on an “optimal” TP profile, whereas by definition BTP is expressed in between-time horizon flexibility. Actually this is certainly some simplification, however Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) state that these particular levels of each TP dimension allow an individual to easily switch between the three adaptive time horizons (Past-Positive, Present-Hedonistic and Future), and only occasionally take the maladaptive ones (Past-Negative and Present-Fatalistic). The “optimal” points are based on a huge ZTPI dataset collected from a non-clinical sample comprising mainly young adults (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999, 2008), and thus the coefficient is applicable to the present sample. The DBTP is usually normally distributed and is often interpreted as a meta-level TP dimension (Stolarski, Fioulaine, et al., 2015; Stolarski, Wiberg, et al., 2015). Its pronounced associations with mood (Stolarski et al., 2014), well-being (Zhang et al., 2013), cortisol dynamics (Olivera-Figueroa, Juster, Morin-Major, Marin, & Lupien, 2015) and emotional intelligence (Stolarski et al., 2011) provide a strong evidence for the indicator's validity.

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