Psychological flourishing: Validation of the French version of the Flourishing Scale and exploration of its relationships with personality traits

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to test the psychometric properties of the French version of the Flourishing Scale (FS, Diener et al., 2010) as a means to investigate the relationships between psychological flourishing and Big-Five personality traits. Participants for the study were 403 French sophomore students. Confirmatory factor analyses provided support for a single construct and an invariant structure of FS. Results revealed good fits in convergent validity through well-being related variables and the scale demonstrated satisfactory internal reliability. Correlation analysis indicated that conscientiousness had the highest positive correlation with psychological flourishing; extraversion and agreeableness were also positively related, whereas neuroticism was negatively related. A low positive correlation was also observed between FS and openness. Overall, personality traits accounted for 30% of variance in predicting psychological flourishing. Consistent with previous studies of associations between personality traits and well-being, our findings may well extend the concept of psychological flourishing.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Well-being: two main conceptions

Over the past few years, research has overwhelmingly focused on well-being in order to understand the reason people feel happy and to investigate the underlying causes of global satisfaction (Oishi, 2012). Commonly, the notion of well-being refers to the subjective appraisals that individuals make about the quality of their lives based on their personal experiences, relationships, feelings, and overall functioning (Ryff & Singer, 2000). However, in the scientific literature, a significant conceptual distinction has been made between subjective (or *hedonic*) well-being and psychological (or *eudemonic*) well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a broad category of phenomena including a person's emotional responses, domain satisfaction, and global judgment of life satisfaction and employs a hedonist approach to happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). SWB is usually operationalized as a multidimensional construct referring to perceived life satisfaction and a balance between positive and negative affect (Argyle, 1999; Diener, 1984, 1994; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996). In contrast, psychological well-being (PWB) is defined in terms of psychological functioning and personal growth, including the way in which people interact with their environment, and employs a eudaemonist approach to happiness (Ryff, 1989). Therefore, PWB can be operationalized in various ways, depending on which aspects of life are the focus of theoretical and epistemological interest (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008). On review of the literature (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), Ryff's model (1989) may be considered as the most consensual taxonomy of PWB. The model distinguishes six dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

1.2. Psychological flourishing

Recently, the opposition between the hedonist and eudaemonist approaches to well-being has been discussed in a more integrative way by several leading theorists in the field. Kashdan et al. (2008) suggested that these two approaches are not totally different, while proposing that there are no relevant benefits to follow the general trend, which consists in separating them into two independent dimensions. Likewise, Henderson and Knight (2012) proposed that these conceptions "should not be treated categorically, nor considered mutually exclusive, but rather that hedonia and eudemonia operate in tandem, in a synergistic fashion" (p. 201). Seligman (2011) also attempted to integrate the two conceptions by considering that hedonist and eudaemonist approaches denote different but important aspects of the general well-being construct. The author combined several

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components derived from both aspects and designated a new *flourishing theory* of well-being. Thus, the term "flourishing" was proposed to describe the desirable state whereby both hedonist and eudaemonist components of well-being are simultaneously present within an individual (Huppert & So, 2013). Despite the growing interest in the concept of psychological flourishing, no purpose-made instruments were available for its assessment (Diener et al., 2010; Hone, Jarden, & Schofield, 2014; Huppert & So, 2013). In consequence, Diener et al. (2010) addressed this issue by providing a new psychometric scale to evaluate psychological flourishing: the *Flourishing Scale* (FS). This new concise instrument was developed on recent theories of human flourishing and psychological and social well-being such as universal human psychological needs, meaning and purpose in life, involvement in activities, optimism, positive social relationships, self-esteem, and feelings of competence (Diener et al., 2010). The FS may therefore correspond more closely to non-hedonistic philosophical theories of well-being and reflect more accurately the items including content that goes beyond PWB.

1.3. Personality traits as predictors of well-being

Most studies conducted on the association between personality traits and well-being have focused primarily on SWB. As the most widely accepted model for describing personality traits, the Five-Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) has been acknowledged as one of the most important and consistent predictors of SWB, with evidence derived from a large variety of research methodologies and an abundant number of studies (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Accordingly, neuroticism was frequently designated as the strongest predictor of negative affect and life satisfaction, while positive affect was steadily predicted by extraversion (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener & Lucas, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1991). Even though the implications of these two personality traits were clearly established, conscientiousness and agreeableness were also considered as significant predictors of SWB (McCrae & Costa, 1991). In the meta-analysis conducted by Steel, Schmidt, and Shultz (2008), the associations between each personality trait and SWB were extensively tested. These authors observed that neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness were significantly related to all the components of SWB whereas openness was of slightly less significance. Overall, these five personality traits accounted for a significant 39% of the variance in SWB.

In contrast, the relationships between personality traits and PWB have received less attention (Kokko, Tolvanen, & Pulkinnen, 2013). For instance, Schmutte and Ryff (1997) found that PWB was negatively related to neuroticism and positively related to extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, while no significant relationship between PWB and openness was reported. Similarly, Lamers, Westerhof, Kovács, and Bohlmeijer (2012) observed that PWB had moderate positive correlation to emotional stability (reversed neuroticism), extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness with .18, .27, .20, .13, and .25, respectively. In another recent study, Kokko et al. (2013) observed significant correlations between personality traits and PWB. These correlations across middle adulthood ranged from .45 to .63 for neuroticism, from .24 to .52 for extraversion, from .17 to .33 for conscientiousness, from .15 to .36 for openness, and from .16 to .34 for agreeableness. Globally, these authors reported personality traits as better predictors of PWB rather than SWB.

1.4. Purpose of this study

Though relationships between personality traits, SWB, and PWB have received considerable attention, to our knowledge, no study has yet investigated the links between personality traits and psychological flourishing. However, this new conception of well-being integrates elements from the hedonist and eudaemonist approaches, which are well known to be conceptually distinct. Thus, empirical studies indicated differential but also overlapping degrees of association between personality traits and well-being, depending on how well-being is considered (as subjective or as psychological, and with which aspects) and assessed. Consequently, it is unclear whether personality traits are related to psychological flourishing as they are (in terms of degree of association) with SWB or PWB or whether personality traits would be related to higher levels of psychological flourishing because the latter provides an expanded conception of well-being.

Therefore, further studies are needed to increase understanding of the different aspects of well-being phenomena and to help identify and explain the most stable individual processes (such as personality traits) that facilitate psychological flourishing, and more globally promote positive human functioning.

The present study was designed to extend prior research on well-being by exploring the relationships between personality traits and psychological flourishing. First, in order to ensure a reliable and suitable measure of psychological flourishing, we examined the psychometric properties of the French version of the Flourishing Scale. Second, based on our initial results, we used the FS as a measure to explore the associations between Big-Five personality traits and psychological flourishing.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 403 sophomore students majoring in either psychology (48%) or in nursing (52%). Of these, 345 were female (85%), 57 were male (14%), while one participant did not report gender (<1%). Ages ranged from 18 to 62 years ($M = 23.08$, $SD = 5.77$), while one participant did not report this information (<1%).

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Psychological flourishing

The *Flourishing Scale* (FS, Diener et al., 2010) includes eight items and provides a single psychological flourishing score. Responses to each item use a 1–7 scale ranging from 'Strong Disagreement' to 'Strong Agreement'. All items are phrased as positive statements and the possible range of scores is from 8 (lowest possible) to 56 (highest possible). High scores indicate that respondents view themselves positively regarding important areas of functioning or that they have many psychological resources and strengths. For the present study, Cronbach's alpha reliability was .82.

The FS translation procedure consisted of three steps. First, the eight-item scale was translated simultaneously into French by two translators, who initially worked separately and were subsequently asked to collaborate until total agreement was reached. Second, the resulting French version was back-translated by a separate, native-English translator so it could be compared with the original English version. Third, a pre-test was conducted among seventy first-year students majoring in psychology (60 women and 8 men, and 2 participants who did not report their gender) with age ranging from 18 to 34 years ($M = 19.62$, $SD = 2.20$). The reliability of the 8-item scale was .81. Item comprehensibility was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (I don't understand at all) to 5 (I fully understand). Mean scores of item understanding ranged from 3.69 ($SD = 1.23$, item 6) to 4.79 ($SD = .45$, item 7) with an intra-class correlation coefficient of .72, IC 95% [.61; .81]. According to this preliminary investigation, scale reliability and item understanding were considered sufficient for the scale to be used in the next studies.

2.2.2. Life satisfaction

The *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), adapted to French by Blais, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Brière (1989) from the original English version, was used as a unidimensional cognitive measure of overall life satisfaction. This scale consists of five items using a 7-point Likert-type response format,