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## Importance, pressure, and success: Dimensions of values and their links to personality

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### ABSTRACT

A total of 246 students (mean age = 18 years) completed measures assessing the Big-Five personality domains, psychoticism, and three dimensions of values (importance, pressure, and success). Results showed that participants high in neuroticism did not differ in *what* they valued, but felt more value pressure and less value success. Extraverts valued sensation-seeking, but did not necessarily value other people, and generally felt more successful than others at their values. People high in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and low in psychoticism were similar in endorsing pro-social values, but differed in their perceived success at those values. The results are discussed with reference to knowledge about these personality dimensions and their implications for different dimensions of values.

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### 1. Introduction

Human behaviour is shaped in multiple ways. One way is through the values we hold. Values act as frames of reference and are linked to one's sense of self and thereby shape our behaviours in predictable ways (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Values are linked to the sorts of goals we set, how attractive or not we find those goals, and how we go about achieving them (Feather, 1988). Another way that behaviour is shaped is through our personality dispositions. Personality is known to have multiple consequential outcomes and these have been well documented (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006).

This paper focuses on the links between personality and different dimensions of values. The associations between personality dimensions and values have been well articulated in research (e.g., Parks & Guay, 2009; Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002). However, far less research has examined the personality correlates of the different dimensions of values. For instance, are the personality factors that underpin ratings of the *importance* of values, the bulk of research thus far, the same as those that drive our perceived *success* at achieving those values? And, are these factors the same as those that drive our perceived *pressure* to adopt certain values?

We use the term values as a shorthand to refer to both terminal values (things done for their own sake) and abstract goals (things done in the service of values). Values research typically focuses on one rating dimension, namely, importance. However, this is not the only dimension that is of practical relevance. Personal strivings research suggests that other relevant dimensions include the extent a value is felt as externally controlled (what we term “pressure”), and the extent that one is successful at living according to values (Emmons, 1986; Romero, Villar, Luengo, & Gómez-Fraguela, 2009; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Personal strivings research takes an idiographic approach (people generate their own values or strivings), whereas values research takes more of a “universalist approach”, requiring people to assess the importance of value items that cover a wide variety of “universal” domains. The present study utilized the values approach, but expanded the ratings of those values beyond importance to include ratings of pressure and success.

The major personality dimensions (notably the Big Five as well as Eysenck's psychoticism dimension) have been found to be significantly associated with value importance ratings. For instance, extraversion is positively associated with stimulation, hedonism and achievement values, intellect/openness with universalism and self direction values, conscientiousness with achievement and conformity values, agreeableness with benevolence and tradition values (Haslam, Whelan, & Bastian, 2009; Parks & Guay, 2009; Roccas et al., 2002), and neuroticism with tradition (Haslam et al., 2009) and security values (Luk & Bond, 1993). Psychoticism has been negatively associated with prioritising

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satisfying relationships, personal growth and religiosity (e.g. Heaven, 1993).

### 1.1. The present study

This study extends previous research by examining the personality correlates of value pressure and success. In addition to importance, we argue that the extent an individual feels pressured to hold a value and the extent of success at living according to those values (Emmons, 1986) will assist in distinguishing between different types of personality.

Given the emotional instability of neurotics (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968) and the association between neuroticism and avoidance goals which, in turn, are linked to a higher perceived pressure to hold a value (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998), we expected neuroticism to be associated with more pressure to hold values. Conversely, those high on intellect/openness tend to be non-conventional (Costa & McCrae, 1985) and are therefore less likely to be influenced by external pressure from others. Given that high O individuals also have a tendency to prioritise self-direction and autonomy values (Haslam et al., 2009), we expected this personality variable to be negatively related to pressure to hold values.

Extraversion has been linked to positive affect (PA) whereas negative affect (NA) comprises the core of neuroticism (Steel, Schmidt, & Schultz, 2008). PA has been linked to greater motivation and goal success, whilst NA has been associated with less goal success and lower goal setting (Emmons, 1986; Little, Lecci, & Watkinson, 1992). Thus, we expected that extraverts would be more successful and neurotics less successful at living according to their values, since goals are often the physical realization of values. Although we expected high neurotics to report less success than low neurotics, we did not expect neurotics to differ in what they believe to be important values, in keeping with past literature (e.g., Roccas et al., 2002).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 246 students (137 females, 106 males, 3 unidentified) from five high schools in a Catholic Diocese of New South Wales, Australia. The mean age of the sample was 18 years. (range = 17–18).

### 2.2. Measures

The following measures form the basis of this report:

#### 2.2.1. The survey of guiding principles (SGP; Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008)

The SGP was developed based on a synthesis of the values and goals literature, measuring not only item importance, but also pressure and success. It was designed to be brief and cover as wide a range of principles as possible. The SGP was designed to build on previous values measures, rather than be distinct from them. As such, the items are similarly worded to that used by Schwartz (1992) and include items derived from his 10 value dimensions (see scales below). Research suggests that ratings of value importance on the SGP correlate highly with ratings on Schwartz's measure (Williams & Ciarrochi, 2010). In addition to Schwartz's dimensions, the SGP contains items related to spiritual and religious values, to sexuality, and seeking positive emotions.

Previous factor analytic research on importance ratings suggests that some items on the SGP were sufficiently similar to be averaged together to form a new scale (Ciarrochi & Bailey, 2008). The new scales were named power (e.g., 'having authority and being in charge,' 2 items;  $\alpha = .89$ ), conscientious achievement (e.g., 'being ambitious and hard working,' 5 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ), hedonism (e.g., 'having an enjoyable, leisurely life,' 2 items;  $\alpha = .79$ ), stimulation (e.g., 'having an exciting life,' 3 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ), artistic direction (e.g., 'being creative,' 4 items;  $\alpha = .82$ ), benevolence (e.g., 'being loyal to friends, family, and/or my group,' 4 items;  $\alpha = .87$ ), religious values ('being at one with god,' 2 items;  $\alpha = .92$ ), health (e.g., 'being physically fit,' 3 items;  $\alpha = .80$ ), sex ('being sexually active,' 2 items;  $\alpha = .79$ ), and seeking positive emotions (e.g., 'experiencing positive mood states,' 3 items;  $\alpha = .85$ ). If a principle did not fall into one of these scales, it was utilized as an individual item in all analyses reported below.

Participants rated the extent that fifty-four values were important to them, on a Likert scale of 1 (*unimportant*) to 9 (*extremely important*). Respondents then indicated the extent they felt pressured to hold each value, from 1 (*no pressure*) to 9 (*extreme pressure*). Next, participants indicated their level of success from 1 (*not at all successful*) to 5 (*highly successful*).

For importance ratings,  $\alpha$ s ranged from .79 (hedonism) to .92 (religious values), pressure ratings ranged from .78 (power) to .96 (stimulation), and success ratings ranged from .64 (sex) to .88 (stimulation). These reliabilities fall within the range commonly observed for values (see Roccas et al., 2002).

#### 2.2.2. International personality item pool five factor scale (IPIP-50; Goldberg, 2008)

This instrument assesses the major 5 personality dimensions, namely extraversion (E), openness-intellect (O), neuroticism (N), conscientiousness (C), and agreeableness (A) with strong convergent validity with the NEO Inventory Revised. Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*very inaccurate description of me*) to 5 (*very accurate*). Alpha coefficients were  $E = .78$ ,  $N = .81$ ,  $O = .78$ ,  $C = .78$ , and  $A = .77$ .

#### 2.2.3. Psychoticism scale (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975)

We used Corulla's (1990) revision of this instrument. It comprises 12 items ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

### 2.3. Procedure

After obtaining parental and student permission, participants completed surveys in class under the supervision of a teacher or researcher. The IPIP and psychoticism scales were completed first, using paper and pencil, followed by completion of the SGP online. Surveys were completed anonymously and without discussion.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Skewness

Several variables were slightly negatively skewed, with skewness statistics being larger than twice their standard error. To deal with skewness, we examined all relationships in parametric (e.g., Pearson) and nonparametric (e.g., Spearman) analyses, and declared a result to be significant only if it was significant in both instances. For ease of interpretation, Pearson correlations are presented in the tables.

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