


The Role of Personality Traits, Attachment Style, and Satisfaction With Relationships in the Subjective Well-Being of Americans, Portuguese, and Mozambicans

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Abstract

Personality traits, attachment security, and satisfaction with relationships are each important predictors of subjective well-being (SWB). However, no studies have included these predictors together to analyze the unique contribution of each to SWB. Furthermore, most studies are empirically based in Western/industrialized societies, and few studies include African countries. This article addresses the unique contribution of extroversion, neuroticism, attachment security, and satisfaction with relationships to SWB across three samples of 1,574 university students: 497 from North Carolina (United States of America), 544 from Maputo (Mozambique), and 533 from Lisbon (Portugal). Structural equation modeling analysis showed that in the American sample, emotional stability was a more important predictor of global SWB than satisfaction with relationships. In the Mozambican sample, satisfaction with relationships was far more important as a predictor of SWB than emotional stability. In the Portuguese sample, emotional stability and satisfaction with relationships were equally important predictors of SWB. The main difference between the three samples was the contribution of satisfaction with relationships to SWB. Similarities between the three samples include the low or nonsignificant contributions of extroversion and attachment to SWB, above and beyond the contribution of satisfaction with relationships and neuroticism, suggesting they may be sharing variance in the prediction of SWB.

Keywords

personality, attachment, satisfaction with relationships, subjective well-being, cross-cultural

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There is a large body of evidence that personality traits, attachment security, and satisfaction with relationships are each important predictors of subjective well-being (SWB; Diener & Ryan, 2009; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). However, to our knowledge, there have been no studies that included personality traits, attachment, and satisfaction with relationships together to analyze the unique contributions of each variable to SWB. Furthermore, most studies and theories in psychology are developed and empirically based in Western/industrialized societies, assuming that psychological processes are universal (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Moreover, despite much cross-cultural research in the area of SWB (see Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003, for a review), few studies have included samples from nonindustrialized cultures, particularly Middle Eastern and African countries. The present study addresses both of these limitations of past research by using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine (a) the unique contribution of Big Five personality traits, attachment, and relationship satisfaction to SWB and (b) whether the role of personality traits, attachment style, and relationship satisfaction in SWB varies across three nations: the United States, Portugal, and Mozambique. A third goal is to explore mediation of the effects of these variables on SWB. Specifically, we cross-culturally examine (c) attachment style and satisfaction with relationships as mediators of the effect between personality and SWB and attachment style as a mediator of the effect between personality and satisfaction with relationships.

The Predictors of Subjective Well-Being

SWB is a broad construct that includes satisfaction with life as a whole and with various life domains, the frequent experience of positive affect and the relatively infrequent experience of negative affect (Diener & Ryan, 2009; see Arthaud-Day, Rode, Mooney, & Near, 2005; Galinha & Ribeiro, 2008, for empirical support). In the following section, we provide a brief overview of the three predictors of SWB examined in the present study: personality, attachment, and satisfaction with relationships.

Personality and SWB. Personality can be defined as consisting of individual trait characteristics that are mainly determined by innate disposition (Costa & McCrae, 2000) but also shaped by environmental experiences (Sanson, Hamphil, & Smart, 2002). According to the Five Factor model (Digman, 1990), personality can be comprehensively described along the five broad dimensions of neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Among these five traits, extroversion and neuroticism are the most consistently and strongly related to SWB through their associations with positive affect and negative affect, respectively (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Lucas, 2008). Personality has also been associated with the quality of, and satisfaction with, romantic relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). Specifically, extroversion has been positively—and neuroticism negatively—related to romantic relationship quality (White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004).

Attachment and SWB. Attachment style is a relatively stable characteristic related to expectations about significant relationships with others. It is considered to be a joint product of early experiences in attachment relationships and current cognitive and social contexts (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The contribution of genes, however, is not excluded from the process (Crawford et al., 2007). According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2007), attachment style develops as a result of the individual's experiences with attachment figures and is based upon an appraisal of the figure's availability and responsiveness, producing an adaptive regulation of one's emotions in response. Repeated experiences with caregivers are responsible for a sense of attachment security or insecurity and will constitute schematic mental representations of these experiences. These schematic mental representations will constitute working models of action that are relatively stable, although they are open to change. Attachment insecurity is characterized by hyperactivation (anxiety) or