



## Big Five traits mediate associations between values and subjective well-being

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### ABSTRACT

Traits and values have both been shown to predict subjective well-being (SWB), but the two sets of predictors have rarely been investigated together. A study of 180 undergraduates compared their predictive contribution and examined whether associations between values and SWB are mediated by traits. Several values from Schwartz's model were associated with SWB, but these associations were weaker than those between Big Five traits and SWB. These traits mediated all associations between values and SWB. By implication, associations between values and SWB are largely indirect effects of stronger and more basic associations between traits and SWB.

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### 1. Introduction

Personality traits have long been recognized as strong predictors of subjective well-being (SWB) (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998) conceptualised as people's levels of positive versus negative emotion and their satisfaction with life. SWB is consistently associated with all Big Five factors, notably low Neuroticism and high Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Openness. Relatively little research has examined whether SWB is also associated with values. Values are importantly different from traits, reflecting what people believe to be personally important rather than how they tend to think, feel and behave (Schwartz, 1992).

Several theorists have argued that particular values are associated with SWB. Self-determination theorists (Deci & Ryan, 1991) propose that pursuing intrinsic goals such as autonomy and relatedness leads to SWB more reliably than pursuing extrinsic goals such as money and fame. Similarly, Bilsky and Schwartz (1994) argued that SWB is more strongly associated with realizing values related to growth needs than those related to deficiency needs. Framed within Schwartz's (1992) value model, these theorists imply that values of Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Achievement and Stimulation should be positively associated with SWB, and more extrinsic or deficiency-related values (e.g., Power, Tradition, Conformity, and Security) may be negatively associated.

Some studies have supported these predictions. Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) found that Self-direction, Achievement and Stimulation were positively associated with positive affect, whereas Security, Conformity and Tradition values were negatively associ-

ated. Similarly, Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, and Knafo (2002) found positive affect to be associated with Self-direction, Stimulation and Universalism values and negatively associated with Power and Conformity values. Oishi, Diener, Suh, and Lucas (1999) demonstrated positive implications of Achievement values for SWB, and Sheldon (2005) found intrinsic values to be associated with high SWB. Finally, Kasser and Ryan (1993) showed that Benevolence values were associated with high SWB and extrinsic values with low SWB.

Although traits and values are conceptually distinct, they are empirically related. Roccas et al. (2002), for example, found that Extraversion was associated with Achievement, Stimulation and Hedonism values; Openness with Self-direction, Universalism and Stimulation values; Agreeableness with Benevolence, Tradition and Conformity values; and Conscientiousness with Achievement and Conformity values. Although small to moderate in size, these associations imply that the trait and value domains have significant common variance.

If traits and values are empirically related, associations between values and SWB may be mediated by traits. This possibility is consistent with the findings of Roccas et al. (2002), who showed that values accounted for 5% of the variance in positive affect but added only 2% to the variance explained by Big Five traits. However, Roccas et al. did not test for mediation and assessed only one component of SWB (positive affect). We therefore tested for mediation in a study of Big Five traits and Schwartzian values that included a more comprehensive SWB assessment. We hypothesized that any observed associations between values and SWB would be indirect (i.e., mediated by traits), given previous work indicating that traits are more powerfully linked to indices of SWB than values, and account for some of the predictive variance ascribed to values (Roccas et al., 2002).

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**2. Method**

**2.1. Sample**

Participants were 180 psychology undergraduates who took part in the study as a course research participation requirement. They included 132 women and 46 men (two did not indicate gender) and their mean age was 22.0 (SD = 3.9).

**2.2. Materials**

Participants completed a questionnaire containing four scales presented in a standard order.

**2.2.1. International personality item pool five factor scale (IPIP)**

This well-validated 100-item inventory (Goldberg, 1999) assesses the Big Five factors, with 20 items per factor. Items are rated from 1 (very inaccurate) to 5 (very accurate). Internal consistencies were very good to excellent Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  ranging from 0.85 to 0.94.

**2.2.2. Schwartz value schedule (SVS)**

This 56-item inventory (Schwartz, 1992) assesses the ten segments in Schwartz’s value model. Scales range from 2 to 8 items, rated on a scale from –1 (opposed to my values) to 7 (of supreme importance). Internal consistencies were adequate to very good,  $\alpha$ s ranging from 0.57 to 0.81 (mean = 0.70).

**2.2.3. Positive and negative affect scales (PANAS)**

These 10-item scales (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) measure the extent to which positive and negative affective states (PA & NA) are generally experienced, rated from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). Both scales had good to very good reliability ( $\alpha$ s = .72 (PA) & 0.84 (NA)).

**2.2.4. Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS)**

This 5-item scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) assesses life satisfaction, with items rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Internal consistency was very good ( $\alpha$  = .85).

**2.3. Procedure**

Participants completed the study in groups of 15–28 in a supervised classroom setting. Completion of the questionnaire typically took less than 20 min.

**3. Results**

Correlations between the traits and values are presented in Table 1, and closely resemble previous research (Roccas et al.,

2002). Extraversion is most strongly associated with values in the “openness to change” region (Stimulation, Hedonism, Self-direction), Agreeableness with prosocial values (Benevolence), Conscientiousness with “conservation” values (Conformity, Tradition, Security), and Openness with self-transcendent and openness to change values (Universalism, Self-direction, Stimulation). Neuroticism had a positive association with Tradition values and a negative association with Stimulation values.

A composite measure of SWB was constructed by standardizing the SWLS and the PANAS scales and combining them (SWB = SWLS + PA – NA). This composite incorporates the two dimensions of affect and a cognitive assessment of well-being (PA/NA:  $r = -0.12, p > .05$ ; SWLS/PA:  $r = 0.37, p < .001$ ; SWLS/NA:  $r = -.40, p < .001$ ). Correlations between SWB and its components and the traits are presented in Table 2. SWB had strong to moderate associations with Neuroticism, Extraversion and Agreeableness, with smaller but statistically reliable correlations for Openness and Conscientiousness. Neuroticism was most strongly associated with NA, and the other traits with PA. Correlations between SWB and the values (Table 3) were fewer and generally smaller. SWB was correlated with four intrinsic or growth-related values (i.e., Stimulation, Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence), these correlations based primarily on associations with PA.

We tested our mediation hypothesis using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) approach. A precondition of mediation is that the predictor, dependent and potential mediator variables all have significant bivariate associations. We therefore restricted our analysis to the four values that correlated significantly with SWB and to those traits that were significantly correlated both with these values and with SWB, yielding eight triads. Table 4 presents partial correlations of traits and values with SWB (e.g., the value/SWB correlation partialling out the trait), and the value and trait  $\beta$ s when both simultaneously predict SWB. A significant effect for the trait and a nonsignificant effect for the value indicate full mediation, and the Sobel test assesses significant mediation. Sobel tests of reverse

**Table 2**

Associations between traits and positive affect (PA), negative affect (NA), satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) and the SWB index

	NA	PA	SWLS	SWB
Neuroticism	.66***	-.27***	-.45***	-.64***
Extraversion	-.26**	.55***	.44***	.57***
Agreeableness	-.19*	.39***	.28***	.39***
Conscientiousness	-.02	.26***	.07	.16*
Openness	-.10	.47***	.15*	.33***

\*  $p < .05$ .  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ .  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3**

Associations between values and positive affect (PA), negative affect (NA), satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) and the SWB index

	NA	PA	SWLS	SWB
Benevolence	.01	.23**	.13	.16*
Conformity	.04	.14	.06	.08
Tradition	.11	-.02	-.09	-.10
Security	.09	.15*	-.06	.00
Power	.02	.04	-.09	-.04
Achievement	.08	.36***	-.01	.12
Hedonism	.01	.21**	.07	.13
Stimulation	-.05	.39***	.19*	.29***
Self-direction	.00	.38***	.02	.18*
Universalism	-.02	.29***	.06	.17*

\*  $p < .05$ .  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ .  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Table 1**

Correlations between traits and values (decimal omitted)

Values	E	A	C	N	O
Benevolence	11	35***	16*	10	-.01
Conformity	05	23**	30***	12	-.14
Tradition	-.10	19*	27***	22**	-.28***
Security	08	15*	30***	13	-.02
Power	14	-.20**	03	-.04	-.08
Achievement	21**	05	17*	-.09	11
Hedonism	33***	06	-.10	-.10	16*
Stimulation	39***	03	-.05	-.21**	32***
Self-direction	27***	11	12	-.03	40***
Universalism	11	10	12	-.05	42***

\*  $p < .05$ .  
 \*\*  $p < .01$ .  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

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