



Happiness, introversion–extraversion and happy introverts

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Received 27 October 1999; received in revised form 24 February 2000

Abstract

Some 270 mature participants completed the Oxford happiness inventory (OHI), the extraversion and neuroticism subscales of the Eysenck personality questionnaire and measures covering several cognitive and other aspects of individual personality. Extraversion was associated with happiness as is usually found, but the correlations of other personality differences, particularly those related to life satisfaction, were greater. These variables were substantially independent of extraversion but other variables such as empathic and affiliative tendencies were not. Extraversion is primarily a measure of sociability, and social relationships are a self-evident source of happiness. Nonetheless, a substantial minority of the participants could be classified as happy introverts. In terms of preference for solitude, relations with friends, and taking part in potentially introspective activities, the behaviours of happy introverts and happy extraverts were virtually identical. It is suggested that the mechanism by which introversion–extraversion affects happiness is different from that of the other variables, and might better be considered as an instrumental variable that mediates the ways individuals choose to achieve their own happiness. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Happy introverts; Happiness; Extraversion; Oxford happiness inventory

1. Introduction

Subjective well-being, or happiness, is not necessarily a unitary construct. Diener (1984) has argued that subjective well-being has at least three components: positive affect, negative affect and cognitive variables such as satisfaction with life. Positive affect correlates strongly with

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extraversion and negative affect with neuroticism. Most measures of happiness also correlate positively with extraversion. A recent meta-analysis (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998) reported correlations between extraversion and several measures of subjective well-being between 0.17 and 0.27, although in studies with the Oxford happiness inventory (OHI) (Argyle, Martin & Lu, 1995) happiness and extraversion are typically associated with correlation coefficients of about 0.45. For such reasons, extraversion has come to be regarded as the individual personality difference that is most strongly and positively allied with happiness. In a longitudinal study, Costa, MacCrae and Norris (1981) reported that extraversion predicted positive affect 17 years later. More recently, Tellegen (1985) has put forward the complementary idea that happiness, or more specifically positive emotionality, forms the core of the trait of extraversion.

The main characteristic of the extravert is social activity, which can be a major source of happiness (Argyle & Lu, 1990a). Hills, Argyle and Reeves (2000) investigated some motivational factors that might lead young people to engage in a variety of leisure pursuits. As such activities are voluntary and not generally undertaken for material gain, it seems reasonable to assume that they are carried out for the satisfaction or happiness that they are expected to generate. The most widely applicable explanation for taking part in leisure activities was found to be the opportunity they created for social interaction, which provides further support for a link between happiness and the sociability that characterises the extravert.

However, these results are not fully consistent with personal observation. Most people can number among their friends and acquaintances those who appear to be happy without being particularly gregarious. The above results are also at variance with the ideas of those classical philosophers, for example Aristotle and Epicurus, who have given the greatest attention to human happiness. Their prescriptions for happiness involve withdrawal from many of the social aspects of life and living a quiet, peaceful existence in relative solitude. The same can be said of the ways of life commended by most religious systems. Their aim is to provide great personal happiness for believers, either in life or after death, and medieval anchorites and hermits believed that total isolation was the way to achieve it. Nevertheless, religious systems usually prescribe detailed codes of social behaviour that may include taking part in regular corporate worship. This can be a source of social support that may in turn enhance well-being (Hills & Argyle, 1998a). However, these codes are generally regarded as duties or obligations and not as the primary source of religious happiness; religious happiness comes from a personal relationship with the Divine. In this context, it is noteworthy that the majority of those who report intense religious experiences say that these occur in solitude (Hay & Morisey, 1978).

As originally described by Jung (1928), introverts and extraverts differ in their primary orientations. The introvert's main concern is to establish autonomy and independence of other people, whereas the extravert looks towards and seeks the company of others. Jung envisaged introversion and extraversion as two alternative orientations, and expressed no opinion about which was the more desirable. However, Jung's typology was adopted by other workers beginning with Freud, who considered extravert behaviour to be a sign of maturity and introvert behaviour a sign of arrested development (Coan, 1994).

A higher-order factor corresponding to Jung's introversion–extraversion has been identified in most multidimensional personality inventories developed over the past 75 years. In consequence, much research has been devoted to identifying the individual traits and behaviours that form its component parts. From a consideration of the principal existing models of extraversion, Watson

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