



# Your personality on a good day: How trait and state personality predict daily well-being



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## ABSTRACT

The dynamic mediation model (Wilt, Nofle, Fleeson, & Spain, 2012) explains the associations between personality traits and happiness through links between personality states and daily well-being. To test this model, and the mediators of these relations, we examined if between- and within-person variation in personality was associated with daily well-being for undergraduates ( $N = 133$ ) and US adults ( $N = 117$ ). The model explained the trait neuroticism and daily well-being association. Also, after controlling for traits, people were happier on days in which they were extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, and open to experience. Finally, these associations were partially mediated by the satisfaction of daily psychological needs. We discuss how the operationalization of state extraversion might impact its relation with daily well-being.

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## 1. Introduction

Personality is important. It influences people's internal states, interactions with each other, and behaviors relevant on a larger social scale (see Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006). Also, while there is some uncertainty regarding specific behaviors and activities that ensure sustainable happiness, research over the past 50 years has identified two broad variables consistently related to life satisfaction: (1) life circumstances and (2) personality traits. Be it through good health, social relationships, community involvement, or psychological need satisfaction, personality traits tend to explain about 50% of the variance in subjective well-being (Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002; Vittersø & Nilsen, 2002).

To better understand the association between personality traits and subjective well-being (or happiness), most researchers rely on The Big Five framework (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This framework consists of five superordinate traits: extraversion (i.e., being socially outgoing), agreeableness (i.e., having compassion and willingness to cooperate), conscientiousness (i.e., being reliable and organized), neuroticism (i.e., being emotionally unstable), and

openness to experience (i.e., being broad-minded, creative, and imaginative). Decades of research demonstrate that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness are positively correlated with subjective well-being, while neuroticism is negatively correlated with subjective well-being (for a complete meta-analysis see Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008). Further, these strong personality and affect correlations are consistent across several diverse cultures (e.g., the United States, Germany, Japan, Mexico, and Ghana; see Schimmack et al., 2002).

However, because personality traits assess individual differences across many situations, traits only differentiate individuals from each other. In this way, there tends to be less consideration of how within-person personality fluctuations impact important outcomes (e.g., subjective well-being; see Fleeson, 2001). Further, with more comprehensive state personality assessments we can better understand how personality traits contributes to subjective well-being (Fleeson, 2004). Specifically, Fleeson and colleagues proposed a framework which argues that the association between personality traits and subjective well-being is better understood by first linking personality states and emotions (i.e., the dynamic hypothesis; see Wilt, Nofle, Fleeson, & Spain, 2012). Quite elegantly, personality traits increase the propensity to enact specific personality states, which are associated with positive and negative emotions that ultimately influence well-being. While prior research has supported this dynamic mediation model (see Ching et al., 2014; Wilt et al., 2012), the potential mechanisms through

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which different personality states influence daily emotions remains an open question. Thus, the goal of this study is to answer two research questions: (a) how are personality traits and states associated with daily well-being (b) and does the satisfaction of different psychological needs mediate these relations?

## 2. How the dynamic mediation model links personality traits and global well-being

Why are the Big Five personality traits so strongly related to subjective well-being? McCrae and Costa (1991) suggest two models to explain why personality traits are strongly related to well-being: (a) the temperament model, which predicts that personality traits are linked to well-being because they are associated with consistent affective experiences (also see Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004) and (b) the instrumental model, which suggests that different personality traits are associated with different daily behaviors, actions, and circumstances, which in turn are associated with affective experiences.

Extending these models, Fleeson and colleagues have established the invaluable groundwork for studying the relationship between personality traits and well-being through an understanding of natural fluctuations in state personality (an individual's personality at a given moment; see Fleeson, 2001; Fleeson & Nofhle, 2008). The importance of the within-person approach to Big Five research is that it can help explain phenomena, including the influence of personality on daily well-being, underexplored in trait studies (Fleeson, 2004, 2012). Specifically, the dynamic mediation model attempts to explain the robust associations between personality traits and subjective well-being through two mediators: state personality and daily positive as well as negative emotions. That is, trait personality influences well-being through dynamic mediation: (a) each personality trait results in an increased propensity to enact daily behaviors (i.e., personality states) corresponding the personality trait, (b) enacting specific behaviors associated with certain personality states (e.g., extraverted behaviors) leads to increased positive emotions and decreased negative emotions, and (c) the accumulation of positive emotions (and decreased negative emotions) in daily life contributes to one's overall well-being. An example of this model is that generally extraverted people are happier because: (a) they more often enact extraverted behaviors (i.e., state extraversion), (b) these extraverted behaviors result in positive emotions during daily life, and (c) the experience of more positive affect on a daily basis results in increased overall subjective well-being. There is growing empirical support for the dynamic mediation model.

### 2.1. Support for the dynamic mediation model

There is emerging evidence that personality traits increase the propensity to enact behaviors that express that trait (Ching et al., 2014; Wilt et al., 2012). Specifically, Wilt et al. (2012) consistently demonstrated that trait extraversion significantly predicted enacted extraversion (e.g., "during the previous hour, how talkative were you?" [p. 1214]). For example, an extraverted person is more likely to self-select socializing with others (i.e., enacted extraversion) than an introverted person (Emmons, Diener, & Larsen, 1986). Further, Ching et al. (2014) showed that, even after controlling for the other Big Five traits, each personality trait was significantly associated with its corresponding state personality for a US sample of college students. Moreover, if people have the goal to enact extraverted or conscientious behaviors in a social setting, they indeed report feeling more extraverted and conscientious (McCabe & Fleeson, 2016). However, another reason for short-term personality variance may be the ever-changing nature

of people's daily lives (Fleeson, 2001). A person may feel highly outgoing in the midst of a social event; however, that same person may feel that he or she is not outgoing during leisure in social isolation. Indeed, Fleeson (2001) found that people report greater extraversion when surrounded by others. Additionally, individuals are more conscientious on a given day if they set goals at work on the day prior (Judge, Simon, Hurst, & Kelley, 2014). That said, people's broad personality traits influence their personality states in the corresponding domain through the course of a day.

In turn, there is robust support that personality states (e.g., enacted extraversion) are associated with daily well-being as well as positive and negative emotions. Specifically, there is emerging work showing that the contribution of state personality to daily well-being conceptually mirrors the larger literature on the association between personality traits and well-being. For example, just as trait extraversion is positively associated with global subjective well-being whereas trait neuroticism is negatively correlated with global subjective well-being (e.g., extraversion is the strongest predictor of positive affect and neuroticism is the strongest predictor of negative affect, see Steel et al., 2008), enacted extraverted states increase current positive emotions (e.g., McCabe & Fleeson, 2012; McNiel & Fleeson, 2006; McNiel, Lowman, & Fleeson, 2010) while enacted neurotic states increase current negative emotions (McNiel & Fleeson, 2006). Even introverted people experience a well-being boost when they act in an extraverted manner (Fleeson, Malanos, & Achille, 2002). Overall, across different cultures, the personality states of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience are associated with the experience of greater positive affect and lesser negative affect in their daily lives (Ching et al., 2014).

Finally, a few studies have provided direct support for the dynamic mediation model. Ching et al. (2014) found that trait extraversion predicts daily positive affect through the mechanism of state extraversion. That is, generally extraverted people, compared to generally introverted people, are happier on a daily basis as a result of enacting more extraverted behaviors. Likewise, people who are generally agreeable or open to new experiences, than people who score low on these personality domains, are more likely to enact agreeable and open behaviors in their daily lives; this is one reason that agreeable and open people are also happier in their day-to-day lives (Ching et al., 2014). However, although the dynamic mediation model helps explain the associations between personality traits and subjective well-being, fewer studies have examined the processes through which state personality contributes to state well-being. For example, people who feel extraverted at a particular time also perceive themselves to be making valuable social contributions at that time, and through this feeling of social contribution state extraversion predicts state well-being (Smillie, Wilt, Kabbani, Garratt, & Revelle, 2015). Given the need to know how personality states influence daily well-being, a major goal of this study is to test the mediators of these associations.

## 3. How personality states influence daily well-being

At a first look, Wilt et al.'s (2012) dynamic mediation model appears to fit better within McCrae and Costa's (1991) temperament model: state personality helps explain the aggregation of affective experiences associated with trait personality. However, we argue that the state links between personality and well-being may also reflect elements of the instrumental model: state personality affects people's daily behaviors, actions, and circumstances, which contribute to recurring positive or negative emotions. We will argue that satisfied psychological needs are likely mediators of the relation between personality states and daily well-being.

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