



# Dimensions of personality, domains of aspiration, and subjective well-being

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## Abstract

One hundred and seven respondents completed the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, the Aspiration Index, as well as measures of happiness, self-actualization, and self-esteem. Scores on the personality and aspiration scales were entered together in a regression equation to predict scores on happiness, self-actualization, and self-esteem. In accord with previous research it was found that greater extraversion and lower rated importance of financial success were associated with higher scores on happiness, self-actualization, and self-esteem. We also found that likelihood of financial success was associated with higher scores on self-esteem, likelihood of self-acceptance was associated with higher scores on self-actualization, and likelihood of community feeling was associated with higher scores on happiness. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, psychologists have become increasingly interested in what makes people happy. One avenue of research that has attracted much attention is the relationship between personality and happiness. Much research has now accumulated showing that extraversion is positively associated with well-being (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby & Ward, 1995; Furnham & Brewin, 1990; Headey & Wearing, 1989; Hotard, McFatter, McWhirter & Stegall, 1989; Lu, 1995; Lu & Argyle, 1991; Lu & Shih, 1997; Lu, Shih, Lin & Ju, 1997) and that neuroticism is negatively associated with well-being (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Brebner et al., 1995; Furnham & Brewin, 1990; Headey & Wearing, 1989; Hotard et al., 1989) (for reviews see Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990; Myers & Diener, 1995). However, because

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personality is conceptualised as an unchanging aspect of the person, knowing that personality is related to well being offers only very limited implications for psychotherapeutic practice. But, personality typically accounts for no more than 30% of the variance on well-being measures, and so there does remain much interest in discovering what other potentially modifiable factors are related to well being.

Another more recent approach to the study of well being which does provide a basis for psychotherapeutic practice is the focus on personal strivings (Emmons, 1986; 1991), personal goals (Brunstein, 1993) and aspirations in life (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; 1996). This more recent line of work draws on the humanistic theories of Rogers (1963), Maslow (1954), and Fromm (1976) in suggesting that the choices we make in life about what is important and what we want determine our level of well-being. Kasser and Ryan (1993) investigated the association between self-relevant values and expectations and psychological well-being, finding that when goals regarding extrinsic rewards or the contingent approval of others are more central to an individual than goals concerning intrinsic rewards, lower well-being occurs. Specifically, what Kasser and Ryan (1993) found was that well-being was negatively associated with a predominance of extrinsic life goals, i.e., aspirations towards financial success, and positively associated with a predominance of intrinsic life goals, i.e., aspirations towards affiliation, community, and self-acceptance. Kasser and Ryan (1996) present similar data. These data remain to be replicated in Britain. These studies, as well as others (King & Napa, 1998), provide support for the humanistic theories which emphasise intrinsic rather than extrinsic values as central to well being.

The objective of the present study is to investigate the association between personality, self-relevant intrinsic and extrinsic values and expectations, and psychological well-being. Are domains of aspiration able to explain variance in well being over and above dimensions of personality? If so, the emphasis on life goals and values is of potential importance in understanding how subjective well-being can be enhanced.

## 2. Method

Respondents were 107 students (40 males and 67 females) at the University of Essex ranging in age from 18 to 37 years (mean = 26.5, SD = 4.5). All completed a battery of questionnaires that included:

The Aspiration Index (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). This is a list of 21 possible aspirations representing four life domains, self-acceptance (4 items: e.g., “you will know and accept who you really are”); affiliation (6 items: e.g., “you will share your life with someone you love”); community feeling (6 items: e.g., you will donate time or money to charity”); and financial success (5 items: e.g., “you will have a job with high social status”). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale for personal importance and for likelihood of attainment. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the 8 subscales were: importance of self-acceptance (SAI)=0.72; importance of affiliation (AFI)=0.82; importance of community feeling (CFI)=0.80; importance of financial success (FSI)=0.69; likelihood of self-acceptance (SAC)=0.71; likelihood of affiliation (AFC)=0.79; likelihood of community feeling (CFC)=0.80; and likelihood of financial success (FSC)=0.72.

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