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Well-being is more than “a personality thing”: common and unique genetic effects on higher order factors of personality and well-being

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ABSTRACT:

Based on studies finding that genetic effects on well-being were completely shared with personality, some authors have concluded that “well-being is a personality thing” (Weiss et al. 2008). However, in these studies, well-being is often measured by specific traits (e.g., life satisfaction), while recent studies have suggested that well-being covers a broad spectrum of multiple, overlapping traits. Similarly, previous results are mostly limited to the Big Five personality traits, while personality can be organized hierarchically from general (e.g., Stability; DeYoung et al. 2002) to more specific traits (e.g., the Big Five). In this study, we investigate common and unique genetic influences on well-being and personality while taking their hierarchical organizations into account, by systematically testing competing theoretical independent and common pathway models. Data on the Big Five, life satisfaction, quality of life, self-rated health, loneliness and depression from 14,253 twins and their siblings from the Netherlands Twin Register are used. Multivariate extended twin models showed Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness to have the strongest genetic and environmental overlap with the well-being traits. The best-fitting theoretical model indicated that well-being and personality share substantial common etiological influences, yet that they also have their own personality-specific and well-being-specific influences, and trait-specific effects. Significant amounts of non-additive genetic influences on the traits’ (co)variances was found. Little evidence was found for quantitative or qualitative sex differences. Taken together, our results suggest that well-being is more than a personality thing, which has important implications for studies trying to identify the genetic loci influencing personality and well-being.

References

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