Wood, A. M., & Boyce, C. J. (in press). Personality. In A. Michalos [ed.] *Encyclopaedia of Quality of Life Research*. New York: Springer.

Definition:

Personality is the psychological component of a person that remains from one situation to another. This includes both (1) core characteristics that everyone shares and (2) individual differences between people. Such individual differences can be studied at the macro-level, through focusing on the broadest differences that characterize people, or at the micro-level, through focusing on specific idiosyncratic ways of viewing the world. Personality (a) directly impacts on well-being across different situations (the "*personality as predictor*" effect) and (b) interacts with situations to determine the impact of the event on well-being (the "*personality as buffer"* effect). Approaches to personality and well-being can be categorized according to whether they are focusing on core characteristics, macro-, or micro-level individual differences and whether they are adopting a predictor or buffer approach. Non-psychological components of a person (conventionally including abilities and intelligence) are not considered part of personality.

Description:

There are three basic positions on the *core characteristics* that compose personality and human nature; that people are naturally orientated towards (1) growth and constructive action (associated with humanistic theories, e.g., Horney, 1951; Rogers, 1951), (2) destruction and harming others (associated with Freudian theories, e.g., Freud, 1923/1927), or (3) nothing at all, being "tabula rasas" (blank slates) that totally shaped by their environment (associated with behaviourism, e.g., Skinner, 1969). These theories thus suggest completely different roles of personality as predictor of well-being; acting in line with one's core characteristics forms the essence of positive well-being in the humanistic position, would be disastrous in the destruction position, and would not be applicable to the tabula rasa position. Theories associated with the three basic positions focus heavily on the personality as buffer approach, specifying the precise environmental conditions under which the core characteristics influence thought, well-being, and behaviour. Broadly, the humanistic position focuses on how harmful environments unfortunately stop the core growth tendencies from being realized (e.g., Rogers, 1957), the destruction position focuses on how the environment helpfully prevents the core characteristics from being disastrously expressed, and the tabula rasa position denies the existence of personality, with the environment totally determining well-being. The different expectations of the theories regarding the effect of personality as predictor (whether it leads to growth, destruction, or nothing) and buffer (whether the environment is helpful, harmful, or irrelevant) are the hallmarks of the grand theories of personality (Wood & Joseph, 2007). Such basic positions are highly relevant today as they suggest different actions in daily life, including social relationships, child rearing, education, and law; whether, for example, people should be empowered (humanism), controlled (Freudianism), or shaped (behaviourism). However, despite the continued importance of these positions and attempts to test between them (e.g., Sheldon, Arndt, & Houser-Marko, 2003), the positions are largely beyond scientific verification. Most empirical research has focused on measurable individual differences at the macro- or micro-level.

The *macro-level* of personality focus on the most substantial differences between people. The leading perspective is the Five Factor Model [Editor - link to entry]. This perspective views personality as hierarchically organized, with people possessing and differing on the "big five" basic traits of neuroticism, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness. Other more specific traits exist as a sub-part of one of these (e.g., social outgoingness and energeticness are sub-parts of extroversion), lower down in the personality hierarchy. Conceptualizations that focus on a small number of broad and basic personality traits, such as the Five Factor Model, are commonly used to show how all of personality, widely defined, relates to subjective well-being [Editor - link to entry]. Personality changes very little across the life cycle (Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003) and is therefore one of the most consistent predictors of well-being, reflecting the stable component of well-being (Diener and Lucas, 1999). Each of the Big Five personality traits contributes to the various aspects of well-being via different mechanisms. The traits extroversion and neuroticism, for example, tend to have the strongest and most direct relationship with all components of well-being. These two traits generally capture temperament - the degree to which an individual experiences positive and negative affect throughout their life - and as such extroversion is most strongly related to positive affect (r = .33) and neuroticism more strongly related to negative affect (r = -.33) (Steel, Schmidt & Shultz, 2008). The relationship to well-being of the remaining personality traits, however, is less clear and the relationship, if any, appears to be indirect. The relationship is indirect in the sense that certain personality traits naturally orientate individuals towards situations that are generally regarded as good for well-being. For example, agreeable individuals may tend to have better quality relationships and conscientiousness may be useful for goal completion. The Big Five also act as buffers to life events supporting this indirect relationship. For example, the life satisfaction of conscientious people increases much more than unconscientious people following an increase in income (Boyce & Wood, in press), and similarly conscientious people lose over twice as much life satisfaction following unemployment (Boyce, Wood, & Brown, 2010).

The *micro-level* of personality can be studied in two ways. First, it involves the more specific traits that exist below the Big Five in the Five Factor Model. Research has reliably shown that well-being is better predicted by (a) scales that measure 50 different personality traits that compose the big five, than (b) scales that simply provide 5 measures, one for each of the big five domains (Paunonen, Haddock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003). Specific traits also buffer the impact of life events. For example, experiencing more negative life events may or may not lead to increased suicidiality depending on whether the person has such characteristics as perfectionism, agency, and hopelessness (Johnson, Wood, Gooding, & Tarrier, 2011). Second, the *micro-level* of personality involves individual ways of viewing the world. For example, two people can be helped in identical ways, but only one will feel grateful [Editor - link to entry] depending on their habitual way of interpreting other people's actions (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, 2008). In one sense, highly specific interpretive biases and beliefs are internal to each person, and whilst of relevance in the consulting room such characteristics are not very amenable to scientific study. However, generally such beliefs can be categorized into general themes, as in the "attributional style" perspective (Peterson & Seligman, 1984). Depression and other forms of low well-being are characterized by attributing negative events to causes that are internal (due to me), stable (always going be around), and global (in that they will affect many more instances in life that

this specific issue). Interpreting an argument with a partner as caused "because I am unlovable" is a classic example of this attributional style. Conversely, people with low well-being see positive events as external, unstable, and specific – like the compliment which is interrupted as "the stranger was just in a good mood". In contrast, happy people make the opposite attributions in both cases, seeing negative events as external, unstable, and specific, and positive events as specific, stable, and global. People's attribution style also buffer the impact of life events – being, for example, the forth key personality characteristic that determines suicidal response (Johnson et al., 2011). Attributional style changes through therapy and naturally improves when person's well-being raises (Barnett & Gotlib, 1988).

Conclusion

Understanding personality is critical to understanding well-being, both as a person's personality generally indicates their levels of well-being and as it determines reactions to positive and negative life events. These "personality as predictor" and "personality as buffer" effects are seen at every level at which personality is considered; whether core characteristics, macro- or micro- level individual differences.

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