Trait self-control: Why people with a higher approach (avoidance) temperament can experience higher (lower) subjective wellbeing

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ABSTRACT

The present study sought to examine the interrelationships between approach and avoidance temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing, and to see whether trait self-control could mediate the effect of temperament on subjective wellbeing. Volunteers from the United States answered questionnaires measuring approach and avoidance temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing (assessed through happiness and life satisfaction). Preliminary analyses showed that the model was significant (absolute GoF = 0.51, relative GoF = 0.97, outer model GoF = 0.99, inner model GoF = 0.97, R2 = 31.74%, p < 0.001). Correlation analyses indicated: (a) positive associations between approach temperament, trait self-control, happiness, and life satisfaction (ps = 0.22 to 0.62, ps < 0.001); and (b) negative associations of avoidance temperament with trait self-control, happiness, and life satisfaction (ps = −0.48 to −0.24, ps < 0.001). Mediation analyses revealed that trait self-control: (a) partially mediated the positive effect of approach temperament on subjective wellbeing (but the size of the mediating effect indicated that no mediation would take place); and (b) partially mediated the negative effect of avoidance temperament on subjective wellbeing. Finally, this study is the first to show that temperament can affect subjective wellbeing and that trait self-control can mediate their relationships.

1. Introduction

One of the most important questions addressed by positive psychology is “Why are certain people chronically happy?” Positive psychology refers to the scientific study of “…what makes life worth living” (e.g., Peterson & Park, 2014). In other words, positive psychology examines the processes underlying optimal functioning and healthy outcomes, such as subjective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing can be defined as “…people’s overall evaluations of their lives and their emotional experiences” and “…includes broad appraisals, such as life satisfaction and health satisfaction judgments, and specific feelings that reflect how people are reacting to the events and circumstances in their lives” (Diener et al., 2017, p. 87). More specifically, it may refer to the notions of positive emotions, happiness, and life satisfaction. Research has revealed that genes—primarily expressed in terms of personality—accounted for approximately 80% of the variance of long-term subjective wellbeing (Nes, Røysamb, Tambs, Harris, & Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2006), suggesting that personality traits can influence strongly subjective wellbeing. The goal of the present article is to advance our understanding about how personality traits affect subjective wellbeing. Although the relationships between the Big Five personality traits (i.e., extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness) and subjective wellbeing have received considerable attention (e.g., see Chen, 2015; Soto, 2015; Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz, 2008), there have not been any studies designed to explore the relationship between temperament—the most biological structure of personality—and subjective wellbeing.

1.1. Temperament and subjective wellbeing

Temperament refers to a basic and energizing structure of personality that is essential for adaptive functioning (Elliot & Thrash, 2010). Elliot and Thrash (2010) defined temperament as “…a general neurobiological sensitivity” (p. 866) to either appetitive (i.e., approach temperament) or aversive (i.e., avoidance temperament) stimuli, “…accompanied by a perceptual vigilance for, an affective reactivity to, and a behavioral predisposition toward such stimuli” (p. 866). Elliot and Thrash (2010) argued that temperament would structure several sorts of personality trait, such as the Big Five personality traits, emotionality, motivational systems, and regulatory focus. Through a series
of studies (Studies 4 and 5), the authors revealed that approach temperament was positively related to extraversion (i.e., stable tendency to be active, sociable, and optimistic), positive emotionality (i.e., stable tendency to experience positive emotion), behavioral activation system (BAS) sensitivity (i.e., stable tendency to experience positive affect in response to positive cues), and chronic promotion focus (i.e., stable motivational orientation concerned with ideals and gains in self-regulation). By contrast, they evidenced that avoidance temperament was positively related to neuroticism (i.e., stable tendency to be emotionally unstable, insecure, and to experience anxiety), negative emotionality (i.e., stable tendency to experience negative emotion), behavioral inhibition system (BIS) sensitivity (i.e., stable tendency to experience negative affect in response to negative cues), and chronic prevention focus (i.e., stable motivational orientation concerned with obligations and losses in self-regulation).

Why would temperament influence subjective wellbeing? According to Elliot and Thrash (2010), approach (or avoidance) temperament would strengthen a focus on positive (or negative) events, thereby producing greater sensitivity to positive (or negative) stimuli. Such sensitivity would increase the quantity of positive (or negative) information processed in the cognitive system, thus leading to experiencing more positive (or negative) feelings. One can also propose that approach (or avoidance) temperament would process events according to approach-based (or avoidance-based) regulations and achievement goals, which would trigger agreeable (or disagreeable) states of mind (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). Additionally, approach-based regulations would be more efficient (i.e., faster and less costly) than avoidance-based regulations since they would treat a lower quantity of aversive stimuli, thus leading to activate a more limited number of cognitive operations and to save more cognitive resources (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). In sum, individuals with a higher approach temperament would experience more positive emotions and feelings over time. What is the link between emotions and subjective wellbeing? Diener et al. (2017) proposed that “...affect balance—experiencing more pleasant than unpleasant emotions—is strongly associated with life satisfaction” (p. 91), suggesting that wellbeing would result from experiencing more positive than negative emotions. This view has been supported by different empirical studies showing that positive emotions not only predicted positively wellbeing, but also mediated the relationships between predictors and wellbeing (e.g., Hofmann, Luhmann, Fisher, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2014; Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008). Finally, we argue that approach (or avoidance) temperament would generate more positive (or negative) than negative (or positive) emotions, thereby promoting (or hindering) subjective wellbeing.

1.2. The mediating role of trait self-control

Personality has been conceived in terms of continuum arranged from the most decontextualized (general) to the most contextualized (specific) levels (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2010; Roberts & Wood, 2006). Assuming that personality is made of different personality units, such as dispositions, motives, abilities, and narratives, the neo-socioanalytic theory (e.g., Roberts & Wood, 2006) proposed that every personality unit is hierarchically organized. The theory also proposed that proximal relationships among the unit components would be stronger than distal relationships, and such a proximity effect would operate either across different personality units or within each of them. For example, temperament would be psychologically more proximal to conscientiousness than to subjective wellbeing.

Focused on motives, affects, and performance, Elliot and Thrash (2010) assumed that temperament would produce stable emotional, cognitive and behavioral tendencies to respond to contexts and situations. In their Study 6, they showed that performance-approach goals (i.e., intention to perform better than others) fully mediated the beneficial effect of approach temperament on exam performance, whereas performance-avoidance goals (i.e., intention to avoid performing worse than others) fully mediated the detrimental effect of avoidance temperament on exam performance. Such results suggest that temperament would affect goal attainment (e.g., performance) by influencing self-regulation mechanisms. Because goal attainment promotes wellbeing (e.g., De Ridder & De Ridder & Gillebaart, 2016; Hagger, 2013, 2014), we presume that approach (or avoidance) temperament could promote (or harm) subjective wellbeing via activating adaptive (or maladaptive) self-regulation mechanisms. Self-regulation corresponds to self-corrective actions and adjustments taking place while pursuing desired goals, and trait self-control is known to be a crucial construct of self-regulation (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1998; Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004). Trait self-control can also be viewed as a component of conscientiousness (a Big Five personality trait), which gathers several subtraits, such as conventionality, responsibility, industriousness (or abnegation), order (or organization), virtue (or morality), and self-control (Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Goldberg, 2005). In the present study, we considered trait self-control as a mid-level construct situated between approach/avoidance temperament (high-level construct) and subjective wellbeing (low-level construct).

Considering as a key predictor of subjective wellbeing (e.g., Briki, 2016, 2017; De Ridder & De Ridder & Gillebaart, 2016), trait self-control can be defined as a dispositional capacity of the self to operate appropriate adjustments in order to adapt to the surrounding environment (Tangney et al., 2004). Attempting to account for why trait self-control could influence wellbeing, De Ridder and Gillebaart (2016) assumed that people with a higher trait self-control would experience greater sense of wellbeing because they would “...engage more in goal-directed activities rather than trying to restrain their impulses” (p. 94), thus allowing them to achieve more often the goals they pursue. The authors also posited that achievement goal could “...constitute an important part of experiencing more well-being, since goal achievement has been known to cause positive affect” (p. 93). This echoes Hagger’s (2013, 2014) theory of multiple pathways of trait self-control assuming that trait self-control would optimize the regulation of goal-directed processes by promoting facilitative strategies and overriding goal-disruptive temptations. Cheung, Cheung, Gillebaart, Kroese, and De Ridder (2014) evidenced these views by showing that trait self-control affected happiness via experiencing more promotion focus and less prevention focus. Other studies also evidenced that trait self-control positively predicted subjective wellbeing (e.g., Briki, 2016, 2017; Briki et al., 2015; De Ridder, Lensvelt-Mulders, Finkenauser, Stok, & Baumeister, 2012; Hofmann et al., 2014).

1.3. Study overview

The present study aimed at examining the interrelationships between temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing, and to see whether trait self-control could mediate the effect of temperament on subjective wellbeing. To do so, we constructed and analyzed a structural equation model (see Fig. 1). We proposed the following hypotheses:

1. Relationships between temperament and subjective wellbeing: Because individuals with a higher approach temperament would be more sensitive to positive stimuli (e.g., reward) (Elliot & Thrash, 2010), we expect approach temperament to predict positively subjective wellbeing. By contrast, because individuals with a higher avoidance temperament would be more sensitive to negative stimuli (e.g., punishment) (Elliot & Thrash, 2010), we expect avoidance temperament to predict negatively subjective wellbeing.

2. Relationships between temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing: Because approach temperament would promote goal attainment (Elliot & Thrash, 2010), we expect approach temperament to predict positively trait self-control as well as subjective wellbeing via enhanced trait self-control (indirect effect). By contrast, because avoidance temperament would harm goal attainment...
2. Method

2.1. Participants

Four hundred four volunteers from the United States (234 females, 57.92%, and 170 males, 42.08%; \( M_{\text{age}} = 31.94, SD_{\text{age}} = 10.83, \) from 18 to 71 years old), recruited from a crowdsourcing online platform (ClickWorker), participated in the study. They were African American (\( n = 75, 18.56\% \)), Asian American (\( n = 30, 7.43\% \)), Caucasian American (\( n = 239, 59.16\% \)), Hispanic American (\( n = 35, 8.66\% \)) and other (\( n = 25, 6.19\% \)).

2.2. Study design and procedure

We carried out this study in accordance with the Institutional Review Board’s guidelines of the first author’s university, and with the Declaration of Helsinki. Concerning the procedure, the participants were said that: (a) the purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between personality and feelings; (b) they would answer several questions; (c) their data would remain anonymous and confidential; (d) the items were assessed using a 6-point Likert-type scale, from “1” (“Not at all”) to “7” (“Very much so”). The items were answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “1” (“Strongly disagree”) to “7” (“Strongly agree”). The items were assessed using a 6-point Likert-type scale, from “1” (“Not at all”) to “7” (“Very much so”). The items were answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “1” (“Strongly disagree”) to “7” (“Strongly agree”). The items were answered using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “1” (“Strongly disagree”) to “7” (“Strongly agree”).

2.3. Measures

This study concerned five manifest variables: Approach temperament, avoidance temperament, trait self-control, happiness, and life satisfaction. Subjective wellbeing corresponded to a latent variable comprising happiness and life satisfaction.

2.3.1. Temperament

We used the Approach-Avoidance Temperament Questionnaire (Elliot & Thrash, 2010) to measure the 6-item Approach Temperament Scale (e.g., “Thinking about the things I want really energizes me”) and the 6-item Avoidance Temperament Scale (e.g., “By nature, I am a very nervous person”). The items were scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from “1” (“Strongly disagree”) to “7” (“Strongly agree”), with a mid-point “4” (“Neither agree nor disagree”). Psychometric analyses revealed acceptable scores of dimensionality, reliability, and validity for approach temperament (\( \alpha = 0.83, \) Dillon-Goldstein’s \( D.G. \) \( \rho = 0.86, \) eigenvalues = 3.24, 0.73, factor loadings = 0.65 to 0.80) and avoidance temperament (\( \alpha = 0.85, \) D.G.’s \( \rho = 0.89, \) eigenvalues = 3.48, 0.75, factor loadings = 0.67 to 0.84).

2.3.2. Trait self-control

Trait self-control was measured through Tangney et al.’s (2004) 13-item questionnaire (e.g., “I refuse things that are bad for me”). The items were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale, from “1” (“Strongly disagree”) to “7” (“Strongly agree”) (\( \alpha = 0.76, D.G.’s \rho = 0.83, \) eigenvalues = 4.93, 1.33, factor loadings = 0.41 to 0.74).

2.3.3. Happiness

Happiness was measured through the 8-item Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002; e.g., “I feel fully mentally alert”). The items were assessed using a 6-point Likert-type scale, from “1” (“Strongly disagree”) to “6” (“Strongly agree”) (\( \alpha = 0.88, D.G.’s \rho = 0.92, \) eigenvalues = 3.43, 0.62, factor loadings = 0.69 to 0.89).

2.4. Analysis

Because the distributions of approach temperament, avoidance temperament, trait self-control, and life satisfaction were non-normal (Shapiro-Wilk tests; \( p \leq 0.025 \)), we employed non-parametric tests to analyze the data and test our hypotheses. We used PLS-SEM (XLSTAT-PLS, Addinsoft, version 2016.06.37018) over CB-SEM (e.g., AMOS) to assess the measurement and structural models (i.e., Cronbach’s \( \alpha \), D.G.’s \( \rho \), eigenvalues, GoF indexes, \( R^2 \)), with a bootstrapping of 1000 resampling iterations (e.g., Astrachan, Patel, & Wanzenried, 2014; Tenenhaus, Esposito, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005; Vinzi, Trinchera, & Amato, 2010). We conducted Spearman’s rho correlation analyses to examine the associations between all the manifest variables. We conducted mediation analyses using PLS-SEM (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014). The mediation strength was assessed through the variance accounted for (VAF). According to Hair et al. (2014), a VAF score higher than 80% means that the mediation is full; a VAF score equal to or higher than 20% and equal to or lower than 80% means that the mediation is partial; nonetheless, a VAF score lower than 20% means that “...almost no mediation takes place” (p. 225).

3. Results

Preliminary analyses showed that the investigated model was significant (absolute GoF = 0.51, relative GoF = 0.97, outer model GoF = 0.99, inner model GoF = 0.97, \( R^2 = 31.74\% \), \( p < 0.001 \), Fig. 2). In addition, the manifest variables “happiness” and “life satisfaction” appeared to compose effectively the latent variable “subjective wellbeing” (\( \alpha = 0.78, D.G.’s \rho = 0.90, \) eigenvalues = 1.64, 0.36). The correlation analyses indicated positive associations between approach temperament, trait self-control, happiness, and life satisfaction (\( ps = 0.22 \) to 0.62, \( ps < 0.001 \)) (see Table 1). Avoidance...
temperament was negatively associated with trait self-control, happiness, and life satisfaction \((ρ = −0.48 \text{ to } −0.24, ps < 0.001)\) (see Table 1). The PLS-SEM mediation analyses revealed trait self-control significantly mediated the positive effect of approach temperament on subjective wellbeing; however, the value of VAF indicated that no mediation would take place \((\text{VAF} = 12.21\%\) (Tables 2 and 3). Trait self-control also significantly mediated the negative effect of avoidance temperament on subjective wellbeing \((\text{partial mediation, VAF} = 29.01\%\) (Tables 2 and 3).

### 4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine how approach and avoidance temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing could be related to each other, and whether approach and avoidance temperament could affect subjective wellbeing through trait self-control. We posited that: (a) approach \((\text{or avoidance})\) temperament—corresponding to a biological sensitivity to appetitive \((\text{or aversive})\) stimuli—would promote \((\text{or harm})\) trait self-control and subjective wellbeing; and (b) approach and avoidance temperament would affect subjective wellbeing through trait self-control.

#### 4.1. Interrelationships between temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing

The first purpose of this study was to examine the interrelationships between temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing. Regarding the relationships between temperament and subjective wellbeing, the analyses showed that approach \((\text{or avoidance})\) temperament was positively \((\text{or negatively})\) associated with happiness and life satisfaction \((\text{see Table 1})\), suggesting that approach \((\text{or avoidance})\) temperament would produce more positive \((\text{or negative})\) than negative \((\text{or positive})\) emotions and feelings \((\text{Elliot & Thrash, 2010})\). Although no studies addressed the relationships between temperament and subjective wellbeing per se, Bipp, Kleingeld, and van Dam showed that approach temperament was positively associated with study/work engagement \((\text{i.e., positive state of mind at school/work characterized by vigor and determination})\). Research also revealed that approach-based personality traits \((\text{e.g., extraversion, positive emotionality, chronic promotion focus})\) were positively \((\text{or negatively})\) associated with positive \((\text{or negative})\) emotions and feelings \((\text{e.g., Bipp, Kleingeld, & van Dam, 2015, Studies 2 and 3; Cheung et al., 2014; Loxton, Mitchell, Dingle, & Sharman, 2016; Steel et al., 2008})\). By contrast, Bipp et al. \((\text{2015, Studies 2 and 3})\) revealed that avoidance temperament was negatively related to study/work engagement, while Steel et al. \((\text{2008})\) showed that neuroticism—\text{an avoidance-based personality trait}—was positively \((\text{or negatively})\) related to negative \((\text{or positive})\) emotions and feelings. Finally, our results indicated that approach \((\text{or avoidance})\) temperament could promote \((\text{or harm})\) subjective wellbeing, and this may be due to the beneficial \((\text{or deleterious})\) effect of approach-based \((\text{or avoidance-based})\) regulations \((\text{e.g., Elliot & Sheldon, 1997; Elliot & Thrash, 2010})\).

Regarding the relationships between temperament and trait self-control, the analyses revealed that approach temperament was positively associated with trait self-control, whereas avoidance temperament was negatively associated with trait self-control \((\text{see Table 1})\). These results support our view that approach \((\text{or avoidance})\) temperament would precipitate adaptive \((\text{or maladaptive})\) self-regulatory processes. They also support Maruskin, Thrash, and Elliot's \((\text{2012})\) study showing that approach temperament was positively related to conscientiousness. More specifically, these results suggest that approach temperament would activate helpful means and override unhelpful ones, and one may suggest that approach-based regulations \((\text{e.g., BAS, promotion focus})\) and achievement goals \((\text{e.g., task-approach goals})\) would mediate such effects. By contrast, avoidance temperament would prioritize unhelpful means over appropriate ones, and we can suggest that avoidance-based regulations \((\text{e.g., BIS, prevention focus})\) and achievement goals \((\text{e.g., task-avoidance goals})\) could account for such an effect. Regarding the relationship between trait self-control and subjective wellbeing, the analyses indicated a positive association of trait self-control with happiness and life satisfaction, supporting studies that showed that trait self-control promoted wellbeing \((\text{e.g., Briki, 2015})\).

### Table 2

Path estimates of the PLS model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>(β)</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t-values</th>
<th>p-Values</th>
<th>(f^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Approach temperament (→) subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>9.997</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance temperament (→) subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>−0.398</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>−9.894</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediating</td>
<td>Approach temperament (→) Subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>0.352</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>9.079</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance temperament (→) Subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>−0.282</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>−6.743</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trait self-control (→) Subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>0.287</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>6.747</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approach temperament (→) Trait self-control</td>
<td>0.171</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>3.816</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoidance temperament (→) Trait self-control</td>
<td>−0.402</td>
<td>0.045</td>
<td>−8.960</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Mediation analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects without mediator</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Direct effect</th>
<th>Indirect effect</th>
<th>Total effect</th>
<th>VAF</th>
<th>Mediation strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct with mediator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach temperament → subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.402***</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance Temperament → subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.398***</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect with mediator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach temperament → subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>Trait self-control</td>
<td>0.352***</td>
<td>0.049</td>
<td>0.402***</td>
<td>12.21%</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance temperament → subjective wellbeing</td>
<td>Trait self-control</td>
<td>-0.282***</td>
<td>-0.115</td>
<td>-0.397***</td>
<td>29.01%</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VAF = variance accounted for; N/A = not applicable; VAF > 80% = full mediation, 20% ≤ VAF ≤ 80% = partial mediation, and VAF < 20% = no mediation (none).

⁎⁎⁎ p < 0.001 for a two-tailed test.

2016, 2017; Cheung et al., 2014; De Ridder et al., 2012). Our result also echoes that of Soto (2015) showing that people with a higher conscientiousness tendency experienced greater subjective wellbeing over time.

4.2. Temperament and subjective wellbeing: the mediating role of trait self-control

The second purpose of this study was to see whether trait self-control could mediate the effects of temperament on subjective wellbeing. The analyses revealed that trait self-control mediated the relationship between approach temperament and subjective wellbeing (significant indirect effect). However, the strength of this mediating effect indicated that almost no mediating effect would take place (VAF < 20%), suggesting that approach temperament would foster wellbeing only through its own capacity to energize people’s behavior toward positive/appetitive stimuli and to activate approach-based regulations. Furthermore, the analyses revealed that trait self-control partially mediated the relationship between avoidance temperament and subjective wellbeing (significant indirect effect and VAF = 29.01%). Therefore, this result suggests that avoidance temperament would generate negative emotions and low levels of subjective wellbeing. Such effects might be due to the capacity of avoidance temperament to orientate people’s attention toward negative/aversive stimuli, thus inducing a series of maladaptive psychological responses (e.g., negative thinking, rumination, avoidance-based achievement goals, anxiety, depression, self-deprecation). The mediation result also indicates that avoidance temperament would decrease subjective wellbeing through harming goal-directed processes, and one can suggest that such an effect would be due to the activation of avoidance-based regulations and achievement goals. Interestingly, our results resemble those of Bipp et al. (2015, Study 2) showing that career adaptability—referring to “...individuals’ resources for dealing with (existing or anticipated) occupational tasks, transitions, and work traumas” (p. 3)—partially mediated the positive (or negative) effect of approach (or avoidance) temperament on study engagement. Their results are close to ours because study engagement corresponds to positive feelings, while career adaptability (the mediating variable) encompasses aspects (e.g., self-discipline, effort, persistence) resembling the concept of trait self-control.

4.3. Conclusion and perspectives

Finally, this study is the first to explore the relationships between approach/avoidance temperament, trait self-control, and subjective wellbeing: Its results revealed that approach (or avoidance) temperament positively (or negatively) predicted trait self-control and subjective wellbeing. This study is also the first to examine the mediating role of trait self-control in the relationships between approach/avoidance temperament and subjective wellbeing: Its results indicated that trait self-control mediated the detrimental effect of avoidance temperament on subjective wellbeing, and that trait self-control may mediate the beneficial effect of approach temperament on subjective wellbeing. Notwithstanding, this study is not without limitations, and its major one concerns its correlational nature. Indeed, the design we used aimed to shed the light on the relationships between specific variables, and further studies should use better designs in order to verify our results. For example, based on experimental designs researchers could examine the effects of temperament on ego depletion (or state self-control) and positive/negative emotions while pursuing goals.

From an applied standpoint, the results of this study urge to counteract the harmful effects of avoidance temperament on trait self-control and wellbeing. Grounded in the framework of the self-determination theory (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2008), recent studies have shown that autonomous regulation (i.e., regulation driven by a strong sense of volition and willingness), resulting from the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (i.e., relatedness, competence, and autonomy), could promote the development of trait self-control and wellbeing (Briki, 2016, 2017; Briki et al., 2015). Although everybody should have the chance to satisfy his or her basic psychological needs, our study suggests that people high in avoidance temperament are at risk of ill-being. For that reason, it seems more than imperative that parents, teachers, instructors, managers, psychologists, etc., take care of the innate needs of such people. Indeed, such a strategy would help them compensate their tendencies to activate maladaptive regulations by developing an autonomous personality. Further studies are necessary to test the view that autonomous functioning can be a shield against the harmful effects of avoidance temperament on wellbeing.

References


