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Personality, Cultural Factors and

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Personality is usually defined as an inner set of organized dispositions and psychological processes underlying individuals' behavioral and affective expression. Each individual is characterized by a specific personality profile that is stable over time and across situations. Personality develops during childhood and adolescence and becomes more stable in adulthood. However, a small but consistent evolution can be observed during the entire life course. Personality contributes to the prediction of several important life outcomes such as job satisfaction, subjective well-being, and the quality of one's relationships.

Personality is usually described in terms of personality traits that can be explained by five or six independent higher order traits or personality dimensions. The most common model of personality traits is the five-factor model. The five-factor model postulates that five personality dimensions—(1) neuroticism (negative affectivity vs. emotional stability), (2) extraversion (vs. introversion), (3) openness to experience, (4) agreeableness, and (5) conscientiousness—adequately map personality traits. Even though these traits are biologically rooted and are partly inherited, the context influences the way people express their personality in terms of behaviors and affect, the psychological processes underlying this expression, and the way personality develops. That is, a continual interaction between personality traits and cultural factors, such as social norms, rules, values, or local habits, is at the root of behavior.

Universality of Personality Dimensions

Since the 1990s, an abundance of cross-cultural research has examined the universality of personality models. Several personality models such as Hans Eysenck's psychoticism-extraversion-neuroticism personality model, the five-factor model, or some variation of these models were replicated in a large set of cultures and are currently considered as universal. Some of this research has been conducted on very large samples from more than 50 cultures or nations.

Although many studies adopting an *etic* or a cross-cultural approach confirmed that most personality models could be regarded as universal, with some minor cultural specificities, other studies have adopted an *emic* approach, conducted in a specific culture, leading to the development of indigenous personality models. For example, Ibrahima Sow described an African sub-Saharan personality model and several Asian psychologists suggested considering specific personality traits to describe behaviors in an interpersonal context (e.g., *renqing* that assesses the level of reciprocity in a relationship or the construct of harmony). A combined emic-etic approach allows taking into account both universal and culture-specific aspects of personality. Such an approach has, for example, been used to develop the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory or the South African Personality Inventory. These inventories partly consider the five-factor model and integrate some cultural specificities.

Impact of Cultural Factors

Several studies have tried to describe the impact of cultural factors on individuals' personality development, acknowledging that individuals' personality may also affect the evolution of their cultural context. At the individual level, the cultural environment is considered to have an influence on the behavioral expression of personality dispositions, through regulatory psychological processes (e.g., the regulation of emotional expression). Personality traits are also related to acculturation styles. For example, neuroticism is associated with marginalization, and extraversion with integration.

At the level of culture, aggregate personality traits (mean value per culture or nation) have been related to several cultural factors or *context variables* such as the gross national product, the geographic localization, and the overall level of individualism. National prosperity has been associated with conscientiousness in some studies, suggesting that individuals in a particularly difficult economic context tend to be more organized and perseverant when pursuing their goals, whereas, in other studies, national prosperity has been associated with extraversion, openness, and agreeableness. Also, the average personality profile of a cultural group has been related to the geographical localization (e.g., latitude). On average, people who live farther from the equator seem to be more extraverted and less conscientious.

Cultural values, as defined by Geert Hofstede, are systematically related to personality traits. Individualism correlates positively with extraversion; power distance correlates negatively with extraversion and openness to experience but positively with conscientiousness; masculinity correlates positively with neuroticism and openness to experience but negatively with agreeableness; and uncertainty avoidance correlates positively with neuroticism and negatively with agreeableness.

Finally, different studies have shown that geographically and historically similar cultures are associated with similar aggregated personality profiles. Western cultures are usually more extraverted and open to experience than African and Asian cultures that are more agreeable and more conscientious. Another way of considering the personality characteristics of a culture is to consider the national character stereotypes. These stereotypes are widely shared and are apparently influenced by climate and national wealth. At the same time, they are uncorrelated with aggregate personality traits; thus, they seem unfounded.

Currently, only a few studies have analyzed the relation between cultural factors and personality, or its development, at an individual level. Considering the potential methodological shortcomings (measurement issues) of the studies conducted at the culture level, their results are preliminary and further research and replications are undoubtedly needed to better understand how cultural factors influence personality and its development, and vice versa.

See also [Five-Factor Model of Personality](#); [Individualism and Collectivism](#); [Personality and Personality Disorders: Overview](#); [Personality Disorders: Cultural Factors](#); [Personality Inventories](#); [Self-Concept Development](#); [Self-Regulation Theory](#)

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Further Readings

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