A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Five Dimensions of Personality:
Examining Actual and Perceived Traits Within and Between Australia and the United States

Loni Marie Anthony
University Honors Thesis
Washington State University

Dr. Jeff Joireman
University Honors Thesis Advisor
Washington State University

Honors Thesis
**************
PASS WITH DISTINCTION
TO THE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE:

As thesis advisor for Loni Anthony,

I have read this paper and find it satisfactory.

Jeff Jonesman
Thesis Advisor

2/25/04
Date
# Table of Contents

1. Precis .................................................................................................................. 4
2. Abstract ............................................................................................................... 6
3. Introduction ......................................................................................................... 7
4. Overview of Personality ...................................................................................... 8
5. Background on the ZKPQ-III-R ....................................................................... 9
6. Defining the Five Dimensions ........................................................................... 10
   Activity .................................................................................................................. 10
   Aggression-Hostility ............................................................................................ 10
   Impulsive-Sensation Seeking .............................................................................. 11
   Neuroticism-Emotionality ................................................................................... 11
   Sociability ............................................................................................................ 11
7. Personality Across Cultures ............................................................................... 12
8. Hypotheses ......................................................................................................... 14
9. Method ................................................................................................................ 14
   Participants ......................................................................................................... 14
   Procedure ............................................................................................................ 15
10. Results ............................................................................................................... 16
   Comparisons of Actual Levels Across Culture and Gender ............................. 16
   Actual vs. Perceived Levels Within and Across Cultures ................................. 18
11. Discussion ......................................................................................................... 22
12. References ....................................................................................................... 25
Précis

As a psychology major, many areas within this field are of great interest. Yet even with an abundance of sub-disciplines to choose from, none quite stood out like the complex nature of personality. As a virtually unexplored dimension of personality research, cross-cultural comparisons between Australian and American traits were the focus of this study. Using the ZKPQ-III-R to assess personality traits, five dimensions of personality were explored in both countries. These dimensions included activity, aggression-hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism-anxiety, and sociability. However, a main emphasis was placed on sociability, with regard to the levels of introversion and extroversion. It was predicted that Australians would be more extraverted than American participants, based on a personal interpretation of the media’s portrayal of Australian citizens. Actual levels of personality were observed in this study, in addition to perceptions of personality traits within and between countries.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. The first condition asked the participants to fill out the questionnaire for themselves; the second condition requested that the participants fill out the questionnaire as they believed a typical member of their own society would respond; the final condition asked the participant to fill out the questionnaire according to how they believed a typical member of the opposite society would respond. Research was conducted by collecting a random sample of students completing their undergraduate coursework at universities in both Australia and the United States. This form of random sampling is common within the field of psychology to collect data, along with obtaining data from undergraduate students. The total number of participants of this study was 155.
Findings from this study revealed that a main effect of sex was observed in both the Activity and the Neuroticism-Emotionality dimensions. Additionally, the Neuroticism-Emotionality Factor indicated that women scored higher than men. No significant main effects were found for the remaining scales. Ironically, the primary focus of sociability in this study and the assumption that Australians were more extroverted than Americans did not yield a main effect. In fact, the actual levels showed that Americans were slightly more extroverted than Australians. Interestingly, both cultures rated low in sociability compared to the perceived levels. Several differences were found between the actual levels and the perceptions of traits within the five dimensions.

With little other research within this specific area of cross-cultural personality types, comparing the U.S. to Australia, it is hoped that this study will assist in the contribution of developing theories in the future regarding global personality characteristics. However, in the future, it is suggested that data be taken from a more general study of the population, rather than having data collected from a limited range of college students. Overall, this study shows not only the actual levels of personality, but also the beliefs that people internalize about their own society and other nations. It is hoped that when exploring personality characteristics in the future, more research on cross-cultural studies will incorporate cross-cultural perceptions of personality into their analyses.
Abstract

The study was designed to examine five dimensions of personality on a cross-cultural comparison between Australia and the United States. Personality traits, including sociability, activity, aggression-hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, and neuroticism-anxiety, were measured using the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire. The participants, 155 college students, were randomly selected to complete one of three separate questionnaires, which asked them to either respond personally to each given scenario, how they feel that the “average” person within their society would respond, or how they feel a typical member of the opposite society would react to the given situations. Results on the actual levels of the personality traits revealed main effects of sex on both Activity and Neuroticism-Emotionality, with women scoring higher on both, and an interaction between country and gender on the Neuroticism-Emotionality factor; in both countries, women scored higher than men, but these differences were larger within the Australian sample. Cross-cultural comparisons also revealed differing perceptions between the American and Australian samples.
A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Five Dimensions of Personality:

Examining Actual and Perceived Traits Within and Between Australia and the United States

Psychology is an ever-expanding discipline, composed of many elements, which work to reveal the various aspects of one's character. Within that elaborate sphere lies the complex nature of personality. As one of psychology's major sub-disciplines, the study of personality helps us to capture the uniqueness of a person through analyzing enduring personality patterns (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). Psychologists typically define personality as enduring, distinctive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that characterize the way a person interacts with the world (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). Two dominant models used to study personality traits are the Big-Five and the Alternative-Five factor models. The Big Five factors include neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1987). The Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire, ZKPQ, forms an alternative five-factor model, including activity, aggression-hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism-anxiety, and sociability (Zuckerman, Kuhlman, Joireman, Teta, & Kraft, 1993). A comparison of these models reveals that they are very similar. The only difference is that the ZKPQ does not contain an openness to experience factor, and the Big-Five does not include an activity factor. Because little research has examined cross-cultural differences on the ZKPQ, I chose to focus on this model rather than the big five model. One key area of focus will revolve around the nature of cross-cultural differences. The primary purpose of this study is to analyze differences between Australia and the U.S. on the Alternative-Five Model. A secondary goal is to explore the perceptions of traits within and between cultures. Throughout this paper, a brief overview of personality and the tool used to assess the five dimensions of personality will be detailed, along
with descriptions of the five scales. The results will be outlined in further detail, comparing the actual results with the perceptions of personality.

**Overview of Personality**

Although the first taxonomy of personality was developed in ancient Greece (Zuckerman, Kuhlman, & Camac, 1988), psychology did not recognize the distinct area of personality in its formative years. It was not until the late 1930s that the study of personality became formalized and systematized in American psychology (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). Hence, for more than half of psychology’s history as a science, psychologists paid relatively little attention to personality.

Once the study of personality was brought to the forefront, several techniques were developed to evaluate and classify people into their respective traits. Trait theories propose that people have broad dispositions that are reflected in the basic ways they behave (Halonen & Santrock, 1999), such as whether they are sociable and pleasant or aloof and irritable. Over time, various traits have emerged, with varying levels of acceptance, popularity, and durability. Although explanations of such traits differ, theorists agree that traits are the fundamental building blocks of personality (Johnson, 1997; Wiggins, 1997).

Personality is derived from the Latin word *persona*, which refers to the masks used by actors in a play (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). It refers to a person’s outward appearance, suggesting that personality refers to external and visible characteristics. Although it may be assumed that one’s personality is the mask one wears when he or she faces the outside world, it must be noted that an individual’s personality doesn’t just merely rest on the surface. The many attributes of an individual, and the encompassing characteristics that surpass merely superficial physical qualities, must be included. Therefore, one’s personality is comprised of a host of
social and emotional qualities as well; ones that we may not be able to see directly, that a person
may try to hide from us, or that we may try to hide from others (Schultz & Schultz, 2001).

The study of personality is central to the understanding of human nature (Schultz &
Schultz, 2001), and with that, it is essential to uncover the many facets that compose one's
character. To do so, researchers have developed a myriad of theories to help identify the major
dimensions of one's personality. Theories produce distinctive strategies for assessing
personality. Through such theoretical frameworks, psychologists have developed ways to
capture how individuals differ (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). However, the diversity of theories
and assessments make understanding personality a challenge (Feist & Feist, 1998).

Background on the ZKPQ-III-R

Many methods of assessment are available for use when seeking to evaluate one's
personality. With that, it poses as a rather difficult task to select a test that will provide accurate
and applicable results. To produce good research, it is necessary for the project to be composed
of clear questions (Bessant & Watts, 2002) that relate directly to the study of interest.

With its all-encompassing assessment of personality, the ZKPQ (Zuckerman et al., 1993)
is a useful tool in examining personality traits. A primary reason for its preference and use in
this study is that the Big Five, or the Five-Factor Model, is surrounded by criticism. Zuckerman
argues that the problem with the Big-Five Model is that it is not founded on a biological basis.
McAdams (1993) highlights the Five-Factor Model's inability to address core constructs of
personality and its failure to provide compelling explanations for human behavior.

Establishing an alternative five-factor model, Zuckerman and Kuhlman created an
instrument that incorporated the above-mentioned five factors, consisting of 100 items, with
twenty items specifically pertaining to each factor (Zuckerman et al., 1993). After testing this
Personality model, items from published tests and questions that were worded unclearly, were re-written to form the ZKPQ-II (Joireman & Kuhlman, 2004). This modified scale was then tested and reduced to 89 items to form the ZKPQ-III. However, since the sociability factor was positively skewed, several new items were written for this scale that helped to reflect aspects of introversion, along with ten new items used to detect careless responding (Joireman & Kuhlman, 2004). The current 99-item questionnaire, known as the ZKPQ-III-R, assesses five dimensions of personality. Current uses of this model show that the five factors outlined on the ZKPQ-III-R demonstrate a high degree of internal reliability, in addition to a promising predictive validity. In this study, this tool will be used to assess personality characteristics, with a strong emphasis placed on the similarities and differences revealed across cultures on the levels of activity, aggression-hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism-anxiety, and sociability (i.e. extraversion and introversion), indicated by the five scales.

**Defining the Five Dimensions**

**Activity.** A person's physical energy and vigor often defines his or her activity level (Buss, 1989). People of this nature are often more lively and spirited than others and display their energy in many different situations. They enjoy being busy, and execute given tasks with much effort and zest. They walk and talk fast, find it difficult to sit still, and fidget with their fingers or tap their toes when they are unoccupied.

**Aggression-Hostility.** Although aggressive personalities of this nature may appear confident in their abilities and uninhibited in asserting and defending themselves (Schultz & Schultz, 2001), they are often driven by insecurity, angst, and hostility. Aggressive types will act tough and domineering and will show little regard for others. They are easily agitated, motivated to surpass others, and judge people in terms of the benefit they will receive from those
relationships. Lastly, individuals with aggressive and hostile personality types make little to no effort to appease others, but will argue, criticize, demand, and do whatever is necessary to achieve and retain superiority and power (Schultz & Schultz, 2001).

**Impulsivity-Sensation Seeking.** This third scale regards the amount of sensory input people pursue. Impulsivity and sensation seeking are revealed in specific behaviors that are motivated by the need for varied, novel, and sometimes even dangerous experiences (Zuckerman, 1979). People who measure high in this area are those who seek thrills and enjoy activities such as mountain climbing, skydiving, and other new and exciting experiences. They often do not take the time to plan ahead or prepare for a future task. In addition, they tend to act independently of social conventions and of other people's needs and attitudes; they order their lives to maximize opportunities for self-fulfillment (Schultz & Schultz, 2001).

**Neuroticism-Emotionality.** Neuroticism pertains to people who are characterized as tense, irrational, depressed, anxious, or moody. Complementary to this, emotionality can be defined as being easily upset or agitated. Individuals who fall within this scale often overreact to mild stressors, resulting in chronic hypersensitivity (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). Hence, people who suffer from neuroticism will most likely react emotionally to situations and events that other people would deem insignificant.

**Sociability.** Sociability refers to the degree of preference for contact and interaction with other people. Much of a person's conscious perception of and reaction to his or her environment is determined by the opposing "mental attitudes" of extraversion and introversion (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). Although one characteristic may be more apparent than the other, everyone has the capacity for both attitudes. With only one of these becoming dominant in the personality, the dominant attitude then tends to direct the person's behavior and consciousness. However, the
non-dominant attitude remains influential, functioning under the personal unconscious, where it can affect behavior (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). Both extraversion and introversion are widely used as broad dimensions of personality. The descriptions of these two terms allow psychologists to recognize the essential characteristics of individuals, and help them to observe subtle differences among people (Halonen & Santrock, 1999).

On one end of the sociability scale, extraversion can be defined as the amount and intensity of preferred interpersonal interactions, with a tendency to be social, active, and fun-seeking (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). Not only pertaining to sociability, extraversion can be referred to as an active, zestful, and venturesome attitude toward life (Digman, 1997). An individual classified as being extroverted typically enjoys meeting new people and can often be found in a group-oriented atmosphere. Elaborating on its definition, extraversion can also be referred to as an attitude characterized by an orientation toward the external world and other people (Jung, 1927).

On the other end of the spectrum lies introversion. Introversion is often characterized by the tendency to be reserved, independent, and quiet (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). Oftentimes, introverts are passive and tend to shy away from excitement and stimulation. They are typically withdrawn and prefer to spend time alone. Introverted individuals are distinguished by an orientation toward one’s own thoughts and feelings (Jung, 1927).

**Personality Across Cultures**

If the world in which people live and the factors that affect their upbringing are so different, then surely their personalities can be expected to differ (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). In every city, country, and continent, no two people are the same. With that, the culture and traditions that reside in each location are unique to that specific place, and people within each
environment are unconsciously influenced by these factors. Hence, cultural forces exert an impact on basic personality characteristics (Schultz & Schultz, 2001).

Commonly, culture refers to the behavioral patterns, beliefs, and all other products of a particular group of people that are passed on from generation to generation (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). The culture of a group works to shape each individual’s identity, and although each member holds unique qualities, underneath there lies a certain uniformity that can allow researchers to generalize the results of that population. Therefore, the study of culture works to reveal many commonalities, along with diversity, in human populations (Halonen & Santrock, 1999).

Virtually no studies have been conducted relating personality traits between Australia and the U.S. Therefore, a cross-cultural comparison between Australia and the United States will be examined. This study will work to determine the actual levels of personality traits, along with cultural perceptions. Through this analysis, perceptions of personality within cultures will be studied and examined, along with the perceptions of personality across cultures. It is assumed that the perceptions of personality within cultures will reveal a self-serving bias, meaning that individuals will believe that they score higher on desirable traits, and lower on undesirable traits, when compared to others.

Used to compare two or more cultures, cross-cultural studies aid in the discovery of behavioral similarities and differences among cultures (Halonen & Santrock, 1999). Through the use of cross-cultural research, researchers are able to identify and analyze basic traits and characteristics that are common to whole nations. From the data collected, comparisons can then be studied to expand our knowledge of others and to examine characteristics across cultures.
Assessing dimensions of personality on a global scale allows individuals to most effectively communicate with one another based on the knowledge of general personality patterns found in each nation. Such assumptions allow individuals to adapt their mannerisms and behavior so that they may respectfully interact with others based on that specific society's standards. Hence, once personality traits are evaluated from individuals within a country, people visiting that country can act accordingly.

**Hypotheses**

It is assumed that the five dimensions of personality will differ between countries, not only on actual levels, but perceptions. The primary focus of this study is on the sociability factor. It is predicted that Australians will be more extraverted than American participants, based on the media’s portrayal of Australian citizens. No specific predictions are made for the remaining four factors, or perceptions across cultures. Thus, the latter comparisons are more exploratory.

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants used were students completing their undergraduate coursework at universities in both Australia and the United States. The selected institutions were Australia’s University of Canberra and the U.S.’s Washington State University. To ensure a well-rounded perspective, questionnaires were not specifically targeted to psychology majors or those with any direct knowledge of the subject. Instead, all participants were recruited by random selection in highly trafficked areas of campus and asked to complete the questionnaire, giving all students an equal opportunity to participate. The total number of participants of this study was 155, ranging from 18-22 years of age. The median age was 19.5 years for Australian participants, while the
median age for American participants was 20 years. Of those participants, a total of 74 were Australian, with 26 participants under the “self” condition, 24 participants answering for the average individual within their own society (Australia), and 24 participants responding for the average person of the opposite society (America). The American participants consisted of a total of 81, with 29 participants under the “self” condition, 24 participants answering for the average individual within their own society (America), and 28 participants responding for the average person of the opposite society (Australia). Of the total of 46 men and 109 women, 20 men were of Australian citizenship, while 26 men were of U.S. citizenship. Additionally, 54 women were Australian citizens compared to 55 U.S. women.

Procedure

Participants completed the Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire, ZKPQ-III-R, which analyze five dimensions of personality: activity, aggression-hostility, impulsive sensation seeking, neuroticism-anxiety, and sociability. In the five-scale questionnaire, composed of its 99 questions, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. All participants were assured anonymity.

Three separate versions of the questionnaire were randomly administered to willing participants in each geographical location. The first of the three conditions asked the participant to respond yes or no to the 99 items (e.g., I tend to start conversations at parties). The second condition requested that the participant fill out the questionnaire as they believed a typical member of their own society would respond. The final condition asked the participant to fill out the questionnaire according to how they believed a typical member of the opposite society would respond. Through these three variations, the results are expected to give an overall look at the personality types of the individuals that each culture is comprised of, along with the perceptions
of personality that the U.S. and Australia internalize about themselves and each other. Hence, the average levels of these dimensions can be compared across the two selected countries, in addition to analyzing how the actual levels compare with the perceptions of personality within the U.S. and Australia.

Results

The similarities and differences between sexes and nationalities on each individual scale will first be analyzed. Then, comparisons will be made between all of the three conditions (self, average member of American society, average member of Australian society).

Comparisons of Actual Levels Across Culture and Gender

Reliability tests revealed that all scales demonstrated acceptable reliabilities (.76 to .89). For each personality factor, a 2 (Country) x 2 (Sex) ANOVA was conducted and the alpha level was set at the standard $p < .05$. Table 1 shows the actual levels as a function of country and sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Levels of the Five ZKPQ-III-R Scales In Relation to Gender and Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agg-Hos</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ImpUSS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N-Emot</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociability</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Note.** M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Agg-Hos = aggression-hostility; ImpUSS = impulsive unsocialized sensation seeking; N-Emot = neuroticism-emotionality.

Table 2 displays a summary of the ANOVAs. As can be seen, there are no main effects identified with country for the five dimensions of personality (all \( p \)'s > .42). However, a main effect of sex was observed in both the Activity and the Neuroticism-Emotionality dimensions. Table 1 shows women scored higher on Activity \((M = 8.89, SD = 3.35)\) than men \((M = 6.76, SD = 2.08)\). Additionally, Neuroticism-Emotionality indicates that women once again scored higher \((M = 8.63, SD = 4.86)\) than men \((M = 5.12, SD = 4.12)\). No significant main effects were found for the remaining scales.

### Table 2

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects On Actual Levels of the Personality Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MSE</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>( p )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRY</strong></td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGG</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMPSS</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.11</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEMOT</td>
<td>10.97</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.97</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOC</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SEX</strong></td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>50.27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.27</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGG</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMPSS</td>
<td>29.82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29.82</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEMOT</td>
<td>155.38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>155.38</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOC</td>
<td>15.60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.60</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRY * SEX</strong></td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.77</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGG</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMPSS</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEMOT</td>
<td>65.81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>65.81</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SOC</td>
<td>21.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.65</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Error</strong></td>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>468.06</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AGG</td>
<td>762.84</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>14.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IMPSS</td>
<td>NEMOT</td>
<td>SOC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>766.43</td>
<td>1032.66</td>
<td>864.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.03</td>
<td>20.25</td>
<td>16.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Agg-Hos = aggression-hostility; ImpUSS = impulsive unsocialized sensation seeking; N-Emot = neuroticism-emotionality.

Table 2 also shows a marginally significant interaction between sex and country for Neuroticism-Emotionality. Means for this interaction are shown in Figure 1. As can be seen, females score higher than males, but the male and female differences are seen to be greater in Australia than in the U.S. Additionally, American males scored higher than Australian males on the Neuroticism-Emotionality factor, while Australian females scored higher than American females. Hence, country influences the differences in gender.

Figure 1
Country Comparisons of Gender In the Neuroticism-Emotionality Factor

Actual vs. Perceived Levels Within and Across Cultures

As previously outlined, the primary purpose of this study was to examine individual traits across cultures, with a primary emphasis on the similarities and differences relating to introversion and extraversion, as depicted on the sociability scale. A second purpose of this study was to compare the actual levels within a country to perceptions of those levels both within
and across cultures. To examine these differences, a 2 (Country) x 3 (Target: self, average American, average Australian) ANOVA was conducted on each of the five personality factors.

Condition, which is labeled “target” in the graph below (see Figure 2), compares the results of the actual levels with the results from both the perceptions of the average American and the average Australian on sociability. In this dimension, Australians rated themselves lower than how they perceive both the average American and the average Australian, with the assumption that the average Australian is slightly more extraverted than the average American. Although the actual levels show that Americans are only marginally more extraverted than Australians, American participants assume that the average American and the average Australian are slightly more extraverted, as observed in the actual level among American participants. Interestingly, both cultures rate low in sociability compared to the perceived levels.

Figure 2
*Sociability of Australians and Americans Across the Three Targeted Conditions*

![Sociability graph](image)

Examine the data pertaining to Activity, as seen in Figure 3, Australians scored themselves minutely higher than they assumed the average American to be, yet they scored the average Australian higher than both themselves and the average American. Similarly,
Americans scored themselves nearly the same as Australians on the Activity level, in addition to scoring the average American just below themselves, with their perception of the average Australian being marginally higher than both themselves and their perception of the average American.

Figure 3
*Activity of Australians and Americans Across the Three Targeted Conditions*

Figure 4
*Aggression-Hostility Factor Comparing Australians and Americans Across the Three Targets*

As Figure 4 shows, Australians rated themselves lower in Aggression-Hostility than the average American and the average Australian. Americans also rated themselves lower than the
average American, however, they perceived the average Australian much lower than the average American and only slightly higher than themselves.

Evaluating Impulsive-Sensation Seeking, Australians showed to be lower than their perceptions of the average American. This can be observed in Figure 5. They also make the assumption that the average Australian is slightly lower than the average American, yet only marginally higher than their perception of self. In contrast, Americans rated themselves only slightly lower than the average American, and significantly lower than their perception of the average Australian. Hence, American respondents rated themselves and the average American as being much lower in Impulsive-Sensation Seeking, when actual findings indicate that Australians are only slightly higher than Americans in this dimension.

Figure 5
*Impulsive-Sensation Seeking of Australians and Americans Across the Three Targets*

![Graph showing Impulsive-Sensation Seeking](image)

Under the Neuroticism-Emotionality Factor, illustrated in Figure 6, Australians rated themselves higher than their perceptions of the average American, yet slightly lower than their perceptions of the average Australian. Americans rated only slightly lower than Australians in this dimension, and made the assumption that they were less neurotic than the average American, yet assumed they were higher in Neuroticism-Emotionality than the average Australian.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the actual traits of individuals from the U.S. and Australia, along with the perceptions of traits within and between cultures. It was assumed that differences would be revealed through the data, primarily in the Sociability Factor, which evaluates introversion vs. extraversion. Results implied that actual personality characteristics only marginally differed between countries, yet internalized perceptions that both groups held for one another varied from the actual levels.

Although information was extracted from two seemingly different nations, obvious similarities between Australians and Americans still persist (Mosler & Catley, 1998). Perhaps this is in part due to the fact that many Australians now believe that Australia is entering into a closer relationship with the rest of the world, particularly the U.S. (Bessant & Watts, 2002). Additionally, both sets of data were collected from two relatively similar societies. Many Eastern countries follow the ideals of collectivism, which emphasizes values that serve the group, whereas most Western countries hold individualist values that give priority to personal goals rather than group goals. Hence, since both Australia and the U.S. follow the logic of
individualism (Franzoi, 2003), personalities are not expected to differ as much as if compared to a collectivist country. Even though these similar countries may yield similar results, both Australians and Americans are conscious of the fact that their cultures are alike, and have worked at developing distinctive national identities of their own (Renwick, 1980).

Even though the actual levels of personality that were evaluated displayed relatively similar findings, it must be noted that the two nations do however differ. It has been found that there are many gender differences in personality (Rathus, Nevid, & Fichner-Rathus, 2000). As indicated under the first condition, this study showed a gender difference for the Activity factor, in addition to the Neuroticism-Emotionality factor, where women scored higher than men across both dimensions.

Both Australia and the U.S. are different nations, and with that, both cultures have their own unique set of values and behavioral patterns (Mosler & Catley, 1998). In the Aggression-Hostility dimension, the perceptions that both groups had about the average Australian varied, with Australians believing the average Australian was high in aggression, while the American respondents thought of the average Australian to be low in aggression. Additionally, only a minimal difference was observed for perceptions regarding the average American in the Neuroticism-Emotionality factor. Australians believed the average Australian to be more neurotic than the average American, while the American respondents thought the average Australian to be less neurotic than Americans. Aside from these two dimensions, few substantial differences in personality were revealed.

Although the same factors are common in many cultures, major differences have been recognized in their relative importance and social desirability (Schultz & Schultz, 2001). With that, self-reporting biases may have occurred if respondents answered questions so that they
would conform to socially desirable standards. Also, a self-serving bias may have occurred if respondents answered in a way that they believe present themselves in a positive manner. Additionally, there may have been a sampling bias when participants completed the questionnaires as if they were members of the opposite society, because their answers may have been a result of the media’s interpretations of the other culture. Without there being a specific question regarding where their viewpoint stemmed from, it will be difficult to establish the reasoning behind their answers.

Several other limitations of this study include the small sample of respondents that were used to generalize to the populations. Although the college years are considered by some as being of critical importance for the development of personality (Sanford, 1966), college students provide only a limited range of participants, and a more general study of the population is desirable. Also, since the questionnaire was not administered in both locations at the same time, the reliability of the data may not be completely precise; if one culture shifted over this time, it is likely that that culture’s personality has shifted in relation, although it seems unlikely that personality would shift within an entire culture.

Although some may view the assessments of personality under a critical lens, important findings have been revealed through such research, primarily the effects of culture on personality. Through this specific study, we hoped to have assisted in the contribution of developing theories in the future regarding global personality characteristics. By examining the cross-cultural differences and similarities between two nations, the results assist in giving an overall look at two specific culture’s personality types and the perceptions of personality that those cultures internalize about one another.
References


