

How national character is constructed: personality traits attributed to the typical Russian

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Three thousand seven hundred and five participants drawn from 40 different samples and 34 regions all over the Russian Federation were asked to rate personality traits of the typical Russian living in their region using the 30-item National Character Survey (NCS). Compared with the cross-cultural mean profile of auto-stereotypes across 49 nations [54], the ratings showed that the typical Russian rarely feels depressed or inferior, is dominant, forceful and speaks without hesitation, has vivid imagination, active fantasy life and intellectual curiosity, and is able to re-examine social and political values. There was only one prevalent stereotype of the typical Russian, spreading from Kamchatka to the borders of the European Union, without identifiable geographic or any other regularity in the sample-to-sample variation. Profiles of the typical Russian converged weakly with assessed personality traits of young Russians but not with older Russians. A strong relationship was established between social capital and national character stereotypes: individuals who were inclined to believe in the honesty of other people and trust them were also disposed to describe the typical Russian in more socially desirable terms.

Keywords: Russian Character and Personality Survey, National Character Survey, personality, auto-stereotypes, social capital, Revised NEO Personality Inventory.

Ever since ancient Greece, people have believed that where one lives, reveals us something about one's personality and character. A famous French philosopher Charles Montesquieu, for instance, popularized idea that climate substantially influences the nature of

¹ The 55 contributing members of the Russian Character and Personality Survey are listed alphabetically by sample name in the Appendix.

man and his society: people living in northern climates are cold or icy whereas those who live in southern countries are warm and hot-tempered. Also, in the current day it is popular to believe that culture, history and society in which people have been brought up leave recognizable traces on their personality. For instance, Canadians are believed to be extremely polite, Dutch stingy, and British with a good sense of humour. Thus, it was a great surprise when Terracciano and colleagues [54] published a paper which showed that national character stereotypes in 49 countries did not reflect assessed personality traits. In the current paper, we will examine how people all over the Russian Federation construct a portrait of the typical Russian and how this portrait is related to the mean assessed personality traits of ethnic Russians they know well.

The Concept of Personality

The concept of personality, as an integrating power coordinating all psychological processes, has occupied a prominent role in the Russian-Marxist psychology, in which the main emphasis has been put on the socio-cultural origin of personality. To Alexei Leontyev (1904-1979), whose *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality* (1978) became one of the most influential books in the Russo-phonetic psychology, it was self-evident that we cannot talk about the personality of the newborn; the personality of human being is "produced", created by social relationships into which the individual enters in his or her later life [28]. Personality is understood by Leontyev and his followers as a culturally and socially determined special organization that coordinates the entire activity of an individual with his or her surrounding world.

Although understanding of personality in the current English speaking psychology is more mundane, it shares the premise that personality mainly concerns the way how human being is connected with the environment. Majority of the present day researchers in the field comprehend personality traits as enduring tendencies to think, feel, and behave in consistent ways [2]. For instance, extraverts talk a lot in many situations, conscientious people are methodical and persistent over long periods of time, and agreeable individuals tend to be straightforward and responsive in most of their social relationships. Longitudinal studies from the recent decades have shown that individual differences in personality traits are surprisingly stable: personality traits rated on two occasions separated by more than 30 years demonstrate a remarkable degree of similarity [35]. Besides temporal stability, studies of twins have credibly shown a powerful and systematic effect of genetic variance on interindividual differences in all personality traits, not only on more physiologically grounded "temperamental" traits [29, 48]. Vygotsky perhaps would have said that the growth of personality continues on the both lines, natural and cultural, of development [58]. Together these findings lead some psychologists to propose that basic personality traits are endogenous biological dispositions, relatively untouched by culture, life experience, and social influences [34]. Of course, the thoughts, feelings and behaviour in specific situations are influenced by numerous factors but the temporally and cross-situationally stable basic personality dispositions appear to determine the way how people act under similar circumstances.

What are these basic personality dispositions? Attempts to answer this question started with the lexical hypothesis [20], which states that the most important individual differences in human transactions will be coded with a single word in spoken languages. During the last 80 years, researchers have studied the co-variation structure of personality descriptive words, mainly adjectives, in natural languages. The size of psychological lexicon is usually large. Russian language, for example, contains more than 2,000 words that are regularly used for the description of personality dispositions [50]. However, most of the personality descriptive terms are semantically over-lapping and for the comprehensive description of individual differences in personality fewer categories are needed. It was already noticed by Louis Thurstone (1887-1955) that a large personality vocabulary is used as if it contains only five truly independent categories [56]. Thurstone was a pioneer: During the last few decades a consensus has been reached that

personality trait lexicon can be best represented by five broad nearly orthogonal personality dispositions generally known as the Big Five personality traits [21, 26]. Although the Big Five was first found in English, it soon became evident that other studied languages also contain a similar five-factor structure of personality descriptive terms. Russian is one of the Indo-European languages in which the Big Five personality structure has been identified [14, 49, 50].

In 1980s, personality research following the questionnaire tradition came up with comparable results: personality differences between individuals can be accounted for only by five general factors [32]. In a little while the two research traditions merged and paved way to the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality [13], currently the most comprehensive model for the description of personality traits. According to the Revised NEO Personality Inventory [11], these five factors are labelled as Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The NEO-PI-R has been successfully translated and adapted to more than 40 languages including Russian [30, 36]. Cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that the NEO-PI-R retains its structural properties—the pattern of covariation between traits—across different languages and cultures [37]. Together these findings indicate that these broad personality dispositions may be a universal attribute of the whole human species [33].

National Character

Typically, personality psychologists are interested in individuals and differences between them. However, in everyday life both laypersons and experts are also inclined to talk about personality dispositions characteristic to a whole group. In particular, nations or ethnic groups are often described as they possess the distinctive personality traits like their individual members do. The distinctive set of personality characteristics of national groups as perceived by lay people is usually called *national character* [7, 25, 42] or *ethnic stereotypes* [9, 19]. For example, it is widely believed that Italians are temperamental, Americans are assertive, and Finns are silent. Although national characteristics may contain attributes not related to personality (e.g., marriage practices, sexual activity, intelligence, or religiousness), personality traits still constitute the core of all these descriptions.

Like any other stereotypes, beliefs about national character can be perceived as at least partly accurate although exaggerated descriptions of really existing personality dispositions, thus containing a “kernel of truth” [6]. Some studies indeed have shown a reasonable agreement between national stereotypes and assessed personality dispositions [1]. One good reason, however, for questioning the accuracy of national stereotypes is a frequently observed discrepancy between auto- and hetero-stereotypes. For example, Russians are typically judged disciplined (e.g., serious, hardworking, and secretive) and assertive (e.g., strong, proud) by Westerners while Russian auto-stereotype indicates in the opposite direction: Russians believe that they are untroubled, friendly, and passive [42, 51]. Thus, at least one of these stereotypes must be inaccurate.

After a considerable period of accepting that national stereotypes have “kernels” of truth [9], it was bewildering to discover that auto-stereotypes of most of the 49 nations did not reflect mean personality trait levels of these nations [54]. In the *Personality Profiles of Cultures (PPOC)* project college students from 49 different cultures or subcultures were asked to describe the typical member of their culture. In most cultures studied, personality profile of the typical member of culture was not correlated with the mean profile of the assessed personality traits in the same culture. For example, Russians rated their typical compatriot more open to new experiences than respondents of any other 48 nations [54] but when they were asked to rate personality traits of a real Russian they knew well the mean ratings of Openness were even below the cross-cultural average [38]. The discovery that beliefs about national character do not mirror actually measured personality traits, perhaps not containing even a “kernel of truth”, is very difficult to digest because beliefs concerning one’s own nation or its neighbours appear

very trustworthy or based on irrefutable evidences. Nevertheless, national stereotypes, accurate or wrong, seem to have a clear and replicable internal structure with modernity—self-control [7], competence—morality [43], agency—communion [16], or competence—warmth [18] as its core dimensions.

Social Capital

Assuming that national character does not describe true group differences in personality, we face the task of finding out the sources of national stereotypes. It is likely that there is no single mechanism responsible for all national stereotypes [55]. First, beliefs about national character may be derived, for example, from the functioning of societal institutions such as government, family, business practices, popular myths, and legal system [54]. Since many of these institutions can develop under peculiar historical circumstances, it might be unrealistic to identify one single rule behind formation of all stereotypes. Alternatively, one can assume that beside unique factors some general principles exist which could explain—at least to some extent—how ideas about the national character come into being. For example, it was demonstrated that that nations living in a warmer climate were more likely to be described as having warmer character and people inhabiting richer countries are perceived to be more professional and competent [39].

Providing that national character stereotypes do not necessarily reflect people's assessed personality traits and their behavioural dispositions, it would be natural to assume that the main function of national character stereotypes is to maintain national identity [54]. Although any two cultures can be distinguished by infinite number of attributes, research has shown that a large proportion of intercultural variance can be accounted for by a relatively small number of dimensions. Approximately three decades ago an impressive study of 40 different cultures identified and elaborated four main dimensions of cultural variation: power distance, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity [22, 23]. Among these four dimensions, individualism-collectivism acquired a special position due to its pivotal role in social and political discourse [see 3, 45 for reviews]. Hofstede [23] defined individualism and collectivism as the two poles of a single dimension of national culture: individualism, according to his definition, stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose and where everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family only. Collectivism, to the opposite, stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty [23, p. 225]. On the dimension of individualism-collectivism English speaking countries like the United States, Australia, and Great Britain occupy the first three positions among the most individualistic countries. Hofstede [23] placed Russia in the middle of the individualism-collectivism dimension together with such countries as Brazil, Iran, and Turkey [see 23, Exhibit A5.3]. Many observers of the Russian culture obviously agree with the identification of collectivistic elements in it [41, 46].

Since most of the world-wide surveys indicate a global increase of values associated with individualism [24], this major cultural shift is often perceived as a danger to social cohesion and forces that hold society together [3]. Sociologists have proposed that one of the main mechanisms creating social cohesion and efficient functioning of social institutions is social capital which is usually defined as "the sum total of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual (or a group) by virtue of being enmeshed in a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" [8, p. 248]. A real boost to the concept of social capital was given after appearance of a book *Bowling alone* by Robert Putnam in 2000 which documented the decline of many national-level indicators of social capital—level of interactions with fellow citizens, participation in elections and voluntary organizations, prevalence of honesty and trust— in most Western countries during the past few decades [44].

Despite often repeated prophesy during the last two centuries that modernization is accompanied with unlimited growth of individualism, which poses serious threats to the organic unity of individuals and society, available data show the opposite: individualism in the end of the 20th century appears to be rather firmly associated with an increase of social capital, both within and across cultures [3]. Paradoxically, in societies where individuals are more autonomous and seemingly liberated from social bonds, the same individuals are also more inclined to trust even complete strangers, to serve community and to be engaged both in voluntary associations and activities [27, 47].

Assuming that one of the main functions of national stereotypes is maintaining a national identity, we expected to find a sufficiently strong association between social capital and personality traits attributed to a typical compatriot. There is a good reason to expect that individuals who are inclined to establish trusting relationships and mutual cooperation with other citizens are also disposed to describe the typical representative of their culture in socially desirable manner. To the opposite, people who do not realize that they will benefit individually unless they pursue their goals collectively are expected to characterize their typical fellow citizen in more negative terms.

The Present Study

The present study has two principal aims. First, we seek to establish the Russian national character in a large sample of university students from 34 regions and 40 different samples all over the Russia. Using this large data set obtained from geographically diverse locations we can examine to which degree the ratings of national character converge not only across individuals but also across different regions of Russia. Previous studies have shown that the perception of national character may not be homogeneous [39]. It is possible that the perception of Russian national character may vary across Russia because, for instance, habitants of some regions may want to distinguish themselves from the common view about Russians like Northern Italians want to distance themselves from the typical portrait of Italians [39].

The second aim of our study is to examine possible sources of the Russian national character auto-stereotype. Recent demonstration that national stereotypes do not correspond to aggregated personality traits [54] posed a serious puzzle for the community of personality and social scientists. In later works, however, it has been found that people living in defensive cultures, for instance, tend to believe that their typical compatriot is emotionally unstable or that members of wealthy nations are seen as low in warmth and high in competence [39]. Yet, the previous studies of the national character stereotypes have not been able to reveal straightforward relationship with societal beliefs and values [39]. In this study we attempt to demonstrate that the level of interactions with fellow citizens and prevalence of the spirit of honesty and trust (i.e., social capital) are one of the key factors determining national character stereotypes.

Method

Participants and Personality Measures

Data were collected by members of the *Russian Character and Personality Survey* (RCPS) which involved 40 universities or colleges all over the Russian Federation. The collaborators were recruited from psychology departments of various Russian universities. They were approached by letters of invitation (both by regular mail and e-mail) and the project was announced in one of the Russian leading psychological journals. These 40 samples were collected in 34 federal subjects (oblast, krai, okrug, or republic) from which six (Novosibirsk, Primorsk, Sverdlovsk, Tatarstan, Udmurtia, and Volgograd) were represented by two samples. The list of samples and their corresponding federal subjects are given in Table 1 and in Figure 1

where their geographic locations with administrative names are shown. Data were collected in 2007.

Each of the 40 samples was divided into two separate groups. The first group in each sample (3,705 participants across all samples with the mean age of 20.7 ± 2.9 years, 75% of them women; for details see Table 1) was instructed to complete the *National Character Survey* [54] and rate a typical Russian living in their region. The National Character Survey (NCS) consists of 30 bipolar scales with two or three adjectives or phrases at each pole of the scale. For example, the first item asks how likely it is that a typical Russian living in their region is anxious, nervous, and worrying versus at ease, calm, and relaxed. Each five-point scale taps one of the 30 facets assessed by the Revised NEO Personality Inventory [11] with six items for each of the five major dimensions of personality traits [54].

The direct interpretation of personality scores is ambiguous since they also include the conceptual knowledge about personality in general or "generalized other" [12] which all raters have even before any actual ratings. The only way how to make personality scores comprehensible is to compare how ratings of the typical Russian deviate from the mean auto-stereotype ratings on the same traits of many other nations. Terracciano and colleagues [54] collected, using NCS, national character ratings of 3,989 people from 49 cultures which can be used as a reference for the typical Russian ratings. The scores of the typical Russian ratings were transformed into *T*-scores in such a way that 50 representing the mean and 10 the standard deviation of the aggregate scores of the 49 cultures.

The second group of participants from each sample were asked to identify an ethnically Russian adult or a college-aged man or woman whom they knew well and rate the target using the observer rating version of the Russian NEO-PI-R [30]. For details about the procedure and results, see the other study [5]. Overall, the second group of participants included 7,157 students (78% women) with the mean age of 20.9 ± 3.6 years (see Table 1). The NEO-PI-R domain scale scores were converted into *T*-scores using aggregate scores on the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R) scales (observer-ratings) from 12,156 students in 51 different cultures [38].

Table 1.

Characteristics of subsamples and their mean stereotype values on the Big Five dimensions.

| Sample name | University | Region | National Character Survey (NCS) | | | | | | NEO-PI-R Other-Ratings | | | | | | r_c | |
|----------------|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|-------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------------|
| | | | N | N_{NCS} | E_{NCS} | O_{NCS} | A_{NCS} | C_{NCS} | N_{all} | N_{young} | N | E | O | A | | C |
| Abakan | Katanov State University of Khakasia | Khakassia | 274 | 47.0 | 51.4 | 53.4 | 48.8 | 50.7 | 176 | 95 | 48.5 | 51.8 | 48.7 | 46.6 | 50.1 | 0.47 |
| Adyghe | Adyghe State University | Adyghe | 276 | 46.5 | 51.9 | 55.2 | 52.2 | 53.1 | 192 | 96 | 47.6 | 53.4 | 49.7 | 48.3 | 53.5 | 0.32 |
| Arkhangelsk | Pomor State University | Arkhangelsk Nizhny | 297 | 47.6 | 50.2 | 53.8 | 54.0 | 51.3 | 196 | 97 | 47.3 | 55.4 | 50.7 | 47.1 | 50.6 | -0.10 |
| Arzamas | Arzamas State Pedagogical University | Novgorod | 291 | 48.5 | 52.1 | 54.2 | 52.5 | 52.2 | 195 | 96 | 47.2 | 53.0 | 48.2 | 48.8 | 52.6 | 0.09 |
| Astrakhan | Astrakhan State University | Astrakhan | 261 | 47.6 | 52.6 | 54.2 | 48.6 | 51.5 | 161 | 79 | 49.0 | 52.4 | 49.9 | 48.2 | 51.6 | 0.37 |
| Chelyabinsk | Chelyabinsk State University | Chelyabinsk | 261 | 48.2 | 52.5 | 53.3 | 49.4 | 52.1 | 163 | 90 | 48.1 | 51.5 | 48.4 | 46.3 | 51.0 | 0.21 |
| Dubna | International University of nature, society and human “Dubna” | Moscow | 255 | 49.0 | 51.0 | 53.4 | 47.9 | 50.9 | 169 | 84 | 47.7 | 52.1 | 49.8 | 47.8 | 49.2 | 0.26 |
| Elabuga | Elabuga State Pedagogical University | Tatarstan | 300 | 47.3 | 52.9 | 54.2 | 50.6 | 52.2 | 200 | 100 | 48.1 | 53.5 | 50.1 | 46.3 | 52.1 | 0.46 |
| Izhevsk1 | Udmurt State University | Udmurtia | 276 | 49.8 | 49.5 | 52.7 | 51.4 | 48.9 | 190 | 94 | 48.3 | 51.3 | 48.9 | 47.7 | 51.0 | -0.32 |
| Izhevsk2 | Izhevsk State Technical University | Udmurtia | 547 | 50.0 | 49.0 | 51.9 | 50.6 | 50.0 | 366 | 175 | 46.7 | 54.3 | 50.5 | 47.4 | 51.7 | 0.01 |
| Kazan | Tatar State Humanitarian-Pedagogical University | Tatarstan | 298 | 48.6 | 52.2 | 54.7 | 48.4 | 50.0 | 199 | 99 | 46.5 | 53.4 | 50.0 | 48.1 | 54.3 | 0.27 |
| Krasnodar | Kuban State University of Physical Education | Krasnodar | 168 | 48.7 | 53.1 | 54.6 | 47.5 | 51.9 | 169 | 85 | 49.6 | 51.3 | 49.6 | 47.2 | 49.9 | 0.39 |
| Kurgan | Kurgan State University | Kurgan | 290 | 53.3 | 45.5 | 50.5 | 46.2 | 46.9 | 195 | 98 | 50.9 | 48.1 | 47.1 | 46.5 | 48.6 | 0.64 |
| Magadan | Northern International University | Magadan | 291 | 47.7 | 51.7 | 54.2 | 52.5 | 52.6 | 188 | 92 | 49.0 | 53.3 | 50.2 | 47.1 | 50.7 | 0.03 |
| Moscow | Moscow City University of Psychology and Education | Moscow | 43 | 50.9 | 49.7 | 51.6 | 46.5 | 52.0 | 18 | 15 | 48.1 | 50.5 | 49.3 | 44.5 | 49.9 | 0.13 |
| Nizhnevartovsk | Nizhnevartovsk State Humanitarian University | Khanty-Mansi | 302 | 47.2 | 51.8 | 55.3 | 50.9 | 53.6 | 199 | 100 | 48.7 | 49.6 | 46.9 | 47.2 | 50.3 | -0.23 |
| Novosibirsk1 | Novosibirsk Russian Academy of Medical Sciences | Novosibirsk | 150 | 47.2 | 52.5 | 54.8 | 47.0 | 52.5 | 96 | 48 | 47.8 | 51.1 | 49.9 | 47.1 | 51.0 | 0.60 |
| Novosibirsk2 | Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University | Novosibirsk | 285 | 47.2 | 53.6 | 55.3 | 49.4 | 53.6 | 188 | 97 | 47.7 | 52.7 | 49.7 | 48.5 | 52.7 | 0.45 |
| Omsk | Omsk State Pedagogical University | Omsk | 248 | 48.4 | 49.5 | 54.4 | 49.6 | 52.0 | 177 | 90 | 48.8 | 51.8 | 50.2 | 47.8 | 53.7 | 0.27 |
| Orel | Orel State University | Orel | 183 | 47.8 | 52.1 | 53.9 | 50.3 | 51.1 | 103 | 55 | 48.6 | 54.2 | 50.7 | 47.5 | 51.3 | 0.37 |
| Perm | Perm State University | Perm | 299 | 50.3 | 48.9 | 51.8 | 49.5 | 50.3 | 200 | 100 | 47.8 | 52.5 | 49.9 | 46.6 | 50.8 | -0.10 |
| Petrozavodsk | Karelian State Pedagogical University | Karelia | 301 | 48.0 | 50.1 | 54.3 | 53.2 | 52.0 | 202 | 102 | 47.2 | 55.1 | 51.4 | 47.2 | 52.1 | 0.10 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|---|---------------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|-------------|
| Ryazan | Ryazan State University named after S. A. Esenin | Ryazan | 221 | 47.8 | 51.9 | 54.7 | 51.5 | 52.4 | 156 | 74 | 47.7 | 52.6 | 49.1 | 46.6 | 50.3 | 0.07 |
| Sakhalinsk | Sakhalin State University | Sakhalin | 270 | 47.8 | 52.1 | 54.0 | 49.1 | 51.0 | 185 | 99 | 48.7 | 49.8 | 48.7 | 46.3 | 49.2 | 0.16 |
| Samara | Samara State Pedagogical University | Samara | 288 | 46.5 | 52.4 | 55.3 | 51.3 | 53.3 | 194 | 99 | 46.9 | 54.4 | 49.8 | 47.0 | 51.9 | 0.38 |
| Taganrog | Taganrog Institute of Management and Economy | Rostov | 218 | 49.2 | 51.6 | 54.2 | 47.3 | 51.6 | 117 | 52 | 48.1 | 52.4 | 49.4 | 47.5 | 51.9 | 0.49 |
| Tambov | Tambov State University named after G. R. Derzhavin | Tambov | 298 | 50.5 | 49.2 | 50.9 | 45.9 | 49.7 | 197 | 101 | 46.3 | 56.1 | 50.3 | 47.4 | 52.7 | 0.07 |
| Ufa | Bashkir State Pedagogical University | Bashkortostan | 284 | 45.5 | 55.4 | 56.1 | 52.2 | 53.7 | 181 | 90 | 47.1 | 53.4 | 49.3 | 46.8 | 52.0 | 0.34 |
| Ulan-Ude | Buryat State University | Buryatia | 300 | 46.8 | 54.0 | 55.5 | 51.9 | 53.0 | 193 | 95 | 46.9 | 52.4 | 48.3 | 48.1 | 50.8 | 0.18 |
| Ussuriysk | Ussuriysk State Pedagogical University | Primorsk | 162 | 47.9 | 52.3 | 54.3 | 49.9 | 50.6 | 89 | 46 | 48.2 | 52.4 | 48.4 | 42.8 | 48.3 | 0.19 |
| Vladimir | Vladimir State University | Vladimir | 262 | 49.5 | 48.4 | 53.0 | 48.8 | 49.1 | 181 | 90 | 48.8 | 53.6 | 49.9 | 47.7 | 50.0 | 0.05 |
| Vladivostok | Far Eastern National University | Primorsk | 299 | 50.9 | 51.2 | 54.0 | 47.4 | 50.8 | 197 | 99 | 47.9 | 53.3 | 49.6 | 45.9 | 50.5 | 0.24 |
| Volgograd1 | Volgograd State Technical University | Volgograd | 339 | 47.7 | 51.2 | 52.8 | 49.0 | 52.3 | 226 | 113 | 47.8 | 53.3 | 50.4 | 47.2 | 51.9 | 0.46 |
| Volgograd2 | Volgograd Academy of Public Service | Volgograd | 208 | 47.7 | 50.2 | 54.6 | 51.1 | 50.2 | 160 | 80 | 46.8 | 52.0 | 51.2 | 45.9 | 51.9 | 0.24 |
| Vologda | Vologda State Pedagogical University | Vologda | 299 | 46.0 | 52.9 | 54.7 | 54.3 | 53.7 | 199 | 99 | 46.6 | 54.0 | 50.6 | 50.5 | 52.6 | 0.58 |
| Voronezh | Voronezh State University | Voronezh | 295 | 50.0 | 50.1 | 50.7 | 47.2 | 49.4 | 195 | 97 | 47.4 | 53.1 | 50.9 | 48.2 | 51.5 | 0.25 |
| Yaroslavl | Yaroslavl Demidov State University | Yaroslavl | 216 | 49.7 | 49.5 | 53.8 | 49.0 | 50.2 | 124 | 54 | 48.8 | 52.8 | 50.6 | 48.3 | 50.4 | 0.12 |
| Yekaterinburg1 | Russia State Professional-Pedagogical University | Sverdlovsk | 288 | 51.0 | 50.7 | 52.8 | 47.7 | 50.1 | 187 | 94 | 47.1 | 54.1 | 52.2 | 47.7 | 51.7 | 0.17 |
| Yekaterinburg2 | Ural State Pedagogical University | Sverdlovsk | 263 | 47.7 | 52.9 | 55.1 | 49.3 | 52.2 | 175 | 85 | 46.2 | 54.2 | 50.7 | 47.7 | 52.3 | 0.57 |
| Yoshkar-Ola | Mari State University | Mari El | 266 | 45.2 | 54.7 | 57.0 | 52.0 | 54.7 | 167 | 83 | 47.9 | 52.6 | 49.9 | 46.9 | 51.0 | 0.30 |

Note: N = Neuroticism, E = Extraversion, O = Openness; A = Agreeableness, C = Conscientiousness; r_c = Cohen's correlation between the mean ratings of the typical Russian and the mean assessed personality traits of the ethnic college age Russian living in the same region (significant correlations $p < .05$ are shown in bold).

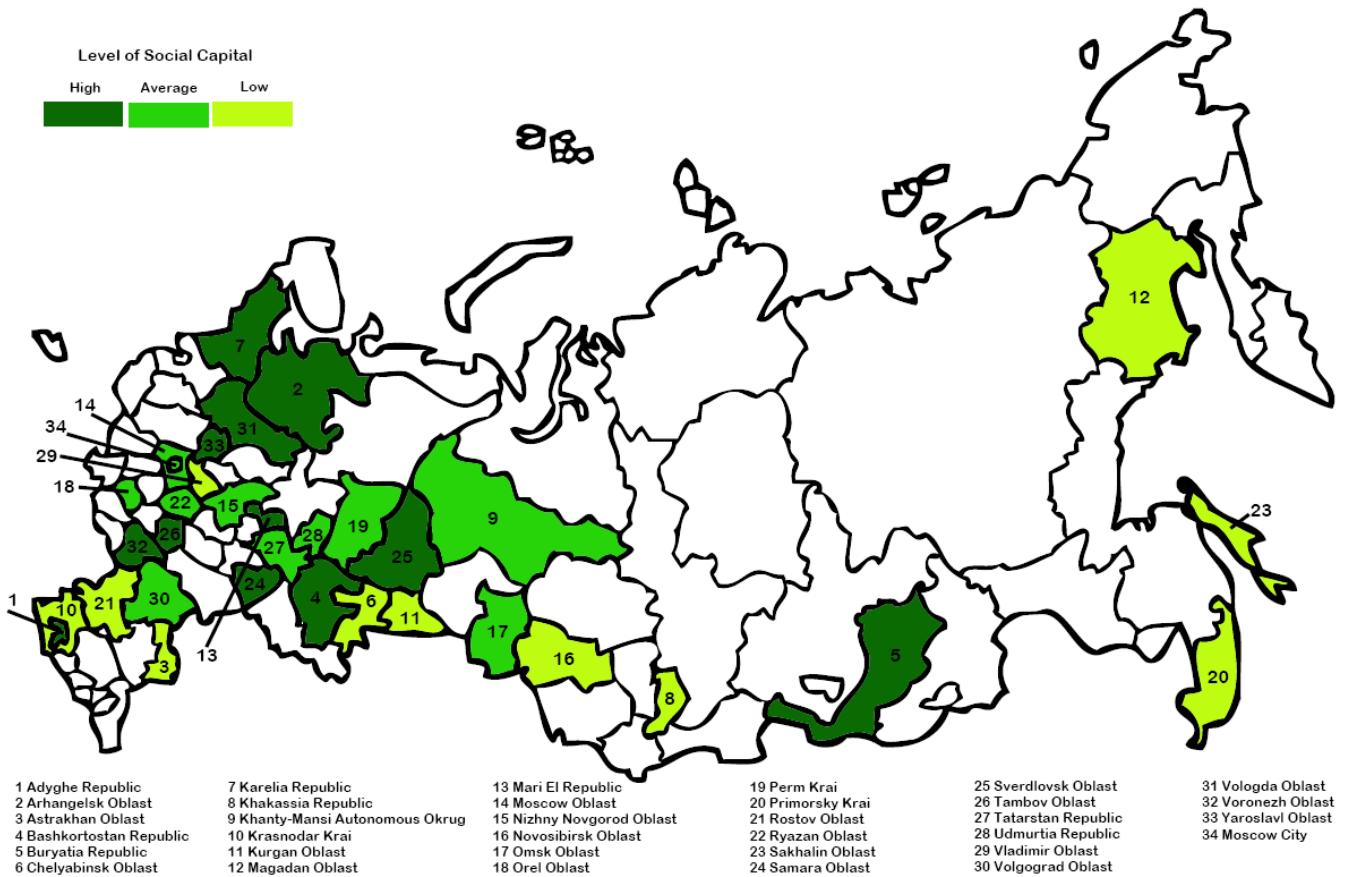


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the subjects of the Russian Federation from which 40 samples were collected.

Other Measures

We also asked raters about the similarity of the Russian national character to that of other nationalities. Of those who answered this question (95.6%), 4.5% believed that the Russian national character is similar to those of Western countries like United States or Great Britain, 3.1% believed that it is similar to those of Eastern countries like China or Japan, 16.4% believed that it resembles a mixture of Western and Eastern countries, and 76.0% answered that Russians have a unique national character not comparable to any other.

Social capital was measured by summing answers to five questions. Participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the following statements: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?” and “Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?” They also rated how important are in their life family, friends, and a possibility to provide services to others. Although the mean pair-wise correlation between these 5 items was not very high (mean $r = .13$, $N = 10,269$, $p < .0001$, Cronbach alpha = .43) they still had a significant overlap in their meaning.

In addition, we searched for potential background information provided by the Independent Institute for Social Policy for each federal region or any other sources about variables such as the Human Development Index.

Scheme for the Analysis

Before even starting the analysis we needed a proof that raters within each of the 40 samples have a reasonable agreement in the way how they perceive the typical Russian living in

their region. An appropriate measure of the agreement between different raters is intraclass correlation or ICC [40] which decomposes the whole response variance into two components: the variance related to estimated traits ("effect variance") and interindividual variance ("error variance"). The higher the trait variance in relation to interindividual variance, the higher the consistency between different raters. The ICC can be calculated for individual raters as well as for the average of all raters. In the first case ICC shows average consistency between ratings of individual raters while in the latter case it shows how reliably does the averaged rating profile describes the part of the variance in ratings that is shared across observers. The computational details of the ICCs can be found at [40]. Although the consistency between single NCS raters was rather low ranging across samples from $ICC(C, 1) = .03$ to $.25$ (median $.14$), the mean profiles of samples reliably described the shared perception of typical Russian. Across the 40 samples, the reliabilities of averaged profiles ranged from $ICC(C, k) = .72$ to $.97$ (median $.94$). In the pooled sample (data from all regions collapsed) single rater consistency was $ICC(C, 1) = .12$ and the reliability of averaged rating profiles was $ICC(C, 3677) = .998$. Thus, while the individual ratings were not very reliable, the averaged ratings provided a sufficiently consistent picture of the typical Russian.

Since collected data had a hierarchical structure (3,705 participants from 40 samples) we need to analyze them on two different levels: the level of individuals within each sample and the group level where the mean scores of the group (sample or federal district) are treated as a single subject.

Results

Mean Profiles of the Typical Russian and Their Regional Variations

We start our analysis from the mean profile of the typical Russian. Figure 2 demonstrates the mean values of the typical Russian ratings on the 30 NCS subscales and five domains normalized relative to the mean values of stereotype ratings across 49 cultures [54]. In order to get an impression about variation of stereotype ratings we also plotted minimum and maximum values of the 40 sample means on the same plot. Compared with the cross-cultural norms of 49 cultures, participants tended to rate the typical Russian to be less neurotic and more extraverted, open and conscientious than other nations. All the differences of typical Russian from national auto-stereotypes of other nations were modest in their size, remaining in most cases within in the range of 5 *T*-scores points (i.e., a half of the standard deviation). Furthermore, in most traits the sample means fall on both sides from the international mean indicating that the typical Russian was not unequivocally rated as being distinct from national auto-stereotypes of other nations. There were only few clearly distinctive traits of the typical Russian: he or she is believed to seldom feel shame and embarrassment (low N4: Self-Consciousness), to be dominant and forceful (high E3: Assertiveness), to have a vivid imagination (high O1: Fantasy) and to be ready to re-examine his or her social, political, and religious values (high O6: Values).

Next we were interested in how much demographic characteristics of the raters (sex, nationality etc.) influenced the perception of the typical Russian. Sex of the rater had only trivial influence on the ratings of the typical Russian. Although one-way ANOVAs revealed a significant effect of sex for 16 out of 30 NCS items at 1% level of significance, the effect sizes estimated in terms of partial eta-squared, η^2_p [53], which shows the proportion of variance due to factor under investigation (effect variance) to the sum of effect variance and error variance (i.e. variance not due to factor under investigation), were very small. The effect of rater's sex on the mean scores of the NCS items was in the range from 0.001% to 1.1% of the total variance with the mean effect size 0.28%. The effect of nationality – being Russian (82.4%) or any other nationality (17.6%) – was even smaller. Across the thirty items of the NCS, nationality explained on average 0.08% and never more than 0.3% of the total variance.

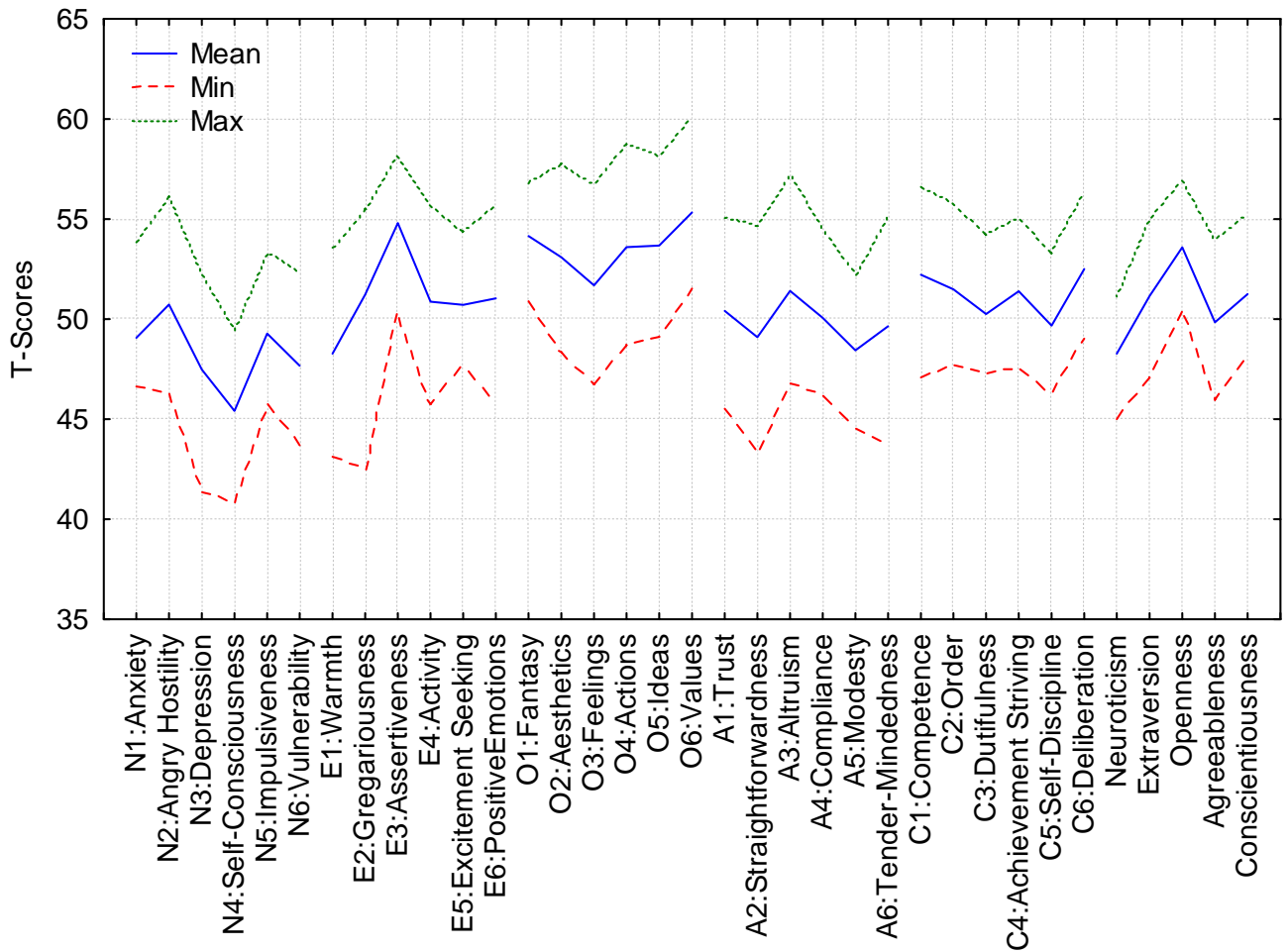


Figure 2. Mean profile of the typical Russian normalized relative to the grand mean of the typical compatriot ratings across all raters and 49 countries for the 30 NCS items [54]. Upper and lower profiles correspond to the maximum and minimum mean values out of all 40 samples respectively.

Uniqueness of Russian Character

Thus, except few traits participants described the typical Russian in much the same way as students from numerous other countries described their typical compatriot. Does this mean that our participants do not believe in the uniqueness of the Russian national character? In fact they do. When explicitly asked, 76% of the respondents said that Russian national character is unique and not comparable to any other nation. We tested whether believing into uniqueness of Russian national character was related to how personality traits of the typical Russian were rated. It would be expected that those who believe into uniqueness of Russian national character perceive the typical Russian from those who do not held this belief. Only 6 NCS items out of 30 showed significant difference ($p < .01$) with the effect size of about 0.3%. Those who believed into uniqueness of the Russian character rated their compatriot slightly lower on Neuroticism and higher on Extraversion and Openness. However, these differences were too small for a claim that the belief into uniqueness of Russian character exerted a significant effect on how the typical Russian is described.

Regional Differences in Russian National Character Stereotype

Our next analyses will be at the group-level: we will analyse the mean profiles of samples. In addition to 40 samples in which participants rated a typical Russian living in their

region, we used previously collected data (Dubna in 2004) in which students evaluated personality traits of the typical Russian in general [54]. In order to estimate similarity of profiles, we computed the correlation matrix between 41 profiles. Ordinary Pearson product correlation suffers from the imperfection that its value varies with arbitrary decisions in which direction personality traits are coded, for example, whether neuroticism or emotional stability is scored high. To overcome this limitation, we used Cohen's r_c for which each element in the paired profile is entered twice in original and reflected form across all pairs of comparison [10]. The reflected score X' is computed from the original score X as $X' = 2m - X$, where m is the midpoint of the scale (for T -scores $m = 50$).

The median correlation between any two average typical Russian profiles chosen from 41 samples was .60 indicating that there was a considerable resemblance between all profiles (from 820 possible pairs-wise correlations 82.8% were significant at $p < .01$). In univariate comparison, one-way ANOVAs revealed a significant effect of the sample for all 30 NCS items at 1% level of significance, but the effect sizes were rather moderate. The independent effect of sample on the variance of the NCS item scores was in the range from 1.9% to 6.6% of the total variance with the median effect size of 4.3%.

Is there many or only one stereotype about the typical Russian? In order to answer this question we applied a principal component analysis to the mean scores of the NCS items of the samples. Each of 40 samples plus ratings of the typical Russian in general from the previous study [54] was treated as a single subject (variable) characterized by the mean scores of the 30 NCS items which were entered twice in original and reflected form (to compute Cohen's r_c). The purpose of the principal component analysis is to look for the common variability between the observed variables (mean profiles of samples) in order to see whether they can be reduced to a smaller number of variables that could reproduce accurately enough the observed matrix of intercorrelations. Indeed, a principal component analysis revealed the presence of one strong factor explaining 60.5% of variance in profile similarities the second factor adding additional 17.1% and the third factor 7.4%. Figure 3 demonstrates factor loadings of 40 samples plus ratings of the typical Russian in general on the first two principal components which together explained 77.6% of the total variance. Although the orientation of final configuration is arbitrary in the factor analysis, the two components shown in Figure 3 corresponded to the maximal contribution of Extraversion (Factor 1) and Neuroticism (Factor 2).

Even though the results of a parallel analysis [52] suggested that three components should be retained, a hierarchical factor analysis indicated that these three components were not independent and the second order component can be extracted on which all samples have at least moderate loading (median loading was .67). The presence of only one dominant factor was also confirmed by the extraction of the first principal component (1PC) which explained an elongated form of the factor loadings in Figure 3. Except Kurgan sample (.06) all other samples loaded from moderately to strongly on the 1PC suggesting that there is only one general type of the typical Russian (median loading .83). Ratings of Russians in general, not living in a particular region, also loaded strongly on the 1PC (.56) implying that instruction (regional or general) made no big difference.

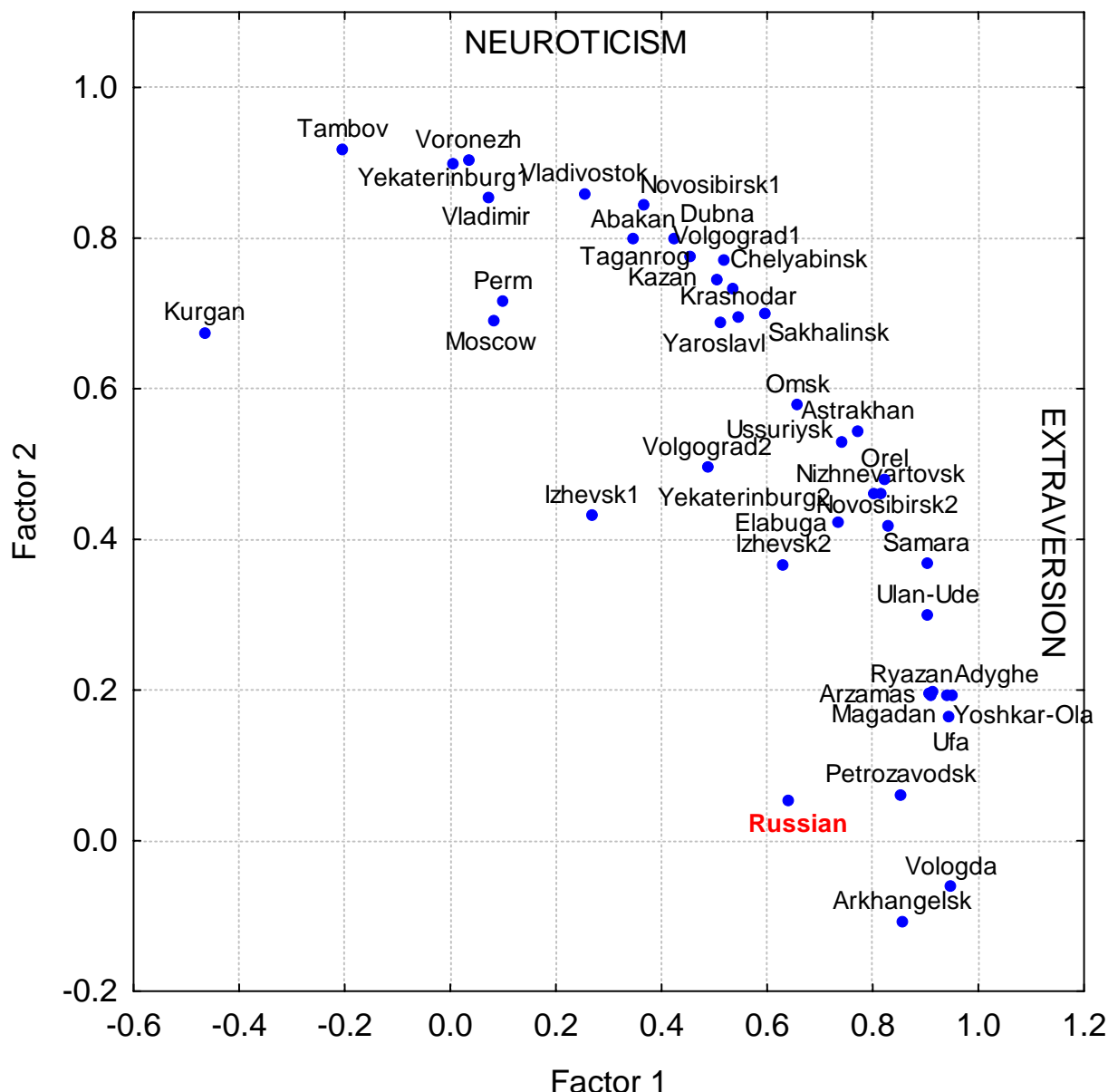


Figure 3. The first two varimax rotated principal components of 40 samples characterized by their mean profiles of the typical Russian ratings.

Despite a relatively simple form, the pattern of factor loadings shown in Figure 3 seems to have no meaningful interpretation. For example, there appears to be no geographical regularity in this pattern because correlations between sample's mean stereotype profiles were not associated with geographical distances between sites where data were collected. Dimensions in Figure 3 had no association neither with geographical coordinates (latitude and longitude) nor climatic variables (temperature). None of many socio-economical variables (e.g., population density, human developmental index, index of democracy etc.) was systematically related to any of these composite dimensions. This corroborates the conclusion that all over the Russia there is only one prevalent portray of the typical Russian.

Stereotypes about Siberians

There are certainly many personality stereotypes associated with a particular region. One of the most well-known beliefs is that people living in Siberia are particularly friendly among other reasons responding to the challenging climatic conditions by an increase a spirit of

cooperation. Thirteen out of 40 samples were collected in Siberia (Buryatia, Chelyabinsk, Khanty-Mansi, Khakassia, Kurgan, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Primorsk, Sakhalin, and Sverdlovsk). We computed the mean profile across all Siberian samples and contrasted it to the mean profile of all non-Siberian samples. These two profiles are shown in Figure 4.

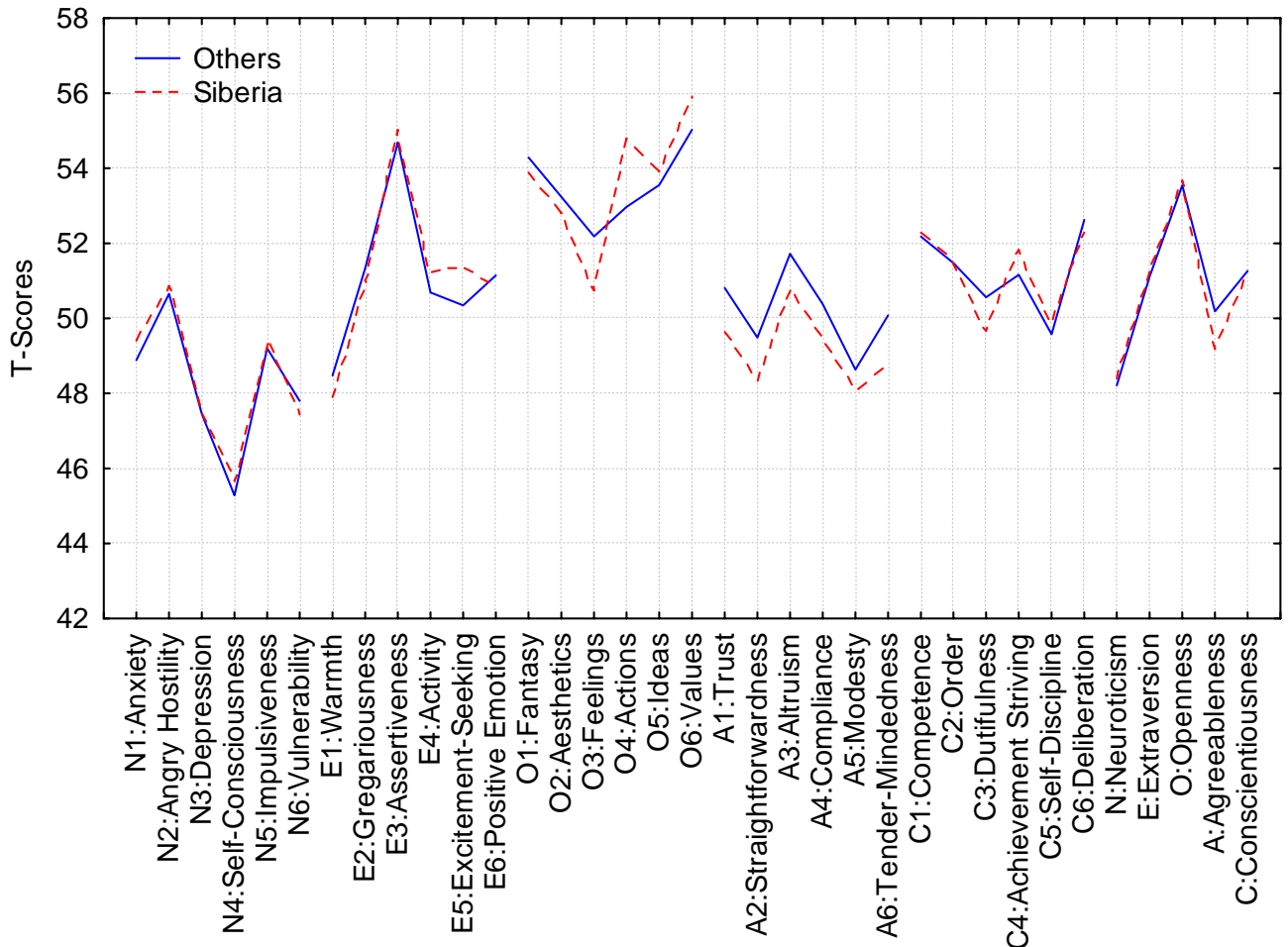


Figure 4. Mean profiles of the typical Russian ratings across 14 Siberian and 26 not Siberian samples.

Eight out of 30 NCS items were significantly different for these two samples. The typical Russian living in Siberia was believed to have somewhat blunted emotional life (O3: Feelings; $\eta^2_p = 0.44\%$, $p = .00005$) and reduced empathy towards others' concerns (A6: Tender-Mindedness; $\eta^2_p = 0.44\%$, $p = .00005$) but relatively higher readiness to try different new activities (O4: Actions; $\eta^2_p = 0.39\%$, $p < .00001$). Ironically, the only significant difference that remained between Siberian and non-Siberian samples on the level of personality dimensions was Agreeableness: Siberian Russians were perceived slightly less friendly, more antagonistic and egocentric than Russians living in other regions ($\eta^2_p = 0.49\%$, $p < .00001$). Interestingly, this is a case where stereotypes and assessed traits indicate in the same directions. In Siberian samples ethnic Russians whom the raters knew well were also assessed less agreeable than in other parts of Russia ($\eta^2_p = 0.08\%$, $p = .02$). Although these differences were very small in their size they nevertheless seem to support the opposite stereotype that Siberia is more likely a place where dislike and distrust of other people is more common than in other places of nowadays Russia. It is possible that the perceived disagreeableness of Siberians may be due to the association of Siberia with coldness or the “friendly Siberian” stereotype is one held in Russia in general (or perhaps mainly in European Russia), not necessarily one that Siberians hold of themselves.

Do National Character Stereotypes Reflect Assessed Personality Traits?

As it was described in the methods, a separate group of participants ($N = 7,065$) was asked to identify an ethnically Russian adult or college-aged man or woman whom they knew well and rate the target using the NEO-PI-R. The normalized NEO-PI-R profile of observer’s ratings was compared with the normalized profile of the typical Russian ratings obtained with the NCS scales. The Cohen’s correlation between mean profile of typical Russian and mean observer-rating profiles was $r_c = .13$ ($p = .32$) indicating nearly no similarity in the profiles. However, assuming that students who rated typical Russian might have been thinking of someone of similar to them in terms of age, we broke the mean observer-ratings profile into two independent profiles: that of young targets (aged between 17 and 23 years) and older targets (with age at least 50 years). Indeed, the profile of the typical Russian was significantly more positively related to the mean observer-rating profile of young ethnic Russians (Cohen’s $r_c = .33$, $p < .01$) but not to the mean profile of older ethnic Russians (Cohen’s $r_c = -.20$, $p = .12$). Thus, it is possible that national stereotypes of college-age participants reflect to some degree average personality scores of younger culture members, not the whole nation (Figure 5).

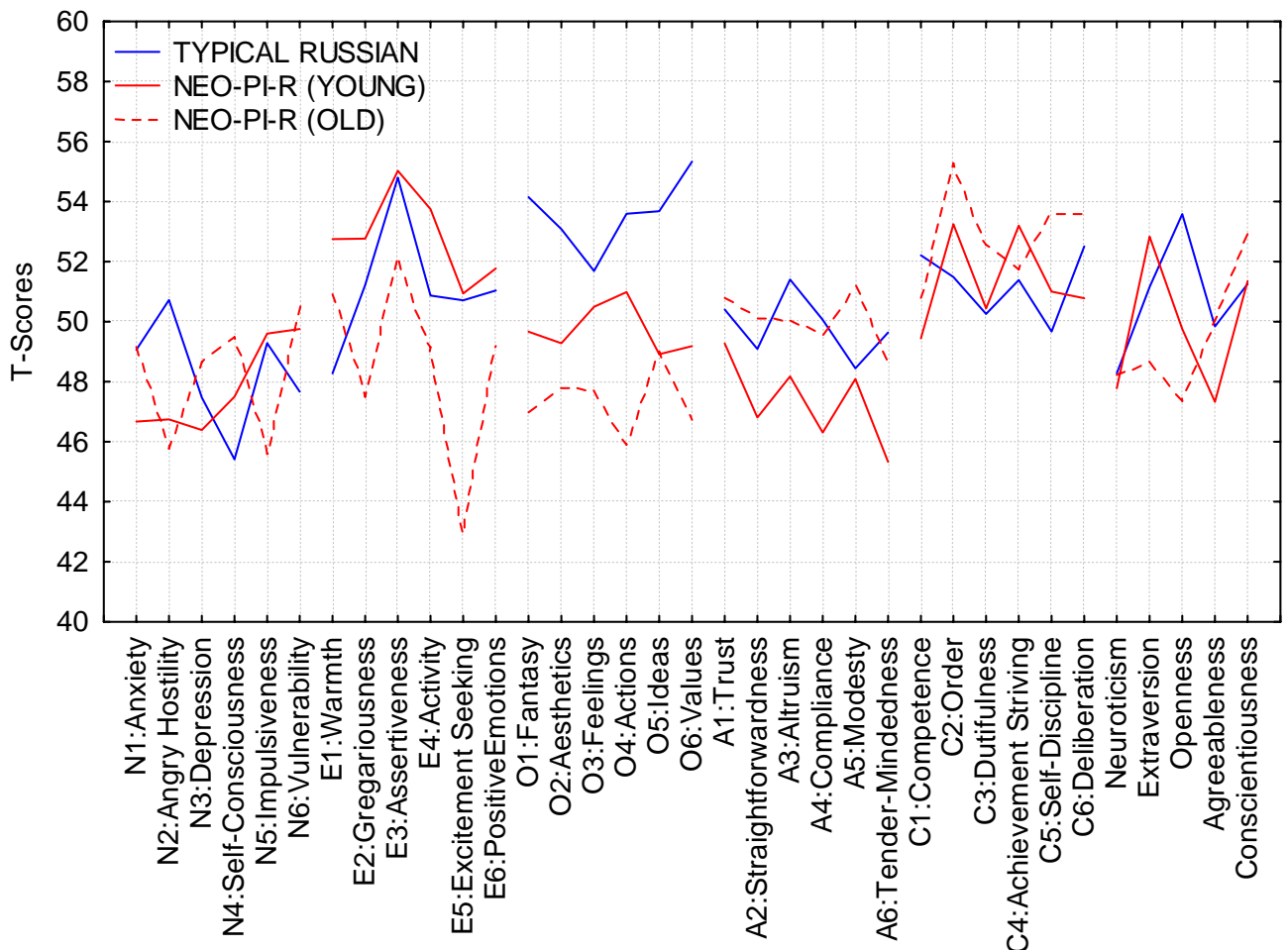


Figure 5. Mean profiles of the Russian national stereotype compared with the mean assessed NEO-PI-R personality traits for younger and older targets.

Despite the significant correlation between mean profile of ratings of the typical Russian and mean profile of observer-rated personality of young ethnic Russians, it is evident that familiar Russians were perceived through the NEO-PI-R items rather differently than the prototypical Russian was perceived through the NCS items. The discrepancy is most pronouncing in Openness domain. Even though the prototypical Russian was perceived as relatively open-minded compared to auto-stereotypes of other nations (T -scores above 50), the

average openness of actual Russian targets tended to be assessed below the cross-cultural mean. A particularly large discrepancy was between stereotype of Openness and assessed Openness of older targets. On Agreeableness, however, the stereotypical Russian matched better mean observer-rated personality of older targets than younger targets who were assessed more disagreeable, antagonistic and egocentric in the relation of the cross-cultural average.

We also analyzed agreement between mean NCS stereotype scores and corresponding aggregate NEO-PI-R observer's ratings across 30 facets separately for 40 samples. Correlations between the typical Russian rating and the mean NEO-PI-R observer rating profiles of college-age targets ranged from -0.32 for Izhevsk1 to 0.64 for Novosibirsk1 (median $r_C = 0.24$). The last column in Table 1 demonstrates that 16 out of 36 positive correlations, all positive, were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Thus, even if there was a modest agreement between stereotype and observers ratings in approximately a half of samples this is insufficient for a claim that the perception of the typical Russian is based on observations of how Russians actually behave in various situations.

Social Capital

If national character stereotypes do not reflect assessed personality traits, how do they arise then? One possibility, as stated above, is that instead of people's personality characteristics and behaviour, the stereotypes reflect societies' values and attitudes. In this paper, we were interested in studying to what extent the level of social capital is related to national character stereotype of the typical Russian. At the level of individual raters ($N = 3,546$) the index of social capital was significantly correlated with all NCS national character ratings except for E5: Excitement-Seeking. In order to visualize the impact of social capital on the typical Russian ratings, the whole sample for which we had complete data for stereotype-ratings and social capital was divided into to halves using the median split. The mean profiles of the typical Russian ratings for low and high scorers on the social capital index are shown in Figure 6.

As expected, apart from E5: Excitement-Seeking all other mean differences were significant at least at the level of $p < .00001$. The largest effect sizes were on the A6: Tender-Mindedness ($\eta^2_p = 2.38\%$), A3: Altruism ($\eta^2_p = 2.23\%$), and C3: Dutifulness ($\eta^2_p = 1.96\%$) subscales and on Agreeableness ($\eta^2_p = 2.72\%$) dimension (for all effects $p < .00001$). Albeit small these effects were approximately ten times larger than the effect of rater's nationality. On the whole, the respondents who believed that most people are honest and can be trusted were inclined to describe the typical Russian in socially favourable terms: emotionally stable, extraverted, open, agreeable, and conscientious.

We also computed the mean scores of the social capital index for each of 40 samples. The average level of the social capital was inversely related to the distance from Moscow, $r = -.57$, $N = 40$, $p = .0001$. In other words, respondents who lived closer to Moscow endorsed more strongly an idea that most people are honest and can be trusted. Unlike geographic and demographic attributes, the sample level mean scores of the social capital were also correlated to the Factors 2 (Neuroticism) in Figure 3: $r = -.48$, $N = 40$, $p = .002$. In other words, samples scoring high on the vertical Neuroticism axis tended to have lower scores on the social capital index.

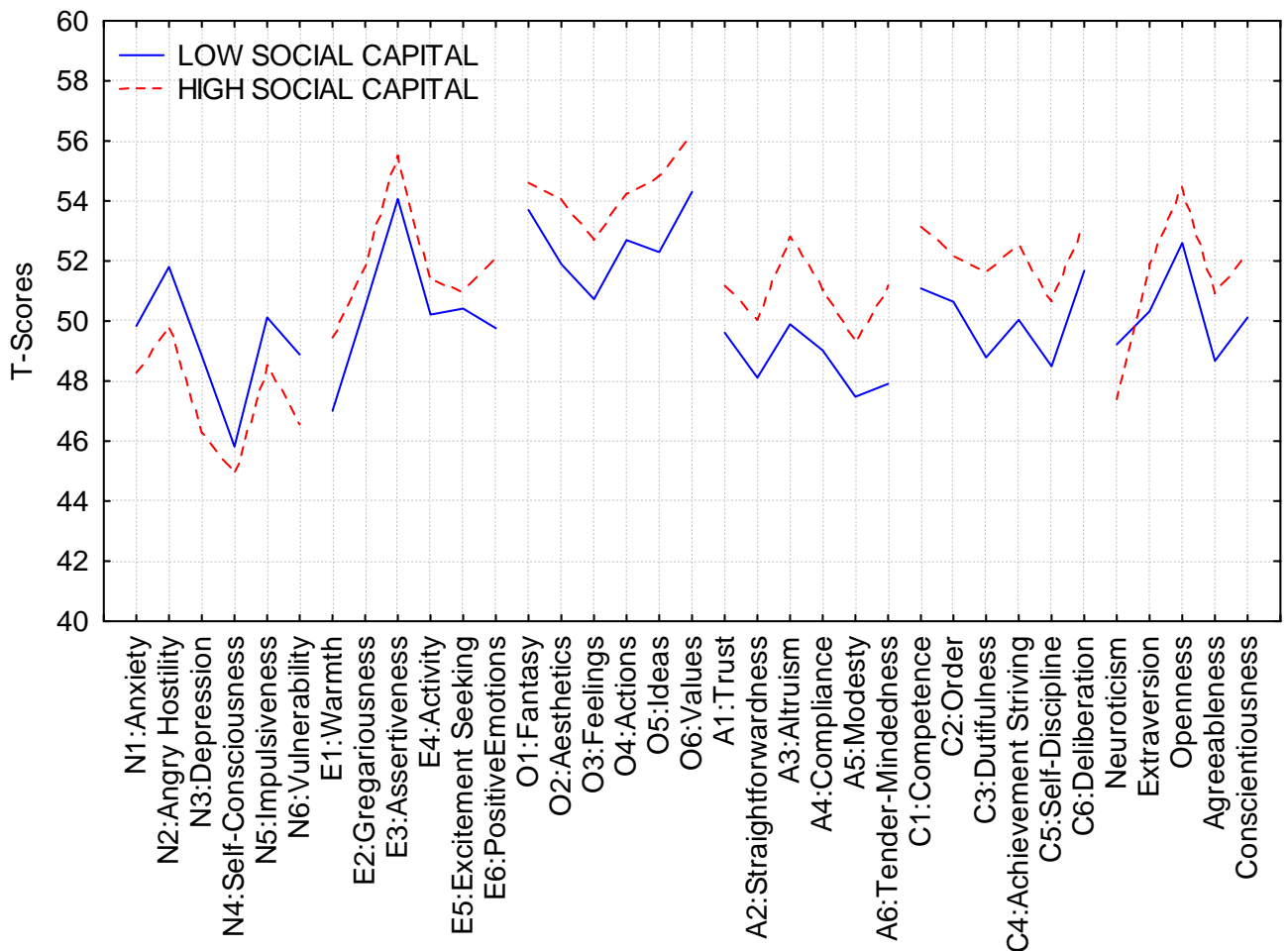


Figure 6. The mean profiles of the typical Russian ratings for low and high scorers on the social capital index.

Discussion

Many famous writers and political thinkers, from Fyodor Dostoyevsky to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Nikolai Berdyaev, have expressed their views about national character of Russians. A comparison of these explicit stereotypes with the assessed personality traits of Russians demonstrated that they unlikely have any foundation in the way how real Russian people are described [4]. In this study we approached implicit stereotypes by asking nearly four thousand college-age participants recruited from all over the Russia to rate the personality traits of a typical Russian living in their region. Agreement of individual raters on the personality traits of a typical Russian was less than half of the average agreement between two raters on an actual person they both know well [31]. Nevertheless, aggregation across a large sample of raters yielded highly reliable ratings that correspond to the perception that is shared by the group as a whole. These might be considered implicit national character stereotypes, because they are accessible only by aggregating across multiple raters, many of whom might not explicitly endorse the cumulative profile. Theoretically, there may be more than one single national character stereotype towards which opinions in any given society converge [cf. 25]. In Italy, for example, there are at least two very different national stereotypes associated with Southern and Northern Italians [39]. Even though we asked about personality traits of the typical Russian in 34 different regions we were not able to identify any clusters of stereotype profiles that would have indicated different national auto-stereotypes. There was only one stereotype of the typical Russian that spreads from Kamchatka to the borders of the European Union. However, the stereotype was relatively fuzzy meaning that the stereotypes obtained from different samples

varied considerably, even if they were recorded at the same time and in the same region or even in the same town. Analysis of this sample-to-sample stereotype variation did not reveal any meaningful regularity in it. For example, in the previous study [39] exploring national character stereotypes in 49 cultures it was observed that climatic warmth and wealth are common determinants of national stereotypes: warm climates were associated with stereotypes of metaphorically warm interpersonal traits. In this survey we were not able to replicate this finding: stereotypic warmth of the typical Russian was correlated neither with economic wealth nor annual temperature of the region where the stereotype was rated. Perhaps the only regularity worth to mention was that Siberian Russians were perceived slightly less friendly, antagonistic and a little bit more egocentric than Russians living in other regions. This result does not endorse the popular belief that cruel climatic conditions in Siberia make its inhabitants more hospitable and cordial.

How the portrait of the typical Russian looks like? The picture assembled from nearly four thousand pieces showed a person who rarely experience depression or feelings of inferiority. Compared with the averaged stereotypes across 49 other countries, he or she is perceived as somebody who is dominant, forceful and speaks without hesitation. Yet, the most salient characteristic that distinguishes the typical Russian from other nations is his or her openness. The typical Russian is portrayed as someone who has a vivid imagination and active fantasy life; one who has intellectual curiosity and ability to re-examine social and political values. This portrait is in a good harmony with the previous study [54] that also showed the typical Russian as exceptionally open-minded, perhaps even more than any other auto stereotype studied so far. The emphasis on openness may reflect the role of the concept of spirituality in the Russian culture. An eminent linguist, Anna Wierzbicka, identified three key words which in her opinion most accurately reflect Russian mentality: *dusha* ("soul"), *sud'ba* ("fate") and *toska* ("melancholy"). Since in the Russian discourse a very high proportion of themes are linked with the concept of *dusha*, the mentality of Western culture in the eyes of Russians appears to be exceedingly materialistic, lacking a desirable spirituality [57]. It seems to have been a cultural norm to endorse openness to non-materialistic values that – beside continual searches of national identity – constitutes a thread that passes through the Russian cultural history [17].

What is the origin of the typical Russian stereotype? Although in some former studies have shown an acceptable agreement between national character and assessed personality [cf. 1], a systematic analysis of nearly 50 cultures demonstrated that national character stereotypes were not based on observable personality traits [54]. The results of the current study seem to support this generalization: the profile of the typical Russian was not very strongly related to the assessed profile of ethnic Russians. However, instead of the categorical statement that national character does not reflect mean personality trait levels we may need a more nuanced verdict: national stereotypes of college-age participants demonstrate some agreement with the mean personality trait level of younger culture members, not older ones. Perceived typical Russian tended to be more similar to observer-rated young ethnic Russian with respect to Neuroticism, Extroversion and Conscientiousness but not with respect to Openness and Agreeableness. On the basis of this partial agreement alone it would be impossible to claim that the stereotype of the typical Russian was copied and amplified from observing really existing tendencies to feel, think, and behave.

The relatively strong relationship between social capital and national stereotypes indicates another possible source of national stereotypes. Individuals who were inclined to believe in honesty of other people and trust them were also disposed to describe the typical Russian in socially more desirable terms. Although social capital is certainly not the only factor that determines the way how the typical Russian is perceived, it is an important one having many times higher impact than demographic factors such as ethnicity, age or sex of the raters. It was also remarkable that trusting people and having faith in their honesty was many times more powerful than believing or not believing into uniqueness of the Russian character.

The established link between social capital and stereotypes may also explain how stereotypes help to maintain social identity. As it was noted by Durkheim [15], the division of labour and roles in the society unites, rather than separates, individuals; it causes activities that can exist only in the presence of and in coordination with other activities [15]. There is no genuine contest between the individual and society because a certain type of society is a precondition of individualism. On the contrary, the growth of individuality, autonomy, and self-sufficiency may be perceived as necessary conditions for the development of interpersonal trust, mutual dependence, and social solidarity [3]. In places where people spend more time with their friends and believe that most people are honest and can be trusted they also seem to portray their fellow citizens in more socially favourable terms. These stereotypes, in turn, may enhance civic engagement and produce more social capital.

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