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Personality profiles and the "russian soul": Literary and scholarly views evaluated

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Abstract

Many domestic and foreign observers have claimed that Russians have a unique constellation of personality traits that mirrors their distinctive historical and cultural experience. To examine the hypothesized uniqueness of Russian personality, members of the Russian Character and Personality Survey collected data from 39 samples in 33 administrative areas of the Russian Federation. Respondents (N = 7,065) identified an ethnically Russian adult or college-aged man or woman whom they knew well and rated the target using the Russian observer-rating version of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory. The mean personality profile of Russians was very similar to the international average based on 50 different countries, debunking the myth of a unique Russian soul. The small variations from world norms did not converge with depictions of Russian national character in fiction and the scholarly literature. New items intended to capture distinctive, emic aspects of Russian personality provided no new information beyond the familiar Big Five dimensions. Religion, ethnicity, and beliefs about the uniqueness of the Russian character and the malleability of personality traits had little effect on personality ratings. Perceptions of the Russian soul do not seem to be based on the personality traits of Russians.

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Keywords

Big Five, Cross-cultural comparison, Personality, Personality ratings, Russian national character: NEO PI-R, Russian soul