Do individuals raised in specific regions of the United States differ in their propensity to avoid interpersonal conflict?

Previous research has found that regions of the United States differ in Big Five Personality Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) scores such that Friendly and Conventional (Midwest); Relaxed and Creative (West); Temperamental and Uninhibited (Northeast and South) regions have been identified (Rentfrow et al., 2013).

We anticipate scores on measures of conflict communication and interpersonal harmony to be predicted by the BFI scales of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (and perhaps Extraversion and Neuroticism).

Furthermore, we anticipate replicating regional distributions of Big Five Inventory scores found in our own and other’s research.

Finally, we predict that individuals born and raised in the Midwest, or the Friendly and Conventional region of the United States, avoid interpersonal conflict to a greater degree than those born and raised in the Temperamental and Uninhibited Region of the United States.

Our findings contribute to research on connections between personality and behavior and to our understanding of US regional cultural differences.

Methods

Participants
- One hundred sixty-seven participants completed all measures (some analyses include a larger sample). The sample was 71.1% female, 76.3% Caucasian (4.5% Asian American, 2% African American, and 75.8% heterosexual with a mean age of 21.83).

Procedure
- We distributed an online survey sampling populations from different regions of the country, from a UWEC student sample and a non-probability national sample obtained through an online psychological research site.

- Participants were presented with an informed consent form, which ended asking if they were a resident of the United States (those who were not were thanked and sent to the end of the survey).

- The survey contained the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999), the Conflict Communication Scale (Goldstein, 1999), the Interpersonal Harmony Scale (Leung, Brew, Zhang, & Zhang, 2011), and a measure of political beliefs.

- The survey concluded with participant demographics and debriefing.

We found partial support for our hypotheses concerning the Big Five personality characteristics as predictors of interpersonal conflict beliefs and preferences.

As predicted, Agreeableness predicted lowered tendencies to approach conflicts directly and in public, but higher tendencies to express emotions.

Conscientiousness predicted greater tendencies for preferring direct conflict confrontations, greater self-disclosure, and a lower desire for interpersonal harmony.

Neuroticism predicted lowered tendencies for approaching conflicts directly or approach them at all, but greater emotional expression and a marginally higher desire for interpersonal harmony.

Although our second hypothesis concerned regional differences in personality, the vast majority of our sample was from the Friendly and Conventional region. As such, we are currently unable to evaluate this hypothesis. Data collection is ongoing, and we hope to obtain a more geographically diverse sample.

Our findings contribute to research on connections between personality and behavior.

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