

Personality science around the world

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Personality science seeks to provide a holistic understanding of people through the study of the functioning, organisation, and distinctive characteristics of the person as a whole (Morf, 2002). Put differently, it is “the scientific inquiry into human nature and its diversity” (Rauthmann, 2020, p. 1). This broad and integrative mandate naturally positions personality science as a hub science with multifarious links and connections to various psychological and non-psychological disciplines dedicated to the study of human nature (Denissen, 2024; Rauthmann, 2020).

However, in today’s personality science neither the researchers who do the studying nor the participants who are being studied are an adequate representation of the human diversity that we wish to understand. This has been a problem for decades (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010) – and it continues to be (Apicella et al., 2020; Lin & Li, 2023; Raval et al., 2024; Thalmayer et al., 2021).

Of note, the issue is far larger than personality science. But if the field does not stand out in a bad way, it does not stand out in a good way either (Götz & Ebert, 2023). As a case in point, a recent audit of the *Personality Processes and Individual Differences* section of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that between 2014 and 2018 a staggering 64% of all published samples came from the United States, while Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East together accounted for a meager 9% – despite representing around 90% of the world population (Thalmayer et al., 2021). The same audit observed that a grand total of 94% of first-authors were from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or member states of the European Union.

To be clear, there is a collective recognition that this is a real problem that hampers progress in personality science and the social sciences at large, such that even the most sophisticated methodological advances will accomplish little if they are only applied to a tiny slice of humanity (Rad et al., 2018). Indeed, scholars are now widely

acknowledging that the lack of adequate geographical and cultural representation poses serious generality problems, threatens epistemological plurality, and restricts the scope of our research through unknown unknowns, that is, important psychological phenomena that fall through the cracks of academic attention because Minority World psychologists are not aware of them (Adetula et al., 2022; Lin & Li, 2023). It also perpetuates the dominance of Minority World knowledge systems which often treat Majority World contexts as mere platforms to test the generalisability of Minority World theories and concepts – instead of fertile breeding grounds for the development of theories and concepts in their own right (Adetula et al., 2022; Raval et al., 2024).¹

In light of this Minority-Majority World mismatch, genuine efforts are being undertaken to level the playing field. At *Personality Science*, the promotion of a personality science by and for all has been a core mandate since the journal’s inception (Rauthmann, 2020). Following *Personality Science*’s relaunch, this direction will be continued and even intensified under the new leadership (Denissen, 2024). This is most saliently reflected in the composition of the journal’s incoming editorial board which features Associate Editors from Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania and South America, and the new global alliance of five learned societies (i.e., *ACPID*, *ARP*, *EAPP*, *JSSP*, *SPSP*) that co-hosts the journal. Importantly, while its global consortium structure is unique,

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Personality Science is not alone in taking action. Similar calls and policy changes are being implemented in other leading outlets in the field (e.g., Adler et al., 2024; Albarracin et al., 2024; Bauer, 2020; Lucas, 2022; Vazire, 2023), suggesting an encouraging sea change and a collective realignment of values (Apicella et al., 2020).

Despite this, change is still slow (Apicella et al., 2020; Bauer, 2020) and probably too slow (Thalmayer et al., 2021), leading a recent review paper to conclude that “despite the calls for global representation, increasing attention to diversity in some subfields, and focus on decolonial approaches, statistics regarding representation of majority world authors and samples in English-language peer-reviewed journals have not considerably changed [...], highlighting that psychological science still has a long way to go in promoting global and diverse research.” (Raval et al., 2024, p. 353).

This is also evident in *Personality Science*. Despite the journal’s affirmative and proactive commitment to raising diversity in representation, an audit of all 51 papers that it published during its first four years observed that approximately three quarters of authors were affiliated with institutions in Germany or North America and only one author had an affiliation in the Majority World (Denissen, 2024).

The current theme bundle

While the status quo may thus feel disheartening, we are convinced that it is not a reason to stop. On the contrary, we believe that, if anything, we should double-down on our efforts to promote an inclusive, equitable, and diverse – in short: truly global – personality science. It is in this spirit – not of naïveté, not of defiance, but of determination – that we have pursued, and are now pleased to publish the current Theme Bundle on *Personality Science around the World*.

The present Theme Bundle is a collection of six papers that can be thought of as dispatches from the field. Together they showcase what it is like to be a personality scientist – and do personality science – around the globe. The articles are authored by the people who are best positioned to tell these stories, because they are their stories – in direct contrast with extractive helicopter research (i.e., researchers from scientifically dominant countries conducting studies in under-researched countries with little to no involvement of local researchers or community members), which has historically been the predominant mode of Majority World research (Apicella et al., 2020; Mughogho et al., 2023). Reflecting the diversity of the contexts and experiences that informed them, the contributions in this Theme Bundle take on diverse forms – from empirical papers and reviews to reflective personal essays and descriptions of the trials and

tribulations of large-scale data collections in traditionally under-researched places. The papers feature rich and varied methodological approaches from lexical analyses to longitudinal survey studies and interventions. In many cases, they are the fruit of collaborations that feature authors from multiple institutions within a certain world region thus offering less of a single-lab snapshot and more of a portrait of the broader personality science ecosystem within which they are embedded.

Articles in the theme bundle

In “*Brazilian Jeitinho: Historical Development, Current Research, and Its Impact on Personality Assessment*”, Cristian Zanon, Jéssica V. da Luz, Taís B. da Silva, & Marlos A. de Lima examine the historical origins, contemporary conceptualisations and societal implications of Brazilian *jeitinho*, an emic personality trait that manifests in creative, rule-bending, and sly problem-solving strategies. Zanon et al. (2024) first present a brief history of Brazil in general and Brazilian personality science in particular. They then define and situate *jeitinho* in the broader construct landscape, carefully distinguishing the two subfacets *jeitinho simpático* and *jeitinho malandro*. The paper concludes with a bird’s eye view on *jeitinho*’s role in Brazilian society and a discussion of the challenges that the construct may pose to traditional self-report, survey-based personality assessments.

Up next, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Christin Camia, Kate C. McLean, and Theodore E. A. Waters report findings from an original, pre-registered study that offers a unique, longitudinal, and intercultural window into the stability of memory functions. Specifically, Camia et al. (2024) recruited student samples in the UAE and the Pacific Northwest of the United States to test the functionalist hypothesis that autobiographical memory functions (i.e., self-, social-, and directive functions) might be part of narrative identity. Using a combination of narrative coding and self-report questionnaires, across an eight-month longitudinal study, the authors found evidence for stable memory functions in specific memories, with no differences between the studied cultural contexts. This indicates that individuals tend to recall the same events for the same purposes, at least in the medium term. For example, for one participant who recalled a time in their life when they got closer to their estranged parents after their sibling left home this memory would consistently be remembered as an important instance of bonding and social growth as opposed to gradually morphing into a memory of personal growth and self-insight (Camia et al., 2024). Together, the findings suggests that memory functions may not only be a memory characteristic, but also a stable component of personal narrative identity and that may be true in both Western and non-Western populations.

Halfway around the world, in *“Hello, Neihou: Anchoring and Adjustment in Personality Assessment”*, Michelle Yik offers a fresh new perspective on an old paradox, namely the persistent finding that despite being commonly perceived as more industrious and hard-working, Chinese individuals consistently rate themselves lower on Conscientiousness than their Western counterparts. To further complicate the matter, Chinese-English bilinguals self-report higher levels of Conscientiousness when they answer the measure in Chinese as opposed to English, even though in both cases they rate their Conscientiousness as lower than that of Americans. Shedding new light on the matter, Yik (2024) first provides a thoughtful review of the issue and extant explanations (e.g., cultural differences in expressed behaviours, ambiguous translations, and bicultural frame switching). She then proceeds to offering a new explanation by revisiting Tversky and Kahneman’s (1974) famous anchoring-and-adjustment heuristic and applying it to the context at hand. Specifically, Yik argues that when self-reporting their Conscientiousness, Chinese individuals may initially estimate their Conscientiousness level based on a cultural ideal (of which they fall short), and then adjust their estimate away from this anchor according to the context suggested by the test language (with Chinese vs. English boosting their perceived Conscientiousness). To corroborate her account, Yik compares and contrasts multiple American and Chinese samples, providing empirical patterns consistent with the anchoring-and-adjustment heuristic in both Mandarin- and Cantonese-speaking Chinese individuals.

Meanwhile, in *“Lifespan Research in Kenya, Namibia, and South Africa: Cohort Profile of the Africa Long Life Study”*, Amber Gayle Thalmayer, Stephen Asata, Elizabeth N. Shino, Luzelle Naudé, Sumaya Laher, Tasneem Hassem, Maria Florence, Tracy-Ann Adonis, Selma N. Uugwanga, Julia S. Rotzinger, Daniel Hofmann, John Makunda, Casey Botha, Annelisa Murangi, and Catherine M. Shirima provide a comprehensive description of the Africa Long Life Study (ALLS). As the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal study on personality and aging in Africa, the Africa Long Life Study marks a major advance and exemplifies true progress towards a more global personality science. In the paper, Thalmayer et al. (2024) offer a detailed introduction to the study, by sharing sample data, preliminary findings, logistical challenges, effective solutions, and thoughtful reflections on a gratifying team journey and many lessons learned. Powered by strong community involvement and input from diverse stakeholders on the ground, the Africa Long Life Study uses a sophisticated mixed-methods approach with both qualitative and quantitative techniques as well as emic and etic contents to elucidate diverse areas of inquiry from personality traits to mental health, lifespan development, and cultural mindsets.

Returning readers to the Middle East, Maria-Jose Sanchez-Ruiz, Tatiana Khalaf, and Natalie Tadros look back on the captivating and turbulent history of personality psychology in Lebanon – and forward to a path of resilience and progress in the face of multifaceted challenges and crises. In doing so, Sanchez-Ruiz et al. (2024) provide a personal and relatable account of their experiences working in the Levant region and the evolution of their research program on trait emotional intelligence – a higher-order constructs that subsumes multiple affective personality dispositions, such as emotionality, self-control, sociability, and well-being. Amongst others, the authors describe the lengths they went to in order to secure funding for their research, which ultimately enabled them to establish a comprehensive nomological network for trait emotional intelligence in Lebanon and design a youth-focused intervention program to promote emotional intelligence that has yielded promising initial results. The authors conclude with an emphatic call for greater collaboration and systematic organisation among researchers in Lebanon and the broader Levant region.

Last but certainly not least, Yasuhiro Hashimoto and Atsushi Oshio take readers on a fascinating tour of lexical personality studies in Japan, spanning over 70 years from the 1950s to the 2020s. Therein, they zoom in on two landmark papers from the early 2000s. Both set out to harness the structure of natural Japanese language to make inferences about the structure of personality in Japan – but in very different ways, and with quite different results. Murakami (2003) adopted an etic, top-down approach that aimed to affirm the existence of the Big Five in Japanese through a lexical approach, finding five factors that resemble the original Big Five to varying degrees. In contrast, Tsuji (2001) adopted an emic, bottom-up approach, employing a lexical approach to focus on the uniqueness of Japanese language – and, in turn, personality – without focusing on the reproducibility of the Big Five. Translating both studies from their original Japanese and thus making them available – for the first time – to an English-speaking audience, Hashimoto and Oshio (2024) provide a thorough and thoughtful comparison and interpretation of the two seminal papers and use them to paint a bigger and more complete picture of the current state of research on personality structure in Japan.

Taken together, the six papers featured in the current Theme Bundle are a testament to the vibrant and resilient research landscape of personality science that stretches across the globe. As such, they provide a direct and unfiltered reflection of the unique challenges and difficulties as well as the unique opportunities and joys that personality scientists around the world encounter. Theme Bundles such as this are by no means enough and the end of the road is far from being in sight – but we do believe that, however small, they are a meaningful step towards a

united, global personality science that is more relevant for – and more reflective of – all of us.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online. Depending on the article type, these usually include a Transparency Checklist, a Transparent Peer Review File, and optional materials from the authors.

Note

1. Following Kagitcibasi (2002) as well as Thalmayer et al. (2021), in this editorial we use the term “Majority World” to refer to the non-Western societies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean where the majority of the world’s population lives.

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