


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.

Keywords

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

The personality of Russians is a particularly interesting subject because of an often-repeated claim about the uniqueness of Russian character. In contrasting themselves with the industrialized and materialistic cultures of the West, Russians in the 19th century began to define themselves in terms of their spiritual qualities, their distinctive “Russian soul.” This phrase became the nucleus of a wide-ranging concept of Russian national character, incorporating both admirable and lamentable qualities, both apparently embraced as part of the national identity. These attributes were

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explored by influential novelists and came to be used by historians and political scientists as part of the explanation for Russia's history and place in the world. This article addresses the question of whether a unique Russian personality can be detected in standard measures of the Five-Factor Model (FFM; Digman, 1990) or in emic items tailored to Russian culture. It also asks whether perceptions of Russian uniqueness affect observer ratings of Russian targets.

The Religious and Cultural Context

Since 988, when Russia, under Prince Vladimir the Great, was converted to Christianity by joining the Greek Orthodox Church, religion has been a dominating force that has shaped Russian culture and society. According to the 2002 Russian Census, a majority of Russian citizens, and as many as 80% of ethnic Russians, identified themselves as Russian Orthodox (<http://www.perepis2002.ru/index.html>). Russian Orthodox Christianity has had a notable influence on Russian value systems, particularly Russians' generally negative attitudes toward money and material welfare (Trifonova, 2005). This derogatory attitude is, indeed, in sharp contrast to the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Weber, 1930).

Many political scientists, before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, have accepted the view that the Russian people are in one way or another exceptional, mirroring the distinctiveness of Russian society and cultural traditions. This notion was particularly championed by Samuel Huntington (1993), who believed, like historian Arnold Toynbee before him, that the cultural distinction between Russia and the West is insurmountable, being rooted in the incompatibility of two different types of civilization (cf., Mälksoo, 2008, about Russia's civilizational dialogue with Europe in legal theory).

In addition to religion, the distinctive Russian identity is often thought to have been shaped by political and historical forces, including its size, its geographic identity spanning Europe and Asia, its ties to the Muslim world, its climate, and its centuries of autocratic rule by the Czars and their successors in Soviet Russia. This idea became fashionable in Russia after the publication in 2000 of the popular Russian author Dmitry Parshin's book *Why Russia Is Not America* (Shlapentokh, 2005). Many contemporary Russians believe that Russia has a special place in history and should have its own specific political and economic order, complementary to its national character. They argue that Russians have a unique constellation of personality traits that make them not only unwilling but unable to adopt a Western mode of life (Shlapentokh, 2005; see also Shevtsova, 2007).

Literary and Scholarly Views of Russian Personality

National character can be assessed in at least two ways. The first is to ask for descriptions of the typical culture member from a sample of respondents (who may or may not be members of the culture) and average their judgments. Agreement between pairs of judges tends to be quite modest ($ICCs = .1$ to $.3$; Terracciano et al., 2005), but aggregation across a large sample of judges yields highly reliable values that correspond to the shared perceptions of the group. These might be considered implicit national character stereotypes, because they are accessible only by aggregating across multiple raters, none of whom individually might explicitly endorse the resulting profile. These implicit stereotypes may reflect national character, but they do little to communicate it across cultures and generations. Instead, that role is more likely to be played by public and explicit national character assessments made by perceived experts, such as artists, scholars, and historians. Some of these assessments may become vital due to their frequent reincarnation in the form of anecdotes, popular images, and conversation topics. This is what is typically meant by national character or stereotypes. An analysis of their sources provides a second window on national character that will be considered in this article.

It seems likely that perceptions of Russian national character were shaped in large measure by works of fiction. Westerners are perhaps most familiar with the anguished soul of Russians from the novels of Dostoyevsky—though some critics claim that all talk, serious or mocking, about a mysterious Russian soul preoccupied with existential problems is nothing more than an excuse for passivity (Pesmen, 2000) and an unwillingness to take responsibility for one's own actions (Khrushcheva, 2008).

Russians themselves have been influenced by the work of many writers. For example, in 1859, Ivan Goncharov published *Oblomov*, a novel whose title character—in contrast to the industrious ethnic German Stolz—epitomizes indecision and procrastination. Russians of the day were so taken with the portrait that *oblomovism* became a Russian word for an idle life thought to be typical of Russians in general.

It is interesting that it is with regard to industriousness that internal and external perspectives diverge. Russians are typically judged by Western Europeans to be disciplined (e.g., serious and hardworking) and assertive (Peabody, 1985), whereas Russians believe that they are unambitious and passive (the latter view also shared by their neighbors, Estonians, who see Russians as less conscientious and less balanced compared with other nations; e.g., Realo et al., 2009; Valk, 1998).

It also seems that the perception of Russians' own diligence has not changed considerably over the last hundred years. During a considerable period of time, the Soviet regime attempted to promote a strong work ethic and conscientiousness, but to judge by the persisting stereotype, these attempts were not very successful (Peabody & Shmelyov, 1996).

Philosophers and writers have discussed key concepts that could represent Russian cultural values and national character reflecting these values. For example, an eminent linguist, Anna Wierzbicka, identified three keywords that most accurately reflect Russian mentality: *dusha* ("soul"), *sud'ba* ("fate"), and *toska* ("melancholy"). Since in Russian literary and everyday discourse a very high proportion of themes are linked with the concept of *dusha*, to a Russian, the mentality of Western culture often seems to be exceedingly materialistic, lacking a desirable spirituality (Wierzbicka, 1992). A bent of Russians for self-sacrifice has often been mentioned by observers of Russian character. This aspect of the Russian spirit was perhaps best embodied in the classical literary characters, such as Andrei Bolkonsky (from Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) and Prince Myshkin (from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*), and the motive of self-sacrifice endorsed by the contemporary Russian cinema (Beumers, 2000). Beside spirituality, an increased Russian leaning toward fatalism has frequently been noted, although it is also typical of many other post-Communist societies (Goodwin et al., 2002). Russians are also thought to be extremists, with exaggerated reactions and attitudes: In Russian, the Likert responses *strongly disagree* and *strongly agree* are rendered as *absolutely disagree* and *absolutely agree*.

Characteristics like spirituality and self-sacrifice may seem inconsistent with indolence and melancholy, but inconsistency has itself been claimed to be a characteristic of the Russian mentality (Berdyayev, 1960). Virginia Woolf noted in her essay "The Russian Point of View" that it is very typical of Russians to love and hate at the same time. Perhaps every Russian knows the quote of their great poet Fyodor Tyutchev (1803-1873), "*Umom Rossiyu ne ponyat*" ("One cannot understand Russia by reason").

Understanding Russians: Etic and Emic Approaches

There is some reason to think that modern trait psychology may hope to understand Russians and determine if they are indeed distinguished from other nations. When measures of the FFM are administered to samples of Russians or used to rate Russian targets, the familiar FFM structure is seen (Martin, Costa, Oryol, Rukavishnikov, & Senin, 2002; McCrae et al., 2005). Thus, Russians do not differ qualitatively from others with respect to Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to

Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Russians might, however, show notable differences in trait levels that set them apart, or they might be characterized by additional traits that are indigenous to Russia and found nowhere else. Such traits would fall entirely outside the framework of the FFM.

Many of the characteristics attributed to the Russian soul seem to be easily operationalized as FFM traits measured by the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992). The often-mentioned inconsistency of the Russian character may mean that an average Russian scores high on scales measuring emotional instability or Neuroticism. The literary emphasis on guilt and melancholy should be seen in elevated scores specifically on the N3: Depression facet. Exaggerated reactions and attitudes might be an expression of a kind of histrionic Extraversion characterized by high E3: Assertiveness and E5: Excitement Seeking (cf., Costa & McCrae, 1990), whereas the indolence Russians attribute to themselves suggests low E4: Activity; overall, Russians might be considered average in Extraversion. Russians would also be expected to score high on scales measuring Agreeableness, particularly A3: Altruism, because they are ready to sacrifice in the name of a beloved one. Provided that *Oblomov* is an accurate portrayal of typical Russians, their mean personality profile should show a remarkably low level on most facets of Conscientiousness, especially C4: Achievement Striving and C5: Self-Discipline. It is less clear how spirituality should be classified in the FFM (Piedmont, 1999), but measures of self-transcendence are known to be related to high Openness (McCrae, Herbst, & Costa, 2001). In contrast to down-to-earth and materialistic Westerners, soulful Russians might be particularly high in O1: Fantasy and O3: Feelings. Thus, the typical Russian might be characterized by the profile illustrated in Figure 1. In this schematic representation, specific facets identified above have been assigned *t* scores of 55 (high) or 45 (low); other facets in the Neuroticism, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness domains have been given *t* scores of 52 (above average) or 48 (below average).

However, it is possible that personality questionnaires may miss something important in the description of the genuine “Russian soul.” Most personality measures, including the NEO PI-R, were developed and validated in Western countries and may have overlooked traits that are salient in non-Western cultures. Uniquely Russian traits may coexist alongside universal traits (Cheung & Leung, 1998). One way to test the completeness of etic personality questionnaires is to generate emic, culture-specific items and see if they are independent of established personality factors. Following suggestions from Russian fiction and scholarly literature, we created a pool of 15 items intended to capture uniquely Russian traits.

Testing Effects on Observer Ratings

To this point, we have considered the possibility that Russian personality profiles differ in notable ways from non-Russians’ profiles—that is, that the idea of a Russian soul corresponds to veridical features of personality. However, it is equally possible that notions of Russian national character, like other national character stereotypes, are groundless (Terracciano et al., 2005). Yet shared stereotypes, even if unfounded, might influence personality assessments, particularly observer ratings. If one knows that an unfamiliar target is Russian, one may guess that he or she is passive and melancholic but intensely spiritual. Even if one knows the target and his or her traits relatively well, ratings may be biased in the direction of the stereotype. The present study was designed to address this possibility by identifying classes of raters who might be more or less likely to be subject to such a bias. We hypothesized that profiles derived from raters who believed in the uniqueness of Russians, or who are entity theorists, or who identify with ethnic Russians, would resemble the profile in Figure 1 more closely than would profiles derived from other raters.

For example, people who subscribe to the idea that Russian personality is unique may be more inclined to select targets who fit the stereotype or more likely to bias their ratings in the direction

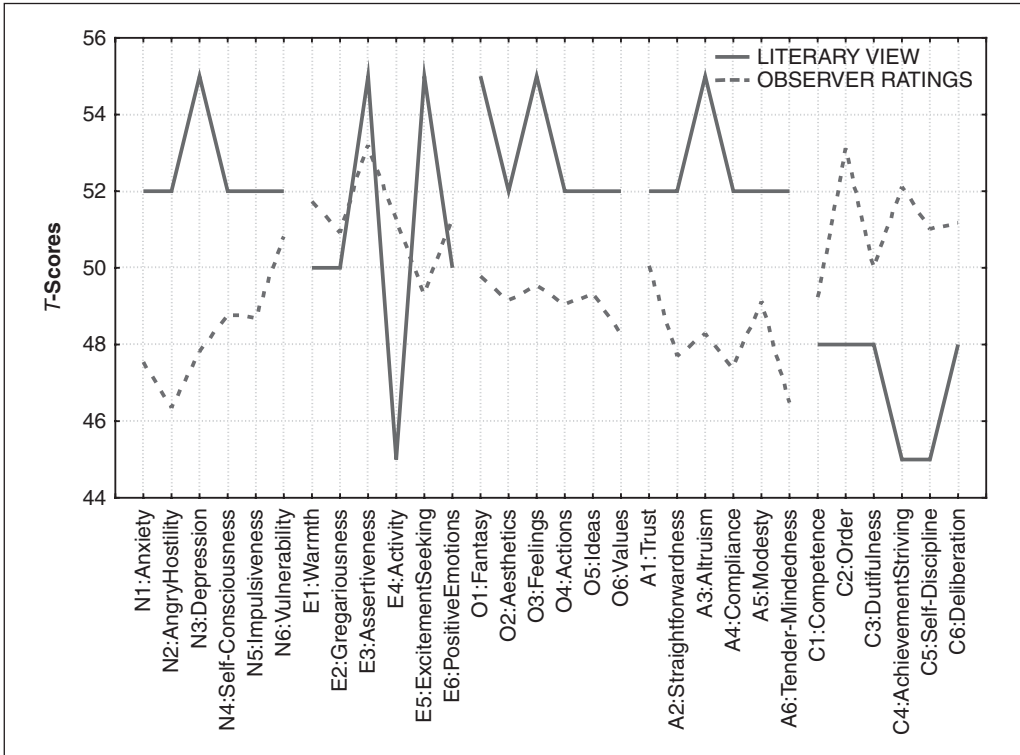


Figure 1. Schematic Representation of Russian Personality as Portrayed in Literature and Scholarly Writings (Solid Line) and Mean Personality Profiles of Observer Ratings of Russian Targets Compared to International Norms (Dashed Line)

of the stereotype than those who reject the idea. Similarly, entity theorists (Dweck, Hong, & Chiu, 1993) and raters who are themselves ethnic Russians or Orthodox in religion may be more influenced by the idea of a Russian soul than are incremental theorists and nonethnic Russians.

Bastian and Haslam (2006) claimed that people who believe in the immutability of human attributes and character—essentialists or entity theorists—“are particularly prone to endorse social stereotypes and to explain them with reference to innate factors” (p. 228). Scales have been developed to identify individuals who believe that a particular trait (intelligence, personality, or moral character) is a fixed disposition versus those—incremental theorists—who believe that traits are malleable (Dweck et al., 1993). A logical consequence of this distinction is the hypothesis that essentialist beliefs affect the way people judge themselves and others (Haslam, Bastian, & Bissett, 2004). Raters prone to conceive of traits as discrete and immutable may be more likely to describe all ethnic Russians in ways that are consistent with the Russian “type.” For the present study, we specifically asked if raters felt that behavior was determined by nationality.

To the extent that the Russian soul is part of Russian identity, we might expect that those who identify strongly with ethnic Russians would be more likely to interpret personality in terms that are consistent with presumed national character. In the present study, we contrast raters who are nominally Russian Orthodox, who are more religious, and who are themselves ethnic Russians with raters who are not.

The aims of this study, thus, were (a) to determine if Russians differed markedly from other groups on the mean levels of NEO-PI-R domains and facets and showed a profile similar to that

suggested by literary and scholarly sources, (b) to assess whether putatively emic items that characterized Russians were independent of FFM traits, and (c) to examine whether explicit perceptions of the Russian soul influenced ratings of observers who subscribed to the idea of Russian uniqueness, held essentialist beliefs, or could be presumed to be more identified with ethnic Russians.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study was initiated by the first five authors from the University of Tartu, Estonia. Data were collected by members of the Russian Character and Personality Survey (RCPS), which involved 40 universities or colleges all over the Russian Federation. Collaborators were recruited from psychology departments of Russian universities through both electronic and conventional letters of invitation and publicity in one of the leading Russian psychological journals. Because of the small number of participants, data from one sample were merged with another sample from the same region. The remaining 39 samples were collected in 33 federal subjects (administrative areas: oblast, krai, okrug, or republic) of which 6 (Novosibirsk, Primorsk, Sverdlovsk, Tatarstan, Udmurtia, and Volgograd) were represented by two independent samples. The list of samples and their administrative names and geographical regions are given in Table 1. Details of samples and procedure were described more completely in a previous report (Allik et al., 2009).

The mean age of respondents was 20.9 years ($SD = 3.6$), of whom 1,494 were males and 5,441 females (130 respondents did not report their sex). Of the 7,065 raters, 82.2% identified themselves as ethnic Russians, followed by Tatars (5.4%), Udmurts (1.8%), Maris (1.0%), and Buryats (0.9%). The respondents were randomly assigned to one of four target conditions and were asked for ratings of college-aged women, college-aged men, adult (over 50) men, or adult women. For the college-aged targets, for example, raters were instructed as follows:

Please think of a young man [woman] aged 17–23 whom you know well. She [he] should be someone who is a native RUSSIAN and who has lived most of her [his] life in the region which is your permanent place of residence. She [he] can be a relative or a friend or neighbor—someone you like, or someone you do not like.

Raters were also asked to estimate education and place of residence—rural village, small town, or city—of the targets.

Measures

NEO PI-R. The NEO PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) is an operationalization of the FFM. Each factor is represented by six facet scales that assess related traits. The 240 items are answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Form R, the observer rating version of the NEO PI-R, uses items phrased in the third person. Data on the reliability and validity of the instrument are given in the manual (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The development and validation of the Russian version is reported in Martin et al. (2002). Scores were converted to t scores using the means and standard deviations of an international sample (McCrae et al., 2005) separately for college-age and adult male and female targets.¹

Emic Russian personality items. In addition to the 240 NEO PI-R items, 15 new items were generated to depict some characteristics that are often portrayed as typical of Russians. These personality characteristics were selected based on a search in Russian literary and scholarly texts by the first

Table 1. Characteristics of the Samples

Sample Name	University or College	Region	Targets			Percent of Raters			
			N	M Age (Years)	Russians	Unique	Essentialist	Orthodox	
Abakan	Katanov State University of Khakasia	Khakasia	176	37.6	92.6	73.2	53.0	30.7	
Adyge	Adyge State University	Adyge	192	39.3	68.8	74.4	59.0	48.4	
Arkhangelsk	Pomor State University	Arkhangelsk	196	39.9	95.9	85.1	66.0	60.7	
Arzamas	Arzamas State Pedagogical University	Nizhny Novgorod	195	41.3	99.5	79.4	68.0	70.8	
Astrakhan	Astrakhan State University	Astrakhan	161	40.3	71.4	66.3	55.0	47.2	
Chelyabinsk	Chelyabinsk State University	Chelyabinsk	163	38.0	90.2	60.9	44.0	45.4	
Dubna	International University of nature, society and man "Dubna"	Moscow	187	39.5	94.1	72.2	63.0	55.1	
Elabuga	Elabuga State Pedagogical University	Tatarstan	200	40.5	57.5	75.4	48.0	39.0	
Izhevsk1	Udmurt State University	Udmurtia	190	38.4	39.2	70.0	61.0	56.3	
Izhevsk2	Izhevsk State Technical University	Udmurtia	366	41.5	79.0	82.1	61.0	49.2	
Kazan	Tatar State Humanitarian-Pedagogical University	Tatarstan	199	39.9	44.7	60.4	48.0	37.2	
Krasnodar	Kuban State University of Physical Education	Krasnodar	169	39.9	43.8	76.3	62.0	29.0	
Kurgan	Kurgan State University	Kurgan	195	39.2	90.8	72.4	35.0	28.2	
Magadan	Northern International University	Magadan	188	39.2	83.5	72.2	59.0	47.3	
Nizhnevartovsk	Nizhnevartovsk State Humanitarian University	Khanty-Mansi	199	39.1	77.9	72.7	48.0	50.3	
Novosibirsk1	Novosibirsk Russian Academy of Medical Sciences	Novosibirsk	96	38.4	94.8	79.2	57.0	46.9	
Novosibirsk2	Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University	Novosibirsk	188	37.9	94.7	77.2	70.0	55.9	
Omsk	Omsk State Pedagogical University	Omsk	177	38.5	84.7	73.4	49.0	48.6	
Orel	Orel State University	Orel	103	37.5	87.4	75.4	57.0	64.1	
Perm	Perm State University	Perm	200	39.9	94.0	76.5	60.0	42.0	
Petrozavodsk	Karelian State Pedagogical University	Karelia	202	39.9	87.1	72.0	58.0	49.0	
Ryazan	Ryazan State University named after S.A. Esenin	Ryazan	156	40.6	94.9	72.4	55.0	77.6	
Sakhalinsk	Sakhalin State University	Sakhalin	185	37.1	86.5	79.1	52.0	34.1	
Samara	Samara State Pedagogical University	Samara	194	39.9	91.2	72.1	62.0	62.9	
Taganrog	Taganrog Institute of Management and Economy	Rostov	117	41.5	92.3	73.9	61.0	51.3	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Sample Name	University or College	Region	Targets		Percent of Raters			
			N	M Age (Years)	Russians	Unique	Essentialist	Orthodox
Tambov	Tambov State University named after G. R. Derzhavin	Tambov	197	39.3	98.0	81.4	64.0	71.6
Ufa	Bashkir State Pedagogical University	Bashkortostan	181	38.1	39.2	73.8	48.0	23.8
Ulan-Ude	Buryat State University	Buryatia	193	38.8	57.5	83.9	52.0	37.3
Ussuriysk	Ussuriysk State Pedagogical University	Primorsk	89	39.0	80.9	73.5	67.0	34.8
Vladimir	Vladimir State University	Vladimir	181	39.9	91.7	87.2	66.0	62.4
Vladivostok	Far Eastern National University	Primorsk	197	39.1	94.9	78.2	63.0	43.7
Volgograd1	Volgograd State Technical University	Volgograd	226	39.4	88.5	75.6	67.0	54.9
Volgograd2	Volgograd Academy of Public Sciences	Volgograd	160	39.5	95.6	80.0	72.0	60.0
Vologda	Vologda State Pedagogical University	Vologda	199	40.7	98.5	74.7	76.0	62.8
Voronezh	Voronezh State University	Voronezh	195	40.6	99.0	77.0	57.0	63.1
Yaroslavl	Yaroslavl Demidov State University	Yaroslavl	124	42.2	98.4	63.3	72.0	62.9
Yekaterinburg1	Russia State Professional-Pedagogical University	Sverdlovsk	187	39.9	93.6	74.4	72.0	49.2
Yekaterinburg2	Ural State Pedagogical University	Sverdlovsk	175	40.6	91.4	67.0	66.0	47.4
Yoshkar-Ola	Mari State University	Mari El	167	39.9	64.7	79.2	46.0	61.7

Note. Region = administrative region of the Russian Federation; Russians = percent of ethnic Russians among raters; Unique = percent of respondents answering that Russians have a unique character not comparable to any other; Essentialist = percent of those raters who believe that nationality determines behavior; Orthodox = percent of raters self-identified as Russian Orthodox.

five authors, who are familiar with Russian language and literature. For example, the item “In his/her behaviors and judgments he/she often fall into extremes” assesses a presumptive tendency toward extreme and erratic responses. Items such as “Believes that he/she cannot escape his/her fate” and “Believes that he/she is an architect of one’s own fortunes” (reversed) measure a supposed tendency toward fatalism. Finally, items like “He/she is not ready to give up everything for the sake of others” (reversed) and “He/she is ready for sacrifice in the name of beloved one” inquire about self-sacrifice.

Measure of uniqueness. We also asked raters about the similarity of the Russian national character to that of other groups. Of those who answered this question (95.2%), 4.6% believed that the Russian national character is similar to those of Western countries like United States or Great Britain, 3.0% believed that it is similar to those of Eastern countries like China or Japan, 8.0% believed that it resembles a mixture of Western and Eastern countries, and 71.2% answered that Russians have a unique national character not comparable to any other. Table 1 shows the percentage of those who believe in the uniqueness of the Russian character. Analyzed at the sample level, there was a significant correlation between the percentage of raters who believed in the uniqueness of Russian character and the percentage who were Orthodox, $r = .35$, $N = 39$, $p < .05$. Interestingly, belief in Russian uniqueness decreases with the geographical distance from the capital, Moscow, $r = .44$, $N = 39$, $p = .005$. These associations suggest that belief in Russian uniqueness is part of ethnic Russians’ national identity in which Moscow serves as a symbol of the whole country and the Orthodox tradition of Byzantium (Figes, 2003).

Essentialist beliefs. Essentialist beliefs were measured by the following question: “Do you believe that representatives of one nation are more similar than representatives of different nations? How much behavior of a human being depends on his nationality: 1. *No dependence* to 10. *Very much*.” Respondents tended to believe that nationality determines human behavior ($M = 6.65$, $SD = 2.17$, $Mdn = 7$). On the basis of the median value, the sample was split into two parts, a minority who were inclined to believe in no strong association between nationality and behavior (scores 1 to 6, $N = 2,817$) and a majority who believed that nationality strongly determines behavior (scores 7 to 10, $N = 4,046$).

Religion. Of 7,065 respondents, 3,550 (50.2%) identified themselves as Russian Orthodox. To the question “Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?” the mean answer on a 10-point scale (from 1 = *not at all religious* to 10 = *very religious*) was 7.36 ($SD = 1.13$, $Mdn = 7$). Those who identified themselves as Orthodox (in contrast to all others) were inclined to stress the importance of religion in their lives, $r = .26$, $N = 6,890$, $p < .001$. It is interesting to note that the belief that nationality determines personality traits was stronger in samples with a higher percentage of Russians ($r = .40$, $N = 39$, $p < .05$) and Orthodox ($r = .47$, $N = 39$, $p < .01$). Thus, Orthodox Russians, more than other ethnic and religious groups, are inclined to believe in immutability of human attributes and character—perhaps an instance of Russian fatalism.

Results

Does the Observed Mean Profile Match the Description of Russian Soul?

Mean levels. To see in what respects Russian personality differs from the international average, the 5 NEO-PI-R domains and 30 facets scales were expressed as t scores ($M = 50$, $SD = 10$) relative to international norms based on 50 cultures (McCrae et al., 2005). Because of the large sample sizes, the differences were significant for 27 of the 30 facets. However, Russians were within the average range ($t = 45$ to 55) on all domains and facets. Modest deviations from average (at least two t score) were seen for N1: Anxiety, N2: Angry Hostility, N3: Depression, A2:

Straightforwardness, A4: Compliance, and A6: Tender-Mindedness, with Russians scoring slightly lower than others; at the same time (consistent with European stereotypes of Russians; Peabody, 1985), Russians were two *t* score points above the pancultural average on E3: Assertiveness, E4: Activity, C2: Order, and C4: Achievement Striving.

These values are plotted in Figure 1, which clearly shows that the way Russians are described by their compatriots today does not replicate the portrayal of the Russian soul in fiction and the scholarly literature. Presumed melancholy is not reflected in higher *N* scores, spirituality is not seen in elevated Openness scores, and the oft-mentioned fatalism and indolence is contradicted by higher Activity and Achievement Striving scores. The correlation between the two profiles in Figure 1 is $r = -.44$, $N = 30$, $p = .014$, suggesting that the literary portrait of Russians may be more like a mirror image of how Russians are described in observer ratings.

Etic items. Ethnic Russians ought to score higher on the etic items we developed than non-Russians would, but that hypothesis cannot be tested in the present study because we have no ratings of non-Russians. We can, however, test the hypothesis that these etic items are independent of the five etic factors. They are not. Table 2 shows that 11 of the 15 items had at least one correlation with the FFM factors larger than .25 in absolute value. In addition, Item 9, describing emotional ambivalence, was correlated at this level with 03: Feelings, and Item 15, suggesting heedless optimism, was related to E1: Warmth, E6: Positive Emotions, and A3: Altruism. Substantively, extreme or erratic responding seems to reflect low A and C, fatalism is chiefly low C, and self-sacrifice is associated with high A and C. From this perspective, Russians cannot be high on both erratic responding and self-sacrifice, because these traits occupy opposite poles in the five space of personality.

We also performed a joint principal component analysis where 30 NEO-PI-R subscale scores were analyzed together with the 15 etic items. Except for three items (#9, #11, and #13) with low communalities, all etic items loaded higher than $|\text{.35}|$ on one of the Big Five factors.

The canonical correlation between the five factor scores and 15 additional items was high, $R = .73$, $\chi^2(75) = 10,214.0$, $p < .0001$, suggesting that one set of variables (the 15 etic items) is sufficiently explained by the other set of variables (the NEO-PI-R domain scores). Because successively extracted canonical roots are uncorrelated, it is permissible to sum up the redundancies across all roots to arrive at a single index of redundancy, which was 44.4%. Thus, almost half of the variance in the etic items can be explained by known NEO-PI-R factors. Most of the rest is likely error.

Do Beliefs and Identities Affect Observer Ratings?

Beliefs about uniqueness. As mentioned, 71.2% of all observers believed that Russians have a unique national character that is not comparable to that of any other nation. These raters may bias their ratings in the direction of the Russian stereotype. However, the mean personality profiles of those who believe in the uniqueness of the Russian national character ($N = 6,726$) and those who do not ($N = 1,691$) were both virtually identical to the mean curve of the observer ratings shown in Figure 1. The correlation of mean scores across the 30 facets ($r = .97$, $p < .001$) suggests that it is difficult to tell the profiles apart by their shape. Although one-way ANOVA revealed significant ($p < .01$) differences in 5 out of 30 NEO-PI-R facet scales, none was significant at $p < .001$, and the largest effect size—partial Eta squared or η_p^2 —did not exceed 0.0015. In particular, those who believed in the uniqueness of Russian character rated the targets to be higher on E6: Positive Emotions and 03: Feelings facets; there were no differences on facets of C. Thus, believing or not believing in the exceptionality of the Russian national character left only a small trace on raters' descriptions of ethnic Russian targets, and the small effects did not consistently reflect explicit notions of the Russian soul. The correlations of the two profiles with the schematic representation in Figure 1 were both significantly negative (both $r = -.45$, $p < .013$) and were not different.

Table 2. Correlations Between NEO-PI-R Factor Scores and Emic Items

Item	Emic Item	NEO-PI-R Factor				
		N	E	O	A	C
Extreme or Erratic Responding						
1	In his/her behavior and judgments he/she often falls into extremes	.37	.00	.02	-.31	-.31
4	According to associates, he/she often behaves unpredictably	.24	.18	.16	-.34	-.33
9	He/she can feel fun and sadness at the same time	.20	.15	.21	-.07	-.09
10	He/she avoids extremes and looks for the golden mean (R)	.16	.07	.08	-.27	-.31
13	It is easy to predict what he/she is going to do next (R)	-.13	.14	.16	-.02	.02
14	His/her life principle is "all or nothing"	.07	.24	.17	-.29	-.14
Fatalism						
2	He/she prefers not to rely upon chance (R)	.13	.09	.10	-.12	-.35
5	He/she believes that he/she is an architect of his/her own fortunes (R)	.18	-.23	-.17	-.02	-.26
6	He/she adheres to the principle not to worry too much	.10	.08	-.01	-.17	-.32
11	Believes that he/she cannot escape his/her fate	.12	.00	-.05	.12	.04
15	He/she believes that whatever you do it's all for the best	.09	-.21	-.16	-.21	-.14
Self-Sacrifice						
3	He/she is ready to sacrifice in the name of a beloved one	-.13	.20	.14	.39	.34
7	He/she is ready to dedicate his/her life to something that he/she considers important	-.16	.23	.20	.15	.36
8	He/she considers his/her own well-being the most important (R)	-.10	-.06	.02	-.41	.17
12	He/she is not ready to give up everything for the sake of others (R)	-.12	.06	.10	-.33	.17

Note. Correlations larger than .25 in absolute value are shown in bold. N = Neuroticism; E = Extraversion; O = Openness; A = Agreeableness; C = Conscientiousness. (R) = reverse keyed item.

Essentialist beliefs. Raters who believed that nationality strongly determines behavior showed significant differences from raters who did not in the mean levels of nine facets ($p < .01$). The largest effects were seen for A4: Compliance ($\eta^2_p = 0.0041$), which essentialists rated lower, and C4: Achievement Striving ($\eta^2_p = 0.0033$) and O3: Feelings ($\eta^2_p = 0.0030$), which they rated higher. However, even the largest effects explain less than 0.5% of variance. Inspection of profiles revealed that implicit beliefs systematically influence the perception of Extraversion and Conscientiousness. Those who are convinced that there is an inherent connection between the individual's nationality and his or her personality traits rate their targets higher on all Extraversion and Conscientiousness facets. Such ratings are inconsistent with the idea that the Russian soul is characterized by passive and indolent oblomovism. The correlations of the two profiles with the schematic representation in Figure 1 were both negative ($r = -.47, p = .009$ for essentialist and $r = -.40, p = .027$ for not essentialists).

We also computed the five-factor structure for those who believed that nationality strongly determines personality ($N = 4,046$) and those who do not ($N = 2,817$). Contrary to predictions of researchers who stress the role of the implicit theories, we found that these two factor structures were identical. The average congruence coefficient between these two structures was .998.

Religion. The impact of religion was slightly stronger than the impact of beliefs in uniqueness. Ten of 30 NEO-PI-R facets showed an effect of religion at the $p < .01$ level. Those who identified themselves as Russian Orthodox described their targets as being higher in A6: Tender-Mindedness ($\eta^2_p = 0.0049$), E1: Warmth ($\eta^2_p = 0.0042$), O3: Feelings ($\eta^2_p = 0.0034$), and A3: Altruism

($\eta^2_p = 0.0026$). These small differences are consistent with the idea that Orthodox raters chose targets who were more self-sacrificing or biased their ratings in this direction.

The impact of religious affiliation, however, may be confused with general religiousness: Participants who were more inclined to acknowledge the role of religion in their lives were more likely Orthodox by denomination. Indeed, if we divided participants into two groups according to the median split ($Ns = 2,986$ vs. $3,904$) on religiousness, the mean profiles were again slightly different. The mean values on 14 of the 30 NEO-PI-R facets were significantly different at $p < .01$. The largest impact ($\eta^2_p = 0.008$) was on A6: Tender-Mindedness: Participants who claimed that religion played a significant role in their lives rated their targets as having stronger humanitarian beliefs and attitudes. Because religiousness is known to be related to Agreeableness (Saroglou, 2002) and Conscientiousness (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009), religious raters may have attributed their own tender-minded attitudes to the targets. These effects on raters did not, however, bias them in the direction of the putative Russian profile: The correlations of the two profiles with the schematic representation in Figure 1 were virtually identical for low and high religiousness groups ($rs = -.42$ and $-.47, p < .02$).

Personality ratings across ethnic groups. The next principal question concerns the perception of personality traits across ethnic and cultural groups. There were three ethnic groups whose number exceeded 100 in this study: Russians ($N = 5,818$), Tatars ($N = 363$), and Udmurts ($N = 144$). These three ethnic groups perceived Russians whom they identified as targets in a very similar way. ANOVA revealed no significant differences in the mean scores on any of 30 NEO-PI-R facets. The largest effect size estimated by partial Eta squared was less than 0.2%, indicating a negligible effect of the observer's ethnicity on personality ratings. Figure 2 presents the mean personality profiles for the three observer groups—Russians, Tatars, and Udmurts—transformed into t scores relative to the combined international samples of 50 cultures. As expected, these three profiles were highly correlated, $rs = .92$ to $.95$. Thus, two non-Russian ethnic groups perceived the personality of Russians much as it is perceived by Russians themselves. The correlations of the three profiles in Figure 2 with the schematic representation in Figure 1 were all negative ($rs = -.45, -.47, \text{ and } -.36, p < .05$) and were not significantly different from each other.

Discussion

Among those researchers who acknowledge the legitimacy of national character research, most seem to think that national character should be equated with modal personality structure, that is, with the most common personality traits in a given society (Inkeles, 1997). This theoretical position assumes that beliefs about personality characteristics typical of members of a culture are generalizations from personal or collective experience containing a "kernel of truth." An extension of this position is that the notion of the uniqueness of Russian character, widely held by both laypersons and experts, must be based on real observation and must reflect the most common type of personality in Russian society. Russians and other ethnic groups living in present-day Russia seem to support this view about the exceptionality of the Russian character: More than 70% of respondents endorsed this opinion.

However, a recent study obtained national character ratings of 3,989 people from 49 cultures, including Russia, and compared them with the average personality scores of culture members assessed by observer ratings and self-reports (Terracciano et al., 2005). National character ratings were reliable, but they did not converge with assessed traits. Terracciano et al. (2005) concluded that perceptions of national character are unfounded stereotypes that may serve the function of maintaining a national identity. The current investigation extends this finding by demonstrating that observer-rated personality traits in Russians do not differ substantially

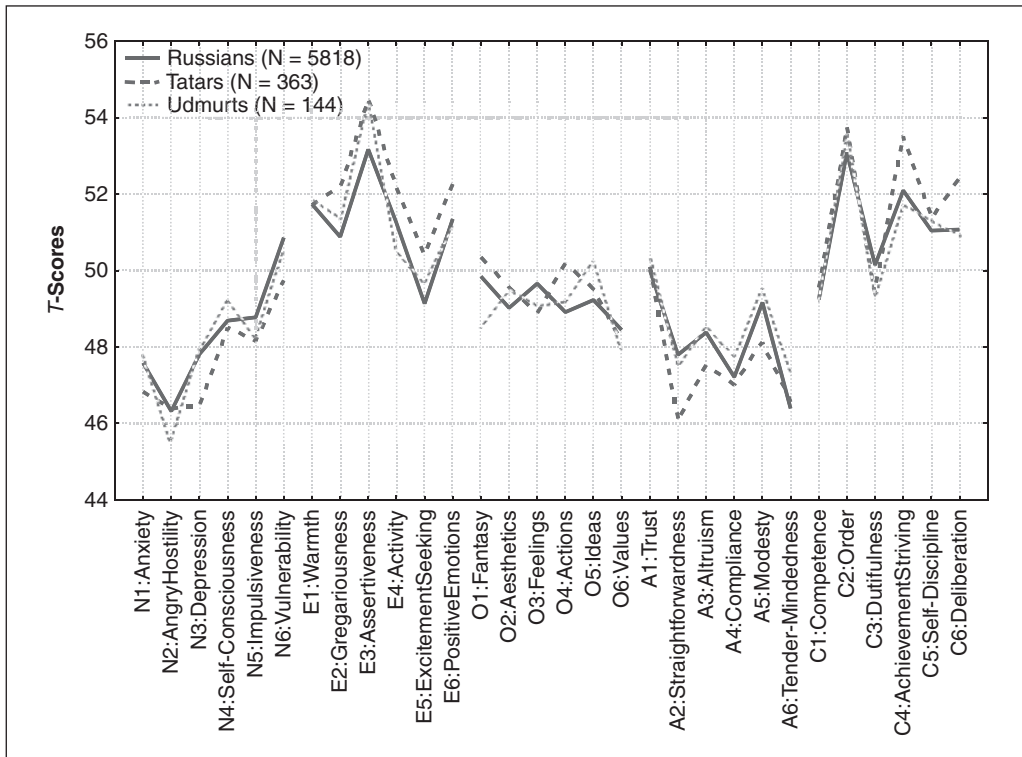


Figure 2. Mean Personality Profiles of Observer Ratings of a Russian Target Made by Three Ethnic Groups, Russians ($N = 5,818$), Tatars ($N = 363$), and Udmurts ($N = 144$)

from world norms and do not resemble the portrait of the Russian soul depicted in fiction and in the scholarly literature.

One possible reason is that personality traits in younger Russians have been more heavily influenced by Western culture shared through the Internet and the media. Older Russians might conform more to the traditional view of Russians. But if that were so, one would expect dramatic age differences between older and college-age targets in the present sample, whereas earlier analyses (Allik et al., 2009) showed that age differences in Russia closely resemble those found around the world. For example, older Russians are not Oblomov-like: They are rated higher on Conscientiousness than college-age Russians.

Although national character stereotypes are apparently not veridical, they clearly have an impact on how individuals and nations think about and respond to national groups. For example, Western capitalists may be reluctant to invest in Russia if they believe that Russians are unambitious and unconcerned about material goods. In this study, we addressed another possibility of greater concern to personality psychologists: Do beliefs in a unique Russian soul taint personality assessments? We found little evidence for such effects. Raters who were ethnic Russian or belonged to the Russian Orthodox church or who subscribed to the belief that nationality determines behavior did not provide distinctive assessments of their targets, and even when small effects were significant, they often did not conform to the explicit portrait of Russian national character we inferred from the literature.

Future research on national character and personality could be refined in several ways. We compared mean personality profiles to a characterization based on our summary of the views of

great novelists—usually thought to be particularly insightful observers of the human condition—and scholars with expertise in history and language. A more systematic way to infer typical Russian traits from literature would be to select a wide array of Russian and Soviet novels, ask students of literature to identify the most typical Russian characters (male and female) in each, and rate these characters on the NEO-PI-R. The average, across novels and raters, would represent the personality profile of the typical Russian as seen in literature.² Similarly, one could conduct surveys of historians and social scientists, within and outside Russia, who could complete the NEO-PI-R to describe the prototypic Russian (cf., Rubenzer, Faschingbauer, & Ones, 2000). A different approach would be to compare assessed traits to the characteristics attributed to the typical Russian by laypersons (cf., Terracciano et al., 2005). Individual ratings of a chosen target might also be compared to the same rater's personal view of the typical Russian: personal stereotypes may bias ratings in a way that collective stereotypes do not. Research on emic characterizations of Russians could also be improved by a more extensive and systematic use of interviews and focus groups (cf., Cheung et al., 2008).

In this article, we were concerned with personality traits as the expression of the Russian soul, a usage consistent with many descriptions in the literature. Clearly, our data do not speak to theological aspects of Russian spirituality, in which Orthodox Russians may differ from others. There is also no doubt that Russians are very distinctive in some of their values, habits, and attitudes—psychological features identified in Five-Factor Theory (McCrae & Costa, 2008) as characteristic adaptations, in contrast to the traits (considered basic tendencies) that were studied here. For example, according to the World Values Surveys, Russian score very low on self-expression and the quality of life dimension, putting an overwhelming emphasis on economic and physical security (Inglehart, Basanez, Diez-Medrano, Halman, & Luijkx, 2004). Russia also occupied one of the highest positions among all countries in terms of conservatism and hierarchy values (Lebedeva, 2000). These beliefs, values, and behaviors may set Russia apart from other cultures, but they might also be perceived quite differently by different classes of raters. For example, embracing Orthodox beliefs might be viewed as a sign of spirituality by Orthodox raters but as evidence of superstition by nonreligious raters. It is the ultimate task of future studies to find out how personality traits and perceptions of national character are related to these distinctive behavior and attitudes and how behaviors and attitudes in turn shape perceptions of Russians.

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Notes

1. The means and standard deviations of an international sample (McCrae et al., 2005) separately for college-age and adult male and female targets can be obtained from the authors on request.

2. Data from such a study would also be useful as a study of literature from the perspective of contemporary personality psychology (see McCrae & Sutin, 2007).

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