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THE PERSONALITY DIMENSION OF IDIOCENTRISM-ALLOCENTRISM AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The association between culture and personality has been widely studied and previous research has shown an association between the culture dimension of individualism-collectivism and the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism. The present study investigates the relationship between individualism-collectivism and idiocentrism-allocentrism among international students in Sweden. 215 international students ($M = 23$ years, age range 19-44, 120 women, 94 men, 1 other) were given definitions of individualist and collectivist cultures and asked to assess their culture of origin. They were then asked to rate themselves on 22 items intended to measure idiocentrism-allocentrism. Finally, they were asked to state their main reason for studying abroad by choosing one of seven options given in a multiple-choice item. One-way ANOVA's and independent t -tests were carried out for data analysis. The results showed an association between cultural background and idiocentrism-allocentrism in the expected direction. Further, the results did not demonstrate an association between geographical background and idiocentrism-allocentrism. Finally, the results did not demonstrate an association between main reason for studying abroad and idiocentrism-allocentrism, nor between main reason for studying abroad and cultural background. It was concluded that in the case of individualism-collectivism and idiocentrism-allocentrism, culture does influence personality. Further, the results suggest that it may not be appropriate to equate geographical entities such as nations with culture as cultural diversity may be found within such entities. Finally, the results indicate that international students differ in their reasons for studying abroad regardless of personality and cultural background, although further research regarding the motivation of international students is needed.

Keywords: culture, personality, individualism-collectivism, idiocentrism-allocentrism

Abstrakt

Sambandet mellan kultur och personlighet har studerats i stor utsträckning och tidigare forskning har visat på en koppling mellan kulturdimensionen individualism-kollektivism och personlighetsdimensionen idiocentrism-allocentrism. Den föreliggande studien undersöker förhållandet mellan individualism-kollektivism och idiocentrism-allocentrism bland internationella studenter i Sverige. 215 internationella studenter ($M = 23$ år, åldersintervall 19-44, 120 kvinnor, 94 män, 1 annat) gavs definitioner av individualistiska och kollektivistiska kulturer och ombads att bedöma sin ursprungskultur. De uppmanades sedan att uppskatta sig själva utifrån 22 frågor avsedda att mäta idiocentrism-allocentrism. Slutligen uppmanades de att ange sitt huvudskäl till att studera utomlands genom att välja ett av sju alternativ i en flervalsfråga. Data analyserades med one-way ANOVA's och oberoende t -tester. Resultaten visade på ett samband mellan kulturell bakgrund och idiocentrism-allocentrism i den förväntade riktningen. Vidare demonstrerade resultaten inte en koppling mellan geografisk bakgrund och idiocentrism-allocentrism. Slutligen visade resultaten varken en koppling mellan huvudorsaken till utlandsstudier och idiocentrism-allocentrism, eller mellan huvudorsaken till utlandsstudier och kulturell bakgrund. Av dessa resultat drogs slutsatsen att när det gäller individualism-kollektivism och idiocentrism-allocentrism så påverkar kultur personlighet. Resultaten tyder vidare på att det kanske inte är lämpligt att likställa geografiska enheter som nationer med kultur, då subkulturell mångfald kan påträffas inom dessa enheter. Slutligen tyder resultaten på att internationella studenter skiljer sig åt för gällande skäl till utlandsstudier oavsett personlighet och kulturell bakgrund, även om vidare forskning krävs gällande internationella studenters motivation.

Nyckelord: kultur, personlighet, individualism-kollektivism, idiocentrism-allocentrism

The personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism among international students

We live in an increasingly globalized world, with information being rapidly transmitted, multinational companies adapting to new markets, and refugees fleeing across continents. As psychology is a field of knowledge with both educational, organizational, and clinical implications, ensuring that psychological theories originated in the West are applicable in non-Western contexts is a pressing matter. Complementing existing psychological models of personality with dimensions inspired by analyses of cultures may be one way of doing so.

Theoretical background

Culture. The concept of *culture* refers to a broad range of elements as it entails both the shared ideology, customs and social behaviors of a certain group of people, as well as the physical products particular to that group, such as tools, architecture, fashion and art (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017a; Triandis & Suh, 2002). When speaking of culture, one may also emphasize the importance of language, as well as time period and geographical location (Triandis, 2001).

However, some elements of culture are especially relevant to the field of psychology as they influence the way individuals perceive, think, respond emotionally to situations, and interact with others. These include shared beliefs, values, attitudes, categorizations, self-definitions, norms, and role definitions (Triandis, 1996). These elements may be referred to as *subjective culture*, distinguishing them from the *material culture* of physical products (Triandis, 2002). In the present study, the concept of culture will specifically refer to the elements of subjective culture.

Culture is created and maintained by individuals through a dialectical process which can be described as consisting of three phases, namely *externalization*, *objectification*, and *internalization* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In the phase of externalization individuals express and act in accordance with certain beliefs, values, attitudes, categorizations, self-definitions, norms and role definitions. In the phase of objectification these elements of subjective reality then come to be perceived by group members as objective reality. In the phase of internalization, subjective reality, now perceived as objective reality, is internalized by individuals and thus guides the way they perceive, think, respond emotionally to situations, and behave, as they again proceed to externalize it. In this way, culture is continuously and simultaneously enacted and incorporated by individual group members.

Culture offers a structure which may guide an individual's understanding of herself, others and the world. As culture is shared by a group it also creates predictability in the everyday life of individuals, as it allows them to assume that other people operate on the bases of similar assumptions about the self, others, and the world as they themselves do, and warrant them to expect others to behave in certain ways. This predictability then may facilitate the interactions of group members, and knowing what one might expect of others may create a sense of control and a certain degree of safety.

Further, culture can be seen as a condition for group membership as it enables a group to define itself as a group. One who presents the beliefs, values and attitudes, and act in accordance with the norms and role definitions of a certain group may more easily be perceived by others as a member of that group, and one who does not present these cultural characteristics may be perceived as an outsider.

Thus, an individual who holds different beliefs, who have different values and attitudes, and who thinks different norms and role definitions should prevail than the majority of the group does, may be perceived as a source of uncertainty as her deviance puts into question how the group should go about its business and how individual group members should understand themselves, and she may even come to be perceived as a threat to the groups existence. Exclusion from the group is threatening to the individual as it entails loss of protection, support and intimacy. Culture may thus be hypothesized to encompass an incentive for individuals to perceive, think, respond emotionally, and behave in certain ways.

As the culture of a group is dependent on the continuous approval and performance of individual group members, it may be consciously changed. However, in order for this to happen the majority would have to be convinced to change its ways. This may require both persuasive argumentation and changes in the economical and juridical system, or alternatively the kind of ideological upheaval which charismatic religious or political movements represents.

Individualism-Collectivism. There are several dimensions by which one may characterize the culture of a certain group (Hofstede, 2011). The present study will focus on the dimension of *individualism-collectivism*. This dimension refers to the degree to which a culture is shaped by the theme of the autonomous individual or by the theme of the collective (Triandis, 1993). When discerning which theme is predominant in a group, one may investigate what meaning individuals give to the self, the structure of goals of individuals, whether behavior is a function of individual attitudes or group norms, and whether individuals focus more on personal gains and losses in their relationships or on the needs of their group (Triandis, 1996).

In keeping with these guidelines, individualism can be defined as a cultural state of affairs where:

(...) people are autonomous and independent from their in-groups [family, tribe, nation, etc.]; they give priority to their personal goals over the goals of their in-groups, they behave primarily on the basis of their attitudes rather than the norms of their in-groups, and exchange theory adequately predicts their social behavior. (Triandis, 2001: 909)

Respectively, collectivism can be defined as a cultural set of circumstances in which:

(...) people are interdependent within their in-groups (family, tribe, nation, etc.), give priority to the goals of their in-groups, shape their behavior primarily on the basis of in-group norms, and behave in a communal way. (Triandis, 2001:909)

Depending on her cultural context an individual will be presented with a social environment where most people behave in accordance with either the assumption of that they are autonomous individuals or the assumption of that they are interdependent parts of a collective. This in turn may cause her to take certain self-definitions, goals, and ways of interacting with others for granted.

Personality. *Personality* is a concept which in everyday language refers to the qualities defining an individual's characteristic way of being (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017b). More specifically, personality can be defined as:

(...) an individual's characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior, together with the psychological mechanisms – hidden or not – behind those patterns. (Triandis, 2001: 908 see Funder, 1997: pp. 1-2).

Since culture comes into being through the continuous internalization and externalization of shared elements of culture by individual group members, it may be hypothesized to constitute one of the psychological mechanisms behind an individual's characteristic patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior.

To investigate how culture is expressed on the individual level, dimensions of personality may be construed which correspond to dimensions of culture.

Idiocentrism-Allocentrism. The personality dimension of *idiocentrism-allocentrism* has been proposed as an individual level construct corresponding to individualism-collectivism on the cultural level (Triandis et al., 1985). This dimension of personality refers to the degree to which an individual is self-oriented or group-oriented.

In conformity with individualism-collectivism, the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism may be examined by probing an individual's definitions of the self, structure of goals, which types of relationships the individual emphasizes, and whether personal attitudes or group norms are perceived as more important (Triandis et al., 1995).

Thus, idiocentrism can be defined as a personality attribute which consists of an emphasis on:

(...) self-reliance, competition, uniqueness, hedonism, and emotional distance from in-groups. (Triandis & Suh, 2002: 140)

Allocentrism can be defined as a property of personality composed of a focus on:

(...) interdependence, sociability, and family integrity; they take into account the needs and wishes of in-group members, feel close in their relationships to their in-groups, and appear to others as responsive to their needs and concerns. (Triandis & Suh, 2002:140)

According to these definitions, an idiocentric is a person whose thought patterns and perceptions, and in extension emotional responses to situations, as well as ways of behaving and interacting with others, are guided by the assumption that she is an autonomous individual who is supposed to be self-reliant and strive for self-fulfillment. An allocentric, respectively, is an individual whose patterns of thought, perception, emotional response, and behavior are guided by the assumption she is an interdependent part of a collective, and as such she should provide support for other members of the collective, as well as expect support in return.

The culture fit hypothesis. The culture fit hypothesis states that individuals who display personality traits in line with the general tendency of a group will be better adjusted to that group than individuals who do not display these tendencies (Triandis & Suh, 2002). This implies that idiocentrics will be better adjusted in an individualist culture and allocentrics will be better adjusted in a collectivist culture.

Triandis and Suh (2002) suggested that idiocentrics in collectivist cultures will feel suppressed by their culture and seek out individualist contexts to which they are better suited, migration being one option, and that allocentrics in individualist cultures will seek out collectivist contexts, such as communes, unions, and gangs. This would suggest that idiocentric individuals from collectivist cultural backgrounds who migrate to individualist cultures may do so in order to find a cultural context to which they are better suited, given that the choice to migrate was made voluntary and not forced on them as a result of war or political oppression.

Measuring Idiocentrism-Allocentrism. The personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism may be measured by asking individuals to rate themselves regarding four elements, namely their definitions of the self, the structure of their goals, the types of relationships that they emphasize (the element of exchange in relationships or the aspect of communality), as well the importance they give to attitudes and norms in predicting their own behavior (Triandis et al., 1995). Measuring personality by asking individuals to rate themselves regarding these elements gives priority to the individual's own perception of how she thinks, responds emotionally, and behaves. It thus respects the subjective reality of the individual and may be perceived as ethically preferable to expert observer ratings.

Several measures of idiocentrism-allocentrism have been developed by a number of researchers (Matsumoto et al., 1997; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990). However, as these measures differed both in their theoretical and methodological approach, and since to the author's knowledge no measure of idiocentrism-allocentrism has been developed following Triandis and Suh's (2002) definition of the construct, a new measure may be warranted for.

Measuring Individualism-Collectivism. Accumulating information from individuals regarding idiocentrism-allocentrism will reveal the general tendency of individualism-collectivism in a group, and the culture of the group may then be characterized accordingly. Although both idiocentric and allocentric individuals may be found in both individualist and collectivist cultures, Triandis and Suh (2002) suggested that there generally are about 60% idiocentrics in individualist cultures and about 60% allocentrics in collectivist cultures.

Alternatively, one may measure individualism-collectivism by allowing individuals themselves to assess their culture of origin. This may be done by presenting them with descriptions of individualist culture and collectivist culture, and then asking them to rate their culture of origin accordingly. This method would give insight into the individuals' perceptions of their cultural context, consequently allowing the examination of subcultural diversity.

Geographical distribution of Idiocentrism-Allocentrism. As the majority of individuals in individualist cultures will display idiocentric tendencies and the majority of individuals in collectivist cultures will display allocentric tendencies, estimates of in what geographical areas individualism and collectivism prevails may serve as an indicator of the geographical distribution of idiocentrism-allocentrism.

Hofstede and McCrae (2004) suggested that the cultures of developed and Western countries are predominantly individualist, whereas the cultures of less developed and Eastern countries are predominantly collectivist, with the exception of Japan which the authors describe as being somewhere in between. More specifically, Triandis (2001) indicated that the cultures of North and Western Europe and North America should be counted as individualist, and those of Asia, Africa and South America should be counted as collectivist. The author did not mention Eastern Europe in this assessment, which may indicate that this region is difficult to place on the individualist-collectivist spectrum.

These estimations suggest that a greater number of idiocentrics can be expected to be found in North and Western European and North American cultures, and a greater number of allocentrics can be expected to be found in Asian, African and South American cultures.

International students. International students were identified as a group which could be assumed to consist of individuals of diverse cultural as well as geographical backgrounds, with the common denominators of being engaged in higher level education and having made the choice to temporarily leave their country of origin to study abroad. Thus, this group was judged to be well suited for an investigation of the association between personality and cultural background, geographical distribution of personality traits, and for testing the culture fit hypothesis.

Previous research

Individualism-Collectivism and Idiocentrism-Allocentrism. Several researchers have found an association between cultural context and personality (Altrocchi & Altrocchi, 1995; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997; Trafimow, Triandis & Goto, 1991; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990).

Trafimow, Triandis and Goto (1991) conducted an experiment designed to prime participants towards either individualism or collectivism. One group of participants were instructed to think of what made them different from their family and friends, and another group to think of what they had in common with their family and friends. When subsequently asked to describe themselves, this resulted in statistically different reports of social content of the self with those primed with the individualist condition on average reporting less social content of the self and those primed with the collectivist condition on average reporting more social content of the self. This suggests that individualist and collectivist cultural contexts respectively may prime individuals to a more idiocentric or allocentric way of thinking about themselves.

Altrocchi and Altrocchi (1995) found that unacculturated Cook islanders on average reported a greater social content of the self than Cook islanders who were acculturated to New Zealand. Ma and Schoeneman (1997) reported that individuals from traditional, collectivist Kenyan cultures had self-concepts with more social components than those from urbanized and educated Kenyan cultures, as well as than individuals from individuated American cultures. These findings suggest that depending on whether the cultural context is more individualist or more collectivist, the average self-concept of individuals may be more self-oriented, i.e. idiocentric, or group-oriented, i.e. allocentric.

Finally, Triandis, McCusker and Hui (1990) found that the content of the self, perceptions of in-groups and out-groups, perceived likeliness of certain social behaviors, and values and goals

varied between individuals from individualist and collectivist cultures. These findings indicate an association between individualist cultural context and the number of individuals presenting the personality attribute of idiocentrism, and between collectivist cultural context and the number of individuals displaying the personality attribute of allocentrism.

These findings demonstrate an association between cultural context and the way individuals perceive, think, and behave. Specifically, they suggest a relationship between the culture dimension of individualism-collectivism and the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism.

Geographical distribution of the Five-Factor Model. A difference in prevalence of the personality dimensions of the five-factor model between geographical areas has also been demonstrated (Allik & McCrae, 2004; Allik et al., 2017).

Allik and McCrae (2004) analyzed data regarding the five-factor model of personality collected from 36 cultures. The authors found that geographically proximate cultures had similar profiles, and a clear contrast was demonstrated between European and American cultures and Asian and African cultures.

Allik et al. (2017) reported data concerning the five-factor model from 62 countries or cultures. A distinction was again found between groups from different countries or cultures. The contrast between European and American cultures and Asian and African cultures observed by Allik and McCrae (2004) was largely preserved, although it was somewhat less clear in this study.

These findings suggest that different traits of personality may be more articulated within groups from different geographical areas, thus making geographical background a factor worth including in an analysis of the distribution of the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism.

Idiocentrism-Allocentrism and the Five-Factor Model. Hofstede and McCrae (2004) examined the association between culture dimension scores and mean personality scores regarding the five-factor model from 33 countries. The authors found that culture dimension scores were correlated with mean personality scores, and the highest correlation was the positive correlation between individualism and extraversion (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). If the culture dimension of individualism-collectivism and the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism are related in the way that has been suggested, these findings would indicate a concurrence between idiocentrism-allocentrism and the personality dimensions of the five-factor model, specifically extraversion-introversion.

The culture fit hypothesis. Some researchers have presented findings which supports the culture fit hypothesis (Schmitz, 1994; Ward & Chang, 1997).

Ward and Chang (1997) investigated the sojourner adjustment of American residents in Singapore. They found that greater discrepancy between subjects scores of extraversion and the host cultures norms were associated with higher levels of depression among the subjects. Schmitz (1994) found that a fit between immigrants chosen acculturation strategy, i.e. integration, assimilation, or segregation, and the acculturation style appreciated by mainstream society may result in higher levels of well-being and health among immigrants. Further, the author suggested that the acculturation of immigrants may become especially stressful if there is a great difference between the immigrant's value system and cultural self-identity and the value system and cultural self-identity presented by the new cultural context.

These findings suggest that a fit between an individual's tendency towards idiocentrism or allocentrism and the cultural context's tendency towards individualism or collectivism may facilitate well-being, and a mismatch of individual and cultural tendencies may be a source of distress.

Aim and scope

The thesis aims to investigate the relationship between the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism and cultural background among international students. In compliance with this aim, the following research questions were determined:

- Is there a difference in the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism between students from different cultural backgrounds?
- Is there a difference in the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism between students from different geographical backgrounds?
- Is there a difference in the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism between students with different main reasons for studying abroad?
- Is there a difference in self-rated cultural background between students with different main reasons for studying abroad?

Method

Participants

The sampling frame were international students at university level in Sweden. Exclusion criteria were being of Swedish nationality, having studied psychology at university level, and having left out personality items. Based on these criteria, 72 participants were excluded, leaving a total of 215 included participants ($M = 23$ years, age range 19-44, 120 women, 94 men, 1 other).

Instruments and Materials

Biographical data. Biographical data regarding the respondent's gender, age, nationality, religion, area of upbringing, and parental education was collected.

The personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism. Since previous measures differ both in their theoretical and methodological approach and since to the authors knowledge no measure currently exists which is based on Triandis and Suh's (2002) definitions of idiocentrism and allocentrism, the decision was made to create a new scale to measure this construct. 22 items (see Appendix) were derived from three different instruments created by Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk and Gelfand (1995), Triandis and Gelfand (1998), and Triandis, McCusker and Hui (1990). Items were chosen which were judged to be in line with Triandis and Suh's (2002) definitions of idiocentrism and allocentrism and deemed to cover the four elements suggested by Triandis et al. (1995) for measuring idiocentrism-allocentrism. In developing the measure, the guidelines for item analysis were followed.

After collecting the data mean scores were calculated by using a four-step procedure. First, a baseline score of 1 was assigned to each idiocentrism item and -1 for each allocentrism item. Second, an item score was calculated for each item by multiplying the baseline score with the assigned rating. Third, an idiocentrism-allocentrism score was calculated by adding the item scores. This score could range between -24 and 24. Fourth, the idiocentrism-allocentrism score was standardized by adding 24 to each value. The standardized idiocentrism-allocentrism score could range between 0 and 48. This was done to avoid the problem which values around zero pose for statistical analysis. Scores higher than 24 indicated predominantly idiocentric personality tendencies, and scores below 24 implied predominantly allocentric personality tendencies.

Cultural background. Participants were given short definitions of individualist and collectivist cultures respectively, and were then asked to rate their culture of origin on a seven point Likert-type scale ranging from 'Completely individualist' to 'Completely collectivist'. The respondents were specifically asked to base their ratings on how they personally had experienced their culture of origin, rather than on how it was generally identified. Groups were then created based on the participants ratings in relation to the neutral point on the range, with those whose ratings were on the individualist side constituting one group, those on the neutral point constituting another and those on the collectivist side constituting a third (Individualist cultural background, Neither individualist nor collectivist cultural background, Collectivist cultural background).

Geographical background. Geographical background was decided based on nationality. Those participants who stated double nationalities were assigned the first nationality stated based on

the assumption that this was the nationality they identified most with. Two sets of geographical background groups were created, the first pair based on Triandis (2001) assessment of how individualism-collectivism is distributed between the continents, Eastern Europe being placed together with the rest of Europe due to geographical proximity (European and North American cultures, Asian, African and South American cultures), and the second on Allik and McCrae's (2004) clustering of personality profiles (European and American cultures, Asian and African cultures).

Main reason for studying abroad. A multiple-choice item was created inspired by Triandis and Suh's (2002) hypothesis that idiocentrics in collectivist cultures tend migrate to individualist cultures as a way to escape the high demands that their in-group make on them. Out of the seven options given, three were intended to capture the spirit of exploration ('To experience another culture', 'To foster my personal development', and 'To promote my future career'), and another three were intended to capture the spirit of escaping ('To find a place where I can live my life like I want to', 'To search for a different way of life', and 'To escape the demands of my family and relatives'). Additionally, an option was included for respondents who wished to state another reason ('Other reason, as specified below'). Based on this categorization of answer options, three groups were created (Explore, Escape, Other). Participants who reported 'Other reason, as specified below' and stated a reason which was judged to be in line with one of the categories, as well as participants who reported multiple reason all within one of the categories, were assigned to the group corresponding to those reasons. Participants who reported multiple reasons from several categories were assigned to the 'Other' category.

Procedure

A pilot survey ($N = 27$) was carried out by snowball sampling via social media during the end of September 2017. A number of items were changed as a result of the feedback received. Due to requests for increased specificity, all items regarding family or relatives were changed to specifically refer to extended family, i.e. aunts, uncles and cousins, and some concepts which were perceived as vague were elaborated. For example, the item 'It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups' (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) was changed to 'It is important to me that I respect the opinions my aunts, uncles and cousins have about my future'.

The data was then collected during October 2017. Requests were sent to the International offices of 11 universities as well as to 21 specific departments of three universities, and to one organization for international students in Sweden to forward a web based version of the survey to their respective international students. Six out of 11 of the International offices as well as 10 out of the 21 specific departments agreed. The web based survey was also distributed via two social media groups for international students. An analogue version of the survey was distributed to international students at Umeå University.

Statistical analyses. Prior to conducting the analyses the distribution of the data was evaluated. It was determined to be normal regarding both idiocentrism-allocentrism and self-rated cultural background.

To investigate the difference between numbers of idiocentrics and allocentrics in relation to cultural background (Individualist, Neither individualist nor collectivist, Collectivist), a one-way ANOVA was performed. To evaluate the nature of the differences between the three means further, the ANOVA was followed up with three Fisher's LSD post hoc tests.

The difference between the numbers of idiocentrics and allocentrics in the geographical background groups was assessed by two independent *t*-tests with groups based on Triandis (2001) assessment (European and North American cultures, Asian, African and South American cultures) and Allik and McCrae's (2004) clustering (European and American cultures, Asian and African cultures), respectively.

The difference between numbers of idiocentrics and allocentrics and main reason for studying abroad (Explore, Escape, Other), a one-way independent ANOVA was performed.

Similarly, to assess the difference between numbers of individuals from different cultural backgrounds and main reason for studying abroad (Explore, Escape, Other) was investigated by performing a one-way independent ANOVA.

The effect size of the results was evaluated based on Cohen's (1994) guidelines.

Results

The descriptive statistics associated with the number of idiocentrics and allocentrics across the three cultural background groups ($N = 214$) can be seen in table 1a. The independent between-groups ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference $F(2, 211) = 13.73, p = .000, \eta^2 = .115$, as can be seen in table 1b. The effect size associated with this effect is considered small.

Table 1a. *Descriptive statistics for self-rated Idiocentrism-Allocentrism among the Individualist, the Neither individualist nor collectivist and the Collectivist cultural background groups (Idiocentric tendencies > 24, Allocentric tendencies < 24).*

Cultural background group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Individualist	107	26.42	6.81
Neither individualist nor collectivist	26	22.54	7.07
Collectivist	81	21.48	6.14

Table 1b. *One-way ANOVA for Equality of Means between the Individualist, the Neither individualist nor collectivist and the Collectivist cultural background groups.*

<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	η^2
1194.891	2	597.446	13.725	.000	.115

* $p < 0.05$

The post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the Individualist and the Collectivist cultural background group, $p = .000$, and between the Individualist and the Neither individualist nor collectivist cultural background group, $p = .008$. However, there was no significant difference between the Neither individualist nor collectivist and the Collectivist cultural background group, $p = .478$.

The descriptive statistics associated with the number of idiocentrics and allocentrics across Triandis' (2001) two geographical background groups ($N = 213$) can be seen in table 2a. The independent samples *t*-test was not associated with a statistically significant effect $t(211) = .690, p = .491$. Thus, the European and North American group was not associated with a statistically different number of idiocentrics and allocentrics than the Asian, African and South American group.

Table 2a. *Descriptive statistics for self-rated Idiocentrism-Allocentrism among the European and North American and the Asian, African and South American geographical background groups (Idiocentric tendencies > 24, Allocentric tendencies < 24).*

Geographical background group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
European and North American	163	24.30	7.15
<u>Asian, African and South American</u>	<u>50</u>	<u>23.52</u>	<u>6.47</u>

Table 2b. *T-test for Equality of Means between the European and North American and the Asian, African and South American geographical background groups.*

<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (two-tailed)	<i>Mean</i> <i>Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error</i> <i>Difference</i>	95% Confidence	
						<i>Interval of the Difference</i> <i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
1.501	.690	211	.491	.78061	1.13097	-1.44884	3.01006

* $p < 0.05$

The descriptive statistics associated with the number of idiocentrics and allocentrics across Allik and McCrae's (2004) two geographical background groups ($N = 213$) can be seen in table 3a. The independent samples *t*-test was not associated with a statistically significant effect $t(211) = -.094$, $p = .925$. Thus, the European and American group was not associated with a statistically different number of idiocentrics and allocentrics than the Asian and African group.

Table 3a. *Descriptive statistics for self-rated Idiocentrism-Allocentrism among the European and American and the Asian and African geographical background groups (Idiocentric tendencies > 24, Allocentric tendencies < 24).*

Geographical background group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
European and American	176	24.10	7.08
<u>Asian and African</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>24.22</u>	<u>6.60</u>

Table 3b. *T-test for Equality of Means between the European and American and the Asian and African geographical background groups.*

<i>F</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (two-tailed)	<i>Mean</i> <i>Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error</i> <i>Difference</i>	95% Confidence	
						<i>Interval of the Difference</i> <i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
.754	-.094	211	.925	-.11963	1.26664	-2.61652	2.37727

* $p < 0.05$

The descriptive statistics associated with the number of idiocentrics and allocentrics across the three main reason for studying abroad groups ($N = 215$) can be seen in table 4a. As the independent between-groups ANOVA did not yield a statistically significant difference $F(2, 212) = 1.135$, $p = .323$, the Explore, Escape and Other groups were not associated with a significantly different number of idiocentrics and allocentrics.

Table 4a. *Descriptive statistics for self-rated Idiocentrism-Allocentrism among the Explore, Escape and Other main reason for studying abroad groups (Idiocentric tendencies > 24, Allocentric tendencies < 24).*

Main reason for studying abroad group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Explore	181	23.82	6.90
Escape	22	26.18	7.73
Other	12	24.25	6.44

Table 4b. *One-way ANOVA for Equality of Means regarding self-rated Idiocentrism-Allocentrism between the Explore, Escape and Other main reason for studying abroad groups.*

<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	η^2
109.987	2	54.993	1.135	.323	.011

* $p < 0.05$

The descriptive statistics associated with the number of individuals from different cultural backgrounds across the three Main reason for studying abroad groups ($N = 214$) can be seen in table 5a. As the independent between-groups ANOVA did not yield a statistically significant effect $F(2, 211) = 1.949$, $p = .145$, the Explore, Escape and Other groups were not associated with a significantly different number of individuals from individualist cultures and collectivist cultures.

Table 5a. *Descriptive statistics for self-rated cultural background among the Explore, Escape and Other main reason for studying abroad groups (1 = Completely individualist, 4 = Neither individualist nor collectivist, 7 = Completely collectivist).*

Main reason for studying abroad group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Explore	180	4.31	1.61
Escape	22	4.64	1.59
Other	12	3.50	1.68

Table 5b. *One-way ANOVA for Equality of Means regarding self-rated cultural background between the Explore, Escape and Other main reason for studying abroad groups.*

<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	η^2
10.168	2	5.084	1.949	.145	.018

* $p < 0.05$

Discussion

The thesis aimed to investigate the association between the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism and cultural background among international students. The research questions were if there is a difference in the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism between students from different cultural backgrounds, if there is a difference in the personality

dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism between students from different geographical backgrounds, if there is a difference in the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism between students with different main reasons for studying abroad, and if there is difference in self-rated cultural background between students with different main reasons for studying abroad.

Idiocentrism-Allocentrism across the cultural background groups.

The findings of the present study demonstrates a significant difference between the cultural background groups regarding number of idiocentrics and allocentrics in the expected direction $F(2, 211) = 13.73, p = .000, \eta^2 = .115$. This suggests that in the case of individualism-collectivism and idiocentrism-allocentrism, culture does influence personality.

This finding is in line with previous research which has shown an association between cultural context and self-concepts as well as between individualism-collectivism and idiocentrism-allocentrism (Altrocchi & Altrocchi, 1995; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990). Specifically, the difference in number of idiocentrics and allocentrics in the cultural background groups may be understood as a consequence of culture's influence on personality as previous studies has demonstrated how cultural context primes individuals to think in certain ways regarding themselves and others (Trafimow, Triandis & Goto, 1990).

The difference between the cultural background groups regarding numbers of idiocentrics and allocentrics may be understood as an example of that the culture of a group is expressed in the personality of a majority of the individual members of that group. As culture creates predictability in everyday life and constitutes a condition for group membership, it becomes internalized by the individual members of the group and continuously enacted by them. Although not all individuals will internalize the culture of their group to the same extent, a majority of the individuals of a group will present the qualities of the culture predominant in that group, as demonstrated in the present study.

However, the effect size associated with the difference between the cultural background groups was low, $\eta^2 = .115$. This may be understood as a consequence of culture being only one of several factors influencing personality, some other factors being biological composition and family dynamics. In shaping an individual's personality these factors may interact in complex ways which results in no one factor being easily identifiable as the predominant cause of personality.

Further, the results demonstrated a significant difference between the Individualist and the Collectivist cultural background group and between the Individualist and the Neither individualist nor collectivist cultural background group, but no significant difference was found between the Neither individualist nor collectivist and the Collectivist cultural background group. This may be interpreted as a consequence of the individuals in the Neither individualist nor collectivist cultural background group being from cultures more similar to collectivist cultures than individualist cultures. However, due to the limited number of participants in this cultural background group ($N = 26$), it is not certain that this result would be replicated if a larger sample was used.

Idiocentrism-Allocentrism across the geographical background groups.

The findings of the present study did not demonstrate a significant difference between the geographical background groups regarding number of idiocentrics and allocentrics, regardless of whether these groups were based on Triandis' (2001) assessment of geographical distribution of individualism-collectivism, $t(211) = .690, p = .491$, or on Allik and McCrae's (2004) clustering of personality profiles, $t(211) = -.094, p = .925$. This suggests that geography does not influence this dimension of personality.

These findings were not in line with previous research which has shown how the personality dimensions of the five-factor model are distributed in distinct personality profiles depending on geographical area (Allik & McCrae, 2004). Nor were they in line with assessments of the distribution of the culture dimension of individualism-collectivism (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004;

Triandis, 2001). This could be a consequence of that the sample in the present study is a non-probability sample consisting only of university students who may not adequately represent the general populations of their respective geographical entities. However, as an association between cultural background and idiocentrism-allocentrism has been demonstrated, this finding can also be seen as an expression of that cultural diversity may be found within nations and continents, which raises the question of how useful it is to equate culture with geographical entities. In relation to this interpretation, it is worth noticing that some participants rated their culture of origin in the opposite way of what was to be expected based on assessment of geographical distribution of individualism-collectivism.

Idiocentrism-Allocentrism and self-rated cultural background across the main reason for studying abroad groups.

The findings of the present study did not demonstrate a significant difference between the main reason for studying abroad groups and number of idiocentrics and allocentrics, $F(2, 212) = 1.135, p = .323$. This suggests that whether an individual is predominantly idiocentric or allocentric is not related to her reasons for studying abroad. Further, the findings did not demonstrate a significant difference between the main reason for studying abroad groups regarding self-rated cultural background, $F(2, 211) = 1.949, p = .145$. This suggest that cultural background is not related to what reason an individual have for studying abroad.

However, these findings do not tell us what the relation is between main reason for studying abroad and the fit between culture and personality. It could be that idiocentrics from individualist cultures differed from idiocentrics from collectivist cultures in this respect, but when combined they present a spread of reasons for studying abroad among idiocentric individuals. Similarly, as different individuals within cultures may have different relationships to their cultural context and differ in their reasons for studying abroad accordingly, when one looks only at the association between cultural background and main reason for studying abroad this may conceal subcategories of individuals between whom a difference may be found in this respect.

Another possible explanation as to why no difference was found is that participants may have interpreted the options in the item used to measure main reason for studying abroad differently.

Thus, although these findings suggest a variety of reasons for studying abroad may be found both among individuals presenting the same personality traits as well as among individuals from a similar cultural background, it cannot be said for certain whether or not these findings are in line with Triandis and Suh's (2002) hypothesis that idiocentrics in collectivist cultures will seek out individualist contexts to which they are better adjusted. This may still be a valid hypothesis for further investigation of the motivation for international studies, as previous research suggests that a good fit between an individual's personality and cultural norms may facilitate well-being and a bad fit may cause distress (Ward & Chang, 1997).

Limitations

Reliability. The sample in the present study was a non-probability sample consisting of international students at university level. This is a group of people who share the attributes of being engaged in higher level education and who have made the choice to temporarily leave their countries of origin to study abroad. Thus, they constitute a narrow segment of society and the results may not be generalizable to other parts of society. If studies were to be made using random sampling the results may be different.

Furthermore, as the sample only contained a limited number of individuals from each country represented, and some continents were greatly underrepresented, such as Africa ($N = 6$) and South America ($N = 13$), the sample may not be representative of the cultures of these geographical entities. If larger samples were to be collected from different countries, and more countries from

Africa and South America were included, the outcome might again be different than that of the present study.

Validity. Although items for measuring idiocentrism-allocentrism were borrowed from previous measures, the current measure was not validated. No formal item analysis was performed, even though the guidelines for item analysis were followed when constructing the measure. This means that it cannot be said for certain that this measure sufficiently measures the construct of idiocentrism-allocentrism. Factor analyses should be performed to ensure that the items included accurately express the factors of the construct. Additionally, further studies examining the relation between idiocentrism-allocentrism and other dimensions of personality should be carried out to ensure the concurrent validity of this construct.

Further, the method used to determine levels of idiocentrism-allocentrism in the present study was that of self-rating. As cultures may differ regarding norms of response style and self-presentation, as well as in standards of comparison, it is uncertain whether the responses of individuals from different cultures can be said to be comparable. Thus, it cannot be said with sufficient certainty that the same thing was measured among all participants. A way of increasing comparability of the results would be to complement self-ratings of personality with observer ratings. Participants would then be asked to rate the personality of someone close to them, e.g. a friend, and this would eliminate the possibility that results reflect different self-representational styles.

Additionally, as the measure was in English and a majority of the participants were from nations where English is not the first language it may be that participants understood items differently. However, advanced knowledge of the English language may be assumed among the participants as they were all engaged in university level education requiring English language skills.

Cultural background was determined using a self-rating item and participants were specifically encouraged to base their rating on their own subjective experience of their culture. As individuals from different parts of the world may have different frames of references when estimating their culture of origin, it is possible that self-rating does not provide a comparable measure of cultural background. For example, one French participant brought up in a slightly urban area stated a 'Completely collectivist' cultural background, and one Thai participant brought up in a mostly urban area stated a 'Mostly individualist' cultural background. This can be seen as an expression of subcultural diversity within nations as the French participant may perceive his or her subcultural context as very collectivist in relation to a highly individualist mainstream culture, and the Thai respectively may perceive his or her subcultural context as very individualist compared to a highly collectivist mainstream culture. But it also calls for deliberation whether the collectivism of French subcultures is the same as the collectivism of Thailand, and if the individualism of Thai subcultures is the same as the individualism of France.

An objective way of measuring cultural background could have been composed of determining set of variables which have been shown to correspond to dimensions of culture, such as GNP per capita, mobility between social classes from one generation to the next, the use of violence in domestic politics, legal obligations, and religion (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004). Depending on what status a certain nation has regarding these variables, individuals from that nation would be assigned a cultural background accordingly. Had cultural background been measured in this way it is possible, if not probable, that the distribution of cultural background among the participants would have been different.

The biggest flaw of the present study may have been the way the participants main reason for studying abroad was measured. A multiple-choice item was used where the answer options were supposed to express the spirit of exploration and the spirit of escaping. The participants' answers were then grouped according to this categorization. However, it is not certain that the participants understood the answer options the way they were intended. For example, 'To promote my future career' was intended to express the spirit of exploration, but it is possible that an individual would see their career as a means to greater independence, thus making it a way of escaping a situation of interdependence. Similarly, 'To search for a different way of life' was intended to express the spirit

of escaping, but it is conceivable that someone who chose this option was not particularly dissatisfied with their culture of origin, but simply especially interested in experiencing what life is like in Sweden. In hindsight, it would have been preferable to use a self-rating item to measure the participants' main reason for studying abroad, with exploring a new culture being on one end of the rating scale and escaping one's culture of origin being on the other. This would have allowed comparison of the reason for studying abroad of idiocentrics from individualist cultures with idiocentrics from collectivist cultures, as well as allocentrics from individualist cultures and allocentrics from collectivist cultures.

Implications

The findings of the present study suggest that there is an association between culture and personality, specifically between the culture dimension of individualism-collectivism and the personality dimension of idiocentrism-allocentrism. This implies that it could be useful to complement existing psychological models of personality with this dimension, in order to make them more applicable to different cultural contexts.

Taking into account cultural differences regarding self-orientation and group-orientation may enable the adaptation of pedagogical models originated in individualist cultures to collectivist cultural conditions, facilitate a better understanding of customer bases in different cultural environments as well as boost the recruitment processes and management training programs of multinational companies, and improve psychological assessment and treatment of clients from different cultural contexts.

Further, the findings of the present study suggest that it may be useful to take into account cultural diversity within geographical entities when studying culture. This may increase specificity when determining which cultures prevail in a certain area, which in turn may be useful for companies aiming to expand into new markets or recruit personnel in new areas. It may also contribute to a more accurate conceptualization of culture and subcultures than that which equating culture with geographical area offers.

Finally, the findings of the present study suggest that both idiocentrics and allocentrics as well as individuals from both individualist and collectivist cultures will differ in their reasons for studying abroad. However, as stated above, further research is required to investigate whether idiocentrics from collectivist cultures see international studies as a means to escape their culture of origin to a greater extent than others. A better understanding of the motivation of international students may benefit universities offering exchange programs, as it may facilitate the creation of programs well suited for future international students.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrated that in the case of individualism-collectivism and idiocentrism-allocentrism, culture does influence personality. Further, the results suggested that it may not be appropriate to equate geographical entities such as nations with culture as cultural diversity may be found within such entities. Finally, the results indicated that international students differ in their reasons for studying abroad regardless of differences in personality and cultural background, although further research regarding the motivation of international students is needed.

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Appendix

Items for measuring the personality dimension of Idiocentrism-Allocentrism

1. I would rather depend on myself than on others.
2. To me, winning is everything.
3. If a cousin was in any kind of trouble I would help within my capacity.
4. Being a unique individual is not important to me.
5. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
6. I think children should live at home with their parents until they get married.
7. I think any person should feel honored if their aunt or uncle achieved something significant.
8. It is important to me that I respect the opinions my aunts, uncles and cousins have about my future.
9. I do better working alone than in a group.
10. It is not important to me that I do my job better than others.
11. If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud.
12. I am not to blame if my cousin fails.
13. What I look for in a job is a friendly group of co-workers.
14. I would rather struggle through a personal problem by myself than discuss it with a friend.
15. The well-being of my co-workers is important to me.
16. It does not matter to me how my aunts, uncles and cousins are viewed in the eyes of other members of my community.
17. I do not believe aging parents should live at home with their children.
18. The most important thing in my life is to make myself happy.
19. I do not think it is important to consult close friends before making a decision.
20. I often do "my own thing".
21. When another person does better than I do, it annoys me.
22. I enjoy talking to my neighbours every day.