

Personality differences between the sexes are largest in the most gender equal countries

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Petri Kajonius. Credit: Petri Kajonius. The University of Skövde.

The self-rated personalities of men and women differ more in more gender-equal countries, according to recent research from the University of Gothenburg, University West and the University of Skövde.

In the study over 130,000 people from 22 different countries filled in a validated [personality](#) test. The test measured the "big five" [personality traits](#) (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), regarded as the most accepted categorization within [personality research](#).

The average [differences](#) between men and women's personality scores were computed for each country and then compared with the country's [gender](#) equality level as measured by the World Economic Forum.

Replicating past research, the study showed that higher levels of gender equality were associated with larger differences in personality between the sexes. Countries with very high levels of gender equality, such as Sweden and Norway, showed differences in personality between the sexes that were around twice as large as countries with substantially lower levels of gender equality, such as China and Malaysia.

Furthermore, women generally rated themselves as more worried (neuroticism), social (extraversion), inquisitive (openness), caring (agreeableness) and responsible (conscientiousness) than men, and these relative differences were larger in gender equal countries.

"Insofar as these traits can be classified as stereotypically feminine, our interpretation of the data is that as countries become more progressive men and women gravitate towards their traditional gender norms. But, we really don't know why it is like this, and sadly our data does not let us tease out the causal explanations," says Erik Mac Giolla, Ph.D. in Psychology.

"A possible explanation is that people in more progressive and equal countries have a greater opportunity to express inherent biological differences. Another theory is that people in progressive countries have a greater desire to express differences in their identity through their

gender," says Petri Kajnoius, Associate Professor in Psychology and Behavioral Measurements.

A combination of social role theory and evolutionary perspectives may ultimately be needed to explain these findings.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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