VOLITIONAL PERSONALITY CHANGE

Who in the World is Trying to Change Their Personality Traits?

Volitional Personality Change Among College Students in 56 Countries

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9   Who in the World is Trying to Change Their Personality Traits?:

10   Volitional Personality Change among College Students in 56 Countries

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13   Abstract

14   Recent research conducted largely in the US suggests that most people would like to change one

15   or more of their personality traits. Yet almost no research has investigated the degree to which

16   and in what ways volitional personality change (VPC), or individuals' active efforts towards

17   personality change, might be common around the world. Through a custom-built website, 13,278

18   college student participants from 56 countries using 42 different languages reported whether they

19   were currently trying to change their personality and, if so, what they were trying to change.

20   Around the world, 60.40% of participants reported that they are currently trying to change their

21   personalities, with the highest percentage in Thailand (81.91%) and the lowest in Kenya

22   (21.41%). Among those who provide open-ended responses to the aspect of personality they are

23   trying to change, the most common goals were to increase emotional stability (29.73%),

24   conscientiousness (19.71%), extraversion (15.94%), and agreeableness (13.53%). In line with

25   previous research, students who are trying to change *any* personality trait tend to have relatively

26   low levels of emotional stability and happiness. Moreover, those with relatively low levels of

27   socially desirable traits reported attempting to increase what they lacked. These principal

28   findings were generalizable around the world.

29   *Key words*: volitional personality change, cross-cultural, college students

Who in the World is Trying to Change Their Personality Traits?:

Volitional Personality Change among College Students in 56 Countries

Personality changes in small and sometimes large ways throughout the lifespan (see McAdams & Olson, 2010; Roberts et al., 2006). Attempts to understand the underlying mechanisms of personality change have emphasized the effects of life events and shifting social roles (e.g., Bleidorn et al., 2018; Caspi et al., 2005; but see Asselmann et al., 2020). Several studies have focused on personality change that occurs during a common life event for young adults - the transition to college (Bleidorn, 2012; Corker & Donnellan, 2017; Donnellan et al., 2007; Lüdtke et al., 2011). Students are often faced with new social and academic challenges that, to be overcome, require adaptive goal pursuit, personal value adjustment, and even personality change (Astin, 1993; Newcomb, 1973).

Recently, researchers have begun to investigate individuals' active role in their personality development, or "volitional personality change" (VPC) (Allemand & Flückiger, 2017; Baranski et al., 2016; Hudson & Roberts, 2014; Miller et al., 2019; Quintus et al., 2017). Although this topic would seem to be universally relevant, nearly all previous research on VPC to date has focused on individuals within the United States. In an effort to remedy this omission and generalize VPC findings outside the US, the current project systematically investigates VPC across 56 countries. Specifically, we assess the proportion of college students attempting to change their personality as well as seeking to identify robust and internationally consistent trends in *who* is currently trying to change, and *what* specifically they are trying to change. Regardless of the countries they reside in, college students are all at a potentially transformative period of life. The present study addresses the ways in which their efforts to change their personalities are robust and consistent around the world.

Volitional personality change

Research on VPC has used varying methodologies, but almost all studies have been conducted entirely within the US. These studies have consistently found that (1) the majority of individuals either currently want to or are trying to increase their emotional stability, conscientiousness and extraversion, (2) attempts and desires to change personality are inversely related to psychological well-being, and (3) current levels of certain personality traits are inversely related to desires or attempts to change them (e.g., individuals low in extraversion aspire to be more extraverted; Baranski et al., 2017, 2019; Hudson & Fraley, 2016, Hudson & Roberts, 2014: Hudson et al., 2020: Stieger et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2015; Stieger et al., 2020; Quintus et al., & 2017).

An early investigation used a modified version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John & Srivastava, 1999) and demonstrated that between 87% (for agreeableness) and 97% (for conscientiousness) of US participants reported a desire to change their personality traits and that, in the case of extraversion, emotional stability, and conscientiousness, participants' desire for specific Big Five personality changes were negatively related to current, corresponding levels of these traits (Hudson & Roberts, 2014). These researchers also demonstrated that over the course of 16 weeks, individuals who accomplished their personality change goals experienced increases in well-being (Hudson & Fraley, 2016).

Moving beyond research that assessed *desires* for personality change, Baranski et al., (2017, 2020) asked US participants whether they were *currently trying* to change an aspect of their personalities (i.e., yes or no), and if they answered in the affirmative, asked what they were trying to change. 67.5% of participants reported trying to change an aspect of their personalities; for conscientiousness, extraversion and emotional stability, there was a strong, inverse

76   relationship between individuals' current personality trait levels and their reported change

77   attempts. This conceptual replication of Hudson and Fraley (2016) was successful despite the

78   subtle but important distinction between wanting and actually trying to change one's personality.

79   To our knowledge, only one published study has investigated VPC across multiple

80   countries. Robinson and colleagues (2015) asked participants from Iran, China and the United

81   Kingdom to complete the Big Five Trait-Change Goal Inventory (BF-TGI), which asks

82   participants to rate whether and in what direction they want to change each of the Big Five traits

83   (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience).

84   Participants in Iran had consistently higher proportions of trait change goals in the socially

85   desirable direction (e.g., increases in extraversion, decreases in neuroticism) relative to China

86   and the UK. Also, researchers reported that overall, participants indicated a goal to decrease

87   levels of neuroticism more than any other trait (Robinson et al., 2015).

88   While large-scale, cross-cultural investigations of VPC are rare, evidence elsewhere

89   demonstrates cross-cultural similarities in the pursuit of self-improvement. For instance, self-

90   direction (i.e., independent thought, creating, exploring) consistently ranked high in importance

91   across more than 60 countries (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001; Schwartz et al.,

92   2001; for a cross-cultural review, see Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, Grouzet and colleagues

93   (2005) found that the goals to feel competent and autonomous were similarly common across 15

94   countries. These tendencies towards self-improvement were particularly pronounced among

95   college students. Indeed, previous research demonstrates that compared to older individuals,

96   college students and college-aged individuals have a higher percentage of goals with a "gain

97   orientation" (Heckhausen, 1997; Penningroth & Scott, 2012).

98   **The relationship between VPC and individual differences**

99   Key components of self-discrepancy theory (SDT) may help build a theoretical

100   foundation in explaining why particular individual difference variables are relevant in

101   distinguishing between those who are and are not trying to change their personality traits

102   (Higgins, 1987). SDT posits that discrepancies between the ideal and actual self are associated

103   with lower levels of happiness (Higgins, 1987). Thus, perhaps the most theoretically relevant

104   individual differences to VPC are those that signal to the individual that there is a discrepancy

105   between their ideal and actual self, and thus the need for personality change. For example,

106   individuals with low levels of happiness and high levels of anxiety or depression may be

107   motivated to shrink the discrepancy between their ideal and actual selves and in the process,

108   alleviate these negative traits and emotions by changing the personality traits they perceive as

109   contributing to their unhappiness, anxiety, and depression (DeFruyt et al., 2006).

110   Previous research suggests several other individual difference variables that may be

111   associated with attempts to change one's personality. For instance, individuals high in narcissism

112   tend to have exaggerated egotism, and thus might not see any need for change (Back et al.,

113   2013). Previous research also demonstrates that individuals high in dispositional optimism tend

114   to take an active approach to personal goal attainment (Carver & Scheier, 2002), and might be

115   similarly willing to work towards specific personality change goals. Conversely, optimists

116   generally view their present circumstances and future personal outcomes as positive (Busseri et

117   al., 2009) and thus might not see any reason to change anything about themselves.

118   Other personality traits might also be relevant for VPC. Individuals high in

119   conscientiousness, for instance, might take responsibility in improving their circumstances and in

120   doing so seek to make active efforts towards their personality change (Soto et al., 2017).

121   Likewise, previous research has shown openness to experience to relate to self-exploration

122 (McAdams et al., 2012), so we may expect individuals high in openness to experience to self-

123 reflect upon the aspects of themselves that they want to change and then explore creative routes

124 towards change. Finally, we may expect religiosity to play a role in whether individuals attempt

125 to change their personalities. Specifically, religious individuals may consider self-improvement

126 as a means to fulfill self-actualization (Watson et al., 1995).

127 **The Current Project**

128   The current project adds to the literature in several key-ways. First, this study is the first

129 to assess the proportion of college students across a large set of countries who are currently

130 trying to change their personality traits. While this aspect of the study is strictly exploratory, it

131 lays the necessary foundation for future confirmatory research that assesses cross-country

132 variation in attempting and achieving personality change.

133   In particular, the current project seeks to establish VPC findings that are generalizable

134 beyond the US. In the emerging field of VPC, across studies with varying methodologies, the

135 majority of participants sampled have indicated a desire or current attempt to change at least one

136 aspect of their personalities. Moreover, there has been a near uniform tendency for current levels

137 of personality traits to be negatively related to desires or attempts to change corresponding traits.

138 The current project is among the first to systematically test the generalizability of these robust

139 and consistent findings outside the US, and the first to do so across over 3 dozen countries. This

140 contribution is particularly important given the field's reliance on W.E.I.R.D samples (white,

141 educated, industrialized, rich, democratic, Heine et al., 2006) and the current push to extend our

142 understanding of individuals outside these populations.

143   Finally, the current project seeks to extend understanding of VPC beyond global

144 personality traits, to facets of personality. Specifically, we utilized the facet structure defined by

145   the Big Five Inventory 2 (BFI-2; Soto & John, 2017). This structure defines each of the Big Five

146   traits along three facets (e.g., extraversion is defined by facets energy level, sociability, and

147   assertiveness), offering more conceptual specificity to measurement. Importantly, while each

148   trait's facets are inter-correlated, they are also meaningfully different and show distinctive

149   relations with self-report and peer-report external criteria (Soto & John, 2017).

150   We assess VPC using a method that combines the use of idiographic, open-ended

151   responses with nomothetic, quantitative coding of the responses. This nomothetic-idiographic

152   approach is especially suitable for measuring volitional personality change for two reasons. First,

153   asking participants to report volitional personality change goals in their own words prompts them

154   to report goals that are readily recalled and thus particularly salient to individuals, especially

155   those that stand up against other more immediately gratifying personal goals (e.g., losing weight,

156   making more money). Indeed, a recent study found that when prompted to list their top ten

157   personal goals, the majority of individuals listed at least one personality change goal (Miller et

158   al., 2019). Second, the idiographic-nomothetic approach limits the risk of demand characteristics.

159   Likert-type personality change goal inventories may prompt participants to endorse several items

160   that are socially desirable yet may not all receive concerted effort towards change in the desired

161   direction from the individual. Thus, in contrast with idiographic-nomothetic methods, Likert-

162   type rating methods may over-estimate volitional personality change goal pursuit.

163   Going beyond previous research in these ways, the current project evaluates VPC by

164   college students across 56 countries. This investigation is exploratory, but is generally guided by

165   four research questions:

166   1. What proportion of college students around the world and in various countries are

167   currently trying to change their personality traits?

168   2. What personality traits and other individual differences (e.g., narcissism, optimism,

169   happiness) are associated with whether one is trying to change *any* personality trait?

170   The present 56 country dataset has a range of individual differences that we are

171   exploring to answer this research question.

172   3. What *specific* traits are college students around the world currently trying to change?

173   4. How are attempts to change *specific* personality traits related to current personality

174   traits?

Method

Participants

177   This study was approved by the University of California Institution Review Board (HS-1-

178   046; The International Situations Project). All participants were college students recruited by

179   collaborators who were local faculty members – a total of 13,278[1] participants using 42 different

180   languages from 79 cities, 56 countries[2] and 6 continents (71.82% female; mean age = 21.69

181   years, SD = 4.52 years)[3]. Participants volunteered or were awarded course credit, monetary

182   compensation, or a small gift for their participation. See Table 1 for demographics.

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[1] Data from 3 data collection sites had fewer than 50 participants and were not included. Data from 11 additional data collection sites included in previous publications using the ISP dataset (see Lee et al., 2020) did not provide translations of open-ended VPC responses and were thus also not included.
[2] Due to its cultural distinction from China, Hong Kong participants are considered a separate sample from their mainland Chinese counterparts. Thus, while we have included it in our list of countries, we acknowledge that Hong Kong is not a country and is instead a special administrative region.
[3] We ran parallel analyses with the age range limited to 18-29 years. There were no substantial differences between these results and results conducted with the entire sample. See these age standardized analyses in the supplementary materials at osf.io/enrd4.

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Table 1
International sample demographic information

Country	Total N	Female %	Mean Age (SD)
Argentina	140	78.57	24.28 (5.66)
Australia	197	75.63	19.71 (3.48)
Austria	113	81.42	21.26 (2.37)
Bolivia	135	57.78	21.01 (2.16)
Brazil	309	72.17	23.68 (7.10)
Bulgaria	150	70.67	25.05 (6.48)
Canada	302	79.14	21.86 (3.98)
Chile	384	66.41	21.45 (3.08)
China	426	48.59	22.64 (4.39)
Colombia	181	74.03	21.68 (4.16)
Croatia	218	64.68	21.46 (1.70)
Czech Republic	193	80.83	22.65 (4.82)
Denmark	244	79.92	22.94 (5.12)
Estonia	293	83.96	25.88 (7.67)
France	228	85.53	22.60 (6.31)
Georgia	140	80.00	20.29 (1.79)
Germany	454	75.11	24.36 (6.39)
Hong Kong	142	59.15	19.00 (1.27)
Hungary	175	60.57	21.71 (1.97)
India	221	49.77	22.38 (4.65)
Israel	171	61.40	25.35 (4.22)
Italy	717	64.57	21.86 (3.73)
Japan	242	61.98	22.58 (4.83)
Jordan	141	80.85	19.87 (2.14)
Kenya	139	65.47	21.17 (1.90)
Latvia	169	82.84	24.87 (6.09)
Lithuania	144	78.47	20.26 (1.75)
Macedonia	54	74.07	21.22 (1.73)
Malaysia	228	71.05	21.53 (2.80)
Mexico	169	68.05	20.66 (2.18)
Netherlands	300	81.33	20.13 (3.03)
New Zealand	129	86.05	19.19 (4.43)
Nigeria	134	33.58	24.75 (5.67)
Norway	159	74.21	23.89 (5.04)
Pakistan	114	50.00	20.61 (2.73)
Palestine	295	83.39	22.17 (4.81)
Philippines	331	69.18	19.71 (2.22)
Poland	234	83.33	22.35 (5.32)
Portugal	156	87.82	21.66 (5.84)
Romania	177	57.06	22.84 (5.57)
Russia	158	78.48	21.92 (4.71)

Serbia	184	86.41	19.73 (1.25)
Singapore	136	77.94	20.93 (2.13)
Slovakia	148	69.59	22.41 (2.71)
Slovenia	122	57.38	20.43 (1.54)
South Korea	281	58.36	22.35 (2.25)
Spain	419	85.20	19.73 (3.47)
Sweden	126	72.22	*
Switzerland	447	84.34	22.28 (4.89)
Taiwan	162	76.54	19.71 (1.35)
Thailand	188	80.32	19.24 (1.14)
Turkey	153	62.75	20.76 (3.52)
Ukraine	243	77.37	20.60 (1.90)
United Kingdom	136	88.97	25.64 (8.08)
United States	1360	67.72	19.85 (3.11)
Vietnam	167	77.25	19.05 (1.33)
World Sample	**13,278**	**71.82**	**21.69 (4.52)**

Note. *Due to confidentiality constraints, Sweden does not have age data

Procedure

Each participant received a unique participant ID from a local faculty collaborator and was directed to the study's custom-built website (ispstudy.ucr.edu). They completed informed consent followed by a series of measures assessing their situational experiences, daily behavior, volitional personality change, and ratings of personality traits and other individual differences (e.g., subjective happiness, dispositional optimism). Upon completing the survey, participants had the opportunity to receive feedback on their trait levels based on the personality measure included.

Materials translation procedure

The content of the website (e.g., consent form, instructions, survey questions) was translated into 42 languages by local collaborators, who are all psychology researchers, and independently back-translated to English. After reviewing the back-translated version of the materials, the ISP project coordinators resolved any discrepancies through consultation with the local collaborators.

200   **Measures**

201   The International Situations Project is a large study that seeks to explore variation and

202   similarity of situational experience and individual differences around the world (Baranski et al.,

203   in press; Lee et al., in press; see https://osf.io/yv2nq/ for a complete list of previous publications)

204   [4]. The measures described below are the ones relevant to the current analyses and are unique to

205   this article.

206   **Volitional personality change (VPC).** Participants responded "yes" or "no" to "Is there

207   an aspect of your personality that you're currently trying to change?" If they answered in the

208   affirmative, a box opened in which they were asked to report the aspects of their personality they

209   were trying to change, an open-ended format akin to methods used by Baranski et al., 2017. See

210   below for a detailed description of the procedure for coding these open-ended VPC responses.

211   **Personality traits and other individual differences.** Several potentially relevant

212   personality traits and individual differences were also analyzed for this study. As this study was

213   exploratory, we cast a large net in our assessment of the relationship between VPC and

214   individual differences.

215   Personality traits were measured using the 60-item Big Five Inventory 2 (BFI-2; Soto &

216   John, 2017) in which each trait is represented by three facets (four items each). The trait and

217   facets are: extraversion (sociality, assertiveness, energy), agreeableness (trust, respect,

218   compassion), conscientiousness (productiveness, responsibility, organization), negative

219   emotionality (anxiety, depression, emotional volatility), and openness mindedness (intellectual

220   curiosity, creativity, aesthetic appreciation). Participants responded to each item (e.g., "I am

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[4] See the complete list of International Situations Project (ISP) measures at https://osf.io/enrd4/.

221   someone who is outgoing") on a five-point scale (1 = "Disagree strongly"; 5 = "Agree

222   strongly").

223   Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky &

224   Lepper, 1999) and the Interpersonal Happiness Scale (IHS; Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015). The SHS

225   is a 4-item scale (e.g., "In general, I consider myself"; 1 = "Not of very happy person" to 7 = "A

226   very happy person") and the ISH is a 9-item scale (e.g., "I believe that I and those around me are

227   happy"; 1 = "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree").

228   Participants also completed the 6-item Life Orientation Test (LOT-R; Scheirer, 1995) to

229   assess dispositional optimism (e.g., "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best"; 1 = "Strongly

230   disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree"), the 10-item Honesty/Humility scale (e.g., "I wouldn't use

231   flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed"; 1 = "Strongly

232   disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree") of the HEXACO measure of personality traits (facets:

233   sincerity, fairness, greed, modesty; Ashton, & Lee, 2009), and the Narcissistic Admiration and

234   Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; Back et al., 2013) ("I deserve to be seen as a great person"; 1 =

235   "Strongly disagree" to 5 = "Strongly agree").

236   Across all 78 separate data collection sites, 62% of the omega reliability coefficients were

237   above .70 (mean Ω = .73; SD = .11; range = .27 - .95), indicating homogenous internal

238   consistency across countries. See Supplementary materials at osf.io/enrd4 for means, SDs,

239   intercorrelations, and Omega reliability coefficient for each measure.

240   **Coding of volitional personality change intentions**

241   As stated above, participants reported whether they were currently trying to change their

242   personalities. For participants who answered 'yes', research assistants coded their open-ended

243   answers to the following question, "What aspect of your personality are you currently trying to

244   change?" using 44 binary categories, referring to attempts to increase or decrease each of the Big

245   Five personality traits and their respective facets (40 categories total), as well as increases or

246   decreases of honesty and humility. This method was adapted from Baranski et al., 2017.

247   Three US research assistants independently coded the entirety of participants' responses

248   (translated to English from 41 languages by local collaborators) using a two-step process. In Step

249   1, research assistants coded each response along 12 mutually exclusive categories. Specifically,

250   they determined whether the participant's response indicated an attempt to increase or decrease

251   one of Big Five traits or honesty/humility (example of a response coded as indicating a desire to

252   increase extraversion: "shyness and being unsocial"). In Step 2, the research assistants then

253   coded which of three facets the participant's response best aligned (example of a response coded

254   as indicating an attempt to increase sociability facet: "Poor active communication").

255   Of the 8,204 participants who indicated that they were currently trying to change some

256   aspect of their personalities, 170 did not provide a response when asked to report exactly what

257   they were trying to change. 164 responses were missing due to coding error. For the remaining

258   7,863 participants, we used majority rule to determine the final response ratings (we marked the

259   code a 'hit' if 2 out of 3 coders indicated the response fell into the category, otherwise the

260   response was treated as a 'miss'). If a participant listed more than one VPC intention, only the

261   first one listed was coded[5]. Categories representing attempts to increase or decrease the Big Five

262   personality traits plus honesty and humility captured 88.39% of participants' responses; the

263   remaining responses were either too vague to represent a single category (e.g., "many different

264   things"), were unintelligible or left blank (e.g., "asdflkj"), or expressed desires to change

265   physically or resolve an addiction. Since coders rated each response as adhering to one of 12 trait

---

[5] A relatively small subset of participants reported more than one personality change goal. To ensure analyses were
consistent across participants, we only included the first one listed.

266   categories (step 1), we calculated an estimate of agreement among raters for this single 'trait

267   category' variable. Inter-rater agreement was good ($\kappa = .68$).

268   See Table 2 for example responses for each trait category and osf.io/enrd4 for data and R

269   script used for all analyses reported below.

Table 2
Participants' responses of VPC content categories

Category	Example responses
Inc Extraversion	
Sociability	• shyness • trying to be more outgoing
Energy	• not enthusiastic; too quiet • relative bored in character
Assertiveness	• To manage to impose me and my points of view a bit more at work • More confidence when expressing myself and making decisions
Inc Agreeableness	
Compassion	• Putting people before myself • selfishness, stronger sense of self
Trust	• Trusting others • Holding grudges
Respect	• Gossiping • I'd like to be better towards others, and not bitter/sarcastic for no reason
Inc Conscientiousness	
Organization	• Disorganized behavior • Careless in time management
Productiveness	• Motivation to study • Trying to be more productive, procrastinating less
Responsibility	• Discipline • My maturity
Inc Emotional Stability	
Dec Anxiety	• Trying to be more relaxed when it comes to doing things. • My more emotional/neurotic tendency to get overwhelmed in situations resulting in anxiety
Dec Depression	• My self-esteem: becoming more confident and self-assured • Wish to be more optimistic
Dec Emotional Volatility	• Being less sensitive • I need to change my emotional personality which may easily get upset when challenges are coming.
Inc Openness	

Creativity	● To depersonalize the physical from the mental
	● Dynamism
Aesthetic	● Adventurousness
Appreciation	● Look at the world
Intellectual	
Curiosity	● Brainless
Inc Honesty	● NA
Inc Humility	● My egocentricity.
	● Too much pride and little acceptance of criticism

Dec Agreeableness

Compassion	● Weak and incapable of saying no
	● Playful and paid too much attention about others easily
Trust	● Naivety
	● I am trying to be more observant/cautious in relationship with others.
Respect	● Straightforwardness
	● Be possessive, demanding, and dependent

Dec Conscientiousness

Productiveness	● Being too focused on academics that I forgot time for myself and others
Responsibility	● To not overthink everything
	● Overanalyzing things and wanting to control everything
Organization	● To not be such a perfectionist
	● Constant planning

Dec Extraversion

Sociability	● Being too extroverted.
	● Clinginess
Energy	● The loudness of my personality seems to bug some people I live with
	● When I am exited I am really loud so I am trying to be little bit quit.
Assertiveness	● too might
	● overbearing
	● I am trying to cut down on interrupting people while they are talking and on using crutch words

Dec Emotional Stability

Inc Anxiety	● NA
Inc Depression	● Being too carefree and happy
	● to be too much optimistic
	● Over optimism
Inc Emotional	● I want to be more emotional.
Volatility	● Suppression and no expression of emotions

Dec Openness

| Creativity | ● Being more rational |

Aesthetic Appreciation	● NA
Intellectual Curiosity	● NA
Dec Honesty	● NA
Dec Humility	● NA
Physical Change	● Too weak and delicate
	● Sleeping late at night
Resolving Addiction	● Drinking
	● Drug use (marijuana)
Other	● All of it
	● Negative

Note. Inc = Increase, Dec = Decrease; NA indicates that there were no agreed upon responses that fell in to the category.

270

271 **Analysis**

272

273 Given the substantial discrepancy in sample size across male and female participants, as

274 well as the consistent tendency for female participants to report VPC at higher rates than their

275 male counterparts, all analyses reported below are weighted equally across gender.

276 To supplement the bi-variate correlations reported in the text, we ran a series of logistic

277 multilevel models to understand the relationship between current traits and VPC at the individual

278 level accounting for nesting at the country level. Specifically, we ran the models as specified

279 below for the relationship between the dichotomous VPC variable (i.e., yes or no VPC) and 22

280 current traits (and facets) (e.g., current levels of extraversion predicting VPC).

281 We used the *lme4* R package to estimate the intercepts and slopes for VPC using

282 individual predictors of current personality trait levels accounting for country level variation. For

283 the Level 1 model, VPC was modeled as a function of current traits on the individual level:

284 1. Level 1 Model: $\text{logit}(VPC_{ij}) = b0_j + b1j\text{Current trait} + r_{ij}$

285 In the Level 2 Model, intercepts and slopes were allowed to differ across countries:

286 2. Level 2 Model:

287        $b0j = y_{00} + u_{oj}$

288        $b1j = y_{10} + u_{ij}$

289   The entire mixed-model is specified as followed:

290   3.   Mixed Model: $VPC_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{10}(\text{Current trait}) + u_{0j} + u_{1j}(\text{Current trait}) + r_{ij}$

291   To assess whether there was significant variation across countries, we ran a series of

292   model fit comparisons to assess the Chi-square difference between a model which fixes all

293   current trait and VPC trait regression slopes to be equal across countries (Level 1 Model) and a

294   model which allows these relationships to vary by country (Level 2 Model; i.e., the addition of

295   u_{1j} term). These model fit comparisons reveal that for all current trait – dichotomous VPC

296   relationships, the fixed sloped model fitted the data better than the random sloped model,

297   indicating that there was no significant variation across countries in how well an individual's

298   current personality trait level predicted whether they were trying to change any aspect of their

299   personalities.

Results

What proportion of college students around the world and across countries are currently

trying to change their personality traits?

303   The majority (60.40%) of college students around the world indicated that they were

304   currently trying to change at least one aspect of their personalities. Countries with the highest

305   percentage of people attempting VPC included Thailand (81.91%), Russia (80.84%), Brazil

306   (78.87%) and Malaysia (77.64%), whereas Kenya (21.41%), Israel (28.21%), Slovakia (43.24%),

307   Hong Kong (46.48%), Turkey (46.39%), and the United States (48.53%) were among the lowest.

308   See Table 3 for a complete list of VPC proportions by gender and country and Figure 1 for a

309   visualization of the variation of country-level VPC percentage around the world.[6]

Table 3
Percentage of individuals indicating an attempt to change an aspect of their personalities by country and gender (sorted in descending order of All %)

| Country	Female %	Male %	All %†
Thailand	85.43	78.38	81.91
Russia	82.26	79.41	80.84
Brazil	79.82	77.91	78.87
Malaysia	73.46	81.82	77.64
Georgia	79.46	71.43	75.45
India*	80.91	69.37	75.14
Vietnam	79.07	65.79	72.43
Argentina	80.91	63.33	72.12
Czech Republic	70.51	72.97	71.74
Estonia	74.80	68.09	71.45
Sweden	75.82	65.71	70.77
Portugal	70.80	68.42	69.61
Bolivia	75.64	63.16	69.40
South Korea	72.56	65.81	69.19
Croatia	71.63	66.23	68.93
Serbia	65.41	72.00	68.71
United Kingdom	63.64	73.33	68.49
Norway	63.56	73.17	68.37
Bulgaria	70.75	65.91	68.33
France	66.15	69.70	67.93
Hungary	63.21	69.57	66.39
Japan	69.33	59.78	64.56
New Zealand	56.76	72.22	64.49
Austria	71.74	57.14	64.44
Latvia	69.29	58.62	63.96
Philippines	62.01	65.69	63.85
Ukraine*	72.87	54.55	63.71
Singapore	66.98	60.00	63.49
Switzerland	63.93	62.86	63.40
Denmark	64.62	61.22	62.92
Germany	60.70	64.60	62.65
Australia	71.81	52.08	61.95
Canada	60.67	61.90	61.29
Spain	65.83	56.45	61.14
Nigeria	62.22	59.55	60.89

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[6] In an effort to help explain cross-country variation in VPC, we ran additional correlational analyses between countries' VPC proportion and several existing country-level variables (e.g., GDP per capita, population density). Please see these analyses in our supplemental materials: osf.io/enrd4.

Italy*	69.11	51.18	60.15
Chile	63.53	56.59	60.06
Colombia	60.45	57.45	58.95
Slovenia*	71.43	46.15	58.79
Poland	60.00	56.41	58.21
Pakistan	59.65	54.39	57.02
Taiwan	63.71	50.00	56.86
Palestine	54.07	59.18	56.63
Mexico	60.87	51.85	56.36
China	57.49	52.05	54.77
Netherlands*	46.31	62.50	54.41
Jordan	60.53	44.44	52.49
Lithuania*	61.95	41.94	51.95
Macedonia	45.00	57.14	51.07
Romania	47.52	50.00	48.76
United States	50.27	44.87	47.57
Turkey	54.17	38.60	46.39
Hong Kong	48.81	43.10	45.96
Slovakia	39.81	46.67	43.24
Israel	27.62	28.79	28.21
Kenya	21.98	20.83	21.41
Average (M of %)	64.09 (*SD* = 12.04)	59.68 (*SD* = 12.06)	61.89 (*SD* = 11.69)
World	**63.56**	**57.23**	**60.40**

Note. Across countries, female participants reported VPC significantly more than their male counterparts, (*t*(6,674) = 6.61, *p* <. 001). * Countries with significant gender differences. † Percentages are balanced across gender.

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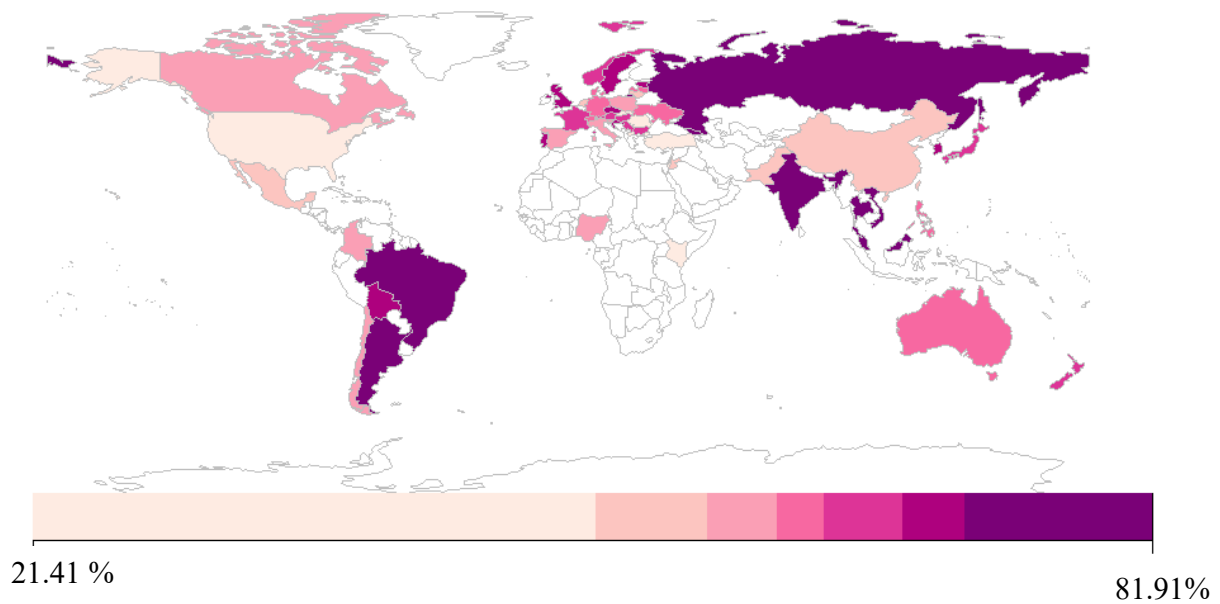
Figure 1. Heat map of percentage of college students attempting volitional personality change

What personality traits and other individual differences are associated with whether one is trying to change *any* personality trait?

To test the generalizability of research addressing *who* is currently attempting or desiring personality change, we next assessed which personality traits and other individual differences are associated with participants' reported attempts to change *any* aspect of their personality traits (i.e., 'yes' when asked if they are currently trying to change an aspect of their personalities). To do so, we ran a series of correlations with their current levels of the Big Five traits and honesty/humility (plus their facets), subjective and interdependent happiness, dispositional optimism, narcissism, and religiosity.

Table 4

Correlations between any attempt to change one's personality traits and other individual differences and analysis of variation across countries.

	r [99% CI]	ΔX^2 (p-value)
Extraversion	-.07 [-.11, -.02]	4.67 (.22)
Sociability	-.06 [-.11, -.02]	3.91 (.41)
Assertiveness	-.05 [-.10, -.01]	3.24 (.20)
Energy	-.04 [-.08, .01]	4.79 (.11)
Agreeableness	-.03 [-.07, .02]	0.59 (.76)
Compassion	.03 [-.02, .07]	1.09 (.60)
Respect	-.01 [-.06, .03]	0.11 (.95)
Trust	-.06 [-.11, -.02]	2.60 (.37)
Conscientiousness	-.12 [-.17, -.08]	2.55 (.30)
Organization	-.09 [-.13, -.05]	2.79 (.37)
Productiveness	-.12 [-.16, -.07]	2.45 (.40)
Responsibility	-.11 [-.15, -.06]	2.90 (.36)
Negative Emotion	.24 [.20, .29]	1.60 (.51)
Anxiety	.22 [.18, .26]	0.77 (.71)
Depression	.22 [.17, .26]	2.36 (.41)
Emotional volatility	.18 [.14, .23]	1.93 (.53)
Openness	.14 [.10, .18]	0.23 (89)
Intellectual curiosity	.15 [.11, .19]	7.07 (.04)
Aesthetic appreciation	.14 [.09, .18]	0.96 (.69)
Creativity	.04 [.00, .09]	1.90 (.49)
Honesty	.03 [-.02, .07]	4.12 (.21)
Sincerity	.01 [-.04, .05]	2.44 (.30)
Fairness	.03 [-.01, .07]	2.61 (.31)
Greed	.01 [-.04, .05]	1.95 (.49)
Modesty	.03 [-.02, .07]	11.54 (.03)
Subjective Happiness	-.17 [-.21, -.12]	9.70 (.02)
Interdependent Happiness	-.19 [-.24, -.15]	4.02 (.14)
Optimism	-.07 [-.11, -.02]	3.51 (.18)
Narcissism	-.01 [-.06, .03]	3.96 (.14)
Religiosity	-.02 [-.06, .03]	14.48 (<.001)

Note. Significant ΔX^2 represents significant variability in the strength of current trait and VPC trait relationships. Correlation coefficients > .03 are significant at the .001 level. *N* = 13,278

In line with the overarching goal of the current study, we sought to assess which of these

relationships are robust and consistent across individuals from an array of cultural backgrounds.

When participants are treated as one 'world sample' VPC was positively related to negative

emotionality (*r* = .24, 99% CI [.20, .29]), along with all three of its facets and negatively related

to both subjective happiness (*r* = -.17, [-.21, -.12]) and interdependent happiness (*r* = -.19, [-.24,

330   -.15]). Finally, in line with our expectations, there was a moderate relationship between VPC and

331   the intellectual curiosity ($r = .15$, [.11, .19]) and aesthetic appreciation facets of openness ($r =$

332   .14, [.09, .18]all r's in this paragraph are $p < .001$). Against our expectations, conscientiousness,

333   narcissism and all other remaining traits were unrelated to VPC. Importantly, virtually none of

334   the relationships between current personality traits and VPC varied significantly in strength

335   across countries at the $p < .001$ level (see Table 4).

336   One interesting exception arose to these otherwise consistent patterns. Converse to our

337   expectations, religiosity was virtually unrelated to VPC when all participants were treated as one

338   world sample; however, this relationship varied significantly across countries ($\Delta X^2 = 14.48$, $p <$

339   .001, Table 4). Indeed, VPC was positively related to religiosity in countries such as Slovenia,

340   India, and Malaysia, and negatively related to religiosity in countries such as Macedonia, New

341   Zealand, and Latvia. See the Supplementary Materials at osf.io/enrd4 for VPC-individual

342   difference correlations for each country.

343   **What specific traits are college students around the world currently trying to change?**

344   Across all 56 countries, among students reporting attempted personality change, the most

345   commonly reported personality change attempts were to increase levels of emotional stability

346   (29.73%), conscientiousness (19.71%), extraversion (15.94%) and agreeableness (13.53%) (see

347   Figures 2a-2d for heat map visualizations of country-level variation for attempts to change each

348   trait). Attempts to increase levels of openness, honesty or humility, and attempts to decrease any

349   trait were rare (i.e., less than 2% of responses; see the Supplementary Materials at osf.io/enrd4).

350   For the sake of brevity and relevance, subsequent analyses will only relate to VPC attempts to

351   increase extraversion, agreeableness conscientiousness, and emotional stability.

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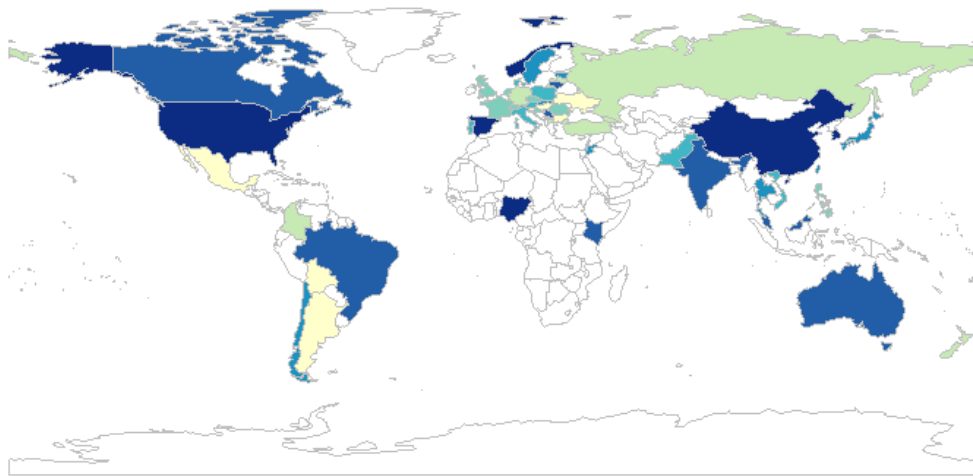
Figure 2a. Heat map of percentage of college students, among those who are trying to change their personality, who are currently trying to **increase Extraversion** across countries.
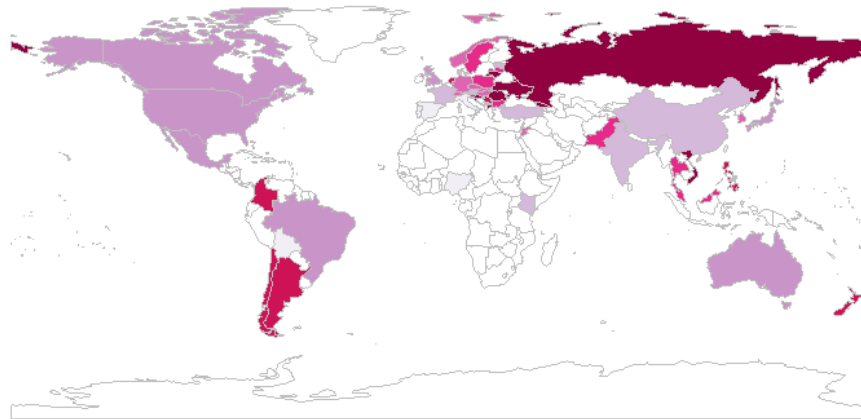

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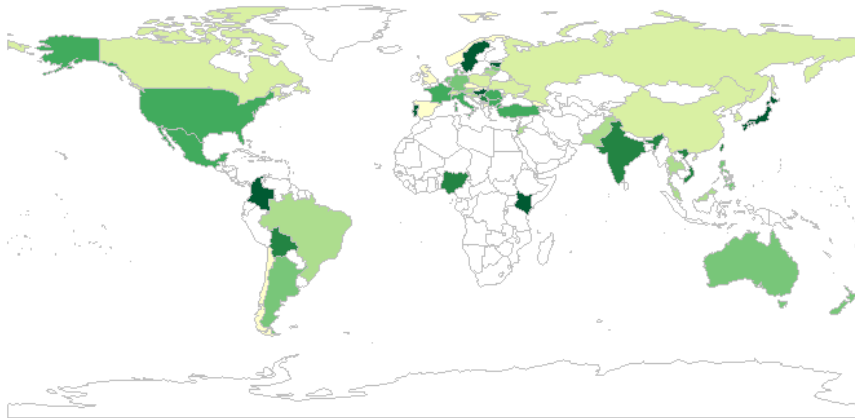
Figure 2b. Heat map of percentage of college students, among those who are trying to change their personality, who are currently trying to **increase Agreeableness** across countries.
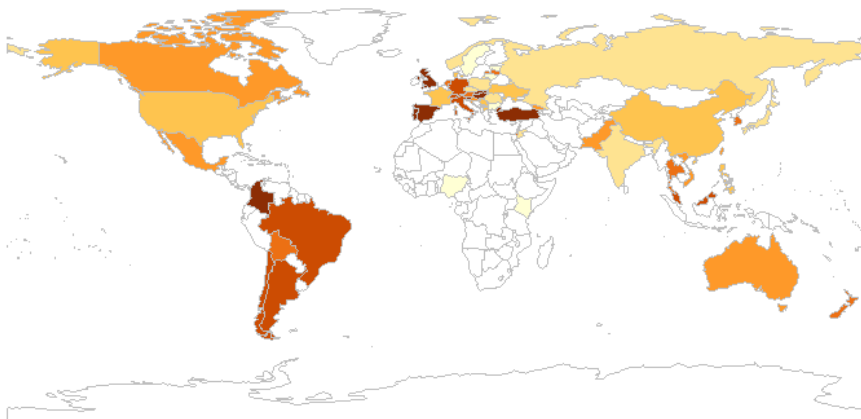
359

360

361   6.5%   37.10%

362   *Figure 2c*. Heat map of percentage of college students, among those who are trying to change
363   their personality, who are currently trying to **increase Conscientiousness** across countries.

364

365   14.70%   54.30%

366   *Figure 2d*. Heat map of percentage of college students, among those who are trying to change
367   their personality, who are currently trying to **increase Emotional Stability** across countries.

368

369   Facet level assessment of VPC content revealed a more precise understanding of exactly

370   what college students are trying to change about themselves. For instance, VPC to increase

371   conscientiousness was largely driven by attempts to increase levels of productiveness (54.38% of

372   those with VPC to increase conscientiousness), and VPC to increase levels of extraversion was

373   largely driven by attempts to increase sociability (78.53% of those with VPC to increase

374   extraversion). In contrast, VPC to increase levels of emotional stability was fairly well-

375   distributed among its facets of anxiety, depression and emotional volatility (25.65%, 37.03%,

376   and 30.12%, respectively, of those with VPC to increase emotional stability). See Table 5 for the

377   percentages of responses that fell into categories with the top 10 highest percentages overall.

Table 5
VPC percentage for the World sample (facets listed as % within respective trait)

	% VPC
Inc Extraversion	**15.94**
Inc Sociability	78.53
Inc Assertiveness	12.36
Inc Energy	2.93
Inc Agreeableness	**13.53**
Inc Compassion	53.50
Inc Trust	10.32
Inc Respect	13.60
Inc Conscientiousness	**19.71**
Inc Organization	11.86
Inc Productiveness	54.38
Inc Responsibility	27.14
Inc Emotional Stability	**29.73**
Dec Anxiety	25.65
Dec Depression	37.03
Dec Emotional Volatility	30.12
Inc Openness	**1.32**
Inc Creativity	12.60
Inc Aesthetic Appreciation	33.06
Inc Intellectual Curiosity	59.10

Note. Inc = increase, Dec = decrease, $n = 7,863$ ((i.e., those who reported an attempt to change their personalities). With the exception of increased openness, we did not include VPC categories in which less than 5% of responses fell into categories. Facet percentages that do not add up to 100% within each trait indicate that coders did not agree what facet aligned with participants' VPC open-ended responses.

378   **How are attempts to change a *specific* personality trait related to current personality**

379   **traits?**

380   To test the generalizability and robustness of the common VPC finding that desires or

381   attempts to change a particular personality trait are inversely related to current, corresponding

382   traits, we ran a series of correlations testing the relationship between corresponding and non-

383   corresponding current trait and VPC trait pairs. To extend previous VPC research further, we ran

384   these correlations on both trait and facet levels.

385   In line with research limited to US college students (Hudson & Fraley, 2016), when our

386   student participants were treated as one world sample, current personality traits were consistently

387   related to attempts to change corresponding traits in the expected direction. Also, as with

388   previous analyses, looking at these relationships on the facet levels provides a more

389   comprehensive assessment. For extraversion, there were strong, negative relationships between

390   the VPC to increase extraversion and current levels of extraversion ($r = . -.23$, 99% CI [-.29, -

391   .18]), and all three of its facets[7]. Given the large proportion of VPC responses that were coded as

392   sociability, it is unsurprising that this relationship were all driven by VPC to increase sociability

393   ($r = -.22$, [-.28, -.17]. With the exception of the facet responsibility, strong, negative correlations

394   arose between VPC to increase conscientiousness and its facets and current traits and facets

395   levels. The strongest of these relationships were between corresponding current trait/facet and

396   VPC trait/facet pairs. For instance, while the intention to increase levels of productiveness was

397   related to current levels of conscientiousness and all three of its facets, the strongest of these

398   relationships was between the attempt to increase levels of productiveness and current levels of

---

[7] Given the large sample size, rs > .05 are significant at the .001 level.

399   productiveness ($r = -.16$; [-.21, -.10]). The same pattern was observed for negative emotionality

400   and its facets (i.e., anxiety, depression, and emotional volatility).

401   Importantly, relationships between corresponding current trait/facet and VPC trait/facet

402   pairs were stronger relative to non-corresponding pairs. As an interesting exception, stronger

403   relationships between VPC to increase agreeableness and low levels of extraversion emerged

404   than did corresponding relationships between VPC to increase agreeableness and current

405   agreeableness. It may be the case that the ways in which researchers measure agreeableness and

406   extraversion is different to how college students conceptualize attempts to change these traits.

407   That is, participants may express attempts to be more compassionate or trusting in an effort to

408   make more friends and thus to be more social. Thus, low levels of extraversion may motivate

409   individuals to work towards being more agreeable. See Tables 6a-d for correlations between

410   current personality traits and VPC trait pooled across all samples.

Table 6a
Correlations between current Extraversion (and facets) and VPC to increase Extraversion (and facets)

	VPC Increase Extraversion	VPC Increase Sociability	VPC to Increase Assertiveness	VPC to Increase Energy
Current Extraversion	**-.23 [-.29, -.18]**	**-.22 [-.28, -.17]**	**-.02 [-.08, .04]**	**-.03 [-.09, .03]**
Current Sociability	**-.26 [-.31, -.20]**	**-.26 [-.31, -.20]**	**-.03 [-.08, .03]**	**-.03 [-.09, .03]**
Current Assertiveness	**-.17 [-.23, -.12]**	**-.16 [-.21, -.10]**	**.00 [-.05, .06]**	**-.05 [-.10, .01]**
Current Energy	**-.12 [-.18, -.06]**	**-.11 [-.17, -.06]**	**-.03 [-.09, .02]**	**.00 [-.06, .06]**
Current Agreeableness	.05 [.00, .11]	.05 [-.01, .11]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	.04 [-.02, .09]
Current Compassion	-.01 [-.07, .04]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	.02 [-.04, .07]
Current Respect	.10 [.04, .16]	.09 [.03, .15]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	.05 [-.01, .10]
Current Trust	.04 [-.02, .09]	.02 [-.03, .08]	.01 [-.05, .06]	.03 [-.03, .09]
Current Conscientious.	.05 [-.01, .10]	.04 [-.01, .10]	-.01 [-.06, .05]	.02 [-.04, .08]
Current Organization	.06 [.00, .12]	.06 [.00, .12]	.00 [-.06, .06]	.02 [-.04, .07]
Current Productiveness	.00 [-.05, C.06]	.00 [-.06, .06]	-.01 [-.07, .04]	.02 [-.04, .07]
Current Responsibility	.05 [-.01, .10]	.04 [-.01, .10]	.00 [-.06, .06]	.02 [-.04, .07]
Current Emotional Stability	-.05 [-.10, .01]	-.02 [-.08, .04]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	-.03 [-.09, .03]
Current Anxiety	-.01 [-.07, .05]	.01 [-.05, .07]	-.02 [-.07, .04]	-.01 [-.07, .04]
Current Depression	.01 [-.05, .06]	.02 [-.04, .07]	.00 [-.06, .06]	-.01 [-.07, .05]
Current Emotional	-.11 [-.16, -.05]	-.08 [-.14, -.02]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	-.05 [-.11, .01]

Note. **Bolded** portion indicated corresponding current trait-VPC trait pairs. *n* = 7,863 (i.e., those who reported an attempt to change their personalities). Due to the high sample size, correlations greater than .06 are significant at the *p* < .001 level.

411

412

Table 6b
Correlations between current Agreeableness (and facets) and VPC to increase Agreeableness (and facets)

	VPC to Increase Agreeableness	VPC to Increase Compassion	VPC to Increase Respect	VPC to Increase Trust
Current Extraversion	.10 [.05, .16]	.06 [.01, .12]	.04 [-.01, .10]	.01 [-.05, .07]
Current Sociability	.10 [.04, .16]	.06 [.00, .12]	.05 [-.01, .11]	.01 [-.05, .07]
Current Assertiveness	.09 [.04, .15]	.04 [.00, .11]	.03 [-.03, .09]	.02 [-.04, .08]
Current Energy	.05 [.00, .11]	.04 [-.02, .10]	.02 [-.04, .08]	.01 [-.06, .05]
Current Agreeableness	**-.08 [-.14, -.03]**	**-.05 [-.01, .01]**	**-.04 [-.10, .02]**	**-.04 [-.09, .02]**
Current Compassion	**-.05 [-.11, .01]**	**-.04 [-.02, .02]**	**-.02 [-.08, .03]**	**-.01 [-.06, .05]**
Current Respect	**-.09 [-.15, -.03]**	**-.05 [-.02, .01]**	**-.05 [-.11, .00]**	**-.02 [-.08, .04]**
Current Trust	**-.06 [-.12, -.01]**	**-.03 [-.02, .02]**	**-.02 [-.08, .04]**	**-.06 [-.11, .00]**
Current Conscientious.	.04 [-.02, .09]	.04 [-.03, .09]	-.01 [-.06, .05]	.01 [-.05, .07]
Current Organization	.03 [-.03, .09]	.02 [-.04, .08]	-.01 [-.06, .05]	.02 [-.04, .06]
Current Productiveness	.05 [.00, .11]	.06 [-.02, .11]	.00 [-.06, .075	.01 [-.05, .07]
Current Responsibility	.00 [-.05, .06]	.01 [-.04, .077	.00 [-.06, .06]	.00 [-.06, .06]
Current Emotional Stability	-.04 [-.09, .02]	-.04 [-.08, .01]	.01 [-.06, .05]	.01 [-.05, .06]
Current Anxiety	-.05 [-.11, .01]	-.05 [-.06, .01]	.01 [-.06, .05]	.00 [-.05, .06]
Current Depression	-.05 [-.11, .01]	-.05 [-.08, .00]	.01 [-.07, .04]	.01 [-.04, .07]
Current Emotional	.01 [-.05, .06]	-.01 [-.06, .05]	.00 [-.05, .06]	.00 [-.06, .06]

Note. Note. **Bolded** portion indicated corresponding current trait-VPC trait pairs. *n* = 7,863 (i.e., those who reported an attempt to change their personalities). Due to the high sample size, correlations greater than .06 are significant at the *p* < .001 level.

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Table 6c
Correlations between current Conscientiousness (and facets) and VPC to increase Conscientiousness (and facets)

	VPC to Increase Conscientiousness	VPC to Increase Organization	VPC to Increase Productiveness	VPC to Increase Responsibility
Current Extraversion	.05 [-.01, .11]	.03 [-.02, .09]	.00 [-.06, .06]	.05 [.00, .11]
Current Sociability	.08 [.03, .14]	.05 [-.01, .11]	.03 [-.03, .09]	.06 [.00, .12]
Current Assertiveness	.02 [-.04, .07]	.02 [-.04, .08]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	.03 [-.03, .09]
Current Energy	.01 [-.05, .06]	.01 [-.05, .07]	-.03 [-.09, .03]	.04 [-.02, .10]
Current Agreeableness	.00 [-.06, .05]	.04 [-.02, .10]	-.03 [-.08, .03]	-.01 [-.06, .05]
Current Compassion	-.03 [-.08, .03]	.03 [-.03, .08]	-.04 [-.10, .02]	-.01 [-.07, .04]
Current Respect	-.04 [-.09, .02]	.02 [-.03, .08]	-.04 [-.10, .02]	-.02 [-.08, .03]
Current Trust	.04 [-.02, .10]	.05 [-.01, .11]	.01 [-.05, .07]	.01 [-.04, .07]

Current Conscientious.	**-.16 [-.22, -.11]**	**-.07 [-.12, -.01]**	**-.16 [-.21, -.10]**	**-.02 [-.08, .04]**
Current Organization	**-.14 [-.20, -.08]**	**-.08 [-.13, -.02]**	**-.12 [-.18, -.07]**	**-.02 [-.08, .04]**
Current Productiveness	**-.14 [-.20, -.09]**	**-.05 [-.11, .01]**	**-.16 [-.21, -.10]**	**-.01 [-.06, .05]**
Current Responsibility	**-.11 [-.17, -.06]**	**-.03 [-.09, .02]**	**-.1.00 [-.16, -.05]**	**-.03 [-.09, .03]**
Current Emotional Stability	-.09 [-.15, -.04]	-.05 [-.10, .01]	-.07 [-.13, -.01]	-.04 [-.09, .02]
Current Anxiety	-.09 [-.15, -.04]	-.04 [-.09, .02]	-.07 [-.12, -.01]	-.04 [-.10, .02]
Current Depression	-.09 [-.15, -.03]	-.06 [-.11, .00]	-.05 [-.11, .01]	-.05 [-.10, .01]
Current Emotional	-.06 [-.11, .00]	-.02 [-.08, .04]	-.06 [-.11, .00]	.00 [-.06, .05]

Note. Note. **Bolded** portion indicated corresponding current trait-VPC trait pairs. *n* = 8, *n* = 7,863
(i.e., those who reported an attempt to change their personalities). Due to the high sample size,
correlations greater than .06 are significant at the *p* < .001 level.

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Table 6d

Correlations between current Emotional Stability (and facets) and VPC to decrease Negative
Emotionality (and facets)

	VPC to Decrease Negative Emotionality	VPC to Decrease Anxiety	VPC to Decrease Depression	VPC to Decrease Emotionality
Current Extraversion	.02 [-.04, .08]	.02 [-.04, .08]	-.04 [-.10, .01]	.06 [.00, .12]
Current Sociability	.02 [-.04, .07]	.01 [-.05, .06]	-.03 [-.09, .03]	.05 [-.01, .11]
Current Assertiveness	.01 [-.05, .07]	.02 [-.04, .07]	-.03 [-.09, .03]	.04 [-.02, .10]
Current Energy	.01 [-.04, .07]	.03 [-.03, .09]	-.05 [-.11, .01]	.06 [.00, .11]
Current Agreeableness	.00 [-.06, .06]	.02 [-.03, .08]	.02 [-.04, .07]	-.03 [-.09, .02]
Current Compassion	.05 [-.01, .11]	.05 [-.01, .11]	.03 [-.03, .09]	.00 [-.06, .06]
Current Respect	.00 [-.06, .05]	.03 [-.03, .08]	.02 [-.03, .08]	-.05 [-.11, .01]
Current Trust	-.03 [-.09, .02]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	-.01 [-.07, .05]	-.02 [-.08, .04]
Current Conscientious.	.04 [-.02, .10]	.06 [.01, .12]	-.02 [-.08, .04]	.02 [-.04, .07]
Current Organization	.02 [-.03, .08]	.06 [.00, .12]	-.03 [-.09, .03]	.00 [-.06, .06]
Current Productiveness	.04 [-.02, .10]	.05 [-.01, .11]	-.03 [-.08, .03]	.04 [-.02, .10]
Current Responsibility	.03 [-.03, .09]	.04 [-.02, .10]	.01 [-.05, .06]	.00 [-.06, .06]
Current Emotional Stability	**.19 [.14, .25]**	**.11 [.06, .17]**	**.09 [.03, .14]**	**.09 [.03, .14]**
Current Anxiety	**.17 [.12, .23]**	**.15 [.09, .21]**	**.07 [.01, .12]**	**.05 [-.01, .11]**
Current Depression	**.15 [.09, .2]**	**.07 [.01, .13]**	**.11 [.05, .17]**	**.03 [-.03, .09]**
Current Emotional	**.17 [.11, .22]**	**.07 [.01, .13]**	**.04 [-.02, .10]**	**.14 [.08, .20]**

Note. Note. **Bolded** portion indicated corresponding current trait-VPC trait pairs; *n* = 7,863 (i.e., those
who reported an attempt to change their personalities). Due to the high sample size, correlations greater
than .06 are significant at the *p* < .001 level.

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418   A few notable exceptions were found to the above relationships. In countries such as

419 Slovakia and Germany, attempts to change specific personality traits were unrelated or even

420 slightly positively related to current, corresponding trait levels (see Supplementary Materials on

421 osf.io/enrd4 for these relationships on the country level).

Discussion

423   Across 56 countries, 60.40% of college student participants reported that they are

424 currently trying to change an aspect of their personalities. The sheer frequency of this goal

425 around the world is notable in and of itself. Only nine countries had percentages lower than 50%

426 (see Table 3). Nevertheless, there was substantial variation across countries, ranging from

427 81.91% (Thailand) to 21.41% (Kenya), and it is notable that the United States, the site of almost

428 all previous research on this topic, had an unusually low percentage of people seeking to change

429 their personalities (48.53%).

430   To explore the marked variation in VPC across countries, we ran supplementary analyses

431 relating countries' VPC proportion with 35 existing country-level variables (e.g., GDP per

432 capita, population density, individualism; see Supplementary Materials for a description of all

433 country-level variables used in these analyses). We explored this question of country-level

434 indicators predicting country-level VPC by (1) correlating country-level variables and VPC

435 proportion, and (2) running a series of multi-level models predicting individual-level VPC from

436 country-level indicators with accounting for country-level nesting. Of 35 potential correlates,

437 none crossed the $p < .01$ threshold used throughout this study. Of 35 MLM models, only

438 subjective health predicted VPC at the $p < .01$ level indicating that in countries with low

439 subjective health, college students tend to report changing their personality traits, perhaps

440 because cultural-level health serves as a reminder that personal change is warranted.

441   This relative lack of consistent country-level explanation for the variability of VPC may

442 underscore the importance of internal and personal factors (e.g., individuals' happiness) rather

443   than external, country-level economic, social, or value factors in influencing whether someone is

444   trying to change their personalities. See Table 1 of Supplementary Materials located at

445   osf.io/enrd4/).

446   An alternative explanation for country variation in VPC is that mean-level country

447   differences in known correlates of VPC (i.e., subjective happiness, interdependent happiness,

448   negative emotionality, openness) are driving variation in VPC across countries. To explore this

449   possibility, we ran a series of model fit comparisons to test whether country-level differences in

450   the relationships between VPC and happiness, negative emotionality, and openness are

451   accounted for by individual-level relationships. Specifically, we compared models in which

452   mean country-level variables predict VPC with models in which both mean country-level and

453   individual-level variables predict VPC. Results indicate that for all four variables, there were

454   significant model fit comparison indicating that models with both country-level and individual-

455   level predictors fit the data better than those with only country-level predictors. These results

456   suggest that while mean level differences in country-level subjective happiness, for instance,

457   predict VPC, an individuals' level of subjective happiness significantly contributes to this

458   relationship. In other words, country-level variability in VPC is not entirely the bi-product of

459   country mean-level differences in known correlates of VPC. Moreover, for subjective happiness

460   and negative emotionality, there is a significant interaction between mean country-level and

461   individual level factors suggesting that the relationship between subjective happiness and

462   negative emotionality are stronger in countries with higher mean-levels of these variables. These

463   results indicate that unhappy people, for instance, are motivated to change their personalities,

464   especially when people in their cultural context are also unhappy (See Table 2 in the

465   Supplementary Materials located at osf.io/enrd4/).

466   In the majority of countries (39 of 56), female participants reported personality change

467   attempts at a higher rate than their male counterparts. Despite this consistent trend, women were

468   only *significantly* more likely to report personality change attempts in five countries (see Table

469   3). Moreover, men reported change attempts at a higher rate than women in only one country

470   (The Netherlands).

471   Overall, the majority of participants around the world indicated that they were trying to

472   change their personalities, in almost all cases to be either more emotionally stable, conscientious,

473   extraverted or agreeable. Similar to Robinson et al. (2015), increased emotional stability was the

474   most frequently targeted trait across the vast majority of countries. Another internationally

475   consistent finding was that individuals who scored high in traits generally considered

476   maladaptive, such as negative emotionality and its facets anxiety, depression and emotional

477   volatility, and those lower in happiness were more likely to report attempting to change their

478   personality (i.e., answering "yes" to the VPC question). We observed some indication that

479   individuals high in openness (driven by intellectual curiosity) were likely to report attempting

480   personality change, although this relationship varied somewhat across countries, it was relatively

481   small, and thus should be replicated. Putting these findings together, it appears to be that open-

482   minded individuals who think deeply about their own maladaptive traits and difficulties in

483   general well-being may be the ones most likely to make active efforts towards changing their

484   personalities, in an attempt at emotional self-improvement. It might also be the case that

485   individuals high in openness to experience have a predisposition to explore new ways to improve

486   themselves even in the absence of low levels of wellbeing or emotional stability. To test this

487   possibility, we ran a generalized linear-regression model predicting whether individuals report

488   changing *any* trait, from the interaction between negative emotionality and openness. Results

489   from these follow-up analyses reveal that for individuals with higher levels of openness, the

490   relationship between negative emotionality and VPC is stronger relative to those with lower

491   levels of openness ($B = .10$, $p = .03$). The same pattern was not observed when predicting VPC

492   from the interaction between subjective happiness and openness ($B = .006$, $p = .83$). It should be

493   noted that the significant interaction effect reported above is relatively small and should be

494   interpreted with caution and replicated in future VPC investigations.

495   While the direction of the relationship between interdependent happiness and VPC was

496   consistent across the vast majority of countries, the strength of the relationships did vary

497   somewhat. For instance, in Australia and Slovenia the relationship between current levels of

498   agreeableness and VPC was strongly positive, in Macedonia and Greece it was strongly negative,

499   and in the majority of countries (e.g., Georgia, Spain, Canada), it was near zero. Likewise, while

500   the average relationship between religiosity and VPC was close to zero, in countries like

501   Macedonia and Latvia, the relationship was strongly negative and in countries like India and the

502   Czech Republic, the relationship was strongly positive. Indeed, in the case with religiosity, there

503   was significant variation across countries in its relationship with VPC. This lack of consistency

504   in the relationship between some individual differences and VPC highlights the cross-cultural

505   variation present in the volitional personality change process and underscores the importance of

506   investigating mechanisms of personality change outside a single country.

507   We next assessed the relationship between current personality traits and *specific*

508   volitional personality change attempts. Conceptually replicating previous research, when all

509   participants were treated as one world sample, current levels of extraversion, conscientiousness

510   and negative emotionality are all strongly related to their corresponding VPC trait attempts. For

511   instance, individuals with low levels of extraversion tended to report that they were currently

512   trying to increase levels of extraversion (primarily driven by attempts to increase levels of

513   sociability). Additionally, with the exception of Emotional Stability, these relationships were

514   driven primarily by one facet, such as sociability for extraversion and productivity for

515   conscientiousness.

516   **Increasing the generalizability of volitional personality change**

517   The greatest contribution of the current study might be its generalization of previously

518   reported correlates of VPC effects outside the US. Specifically, when participants are treated as

519   one world sample, findings from this study overlap considerably from that of previous research

520   conducted in the US (Hudson & Roberts, 2016, Baranski et al. 2017, 2020). However, comparing

521   trends within the US data against other countries illuminates the value of this endeavor. For

522   instance, the US was among the lowest in the percentage of individuals indicating a current

523   attempt to change their personalities. In fact, the United States was one of only seven countries

524   with volitional change percentages below 50%. Moreover, the US was in the top five countries

525   with percentages of attempts to increase extraversion and in bottom ten countries with

526   percentages of attempts to increase emotional stability. Finally, previous research, with samples

527   from the US, has demonstrated the tendency for current levels of agreeableness to be *unrelated*

528   to attempts or desires to increase agreeableness (Baranski et al., 2017; Baranski et al., 2020). In

529   the current study, we again observe this trend in the US, however in over a dozen other countries

530   there was a strong, inverse relationship between current levels and attempts to increase

531   agreeableness. Thus, in several instances, the US is more an exception than the norm, and the

532   disproportionate reliance on US samples in psychological research risks seriously

533   mischaracterizing the mechanisms of VPC among, perhaps, other psychological phenomena.

534   That said, the current research does support the generalization of several other

535   associations with VPC. First and foremost, the majority of individuals in the 56 countries

536   included in the current study indicated that they are currently attempting to change some aspect

537   of their personalities. Most commonly, students are trying to increase emotional stability,

538   extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness. Finally, our world sample replicated the trend

539   for individuals to desire or actively attempt to increase the socially desirable traits in which they

540   perceived themselves lacking. Thus, despite differences in traditions, customs, and values, these

541   previously reported correlates of VPC are consistent around the world. Taken together, the

542   current project both cautions against the reliance on strictly US samples in assessing volitional

543   personality change, and successfully generalizes many of the previously reported effects to

544   individuals across 56 countries (see Heine et al., 2006).

545   **Limitations and future directions**

546   The current study is the first to assess VPC in students across dozens of countries around

547   the world. But it is not without its limitations. First and foremost, while participants were

548   sampled from a large number of countries across 6 continents, the relatively small samples sizes

549   within some countries limit the extent to which we can generalize our findings to everyone

550   residing in each country. Thus, we caution readers in over-interpreting between-country

551   differences. Relatedly, all 56 country samples involved college community participants, and

552   most of them female. Importantly, exclusive use of college samples effectively controls for

553   various social and demographic factors and assesses individuals during a particularly

554   transformative time in their lives that may be especially prone to active efforts towards self-

555   improvements. It does, however, also limit the degree to which we can generalize our findings

556   outside educated populations. Moreover, while previous work has found that VPC goals were not

557   impacted by age (Baranski et al., 2017; Hudson & Fraley, 2016), students' self-improvement

558   goals and motivations may be more distinct from adults in some countries compared to others.

559   Future work should assess differences in VPC across various age groups by including

560   community samples across various countries.

561   A second limitation is the scope by which VPC was assessed. Only two questions (e.g.,

562   "Are you currently trying to change an aspect of your personality?", and for those who answered

563   in the affirmative, "What are you trying to change?") measured this complex psychological

564   concept. It might be important, for instance, to know how participants feel about their personality

565   change goal (e.g., Do they think it is attainable? How long have they been working towards

566   accomplishing this goal?), why they are trying to change their personalities, and in what social

567   context their personality change goal is most relevant. Future work should seek to understand

568   country variation in the motivation for and conceptualization of VPC by incorporating deeper

569   assessments. Relatedly, our reliance on yes/no open-ended questions may limit our ability to

570   distinguish the strength of the pursuit towards volitional personality change. Future research

571   should use a combination of open-ended and Likert-type measurements to provide a more

572   comprehensive assessment of volitional personality change, although researchers should be

573   careful in light of known cultural response biases of Likert-type scales Heine et al., 2002,

574   Johnson et al, 2005; Smith et al., 2016).

575   Next, future longitudinal assessments of VPC across countries are important for two

576   reasons. First, while investigations of personality development using longitudinal designs have

577   become relatively common in the US (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Roberts et al., 2006; Robins et

578   al., 2001), there are very few studies in which longitudinal assessment is conducted across

579   various countries. Secondly, in the context of understanding more about the individual's active

580   effort towards personality change, it is imperative to assess whether they are more or less

581   successful in their pursuit and whether this success varies across countries. It may be the case,

582   for instance, that particular aspects of one's culture facilitates or impedes progress towards

583   desired personality change. The present study did not find it feasible to seek repeated

584   measurements of the same individuals in 56 countries, but future studies should seek to do so.

585   A final limitation of the current study is its reliance on self-report measures. Self-report

586   measures are useful in tapping the internal qualities of individuals and have relatively low cost.

587   However, future research in VPC should combine self-report methods with measurement tools

588   that assess personality change attempts as they pertain to individuals' observed behavior in

589   everyday life (see Steiner et al., 2020).

590   **General conclusions**

591   Across 56 countries, the similarities in VPC around the world are robust. The majority of

592   college students from the majority of countries indicated that they are currently trying to change

593   their personalities, and their specific attempts are related to traits they currently lack. This

594   widespread motivation underscores what may be a nearly universal human drive towards self-

595   improvement. Furthermore, we are beginning to uncover the personality profile of college

596   students who are actively seeking personality change. Specifically, those students who reported

597   higher levels of negative emotionality, lower happiness and high openness were the most likely

598   to report attempting personality change. College students around the world tended to seek to

599   increase aspects of themselves that they lack. Despite many social, political, and religious

600   differences around the world, the current project suggests that a basic human drive towards

601   adaptive personality change is nearly universal.

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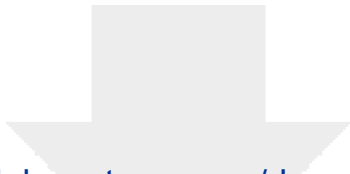
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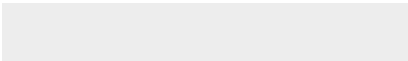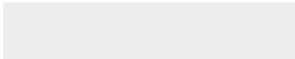
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