



Département de psychiatrie
Centre de neurosciences psychiatriques
Site de Cery
CH-1008 Prilly - Lausanne

Centre de Neurosciences Psychiatriques

CNP SEMINAR

ANNOUNCEMENT

Tuesday, March 22, 2016, 2 p.m.

“Distinct collective temperaments in children across cultures”

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Personality research tend to show remarkable consistency in how people from various cultures describe themselves as well as other individuals within their group. The “big five” factor structure of personality (extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) is found to be remarkably robust across 56 nations and other cultural clusters, albeit with subtle variations. East Asian populations are for example found to score less along the extraversion dimension compared to other populations from around the world (Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, & Benet-Martinez, 2007). At a group level, research show that the distribution of personality traits can thus vary across cultures, in ways that are predictable of national surveys regarding sexual habits (useful for HIV prevention) or self-esteem reports.

We can conclude that on one hand there are universals in ways we construe self and others. On the other, we find significant variations in the levels of such universal traits across cultures. Such variations often tend to be the source of stereotypes regarding group characters, for example the commonly held perception that Southerners are more easy going compared to Northerners. This assumption (which appears also to be universal) does assume that there are both intergroup variability and intragroup consistency that define distinct collective temperaments or behavioral proclivities, in short distinct ways people co-exist (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis et al., 1988).



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Here, based on my own cross-cultural observations of children, I want to revisit the putative existence of distinct collective temperaments across cultures. I present data and observations that could validate the assumption of variable collective temperaments expressed early in childhood, even infancy. For illustration, I draw primarily, but not exclusively, on observations of 3-7 year-olds Samoan, Ni-Vanuatu and North American children in their distinct proclivities to engage with others, particularly to engage with peers as opposed to adults, how they share, cheat, compete, take risks in the context of economic games. Based on these observations, my goal is to capture what we might mean by cultural character and temperament, two elusive concepts that are sources of dangerous profiling and stereotypes, but also natural realities that should be further studied empirically, particularly in the perspective of development if we want to capture gene-culture interaction in personality development.

Selected Publications:

- 1) S. Zebian and P. Rochat. Judgment of land ownership by young refugee Palestinian and U.S. children. *Int. Journal of Beh. Dev.* 2012, 36(6) 449-456
- 2) E. Robbins, S. Starr and P. Rochat. Fairness and Distributive Justice by 3- to 5- Year-Old Tibetan Children. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology.* 2015, 1-8.
- 3) P. Rochat. Layers of awareness in development. *Developmental Review* 2015, 38: 122-145.
- 4) P. Rochat et al. Fairness and distributive justice by 3- and 4-year olds across 7 cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cult. Psychology* 2009, 40, 3:416-442
- 5) P. Rochat et al. Ownership reasoning in children across cultures. *Cognition* 204, 132 : 471-484