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**STUDENT STYLES AND SOCIALIZATION:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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Ensuring compulsory education for children has become a universal goal all over the world (UNESCO, 2000). Never the less indices reflecting participation in education shows that in many countries where compulsory education has been instated, children tend to drop out at a relatively early age and in some countries grade-repetition is as high as 20 per cent (UNESCO, 2006). This suggests that heightening efficiency of teaching is a high priority not only from the viewpoint of formal schooling, but from the individuals', as well. It becomes increasingly important to improve the goodness of fit between the teaching process and the individual - heightening the probability of success for teacher and student alike - by identifying individual preferences.

### *Conceptualising socialization processes*

Results of comparisons and contrasts performed between countries in the process of identifying determining elements of socialization process have typically used an eco-psychological framework based on Bronfenbrenner's theory (1990), but as research has accumulated in this area further models have proven their utility and heuristic value. A more comprehensive understanding of socialization processes and forces at work have been made possible by the eco-cultural model (Segall, 1990), the concept of developmental micro-niche (Super and Harkness, 1986) and related ethnotheories (Harkness and Super, 2006), and the family models derived from the value of children surveys (Kagitcibasi, 1996). According to these conceptual models describing how physical-environmental and geological-ecological forces help shape culture by rendering some solutions to everyday problems and challenges more useful than others, attaching value to them, is transmitted from one generation to the next via socialization processes. Socialization procedures adopted will be affected by characteristics of the micro-niche, such as values of the family members, members of the family and their involvement with the child, parental beliefs regarding child-development and socialization and the socio-economic characteristics of the family. Ecological and economical factors also influence the value of the child in the family - in turn influencing the socialization process and determine characteristic family models (Kagitcibasi, 1996). The *family model of interdependence* is characteristic under circumstances of economic hardships when children are expected to work from early on within the family or outside performing some menial work and children are expected to contribute to the family economy from relatively early age. The work of children is taken for granted - and parents motivate children to take up their place in the labour-market. As parents care for children when they are young, adult children are expected to reciprocate this and be providers for their elderly parents. As having a number of children of a source of old-age security - fertility is highest among the economically disadvantaged. Socialization processes tend to emphasize conformity, observing rules and traditions - ingraining dependence in the process of socialization. The *family model of independence* prevails in affluent societies and/or

urban, middle-class families. In this context having children is no longer a form of investment in future security as society fulfils obligations of providing for old-age pension. Children mainly fulfil psychological needs of parents, which is fulfilled even by one child. Having more than one child - in this context - also means an increase in responsibility and obligations, thus benefits of having children are quickly outweighed by costs. Independence and autonomy emerge as basic values in the socializing process; child-rearing practices are adjusted accordingly to foster autonomy, initiative, volition and independence. Parenting styles are characterized by high levels of permissiveness, reinforcing individual initiatives, providing for volition, autonomous decisions prevail and self-reliance is the norm. In accommodating to changing economic environments family models change and a third type emerges - mainly in countries where originally closely knit families are characteristic - and can be characterized as the *family model of psychological interdependence*. This model is a mixture of the previous two. Although there is no economic pressure on the offspring to contribute to family economy and there is a decreased material interdependence as old-age pension becomes available for parents, the goal of socialization is not separated independence, but rather - interdependence, which is now only of psychological and not financial/material in nature. Preferred values and parenting styles adapt accordingly and as the autonomy of the child is not seen as a threat to family livelihood any longer, personal agency is emphasized and so are its resulting responsibility for actions and outcomes. At the same time parental control is still a valued element and is seen as necessary to regulate psychological interdependence, providing order and ensuring the process of autonomous-relational self-construal. In this model a relational collectivism is maintained - as opposed to normative collectivism where the individual is subordinate to the group and high power distance prevails (as in the family model of interdependence).

### *Characteristics of culture*

In identifying culture characteristics that are likely impact socialization processes four, later adding a fifth dimension, were identified (Hofstede, 1994). *Power distance* is often reflected in the hierarchical nature of group structure, the respect that is expected to be shown by youth towards elders, by the belief in society that inequalities among people should be minimised or to be expected and deemed desirable. *Individualism/Collectivism* is defined as the extent to which the interest of the group is unquestionably more important than the individual's, the extent to which persons are assigned to the membership of a well-defined in-group, or there is personal choice involved with groups being more transient. *Masculinity/Femininity* refers to what extent social gender roles are distinct, to the extent achievement versus relationships are seen as important values. *Uncertainty avoidance* reflects whether persons feel threatened by unknown and uncertain situations or not. This dimension is also influenced by the extent to which predominant belief-systems (e.g. religion)

ascribe to one absolute truth versus relativism. The later added fifth dimension *short-vs. long-term orientation* is related to qualities of persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, observing traditions.

### *Personality and culture*

Eysenck viewed personality as growing out of genetic inheritance and thought of individual differences as very important. He thought that the idiographic approach of trait-level analysis utilized by Cattell is too low-level an approach, and aimed at analyzing higher-order aggregates (inter-correlations of traits) that would be empirically more robust. As an outcome of this analysis Eysenck proposed three factors, extraversion, psychoticism, and neuroticism (Carver & Scheier, 1998).

Following research on super traits the “Big-Five” was born identifying: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness (McCrae & Costa, 1997). Based on their own and relevant research the authors concluded that developmental timing is largely under genetic control, environmental experiences (except for extreme influences e.g. trauma) have little effect (McCrae et al., 2000; McCrae, 2002; McCrae et al., 2002). Based on the above McCrae and his colleagues proposed that the traits measured by the NEO-PI - R are in fact temperaments. The question still remained: are the constructs represented by the five factors meaningful at a cultural level? Factor scores on a multinational sample were calculated and significant correlations with all four of Hofstede’s culture dimensions (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004) were verified. This correlation would suggest all or some of the following: a) the distribution of genetically influenced personality factors systematically differ among national populations, b) children growing up under the influence of a given culture acquire common personality characteristics during their development, and c) national cultures effect the way people provide responses in tests.

### *The Students’ Style Questionnaire*

The Student Styles Questionnaire (SSQ) is essentially a downward extension of the MBTI (Oakland et al., 1996), based on Jungian typology and emphasizing a temperament-based approach. Jung (1989) in his personality theory differentiates between characteristics with primary and secondary functions. The dimension of extraversion and introversion as primary functions characterize basic attitudes towards the objects of the world and the persons in it. These serve as departure points for further concurrence of personality characteristics. In his system Jung differentiates between two possible types of sensing: perceiving and intuition. According to the way information is processed persons may be characterized as thinking or feeling. Jung describes the above attributes as mutually excluding categories, which notion is deemed as unacceptable by most theorists. The SSQ – just as the MBTI – utilizes the dimensions proposed by Jung and adds a fourth, namely

that of organized and flexible. A distinct novel attribute of SSQ is, that it is geared towards school-age population - and thus it may be of considerable interest to education. In order for information on style preferences made available by SSQ to be of use for educators, dimensions should be operationalized in a fashion directly applicable in the school setting.

The original version contains 69 items loading on four bipolar dimensions. The dimension of *extraversion-introversion* depicts where the individual derives energy from. Students characterized by an *extraverted preference* will be energized by the presence of others, they are inclined to join groups and enjoy interacting with peers. At the same time they feel comfortable when they are in the centre of attention thus thrive on feedback from parents and teachers, encouragement and praise are as important to them as air. Because they enjoy interaction they may not easily sense limits to this action and create undue tension by continuously interrupting others. In a learning situation they would prefer oral presentation as opposed to written expression. On the opposite extreme, *introverts* would need time alone to regain their energy. While enjoying time spent alone, introverts sometimes have strong attachments to family and carefully chosen few close friends. Because of their tendency to withdraw from too stimulation social events others might see this child as lacking social competence. In school situations they would be especially sensitive as being in a group whole day drains their energies, thus heavily relying on group-work in their case would just put further burdens on their shoulder. They perform better in individual seat work or in pair-work with a compatible peer. *Practical and imaginative style* differences would tend to surface in the preferred type of information processed, which is also dependent on the type of information predominantly presented in formal school-settings. *Practical style* preference would be associated with attending to facts and details and to a lesser extent to abstractions. These children would prefer a more traditional teaching style which presents information in a sequential fashion. They would enjoy working with peers sharing their concrete interests and prefer assignments which have an obvious purpose. As preference for hands-on activity is characteristic, multi-modal presentation is more meaningful to them than those, which rely on primarily only one sensory mode. Students with a practical preference may subject matter that heavily rely on abstractions, e.g. literature and poetry. Students characterized by an *imaginative style* on the other hand would be drawn to activities where they need to use their imagination and combinatory skills, prefer theory-driven, abstract thinking but are often prone to leap to conclusions without taking the time to check premises in a detailed fashion. They tend to get bored with repetitive tasks or ones utilizing the same skills and algorithms over and over again. *Thinking and feeling style* preferences reflect typical responses in the decision-making process. A *thinking style* preference would reflect that students characterized by this quality would tend to make decisions based on what they believe is fair and logical. They do not understand others' hurt when their decisions affect feelings as long as the decision is just as they usually arrive at a decision only after taking sound and methodological steps to reach a fair conclusion. According to the authors students characterized by a

thinking style are reserved and tend to avoid situations where emotions and inner feelings are exposed. They enjoy tasks that involve logic and would achieve well in a competitive environment, preferring marked visual displays of their standing within the class. Preference for a *feeling style* would make the student very much aware of the emotional waves that appear in the wake of different statements. They would tend to behave in ways that are conducive to an atmosphere of harmony and respect. They would tend to take into account how the decision affects others – instead of the logic of the given problem. In a social situation they enjoy the presence of others and have an innate tactfulness that helps them to understand others and behave in an empathetic manner. They are typically “good listeners” and peers may rely on them for social acceptance and comfort, but at the same time this may also result in these children becoming so enmeshed with others’ emotional needs that they neglect their schoolwork. The *organized-flexible style* dimension reflects how students handle time and environment characteristics. According to the authors approximately even numbers prefer one and the other (Oakland et al., 1996). An *organized style* preference would mean the student prefers having set time schedules ensuring enough time for the things they need to do and a predictable time-table of things (Katona and Oakland, 1999.). This goes hand-in-hand with the need for a feeling of being in control over the course of their endeavours – already knowing the goal. On the reverse side, those with a *flexible style* preference would become easily bored with repetitive routines and tend to think of them an unnecessary restriction that confines opportunities. For them unexpected events provide a source of challenge and stimulation they thrive on, and they themselves tend to act on the spur of the moment. They view structured teaching methods as boring and would prefer opportunities of learning by discovery. Their carefree nature and wit makes them fun to be around, peers like their company.

### *Goals of the research*

One of the main goals of this research was to shed light on the interplay of personality traits and cultural characteristics as mediated by socialization practices of the family and formal schooling, and vica versa. The other goal of the research undertaken was to unveil the extent to which factor-structures of the Student Styles Questionnaire remain unchanged in different cultures. Based on the responses of school-aged children from six different countries we expect that there will be significant differences in style preferences as a function of culture, and if anticipated results emerge, these differences may be understood by utilizing different theories on the process of socialization.

### *Hypothesis*

1. Based on Kagitcibasi's work (1996) on family models identifying the prevalence of interrelated family models in collectivist cultures we hypothesize that the prevalent family model serving as a mediator of cultural values carries over to the individual level. In an interrelated family youngsters are expected to be aware of the emotional undertones of a social situation early-on and thus their early socialization would emphasize this factor thereby youngsters living in collectivist cultures (PRC, Vietnam and Costa Rica) will more often show preference for the "feeling" dimension, while in countries which were grouped together on the basis of literature data (Hofstede, 1994) under the heading of individualist countries will show thinking preference in comparison as relative to each other.

2. Previous studies on extraversion as measured by the Big Five and SSQ show interrelatedness (Oakland et al., 1996), thus following the line of thought explicated by Hofstede and McCrae (2004) we may expect that in individualistic countries extraversion would be more dominant, while in collectivistic cultures introversion is more frequent.

3. Considering eco-cultural perspectives, and based on studies on the value of child (Kagitcibasi, 1996) which emphasizes that in economically less developed countries where the family model of interdependence prevails and the utilitarian value of the child is high, it would manifest in a more prevalent preference for practical style orientations.

4. This hypothesis regards value systems that not only effect family functioning, but also socialization procedures regarding work and work ethic, reflected in the dominant preferences on the different dimensions – and these would influence preferences more than the culture dimension of individualism/collectivism. That is country groups formed on the basis of dominant belief systems (e.g. religion) would be more similar in their preference combinations (Hungary-Costa Rica/ Vietnam-PRC/ Australia-USA), than country groups formed a priori based on Hofstede's work (1994).

5. If differential socialization processes are general in which parents, teachers and peers clearly relate to children differentially based upon gender (Jones et al., 1990; Jones & Wheatley, 1990; Kuebli & Fivush, 1992; Katona & Sztó, 1999) emphasizing emotional harmony and emotional aspects of the relationship in case of girls, while reinforcing a more active stance in boys, we may hypothesize that girls show a more feeling preference– as opposed to boys.

6. The above stated difference between genders will emerge in a more expressed fashion earlier in countries where patriarchal distinction between gender-role stereotypes exists (Best & Williams, 2003) and thus socialization practices will more markedly differ according to the gender of the child.

7. Our last hypothesis is that as a result of developmental processes the preference for flexibility increases with age. For younger children an environment organized in time and space is a source of security, but with the growth of cognitive capacities and abilities rules imposed by other agents become an obstacle to self-realization. Thus a preference for flexibility emerges – if not in an absolute, but at least

in a relative fashion – as this aspect may also be influenced by the “tightness” of culture (Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner, 1997), i.e. how consistently rules and norms are enforced in society and the socialization process.

### *Subjects, Methods & Procedures*

Students from six countries participated in the research (People’s Republic of China [PRC], Costa Rica, Vietnam, USA, Australia and Hungary) with approximately 400 students from each country, altogether 3483 students between the ages of 9 and 15 years. Each country-sample consisted of four age-cohorts (9-, 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds), approximately 100 students in each cohort with an equal distribution of gender.

In order to be sensitive to possible nation/country differentiation issues samples tend to come from one specific region within a country thereby increasing the homogeneity (urban middle and lower-middle class) – but this is at the expense of not being representative regarding geographical distribution. Relative representativity was ensured by recruiting respondents from public schools. A further limitation was posed by the number of tests and questions that could be administered. This also means that individual and country level statements cannot always be clearly carried through to the end.

In this study students’ were administered a short questionnaire of 15 items regarding preferences for leisure-time activities and personality characteristics were measured as reflected on preferences expressed on the Student Styles Questionnaire (Oakland et al., 1996) as a function of culture, gender and age.

The procedures recommended by Brislin (1971, 1980) were utilized in the translation process and a pilot study was performed to ensure maximum equitability of SSQ. Factor analysis was performed and only those items were retained which loaded high on the factor and substantially contribute to reliability. As a result the originally 69-item scale was reduced to 57 items. Confirmatory factor analysis by country also reinforced that factor-structure is maintained across samples. T-score change values vary between 2.2 and 0.6 – showing stability over a 7-month period proving reliability. Leisure-time activity preferences correlate with the factors and validate their content.

After identifying possible interactions between independent variables variance and regression analysis contrast tests were performed using SPSS 10 utilizing a nomothetic and an idiographic approach in data analysis in order to be able to pinpoint the most salient aspect of characteristics.

## Results

In case of countries assigned to the individualist group the *first hypothesis*, that in cultures where independent family structures may be expected a preference for a thinking style will be more characteristic, is verified. Preferences of youth in PRC and Vietnam both conform to the expectations that in cultures where interdependent family models are predominant a feeling style will be more often preferred. The strong thinking-style preference of youth in Costa Rica sets them apart from other countries characterized by collectivist cultures. This result may be due to economic factors – if we accept that economic factors influence family models strongly, which in turn affect socializing procedures. The relative economic affluence of Costa Rica as compared to the other two countries assigned to the collectivist group is verified, thus economic differences may play an important role in emerging differences in style-preferences. On the other hand preferences on this dimension is also partially influenced by gender-role socialization. Thus cultural characteristics influencing gender socialization may also play a role in preferences expressed. If the latter holds true culture characteristics relating to how achievement versus relationships are valued in a society (masculine/feminine culture) become important. In this respect Costa Rica stands apart from the other two countries assigned to the group (Vietnam and PRC), as formal schooling in Costa Rica has a long standing history and net enrolment rates have been high for many decades, and if contrasted with the other two countries students have a realistic chance at entering higher education that is seen as a guarantee of better-paying jobs. As a result achievement – which in the age-group of our sample would be school-achievement – would tend to constitute a value. In order to further identify possible mediating elements studies on the value of education in attaining personal goals should also be assessed.

Four of the six countries (Vietnam, PRC, Hungary, USA) show preferences as predicted by the *second hypothesis*, that in individualistic cultures extraversion – while in collectivistic cultures introversion is more characteristic. In case of Australia a significant preference for introversion is characteristic – instead of the predicted extraversion, and a significant preference of extraversion is characteristic of Costa Rica – instead of the expected preference for introversion.

A closer examination of age-related results underscores findings. Between country and within country analysis reaffirm that in Vietnam introversion, in USA extraversion is the leading preference when utilizing a nomothetic approach. An idiographic analysis points towards the fact that although significant changes take place as a function of age in Hungary, a preference for extraversion is seen as an important salient characteristic of Hungarian youth. In the case of PRC – although country-level data confirms an overall non-significant preference for introversion, within country regression analysis along age points out that significant change occurs as a function of age from a preference for extraversion to a preference for introversion. The initial preference for extraversion may possibly explained by sample characteristics (urban and Westernized) – which diminishes as values of larger society consistently impinge on the individual. In the case of the sample from

Costa Rica a significant preference for extraversion is verified in all statistical analysis. An overarching explanation for these phenomena occurring in economically such diverse environments might lie in factors affecting the value of children in families - and thereby influencing the predominant the family model, as well (Kagitcibasi, 1996). The family model of psychological interdependence has been shown to emerge in countries where economic development is increasing and previous models of tightly knit families were present. Costa Rica's economic affluence as compared to the other two countries characterized by collectivist cultures has been noted, which would mean that impinging on a traditional collectivist culture it could produce a family model of psychological interdependence where obedience and order are still important values but family ties are not seen as exclusive. In Australia family values may not be as directly tied to the family model itself, but environmental characteristics influencing every-day life may well have a similar effect. Due to the relative underdevelopment of local transport and the great distances involved - even within cities - parents tend to be very actively involved in the transportation of children when they are young (i.e. parents take children to and from official and leisure time activities if any appreciable distance is involved), thereby also playing the role of a control-agent in peer relationships. As children mature this role of parents dramatically decreases. Another possible alternative explanation is offered by the distribution of immigrants from different countries - whereby there is a strong tendency for immigrants from the same country to group together in one district - as this promotes a feeling of security, but at the same time perceptions regarding in-groups tend to become more salient. Age-related within country regression analysis asserts both alternatives as there is a significant decrease in the preference for introversion.

The tendency for extraversion to increase from age 9 to early adolescence (Oakland et al., 1996) - previously cited by literature - could not be verified by regression analysis.

The *third hypothesis* regarding the effect of the value of children for families in a society on preferences regarding practical-imaginative style was tested by the combined use of nomothetic and idiographic analysis, and was proven in all country samples except in the case of Costa Rica. The expected result that practical preference will be predominant in economically underdeveloped countries, where economic value of children for families and parents is high, can only be substantiated unequivocally in the case of Vietnam and PRC, but not in the case of Costa Rica - in the case of countries in the collectivistic group of countries. It was postulated that sampling procedures may also play a partial role (namely in all countries urban samples were utilized), and divergent media effects could also be a differential important socializing effect. The distribution and number of media in a country and the richness of programs offered and the frequency of television viewing all effect socialization, as television programmes necessitating a more abstract way of looking upon alternative (virtual) realities may be also adding to socializing factors - where children are characteristically more involved in physical and on-hands activities, embedded in social relationships. The fact that practical orientation shows a decrease

with time – although no significant systematic changes are apparent – also leads us to hypothesize that participation in schooling may also have an effect on this dimension (especially if we take a look at the numeric  $z$  values). Idiographic analysis pointed out that the fact that Costa Rican youth is characterized by a preference for an imaginative style is only relative: as only a significant rejection of a practical orientation is present with the absence of an expressed preference for an imaginative style. On the other hand the opposite side only implicated by the hypothesis is fully verified: in all countries where a relatively higher economic development is characteristic (i.e. Australia, USA and Hungary) a preference for an imaginative style prevails.

The *fourth hypothesis* suggesting that results of country-samples grouped according to prevailing belief-systems (e.g. regarding religion) will be more similar than those grouped according to the individualist/collectivist dichotomy are partially substantiated in two of the pairs (Vietnam and PRC; USA and Australia).

The six countries participating in the research were chosen in a fashion to provide a cross-sectioning of individualist and collectivist cultures as depicted by Hofstede (1994). Results also pointed to the fact that these are not homogenous qualities, at all, although the hypothesized differences mapping on dominant belief-systems was not substantiated unequivocally. The most notable difference was between Latin-American (Costa Rica) and Asian collectivist countries (Vietnam and PRC). In contrast-analysis of countries involved Costa-Rica is characterized by opposite characteristics than PRC and Vietnam: a significant preference for extraversion – imaginative and thinking style. On the fourth characteristic the direction of preferences are the same, but youth in Costa Rica show a significant lower preference for an organised style than do PRC and Vietnam. This latter characteristic of Costa Rica sets them apart from characteristics of individualist cultures. This patterning of preferences tends to reaffirm notions that, in-line with a family model of psychological interdependence, the traditional value of in-group interdependence has loosened and with it the values governing socialization procedures have changed, individual agency and initiatives more valued. This in part may also be attributed to the long-standing public education system – which is by far the most effective if we compare PRC, Vietnam and Costa Rica in this respect.

Individualist countries differed significantly, as well – due to the fact that both Australia and the US can be seen as host countries even today, while Hungary cannot be conceptualized as such. In spite of all historical or chrono-system characteristics – Hungary can be seen as presumably greatly affected by ideals that prevailed for over 40 years, stifling usual social development and artificially re-channelling it. Youth in Hungary significantly differ in their preferences from samples originating from countries traditionally thought of as individualist cultures (Australia and USA), by the fact that Hungarian youths' preference for a flexible and thinking style is significantly lower than that characteristic of samples originating from individualist cultures. At the same preferences expressed by youth in Hungary starkly sets them apart from youth in PRC and Vietnam, as the sample originating from Hungary is characterized by polar opposite preferences (extraversion-imaginative-thinking-flexible) significantly differing from those expressed by youth in Vietnam and PRC

(introversion–practical–feeling–organized). Thus youth in Costa Rica and Hungary are characterized by a mix of preferences that set them apart from the groups they were a priori assigned to, i.e. from individualist and collectivist cultures alike. On the one hand their difference from their own assigned groups can be partially interpreted as a result of their difference in belief system as relating to work-ethics, as well. On the other hand this explanation is questioned by the fact that Hungary and Costa Rica only show similarity in their relative preference for extraversion.

The *fifth hypothesis* regarding salient gender related preference differences as reflected in answers regarding preference for thinking versus feeling style, is fully corroborated by results. Boys and girls in all cultures conform to the pattern that boys – as compared to girls of their own culture – significantly prefer a thinking style (in an absolute or relative manner) more often. This can be attributed to differential socialization practices – or one may also take into account neuropsychological-evolutionary theories that suggest that there are differences in modular organization and neurological functioning between genders from as early on as foetal state (Hassler, 2002). Once again cultural characteristics, socialization practices and biological factors jointly determine preferences expressed on this dimension.

The *sixth hypothesis* anticipated that in countries where a high value on gender-role differentiation is expressed, not only a relative difference, but an absolute difference between genders will emerge. The dimension of thinking-feeling is one greatly influenced by gender-related socializing practices. Although one might expect that in cultures where gender-roles are stratified and emerge in a masculine orientation on culture level characterizations this would be more pronounced, this does not hold true. In all countries – except in PRC and Vietnam – males are characterized by a preference for thinking style and females by a significant preference for feeling style. Once again preferences expressed by youth in Vietnam and PRC are characteristically unique – as evidenced by contrast tests. In these two countries males' preference for a thinking style is only relatively true – in comparison with preferences expressed by females – as the absolute z-score values of both genders are on the feeling side of the continuum. This might be attributed to effects of political indoctrination that has artificially emphasized equality of genders at work – while not working outside the home is not an option – all citizens must work outside the home. Another possible conceptualization regarding the explanation of results is that collectivist countries with a belief system strongly rooted in Buddhist-Confucianism, may have an exceptionally strong effect on this dimension by heightening preferences for a feeling style. These results emphasize that not only cultural and socialization practices and self-definition, but political ideologies indoctrinating the society, should also be taken into account. The effect of these are salient in and mediated by formal socialization settings, i.e. formal schooling. A further possible mediating element is that of differential media usage. Media tend to utilize gender stereotypes and strengthen them. In countries where media is easily accessible and content of media is relatively uncensored, gender stereotypes may be strengthened in spite of all other effort to minimize them.

The *seventh hypothesis* centered on the most salient, developmentally determined change, as verified by universally significant regression-analysis results, namely the distinct preference of 9 year-olds for an organised style steadily decreases until the age of 15, irrespective of gender and the country where the sample originates from. A preference for an organised style at age 9 is universally present, making the assumption that it is a developmental characteristic, a viable one. A preference for organised style in younger students is interpreted that the structuring of the environment in time and space – in the form of daily routines –knowing what to expect, serve as a source of security, which is a basic need. At the same time the same degree of structure will be looked upon as coercion and inhibiting limitation by adolescents 15 years of age. The degree of change in this dimension as a function of age is determined to a great extent by the freedom provided to the individual by the given culture in the form of personal individual choices. The earlier and greater the degree of freedom ensured to the individual for asserting autonomy, a freedom to experiment with self-initiated activities the greater the increase in the need and preference for a flexible style. The numeric characteristic on the given dimension (z score values) will determine the absolute place on the dimension at any given point in time.

### *Summary and review*

A psychological questionnaire to measure personality style characteristics is usually developed with the intent to be able to pinpoint differences between individuals within a given culture or nation (be it the culture of even a work-place or school), emphasizing that individual differences tend to be stable and it is the responsibility of the staff to take these individual preferences into account. In the present writing we report the results of the Students' Style Questionnaire administered as a part of a cultural comparative study, which suggest that differences between samples are greater according to cultures on most dimensions, than individual differences within the country. In interpreting results of a sample consisting of 9- to 15-year-olds we utilized eco-psychological, cultural and cultural-comparative theories, as well as those reflecting on socialization procedures, that may explain surfacing non-biologically based individual differences.

Differences emerging among samples originating from countries with similar economic background point to the fact that value-systems are important mediators between social/culture level influences via socializing procedures are important aspects to be taken into account. Preferences in style are sensitive not only to ingrained cultural belief systems that have made their way to socialization procedures and values characteristically adopted by parents, but to more transient effects of media and social-political indoctrination, as well. The social success of the age-group participating in the research is founded on school success. School principles and teachers need to be aware of individual preferences if they want to maximize the benefits of schooling for children and ensure success to as many as

possible. Idiographic analysis of style preferences makes it possible to interpret individual differences in a social context. Idiographic analysis pinpoints characteristics individuals deem as primarily important in their self-construal and self-schema. point out which characteristic preferences are used by the individual as a principle component in developing self-schemas. School psychologists - by identifying these - can facilitate the development of strengths-based approaches in teaching, which characteristically increase school success and further motivation in learning.

A personality theory sensitive to cultural differences can draw attention to the characteristic preferences high infrequency within a given culture or in different schools within a country, drawing attention to probability of success in case of children coming from diverse backgrounds and a wide array of experiences in the socialization process. If we look upon individual characteristics and school organization culture as both being influenced by predominant values and belief systems - then utilizing a interactive model of causality and a culturally sensitive personality theory - we may look upon individual student styles and school organizational culture elements both as malleable to a given extent. Adopting such a viewpoint provides a secure base for the work of a school-psychologist to assist change processes be the client a student, a member of staff or the school as an organization. In work such as the above, measurements and tools embedded in theories that are sensitive to cultural issues are indispensable in identifying individual preferences which furthers the development of more sensitively planned and self-reflective educational process.

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