

How the pandemic may have altered your personality

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From rethinking workspaces to how we socialize with one another, there hasn't been a part of our lives unaffected by the pandemic. A new study

shows the effects of the pandemic could even have altered our personality.

The most widely used model to determine [personality](#) is the Five Factor Model, which determines one's tendency toward extraversion, openness, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness.

Published in the journal *PLOS ONE*, the study found there were small but significant declines in openness, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness compared to [personality traits](#) measured before the pandemic. The researchers studied 7,109 participants across different ages and races and analyzed their personalities before and during the pandemic.

Among all subgroups, younger adults reported the most change to their personality. The study notes that as people age, our personalities decline in neuroticism and increase in agreeableness and conscientiousness. However, compared to prepandemic personality results, the opposite occurred in young adults.

This is because "all the normal things that younger adults are supposed to do were disrupted: school, socializing, work," study author Angelina Sutin told NPR. Additionally, compared to young adults, older adults were "in a much more stable place in general," she said.

Although small, the changes in personality could result in greater effects on [young adults](#). The study notes that personalities are associated with certain outcomes. For example, people with higher levels of conscientiousness might achieve more education, or those with higher levels of neuroticism might engage in high-risk behaviors. The study notes there's a potential for these changes to ripple into adulthood, but further research needs to be conducted before reaching a conclusion.

While it is largely believed personality remains stable throughout one's life, research points to the contrary.

"There's quite a lot of evidence in the last couple of decades that personality is something that's dynamic, changeable, malleable, and that there are a lot of different factors that influence that change," associate professor of the behavioral and [brain sciences](#) at the University of Georgia, Brian Haas, Ph.D., told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Haas is not affiliated with the study. "People express their personality differently according to different contexts and situations. So, there's a growing consensus in the field of personality research that this notion of personality being really enduring and concrete is not really the case."

The study found that Hispanic and Latino individuals had the greatest change in personality compared to other races. Hispanic and Latino participants reported to have declines in agreeableness earlier compared to non-Hispanic/Latino participants, and they did not decrease in neuroticism. The study speculates this difference might be because Hispanic/Latino participants experience greater stressors from working on the front lines and faced an increased risk to COVID-19.

Cultural contexts play a role in personality, as well, since [different cultures](#) exhibit different traits in different ways. Previously, Haas studied how worldview affects well-being in individuals from the United States and Japan.

"There is quite a bit of variation in the expression of personality traits, according to cultural contexts. People think about how solid or changeable their personality is differentially according to culture," Haas said.

"In the United States, it's highly valued to stick to your guns, in a sense, and be the same person according to different stages of life and different

social contexts. But in other places, for example, in Japan or other East Asian cultures, it's more accepted to express yourself differently. And to be a different person according to different times of life or different social situations."

Changes in personality can also affect health outcomes. Previous studies have indicated increases in conscientiousness and extraversion predicted better health, whereas higher levels of agreeableness and neuroticism had poorer health outcomes.

"In the United States, people that change their personality tend to exhibit lower amounts of well-being and life satisfaction as compared to those that do not change their personality," Haas said. "So personality change in general corresponds to a decrease in well-being."

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