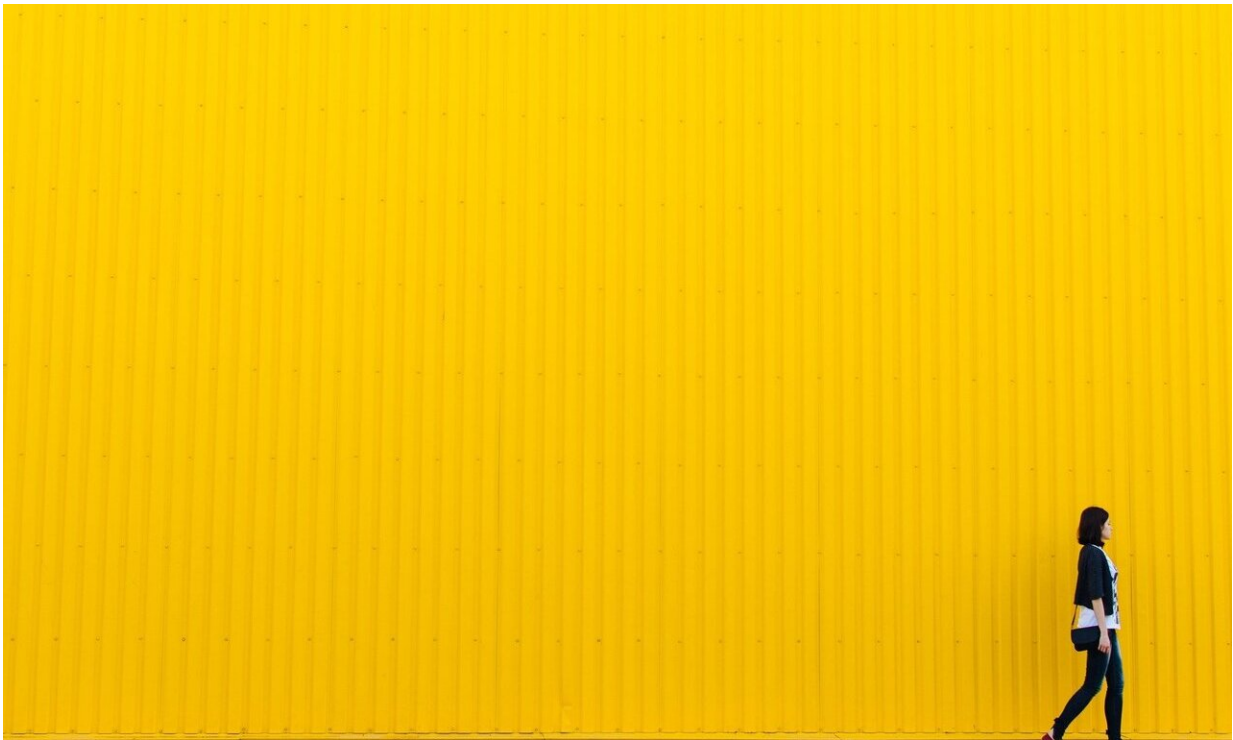


# Study of 62 countries finds people react similarly to everyday situations

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The cornerstone of discrimination is the belief that other people, including people of other races from other countries, are different. They experience life differently; they react differently.

What if research could demonstrate that's not true?

A new study from UC Riverside asserts the [world population](#) may have much more in common than it has differences.

"Even though individuals within the same country have more similar experiences than those in different countries, the differences are barely noticeable," said Daniel Lee, the lead author in the paper recently published by the *Journal of Personality*. "The world is a much more similar and unified place than we once thought."

Lee said the research is the most far-reaching study of everyday situations ever, teaming with researchers across the globe to include 62 countries. The aim is determining whether the world's population experiences life very much the same, or differently.

"This project is unprecedented. Very few international studies look at relationships between more than two countries, let alone 62," Lee, a doctoral researcher in the lab of UCR Distinguished Professor David Funder, and the lead author of the paper "Situational Experience Around the World: A Replication and Extension in 62 Countries."

What's a situation? Everything we experience. Watching Netflix in the living room with your family. Or getting a sunburn. There are simple situations: being in a room that's too warm. There are more complex situations, such as attending a social event where you encounter a potential romantic partner.

Whether people across the world report the same feelings and emotions in those situations, or vastly different ones, was the crux of the lab's study. The study included data from 15,318 members of university and college communities, 10,771 of them females, 4,468 males. Seventy-nine did not choose a gender. Most participants were in their early to mid-20s. Answers were gathered using a 90-question assessment Funder previously developed called the [Riverside Situational Q-Sort](#).

The current study is a much-expanded version of a 2015 study from Funder's lab called "The World at 7:00: Comparing the Experience of Situations Across 20 Countries." That study asked participants from 20 countries what they were doing at 7 p.m. the previous night. Then, researchers looked to see how people experienced them.

Their finding: "The difference among countries is smaller than expected; and the difference within countries is much greater." In other words, people from different countries aren't that different, and people within the same country aren't as similar as expected.

While "The World at 7:00" study asked people what they were doing at 7 p.m. the previous day, participants in the current study were asked to relate an experience they "remember well" from the previous day.

"The World at 7:00" and the current, expanded study both found most experiences are "mildly positive," meaning people within a country are more likely to have similar situations than those in different countries, and that the difference is small in how we experience situations among countries.

The first finding, about positive experience, happily contradicts previous psychological research about how people remember situations.

"Previous research on memory in general would suggest that negative events are more memorable than neutral or positive events," Lee said.

There were some differences in the two studies' findings. "The World at 7:00" found the U.S. and Canada were the two countries most alike in terms of experiences. In the current study, the U.S. and Australia were most alike. In "The World at 7:00," the two countries most different in terms of experiences were South Korea and Denmark. In the current study, the two countries most different were Malaysia and Jordan.

The country most like the rest of the world in "The World at 7:00" was Canada. Four countries tied for that distinction in the current study, including Canada, Australia, Chile, and the U.S.

Two countries registered as the most different from the rest of the world in "The World at 7:00": Japan and South Korea. In the current study, Japan was the most different from other countries.

The country most alike within its own borders in "The World at 7:00" was Japan. In the current study, people within the borders of the Netherlands were most like their countrymen; Japan ranked quite low—No. 56 out of 62—in terms of homogeneity, a finding that perplexed researchers.

The country with citizens least alike their own countrymen was South Korea in "The World at 7:00;" in the current study it was Singapore.

Lee said the findings hold a lesson worth being mindful of in the current climate of unrest during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We can only hope that seeing we're all unified in the challenges we face during these trying times will give people an increased sense of global community," Lee said.

The current study represents the first finding published from Funder's broad-sweeping International Situations Project. Data from this and other studies related to the International Situations Project is available [online](#).

In addition to Lee and Funder, authors on the current study included Erica Baranski and Gwendolyn Gardiner, both doctoral researchers in Funder's lab.

To take the same survey as the participants, click [here](#), select the U.S. flag, enter USA1.ENG for the study ID, and C2NAX99 for the participant ID.

**More information:** Daniel I. Lee et al. Situational Experience around the World: A Replication and Extension in 62 Countries, *Journal of Personality* (2020). DOI: [10.1111/jopy.12558](https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12558)

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