Chapter 2
Peacefulness as a Personality Trait

Linden L. Nelson

What can we do to create a peaceful world, to make our relationships peaceful, and to find inner peace? An important part of the answer to this question is that we should learn how to foster the development of peaceful personality. The concept of “peaceful personality” is defined here as a characteristic of an individual involving the consistent manifestation of peaceful states, attitudes, and behaviors over time and across relevant contextual domains.

This definition of peaceful personality raises a host of questions. What is meant by “peaceful?” What are the relevant contextual domains in which we expect peaceful people to be consistently peaceful? In fact, are people consistent in the degree of peacefulness they manifest within these domains (such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup domains)? Are people also consistent in peacefulness across domains? That is, for example, do people manifesting inner peace also behave peacefully toward others? Do people characterized as interpersonally peaceful also have peaceful attitudes regarding international relations? These are some of the questions addressed in this chapter.

Domains of Peace

Based on his overview of peace literature, Anderson (2004, p. 103) defined peace as “a condition in which individuals, families, groups, communities, and/or nations experience low levels of violence and engage in mutually harmonious relationships.” Because the focus of this chapter is peaceful personality, and personality refers to consistencies in behaviors, psychological states, and attitudes, I am concerned with peacefulness as a characteristic of the behaviors, states, and attitudes of individuals.
Peaceful behavior is defined here as actions that create and maintain nonviolent and harmonious relationships. Cooperation and kindness are examples of peaceful behavior. Peaceful states include emotions such as calmness, serenity, and security as well as conditions of inner harmony between aspects of self. Peaceful attitudes are defined here as beliefs and values that facilitate the creation and maintenance of nonviolent and harmonious relationships. Thus, peaceful personality connotes consistently peaceful behavior, states, and attitudes over time and across relevant contextual domains.

The relevant domains where peaceful behavior, states, and attitudes may occur involve a wide range of relationships within individuals, between groups, and between individuals and other persons, groups, and entities. All of these relationships have potentials for conflict, violence, and harmony. Anderson (2004) identified seven specific contexts where a condition of peace could be experienced. These contexts are within individuals (intrapersonal peace), among individuals (interpersonal peace), among social groups (social peace), within the community (civil peace), within the nation (national peace), among nations (international peace), and with the natural world (ecological peace). Each of these contexts can be seen as domains in which individuals may behave peacefully, hold peaceful attitudes, and/or experience peaceful states. All of these domains are relevant to the construct of peaceful personality because they represent important relationship contexts in which individuals experience peace and conflict.

Anderson recognized that typologies for contexts of peace could also be categorized and segmented in other ways. For example, we might differentiate between peacefulness in the family vs. the workplace, or between allies vs. enemies. In addition, it might be useful to add more domain categories such as peace with ultimate reality or God (existential peace). The important issue here is not to specify all of the possible contexts for peaceful behavior, emotions, and attitudes. Nor is it essential to obtain agreement among scholars regarding the ideal typology for classifying the domains of peace. Rather, the critical issues for establishing the viability of the conceptualization “peaceful personality” are to recognize that peacefulness is a relevant personality attribute in a wide range of relationship domains and to demonstrate that at least some people are consistent in the degree of peacefulness they exhibit over time and across domains.

While it might be useful to define peaceful personality by reference to consistency in peacefulness within a single domain, this would be a rather narrow perspective and would fail to acknowledge the relevance of peacefulness in the other domains. For example, we could suggest that people who are generally peaceful in relationships with other individuals are “peaceful people,” but it seems more meaningful to reserve use of that characterization for people who are also peaceful in other domains such as in their attitudes toward groups and nations.

It should be noted that this definition of peaceful personality does not necessarily imply that peaceful people are peace activists or peace workers. Some individuals may manifest peaceful emotions, behaviors, and attitudes across relevant domains without becoming agents of change for a more peaceful world. For example, a person may value peace and favor peaceful alternatives for conflict resolution and still
be relatively inactive in organizations and programs for promoting peace. While it seems reasonable to hypothesize that peaceful people are more likely than less peaceful people to be involved in peace activism, peaceful personality and peace activism are defined here as independent constructs. The relationship between peaceful personality and social activism for peace and justice is discussed further in Chaps. 3, 7, 9, and 11, and it is an important subject for future research.

**Consistency in Peacefulness Across Domains**

The concept of peacefulness as a personality trait implies that some people show a consistent pattern of peaceful behavior, states, and attitudes across time and relevant contextual domains. There are at least two fundamentally different ways of conceptualizing personality traits. The “common trait” approach assumes that the same trait dimensions can meaningfully describe most people. For the trait of peacefulness, the assumption would be that most people can be described somewhere on the dimension from very peaceful to very unpeaceful. This implies that most people exhibit a consistent pattern of peacefulness on that dimension. Thus, some people are consistently peaceful, some people are consistently moderate in peacefulness, and some people are consistently unpeaceful. Of course, there may also be some people who are very inconsistent in peacefulness, but such people are assumed to be a minority. On a personality inventory measuring peacefulness, the highly inconsistent people would obtain moderate scores and would be difficult to differentiate based on their scores from people who are consistently moderate in peacefulness.

The second approach for conceptualizing personality traits assumes that people are idiosyncratic in the degree to which they exhibit consistency in peacefulness. This approach suggests that some people are consistent across relevant domains, but most people either are inconsistent or show unique patterns of consistency where they may be peaceful in some domains but not in others. So long as some people can be shown to be consistently peaceful across relevant domains, peacefulness is a viable idiosyncratic personality trait. The concept of personality type is also used to describe people who show an idiosyncratic pattern of consistency in behavior, emotion, and attitude across relevant domains. Thus, even if most people are inconsistently peaceful, a person who is peaceful across domains may be described as exhibiting the idiosyncratic personality trait, or personality type, of peacefulness.

The question of whether peaceful personality is better conceptualized as a common or idiosyncratic trait has not been addressed by researchers. Determining whether peacefulness can be usefully described as a common trait requires measuring the degree to which people in the general population are consistent in the degree of peacefulness they exhibit across domains, and I will report evidence on this matter later in this chapter. First, I will explain some of the reasons for expecting that people might be consistent in peacefulness across domains and over time, and then I will describe some methods for measuring peaceful personality.

There are a number of reasons for expecting consistency in peacefulness across domains and over time. Conflict is a common stimulus in each relationship domain
and throughout the life span. Whatever responses a person has learned in order to deal with conflict in one domain, or at a particular time of life, are likely to generalize to other domains and to later time periods. Generalization is a pervasive phenomenon affecting human behavior, emotion, and attitude. Without generalization, it would be difficult to adapt to new environments because every new situation would require that we adapt without the benefit of past experience. Fortunately, we bring to new situations the tendencies to behave, feel, and think in ways that have seemed useful for similar situations in the past. The idea that interpersonal attitudes and behaviors tend to generalize to attitudes about foreign policy has been labeled “the generalization hypothesis” (Christiansen 1959/1974). It seems likely that attitudes and behaviors also generalize between the other domains where conflict is salient and peacefulness is an option.

A second reason for expecting consistency in peacefulness is that the values, competencies, and cognitive dispositions that promote peacefulness in one domain or at a particular time are also likely to be active in promoting peacefulness for other domains and at later times. For example, valuing tolerance would seem relevant to attitudes and behaviors in all domains and would tend to influence a person to be peaceful toward self, other individuals, and other groups. People who value and seek harmony in one domain are likely to value and seek harmony in other domains because they would otherwise feel deprived of a valued experience. Possessing self-regulation and problem-solving abilities would seem likely to facilitate peacefulness across domains. Anger interferes with inner peace and predisposes people to respond aggressively to conflict in all domains, so people with an ability to control anger are likely to be relatively peaceful across domains.

A third reason to expect consistency is that genetic determinants and developmental antecedents of peacefulness in various domains may be the same or similar. Pervasive parental modeling of tolerance, for instance, probably promotes the development of tolerance across domains.

There are additional reasons to expect that intrapersonal peacefulness relates to interpersonal peacefulness. People who behave peacefully with other individuals are likely to experience reciprocally positive behavior in return and to develop harmonious and friendly relationships with others, and they are therefore more likely to experience peaceful emotions. In addition, as noted by Sigmund Freud and other psychologists, interpersonal conflict often causes intrapersonal conflict (Sandy et al. 2006). For example, conflict with others may cause inner conflict between the desire to aggress and the need to inhibit such aggression. Such conflict is less likely for people who behave more peacefully, so they may have more inner peace as a result.

Further, feeling peaceful probably facilitates peaceful interpersonal behavior in the person experiencing peacefulness in much the same way as positive emotions have been shown experimentally to enhance conflict resolution, cooperation, and helping behaviors (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Feeling peaceful may activate peaceful thinking and peaceful goals that have been associated together in one’s past, such that a person who consistently experiences peaceful emotions is also likely to approach interpersonal conflict in peaceful ways.
Thus, there are numerous reasons to expect some consistency in the peacefulness of people’s behaviors, attitudes, and states across time, situations, and relevant contextual domains. It is important to remember, however, that human behavior at any particular time is influenced by multiple personality factors and by many situational variables. Even someone with a generally strong disposition for peaceful behavior would be expected to show variation in the degree of peacefulness exhibited across situations and domains. Therefore, I hypothesize that people will generally show some consistency in peacefulness across contextual domains, but I expect the correlations to be small to moderate.

Measuring Peacefulness

In order to investigate the utility of the common trait approach for understanding peaceful personality, it is necessary to measure peacefulness in each of the relevant domains for a group of people and then to examine the correlations between measures of peacefulness in the various domains. This would allow us to determine the degree to which people are consistent in peacefulness across domains. Measuring peacefulness is also necessary when investigating the idiosyncratic trait approach in order to identify a subgroup of people who exhibit peacefulness across domains. Regardless of whether we use a common trait or idiosyncratic trait conception, it is necessary to measure peacefulness in order to conduct scientific studies of the development, dynamics, and determinants of peaceful personality.

Although it would be desirable to measure and study peacefulness in all of the relevant domains that have been identified here, there have been relatively few studies of peaceful personality. The tools for assessing peacefulness in some of the domains have yet to be developed. Therefore, this chapter focuses on peacefulness in three of the relevant domains for which measurement tools are available and studies have been conducted. I will focus on peaceful behavior, emotions, and attitudes in the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and international domains. Instruments that could be used to assess peacefulness in the social, civil, ecological, and existential domains may exist, but they have rarely been identified by researchers as measures of peacefulness or used for studies of peaceful personality.

As instruments for measuring personal peacefulness in the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and international domains are described below, we will also examine evidence for consistency in peacefulness over time and across situations within each domain. Unless people exhibit consistency in peacefulness within domains, we could not expect to observe much consistency across domains. The relevant statistical principle here is that correlations between measurements are limited by the reliability of each of the measurements. While it is important for validating the common trait conception of peaceful personality to demonstrate that people are consistent in peacefulness within domains, such evidence would not fulfill all of our criteria for accepting the notion that peacefulness is a personality trait. This would also require evidence of consistency across domains, and this issue will be discussed following the sections on measurement.
Measuring Intrapersonal Peacefulness

As a personality trait, intrapersonal peacefulness may be defined in several ways: (1) as a disposition for self-acceptance, self-compassion, and nonviolence toward self, (2) as a relatively enduring state of harmony (i.e., congruence) between aspects of self, and (3) as a disposition for emotional states that support peaceful relationships and/or are associated with experiencing harmony. Of course, each definition includes the characteristic of consistency across relevant situations and over time. Ideally, the assessment of intrapersonal peacefulness would sample the attitudes and psychological states included in all three of these definitions. Although few studies to date have measured intrapersonal peacefulness in this comprehensive manner, research assessing one or two aspects of intrapersonal peacefulness is still informative. This is particularly true given the likelihood that the three aspects of intrapersonal peacefulness are correlated.

Researchers have found that measures consistent with the three definitions of intrapersonal peacefulness do indeed correlate. One study found that a disposition for positive emotional states correlated positively with measures of personality congruence and coherence (Sheldon and Kasser 1995). Studies have also shown that intrapersonal conflict is associated with unpeaceful emotional states. Intrapersonal conflict may involve conflict within or between any of the various aspects of self such as self-beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, wishes, goals, and values. Emmons and King (1988) found that both conflict between personal strivings and ambivalence about particular strivings correlated positively with negative affect, depression, and neuroticism. In both correlational and experimental studies, conflict between self-perceived attributes, wished-for attributes, and attributes that people believe they ought to possess related to emotional discomfort ranging from dejection-related emotions to agitation-related emotions depending on the particular type of conflict (Higgins 1987).

Researchers also discovered that an experimentally induced intrapersonal conflict between attitudes and behavior (i.e., cognitive dissonance) created an emotional state of feeling uncomfortable, bothered, and uneasy (Elliot and Devine 1994; Harmon-Jones 2000). Brook et al. (2008) cited studies showing that experiencing role conflicts (i.e., identifying with roles that require incompatible behaviors) related to lower subjective well-being, and their research found that having many identity roles correlated with positive affect and greater well-being if the identities were in harmony, but correlated with negative affect and lower well-being if the identities were in conflict.

Other studies have shown that self-compassion is correlated positively with positive affect and negatively with negative affect and with neuroticism (Leary et al. 2007; Neff et al. 2007b). In addition, self-acceptance is correlated positively with positive affect (Ryff 1989) and life satisfaction (Hansen et al. 2009) and negatively with negative affect and neuroticism (Shallcross et al. 2013). A number of studies have shown that induction of positive affect makes people feel good about themselves (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

My review of relevant literature identified only one instrument that was explicitly labeled as a measure of inner peace (Luma 2004). This 14-item questionnaire
appears to assess the ability to cope with stress, regulate emotions, and maintain a positive perspective on life. A Serenity Scale, developed by Roberts and Aspy (1993), yields scores for inner haven, acceptance, belonging, trust, perspective, contentment, present centeredness, benevolence, and cognitive restructuring/self-responsibility. The authors defined serenity as “sustained inner peace,” and they reported evidence for the internal consistency of the 40-item scale (alpha = 0.92). Another scale that assesses serenity, the Viterbo Serenity Inventory, was developed by Floody (see Chap. 5 in this volume). Instruments that can be used to assess the three types of intrapersonal peacefulness separately are described below.

**Self-acceptance, Self-compassion, and Inner Harmony**

Instruments that measure self-acceptance (Ryff 1989) and self-compassion (Neff 2003) can be used for assessing the first type of intrapersonal peacefulness (i.e., disposition for self-acceptance, self-compassion, and nonviolence toward self). Instruments that measure personality congruence and coherence (Sheldon and Kasser 1995) can be used for assessing the second type of interpersonal peacefulness (i.e., harmony between aspects of self). The Q-technique developed by Stephenson (1953) and used by Carl Rogers and his colleagues to assess congruence between perceived self and ideal self (Rogers and Dymond 1954) could also be used to measure harmony between aspects of the self. Congruence, as measured by the Q-technique, is typically quite low for people seeking psychotherapy, but it tends to increase as a result of psychotherapy. For most people, congruence is a stable personality characteristic across time. Other relevant instruments for assessing intrapersonal conflict between self-beliefs are described by Higgins (1987).

I recently developed a self-report instrument, the Self Perceptions Scale, to assess the first two types of intrapersonal peacefulness (see Appendix 2.1). Two examples of items intended to measure disposition for self-acceptance, self-compassion, and nonviolence toward self are: “I am self-accepting of my weaknesses and failures” and “I punish myself for my mistakes and failures” (reverse scored). Two examples of items intended for measuring harmony between aspects of self are: “I am at peace with myself” and “I experience inner conflict” (reverse scored). Mayton et al. (2011) (also see Chap. 3) developed a 20-item Intrapersonal Nonviolence Scale that included the 12 items from the Self Perceptions Scale and eight items assessing stress and emotion regulation tendencies.

**Emotional Dispositions**

There are many instruments that measure emotional traits. These could be useful for assessing the third type of intrapersonal peacefulness, a disposition for experiencing the emotional states associated with harmonious relationships. For example, instruments that assess feelings of fulfillment, security, harmony, calmness, and satisfaction seem relevant for assessing peaceful emotional dispositions, and instruments
that assess dispositions for anger and hostility, insecurity, anxiety, irritability, and discontentment seem relevant for assessing unpeaceful emotional traits. The trait of neuroticism may be useful for describing a very general disposition for experiencing peaceful vs. unpeaceful emotional states. Neuroticism is one of the “big five” personality dimensions many psychologists consider higher-order personality factors useful for describing the core aspects of personality. A high score on this dimension indicates emotional instability and negative emotionality, and a low score indicates emotional stability and positive emotionality.

Examination of the items used in neuroticism scales suggests that measures of neuroticism could, indeed, be used to assess dispositions for peaceful vs. unpeaceful emotional states. The most widely used commercially available instrument for measuring the Big Five traits is the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R). The subscales or “facets” that contribute to scores on neuroticism in the NEO PI-R are labeled as follows: anxiety (tense), angry hostility (irritable), depression (not contented), self-conscious (shy), impulsiveness (moody), and vulnerability (not self-confident). The descriptors shown in parentheses are from the Adjective Check List and are highly correlated with the facet scores (Costa and McCrae 1992).

The International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) NEO Neuroticism Scale includes 20 items, ten keyed positively for neuroticism and ten keyed negatively for neuroticism (International Personality Item Pool, n.d.). The ten items that are keyed positively for neuroticism are as follows: Often feel blue, Dislike myself, Am often down in the dumps, Have frequent mood swings, Panic easily, Am filled with doubts about things, Feel threatened easily, Get stressed out easily, Fear for the worst, and Worry about things. The items keyed negatively for neuroticism are: Seldom feel blue, Rarely get irritated, Feel comfortable with myself, Am not easily bothered by things, Am very pleased with myself, Seldom get mad, Am relaxed most of the time, Am not easily frustrated, Remain calm under pressure, and Rarely lose my composure.

The IPIP NEO Neuroticism Scale correlates highly ($r=0.93$) with the Neuroticism Scale of the NEO-PI-R (International Personality Item Pool n.d.). Both of these scales have been shown to have substantial internal consistency, and there is considerable evidence for the test/retest reliability, validity, and temporal stability of the NEO-PI-R Neuroticism Scale (John and Srivastava 1999). Over 10-year time spans after age 30, the stability coefficient for NEO-PI-R Neuroticism in a large sample was very high ($r=0.78$) (Terracciano et al. 2006). Other researchers have found evidence for considerable consistency in emotions, particularly in tendencies to experience positive vs. negative emotions, across a wide range of situations (Eisenkraft and Elfenbein 2010). For example, people who felt calm and relaxed when interacting with a group member also tended to feel calm and relaxed when interacting individually with three other group members. Therefore, intrapersonal peacefulness, when defined as a disposition to experience peaceful emotions, tends to be consistent across time and across situations and therefore can be conceptualized as a common trait.

One problem with using neuroticism scales as a measure of the disposition for experiencing peaceful emotions is that they assess certain characteristics in addition to the disposition for experiencing peaceful vs. unpeaceful emotions. For example,
two of the facets for the NEO PI-R Neuroticism Scale, self-consciousness and impulsiveness, are correlated with the other facets, but are not directly relevant to my definition of intrapersonal peacefulness. Thus, neuroticism is not a precise measure of dispositions for peaceful vs. unpeaceful emotional dispositions. Neuroticism is useful for research on intrapersonal peacefulness, but it would be desirable to use instruments designed more specifically for this purpose.

Measures of subjective well-being or happiness, defined as “frequent positive affect” by Lyubomirsky et al. (2005), could also be used to assess disposition for experiencing peaceful emotions. Most kinds of positive affect are peaceful in that they support peaceful relationships and/or are associated with experiencing peaceful relationships. A person experiencing frequent positive affect is probably experiencing peaceful feelings much of the time.

For a research project described later in this chapter, I developed an instrument for measuring disposition for peaceful emotions. The Peaceful Feelings Scale (see Appendix 2.2) includes a list of 20 feelings, ten peaceful feelings mixed with ten unpeaceful feelings. Examples of peaceful feelings are calm, secure, satisfied, and harmonious. Examples of unpeaceful feelings are agitated, frustrated, anxious, and discontented. Participants were asked to indicate the amount of time they experienced each feeling on an average day. Items for unpeaceful feelings were reverse scored. The instrument was internally reliable (alpha = 0.87), but evidence for validity and stability is not yet available.

**Measuring Interpersonal Peacefulness**

We can apply the definition of peaceful personality to the interpersonal domain by suggesting that a peaceful person consistently exhibits behavior and attitudes that are nonviolent and that create and maintain harmonious relationships with other persons. Compared to most people, a peaceful person is less likely to behave in hurtful ways toward others and is more likely to be cooperative, considerate, helpful, and trustworthy. The attitudes of interpersonally peaceful people tend to be tolerant, empathic, trusting, and forgiving. It seems obvious that these behaviors and attitudes facilitate the development and maintenance of harmonious interpersonal relationships.

According to this conceptualization, the trait of interpersonal peacefulness includes two correlated dimensions: nonviolent vs. violent and harmonious vs. disharmonious. Given the evidence for a positive correlation between these dimensions (discussed below), studies that assess either of them are relevant for understanding interpersonal peacefulness and its relationship to other domains of personal peacefulness. Ideally, however, the assessment of interpersonal peacefulness would measure both (1) nonviolent behaviors and attitudes toward other people and (2) behaviors and attitudes that create and maintain harmonious relationships with other people. One way to include both dimensions is to combine them into a single dimension of harmonious vs. violent. This is done in the case of some instruments for measuring the Big Five trait of agreeableness.
Agreeableness

The trait of agreeableness captures very well the characteristics of interpersonal peacefulness. The “facets” that contribute to agreeableness scores in the NEO PI-R are labeled as follows: trust (forgiving), straightforwardness (not demanding), altruism (warm), compliance (not stubborn), modesty (not show-off), and tender-mindedness (sympathetic). The descriptors shown in parentheses are from the Adjective Check List and are highly correlated with the facet scores (Costa and McCrae 1992).

The IPIP NEO Agreeableness Scale includes 20 items for agreeableness, ten keyed positively and ten keyed negatively (International Personality Item Pool, n.d.). The ten items that are keyed positively are as follows: Have a good word for everyone, Believe that others have good intentions, Respect others, Accept people as they are, Make people feel at ease, Am concerned about others, Trust what people say, Sympathize with other’s feelings, Am easy to satisfy, and Treat all people equally. The negatively keyed items are: Have a sharp tongue, Cut others to pieces, Suspect hidden motives in others, Get back at others, Insult people, Believe that I am better than others, Contradict others, Make demands on others, Hold a grudge, and Am out for my own personal gain.

The IPIP NEO Agreeableness Scale correlates highly ($r=0.90$) with the Agreeableness Scale of the NEO-PI-R (International Personality Item Pool, n.d.). Several other instruments are also available for measuring the Big Five traits including agreeableness, and they have been shown to be highly correlated with one another (John and Srivastava 1999). Based on their review of many studies on agreeableness, Graziano and Tobin (2009, p. 46) concluded that the trait of agreeableness “describes individual differences in being likeable, pleasant, and harmonious in relations with others.”

Considerable evidence suggests that people who score high on agreeableness are motivated to maintain peaceful relationships with other people. They have been observed to be more constructive when dealing with conflict in various experimental situations and have been found to be more cooperative, helpful, empathic, and less prejudiced than people who scored low on agreeableness (Graziano and Tobin 2009). For example, in a study with fifth and sixth graders, children scoring high on agreeableness reported greater endorsement of constructive conflict resolution tactics (e.g., negotiation), and less endorsement of destructive tactics (e.g., manipulation or physical threat), than children scoring low on agreeableness; and ratings by the children’s parents and teachers of the children’s use of constructive conflict resolution tactics correlated positively with the children’s scores on agreeableness (Jensen-Campbell et al. 2003). Another study found that graduate students who scored high on agreeableness used negotiation tactics more frequently during interpersonal conflicts experienced over a 3-week period, and used contending and attack tactics less frequently, relative to students scoring low on agreeableness (Sandy et al. 2006). Other studies showed that agreeableness related to cooperativeness when participants were presented with a resource dilemma (Koole et al. 2001) and correlated positively with use of collaborative tactics and negatively with use of competitive tactics in experimental situations (Park and Antonioni 2007; Wood and Bell 2008).
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