



Personality and geography: Introverts prefer mountains



Shigehiro Oishi*, Thomas Talhelm, Minha Lee

University of Virginia, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 June 2015

Revised 30 June 2015

Accepted 2 July 2015

Available online 3 July 2015

Keywords:

Personality
Extraversion
Introversion
Mountains
Beaches

ABSTRACT

In five studies, we tested the link between personality and geography. We found that mountain-lovers were more introverted than ocean-lovers (Study 1). People preferred the ocean over mountains when they wanted to socialize with others, but they preferred the mountains and the ocean equally when they wanted to decompress alone (Study 2). In Study 3, we replicated the introversion–extraversion differences using pictures of mountains and oceans. Furthermore, this difference was explained in part by extraverts' perception that it would take more work to have fun in the mountains than in the ocean. Extending the first three studies to non-students, we found that residents of mountainous U.S. states were more introverted than residents of flat states (Study 4). In Study 5, we tested the link between introversion and the mountains experimentally by sending participants to a flat, open area or a secluded, wooded area. The terrain did not make people more introverted, but introverts were happier in the secluded area than in the flat/open area, which is consistent with the person–environment fit hypothesis.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Many cultures have an enduring image of a hermit alone in the woods or mountains apart from others. Thoreau (1854/2004) famously started *Walden* as follows: “When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor” (p. 3). Likewise, Bodhidharma founded Zen Buddhism around 500 A.D. in Shaolin Temple on Mount Sun, Henan Province, China, after meditating for 9 years in cave (Pine, 1987). Although some people might like to go to the ocean to meditate, introspection seems better suited to secluded woods and mountains rather than the open area of the ocean.

Do the woods and mountains attract certain people—for instance, people who share the qualities of hermits? This study explores the potential link between personality and geography (for a review of the psychology of geography, see Rentfrow, 2014). In this study, we focus on mountainous terrains (including woods) relative to the ocean and plains because these are prominent geographic characteristics in the U.S. There are lakes, deserts, and rivers, of course. However, when people talk about where they want to live, they often talk about the ocean or the mountains. When people think about vacations, they often think about ocean vacations or mountain retreats. Thus, it seems appropriate as a first

step to examine the link between personality and geography by focusing on mountains relative to the ocean/plains.

1.1. Selection into environments: presses and needs

What is the personality trait that describes hermits best? Most dictionaries define a hermit as someone who chooses to live alone far away from society or who spends a lot of time alone. Thus, introversion captures hermits' personality most succinctly.

This definition also suggests a theoretical perspective. That is, introverts *choose* woods or mountains to be alone. Psychologists have long theorized that people actively select certain situations to fulfill their desires (Murray, 1938; Snyder, 1983). One of the main facets of extraversion is sociability (gregariousness), or the degree to which people are willing to engage in activities with others. Not surprisingly, previous research found that extraverts are high in need for affiliation (defined as the need to greet, join, live with others, cooperate, and converse socially with others) and need for exhibition (defined as the need to attract attention on oneself, to excite, amuse, stir, shock, or thrill others), and introverts are low in need for affiliation and exhibition (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Piedmont, McCrae, & Costa, 1992). Then, extraverts should seek physical environments that allow them to fulfill their needs for affiliation and exhibition, whereas introverts should seek physical environments that allow them to be alone.

What kinds of environments might allow people to fulfill their high or low need for affiliation and exhibition? Murray (1938) postulated that people choose certain situations to fulfill their

* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400400, Charlottesville, VA 22904–4400, United States.

E-mail address: soishi@virginia.edu (S. Oishi).

needs and that they must know that certain situations elicit certain psychological reactions. Murray called the force that an environment elicits a “press,” in contrast to the inner force, or “need.” More formally, he defined “the press of an object” as “what it can do to the subject or for the subject—the power that it has to affect the well-being of the subject in one way or another” (p. 121). Murray gave an example that a friendly companion possesses *p Affiliation*, or press (force) for affiliation. He also mentioned that a barren monotonous environment lacks positive press.

Murray’s concept of presses applies easily to geographical characteristics. Wooded, mountainous environments have low press for affiliation, whereas a wide-open beach has high press for affiliation and exhibition. Murray’s theory guides this study because the heart of our research is the assumption that natural environments such as oceans, beaches, woods, and mountains have certain presses and have the power to affect people’s well-being and that certain environments fulfill certain people’s needs and desires more than others’. In this study, we argue that woods and mountains seem to have a press that satisfies introverts’ needs more than extraverts’. In contrast, plains and oceans seem to have a press that satisfies extraverts’ needs more than introverts’.

Similar to Murray (1938), Eysenck (1967) put forth a theory that people seek out environments that fit their needs. His optimum arousal theory of extraversion–introversion centered on the idea that extraverts seek arousing situations because extraverts are chronically under-aroused. Meanwhile, introverts seek calm environments because introverts are chronically over-aroused.

Consistent with his theory, extraverts prefer studying in a noisy reading room rather than a quiet room (Campbell & Hawley, 1982). Likewise, extraverts choose a higher level of noise as background noise for a paired association–learning task in the laboratory than introverts (Geen, 1984). Furthermore, extraverts performed the paired association task better with high noise than low noise (Geen, 1984), although the difference between extraverts and introverts appears to be largest with stimuli of moderate intensity, not of extreme intensity (Stelmack & Geen, 1992; see also Revelle, Amaral, & Turriff, 1976). A recent experience sampling study also showed that state extraversion is associated with high-arousal activities such as trying to connect with others, trying to make others laugh, and having fun (McCabe & Fleeson, 2012). Although some studies have not supported some aspects of Eysenck’s optimal arousal theory (e.g., Gray, 1970; Revelle, Humphreys, Simon, & Gilliland, 1980), they do consistently find that extraverts and introverts prefer different types of stimuli in the environment.

In terms of geographical characteristics, we argue that beaches are typically noisier, with more people to watch, talk to, and hang out with than mountains. Thus, Eysenck’s optimal arousal theory would support the hypothesis that extraverts should like the ocean more than introverts, whereas introverts should like mountains more than extraverts. This is because the ocean presents an open area, where people are more easily seen by others, which facilitates socialization. In contrast, mountains offer many secluded places, which facilitate isolation. If these environments fit people’s personality, extraverts should be particularly happy when they are in an open area, whereas introverts should be happier when they are in a secluded area.

1.2. Person–environment fit and happiness

Besides Murray (1938) and Eysenck’s (1967) seminal theories, our hypotheses are based in part on the long tradition of person–environment fit research in personality psychology (e.g., Pervin, 1968; Snyder, 1983). Researchers have theorized that people actively choose environments that afford the expression of their strengths, skills, and values (Holland, 1997; Pervin, 1968; Snyder, 1983). Indeed, one experience sampling study found that

extraverted individuals choose recreational environments more than introverts in their everyday lives (Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984). Furthermore, extraverts feel more positive affect than introverts when they are in social situations and engaged in recreational activities. However, it should be noted that, in this experience sampling study, introverts did not feel more positive affect when alone than extraverts. This is in part because extraverts are generally happier than introverts in most situations (see also Lucas, Le, & Dyrenforth, 2008).

Daily diary studies have found further evidence for person–situation interaction effects on subjective well-being. For instance, a 21-day diary study found that people high in need for affiliation felt more positive affect on days when they had positive interpersonal events, whereas people high in need for achievement felt more positive affect on days when they had positive academic events (Emmons, 1991). Similarly, a 23-day diary study showed that participants with achievement values reported higher daily life satisfaction on days when they were satisfied with their academic lives, whereas people with relationship values reported higher daily life satisfaction on days when they were satisfied with their social relationships (Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999). Many other studies also found important person–situation interaction effects on subjective well-being (e.g., Crocker, Sommers, & Luhtanen, 2002; review: Oishi, 2012).

However, it is important to note that most experience sampling and daily diary studies conducted by personality and social psychologists so far focused on either an immediate social context (e.g., alone, at a party) or life events (e.g., acceptance, rejection). These are micro-situations, settings, or events and not, strictly speaking, objective, physical “environments” like mountains (see Graham, Gosling, and Travis (2015) for a call for this type of research).

One exception is a recent study in which researchers assessed qualities like population density and ethnic diversity in different parts of London (Jokela, Rentfrow, Bleidorn, Lamb, & Gosling, 2015). Consistent with the person–environment fit theory, people high in openness to experience were more satisfied with their lives than people low in openness if they lived in an ethnically diverse, densely populated area. However, agreeable people were more satisfied in the outskirts of London, where diversity is lower. That study showed that fit between personality and objective environment can be positive for well-being.

Besides personality and social psychologists, many organizational psychologists have examined the effect of the fit between individuals and organizations on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. For example, workers whose personal values matched the values of their organizations reported higher job satisfaction than people whose values did not align well with their organizations (Bretz & Judge, 1994; Leung & Chaturvedi, 2011). Similar to person–organization fit, the fit between person and college is associated with positive outcomes. For instance, students whose person–college fit increased over time experienced an increase in self-esteem over time (Roberts & Robins, 2004). Similarly, person–college fit is associated with better academic performance (Harms, Roberts, & Winter, 2006).

In addition, a few studies have investigated how person–culture fit affects subjective well-being. For example, extraverts are happier in extraverted nations than in introverted nations (Fulmer et al., 2010). Likewise, people high in horizontal individualism (e.g., autonomy, uniqueness) were more satisfied with their lives if they lived in individualistic nations than in collectivist nations (Oishi, 2000). These findings suggest that people who have higher person–environment fit have higher subjective well-being.

Despite the long tradition of person–environment fit theory (Pervin, 1968; Walsh, 2006), we are not aware of any person–environment studies that have examined a physical aspect of geographical environments such as mountains and oceans. However,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7326700>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7326700>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)