

Let the sun shine: Exploring explicit and implicit preferences for bright, sunny, and natural environments

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Introduction

Restorative effects of natural views are well established. Views to nature can improve health, vitality, mood, and cognitive performance, as well as reduce stress. Interestingly, similar effects have been found for daylight (Boyce et al., 2003; Partonen & Lönnqvist, 2000). Because exposure to nature and daylight often co-occur (both outdoors and indoors through windows), disentangling the effects of these two determinants is a non-trivial issue. In the present study, we conjointly investigated effects of view content and light on implicit and explicit preferences for environments differing on three dimensions: environment (nature-urban), weather (sunny-cloudy), and lightness (light-dark). Preferences have been linked to restorative potential (Ulrich, 1983; Van den Berg et al., 2003). We expected natural, sunny, and light photos to be preferred over their counterparts, indicating restorative potential of these characteristics.

Method

In three experiments (N=20; 122; 125) we measured both explicit preference and implicit affective evaluation for the different environments. In both experiments, a set of photos was used differing in environment (nature vs. urban), weather type (sunny vs. overcast), and lightness (light vs. dark).

For explicit preference, we asked participants to indicate how [beautiful, pleasant, nice] they rated the environment, and how [attractive, pleasant, positive] it would be spending one hour in the environment (Hartig & Staats, 2003).

Implicit evaluation was tested using an affective priming paradigm (Hietanen & Korpela, 2004). Pictures of the environments were used as primes, after which participants categorized target words as positive or negative.

Results

For explicit preferences, main effects emerged for all three experiments and for all three manipulations, indicating a clear preference for the natural, sunny, and light environments. No significant gender effects were found.

For implicit evaluations, no significant main effects were found for any of the manipulations. One significant interaction effect was found, indicating a significantly faster response to positive than to negative words after a natural prime, but only for females.

Discussion

Participants showed clear preferences for natural, sunny, and light environments when explicitly probed, but we found no proof for rapid affective processing, except for females' evaluation of nature. Findings and their implications will be discussed

References

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