Place-Personality Interactions: From Living Rooms, Cafes, and Bars to Cities, Regions, and Nations

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Different places differ in their psychological, sociological, and demographic features. How do these differences arise, how are they maintained, and how do they affect where people go?

Interactionist theorists in Psychology have long recognized that individuals select and create their social environments (e.g., friendships, social activities) to match and reinforce their dispositions, preferences, attitudes, and self-views. Buss (1987) used the terms *selection*, *evocation*, and *manipulation* to delineate three broad modes of interacting with one's environment. The modes were originally developed in the context of social interactions but they can easily be applied to physical environments to understand the ways in which humans affect the places they occupy. People select existing spaces with features that they believe will allow them to express their personalities and preferences and will allow them to engage in their desired activities—an extravert may go to a busy bar to meet her need for social stimulation whereas an introvert may prefer a quiet café where he can read in peace. People evoke environmental features by engaging in activities that leave material traces in their wake—examples include a messy desk or a diverse collection of books on the shelves. And individuals manipulate their existing spaces; thus, a person may choose décor that reflects a cultural identity, use products to affect the ambient conditions, or alter the arrangement of furniture to facilitate desired activities.

The aim of the present symposium is to examine how these person-place processes play out at different levels of analysis, ranging from interior living spaces to nations.

The sequence of talks starts at the narrowest level of analysis (living spaces) and progresses through broader and broader geographic units of analysis, with the final talk examining differences among nations.

Talk 1 identifies the range of basic ambiances that individuals want to elicit in their spaces and establishes how they are distributed across the rooms of living spaces.

Talk 2 moves up a level to focus on the day-to-day decisions individuals make about which cafes and bars to frequent. Using the establishments' profiles derived from location-aware mobile devices (FourSquare), the research showed that ambiances can be identified purely by viewing the online profiles of individuals who frequent that establishment.

Just as cafes and bars differ in the sorts of people they attract, so too do cities; people make decisions about neighborhoods and cities in which to live and are in turn influenced by those places, resulting in regional psychological differences. Talk 3 broadens the focus to the regional level and shows that there are robust psychological differences among cities and that these differences are linked to a range of important social, economic, political, and health outcomes.

Finally Talk 4 uses the case of nation-level differences in Conscientiousness to address widely voiced criticisms regarding the interpretation of regional differences in personality.

References

Buss, D. M. (1987). Selection, evocation, and manipulation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53,* 1214–1221.

Presentation 1: Identifying and mapping the ambiances desired in different areas of living spaces

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People put a great deal of effort into selecting and decorating their living spaces. However, the reasons why people shape their spaces are not well understood by scientists or even those doing the shaping. One possible function of selecting and decorating a space is to affect the feelings of the occupants and visitors to the space. For example, occupants may want to evoke a feeling of relaxation in their bedroom and of productivity in the kitchen. Here we map an initial topography of the ambiances that people want to elicit in the different rooms within their homes. In Phase I a set of potential ambiances was derived. A list of 25 ambiances (developed by Christopher Travis as an exercise in his architecture practice) was used as a starting point. This list was supplemented with terms derived from extensive written exercises undertaken by 14 of Travis' architecture clients. The exercises were designed to elicit detailed accounts of the desired qualities of built spaces. Each set of materials was coded by 7 coders, resulting in a total of 267 terms. After removing duplicates, commonly used terms were added to Travis' orginal list of 25 ambiances, with 3 existing terms modified and 4 new terms added to yield a final list of 29 ambiances. In Phase II, two hundred participants (70% female; Mean age = 33.8, SD = 12.07) selected up to two emotions (from the final list of 29) that they would like to elicit in 18 spaces (e.g., master bedroom, kitchen) in their ideal home. The most frequently selected emotions across all spaces were welcoming (95% of participants listed it as their first choice for at least one space), organization (85%), and relaxation (70%). However, the desired emotions varied considerably across the rooms. For example, the emotions most frequently sought in the master bedroom were relaxation, rejuvenation, privacy, romance and tranquility while the emotions most frequently sought in the kitchen were organization, family, productivity, abundance, and togetherness. A factor analysis of the ambiances identified five broad dimensions, which we labled, "Restorative" (capturing such ambiances as tranquility, privacy, rejuvenation, relaxation, spirituality, and romance); "Stimulating" (fun, entertaining, joy, excitement); "Casual" (cozy, friendship, disorganized, comfort, not abundant, welcoming, not safe, not wealthy); "Communal" (togetherness, family, sophistication, community, love); and "Self-oriented"(inspirational, quiet, creativity, productivity, self-expressive, not unique). These findings lay the groundwork for future research aimed at understanding how people select, evoke, and manipulate their physical surroundings to regulate emotions in themselves and others.

Presentation 2: Using Foursquare profiles to judge the ambiance of bars and cafes

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Interactionist theories in the social sciences suggest that individuals select, manipulate, and evoke environments to suit their temporary states and chronic traits (Buss, 1987). For example, an introvert looking for a place to study might choose to go to a quiet café rather than a crowded techno club. Finding the appropriate environment requires that spaces express a consistent ambiance and facilitate certain activities. Recently, a number of social networking sites (OSNs; e.g., FourSquare, GoWalla, Facebook's Places, Yelp) have emerged that allow people to record and broadcast their presence at physical locations (e.g., cafes, stores, hotels, business, etc.). Some of the locations have profiles on the OSNs listing the people who frequent that location. The present research examined the

viability of using the lists of frequent patrons to infer the ambiance of the locations. In Study 1, 10 judges independently made ratings of 50 locations (25 bars and 25 cafes) randomly selected from a comprehensive list of eligible venues in Austin, Texas. The ratings were based on the profile pictures of 25 randomly selected persons who, according to FourSquare.com, frequented each target location. Ratings were made on a range of variables tapping ambient physical and psychological qualities (e.g., loud, creepy), typical-patron personalities (e.g., extraverted, disorganized), and likely patron activities (e.g., dancing, reading). Results indicated considerable inter-judge agreement across the attributes rated; intraclass correlations averaged .32 for the ambiance variables, .69 for the typical-patron personalities, and .33 for the likely patron activities. In Study 2, a team of 10 (different) observers visited each target establishment during business hours and independently rated each location in terms of ambient physical and psychological qualities (e.g., loud, creepy), typical-patron personalities (e.g., extraverted, disorganized), and likely patron activities (e.g., dancing, reading). These ratings also showed strong interjudge consensus: intraclass correlations averaged .69 for the ambiance variables, .79 for the typical-patron personalities, and .62 for the likely patron activities. Given the strong consensus, these ratings based on the real location (from Study 2) could serve as a criterion against which to validate the ratings based on the online profiles alone (from Study 1). Correlations between the ratings obtained in Study 1 and Study 2 showed surprisingly strong levels of convergence, with correlations averaging .22 for the ambiance variables, .37 for the typical-patron personalities, and .45 for the likely patron activities. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted at the regional level, which identified clusters of personality types (Rentfrow, Gosling, & Potter, 2008); the findings suggest that the processes played out at regional levels can be found at local levels and are expressed in day-to-day decisions about which establishments to frequent.

Presentation 3: Mapping the personalities of cities

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The cities in which we live are profoundly important to our way of life: Cities are places where individuals come together, fall in love, start families, go to work, worship, and spend their free time. In other words, cities are where the psychology of everyday life unfolds. Curiously, however, psychology has had hardly anything to say about person X city interactions, or how people shape cities and vice versa. This is odd considering that cities differ on so many characteristics known to be linked to psychological factors. For example, some cities are liberal (e.g., San Francisco), some have strong economies (Houston), and some have high crime rates (St. Louis); at the same time, research in psychology suggests that political orientation is linked to Openness, that occupational success is linked to Conscientiousness, and that prosocial behavior is linked to Agreeableness. It is therefore conceivable that such city-level trends reflect, at least in part, the psychological characteristics of the residents. Perhaps San Francisco is liberal because a lot of open people live there; and maybe Houston's economy is vibrant because there are large numbers of conscientious people there. The present research attempts to integrate theory and research in psychology and regional science by examining the personality profiles of cities. Using personality data from large Internet samples, this work examined citywide personality differences in the US. The results showed clear personality differences between cities. For instance, San Francisco, New York, and Austin ranked among the highest cities on Openness, whereas Detroit, Cleveland, and St. Louis ranked near the bottom; Boston, New Orleans, and Pittsburgh were among the highest cities on Neuroticism, whereas Miami, Salt Lake City, and San Diego ranked near the bottom. To determine whether city-level personality is represented at the

geographical level, correlations between city-level personality and various social indicators were examined. The results showed that city-level Openness, for instance, was positively linked to the proportion of gay residents and artists, as well as patent production; and city-level Neuroticism was positively related to mortality rates. Taken together, these results suggest that some personality traits are concentrated in certain cities and that the links between personality and behavior emerge at broad regional levels.

Presentation 4: Validity of culture-level mean scores

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The validity of national mean scores of self- and other-reported personality traits has been seriously questioned since sometimes they are paradoxically correlated with various country-level behavioral and demographic indicators and some country rankings of the mean scores look strikingly counterintuitive. In this report I try to identify and overcome a series of theoretical and methodological issues, allowing thereby for more informed conclusion on the validity problem. The main focus is on Conscientiousness, the most controversial personality trait in cross-cultural comparisons. Compared to previous research, more rigorous requirements for the study of the predictor-criterion relationships were formulated and followed. Based on two large cross-cultural databases on personality, the mean Conscientiousness scores were significantly related to most of the criteria but, importantly, the relationships differed largely across facets of the broad Conscientiousness domain. In another study involving samples from 21 different countries from around the world we used the anchoring vignettes method to identify different cultural standards for Conscientiousness. Controlling for the differences in standards did not substantially change neither the rankings of samples on mean self-ratings nor the predictive validities of these rankings for objective criteria. The findings thus lend little support to mean self-rated Conscientiousness scores being influenced by culture-specific standards.

Presentation 5: Discussant

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