Are There Individual Differences in Social Interest During Visualization?

J. Heutmaker, C. von Karolyi, & A. Collier

Department of Psychology ❖ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

When using visualization to improve a terrible mood…

H_1: Females compared to males are more likely to include people in their visualizations and to imagine people they know.

H_2: Extroverts compared to introverts are more likely to include people in their visualizations and to imagine people they know.

Introduction

• **Both personality and gender differences are found in social interest and response to social interaction.**

• **Extrovert and Introverts differ in social response**

For example, compared to introverts, extroverts react more positively in social situations and rate social situations as more pleasant (Lucas, 2001).

• **Females and males differ in social response**

For example, compared to males, females are more likely to seek out emotional social support (Day & Livingstone, 2003) and are more affected by their social interactions (Bellman et al, 2003). They seek out social support intentionally to improve their state of mind (Kelly et al, 2007) and benefit more from social support than do males (Hughes, 2007). Whereas females benefit from social support when coping with stress, social support actually creates more stress for males (Hughes).

• **Females and males differ in the use of visualization or imagery.**

For example, females are better able to engage in self hypnotic imagery when compared to males (Lombard, 2007).

• **Extrovert and Introverts differ in the use of visualization or imagery.**

For example, extroverts, when compared to introverts, were more able to employ self hypnotic imagery (Lombard, 1990).

Given that both the effects of real-world social interactions and the use of visualization differ by gender and personality, we wondered whether differences would also be found for imagined or visualized social interactions.

We, therefore hypothesized that, to improve a terrible mood, females and extroverts will imagine familiar people present in their visualizations more so than do males and introverts.

Method

Participants

Our participants were undergraduates enrolled in Psychology courses at a Midwest university (n=91). The sample was disproportionally female (n = 74, 81.1%), with males making up only 18.9% (n = 17) of the sample. Our sample was a subset of a pool of 158 participants engaged in a larger study. They were selected because they reported that they had used visualization techniques to improve a terrible mood in the past.
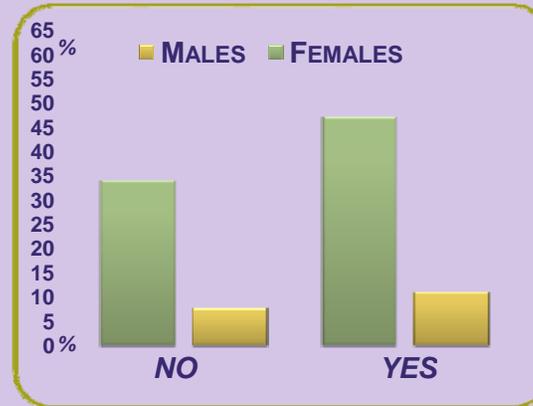
Which Visualizers Imagine People?
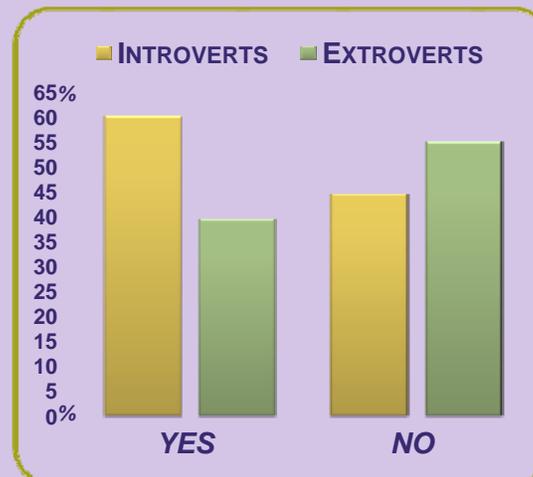
Procedure

Responding to an online survey, participants reported their (a) gender, (b) use of visualization to improve a terrible mood, and (c) social interest, in terms of whether they include other people in their visualizations, and (d) whether they knew the people they visualized. They then responded to the questions from the Extroversion Factor of a Big Five personality measure.

Results

Of the 91 *visualizers* (participants who reported using visualizations to change a terrible mood), 53 (58.2%) reported they imagined people. Of these, 60.4% were introverts and 39.6% were extroverts.

Although the difference was not significant, Chi Square analysis revealed a non significant trend for introverts to be more likely than extroverts to imagine people in their visualizations [$\chi^2(1, n = 91) = 2.179$, $p(1\text{-}tailed) = .103$].

Over 90% of the visualizers reported that the people they imagined were familiar to them. Introverts and extroverts did not differ on this measure. **No gender differences were found.**

Discussion

H_1: **Contrary to our first hypothesis, we found no gender differences in social interest during visualization.**

H_2: **Contrary to our second hypothesis, we also found no personality differences in social interest during visualization when comparing introverts and extroverts.**

There was, however, a tendency for introverts to imagine people in their visualizations more so than extroverts. The literature reveals both gender differences and differences between introverts and extroverts in social interest in real world interactions. Perhaps such interest does not differ when imagining or visualizing interactions rather than engaging in them in the real world.

It may be that females and extroverts are more likely to have their social needs met in real life; whereas males and introverts might not. Maybe visualization is how the latter can satisfy their social needs without participating in real life interactions.

Visualization techniques are frequently used during therapy. If future research confirms differences in imagined and real social interest, therapists might find it helpful to differentiate their guidance of visualizations according to the gender and personality of their clients.

Our finding that, compared to their counterparts, neither males nor introverts revealed lower levels of social interest in their visualizations, but are regularly found to do so in the real-world is suggestive and provides a potentially fertile direction for future research.

References

Please see the references handout