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Cultural Influences on Time Pressure in the U.S. and Taiwan

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Abstract

In this study, we investigated differences in walking speeds in Des Moines, Iowa, and Taipei, Taiwan. We also examined differences by location—an outdoor shopping area vs. downtown—time of day, day of week, gender, and age. Men walked faster than women, and younger people walked faster than middle age, or older people, regardless of country. There was no difference in pace by day of week. Controlling for gender and age, people walked faster downtown than in shopping areas, but there were no differences in pace by country.

Introduction

For centuries, time has been an essential factor in everyday life, yet the interpretation and measurement of time has not always stayed consistent. Changing perceptions of time have an impact on people across cultures on a societal and individual level. The pace at which people live corresponds to their perceptions of the importance of measurable time.

Individualism and collectivism are cultural factors that affect time pressure. People in more individualist countries (which put an emphasis on the self vs. the group) and more economically developed countries tend to be more conscious of time than those in more collectivist or less developed countries (Levine & Bartlett, 1984). In a multicultural observational study, Levine and Norenzayan (1999) found that pedestrians in New York City walked more quickly down a sidewalk than people in Taipei, Taiwan, a more collectivistic country.

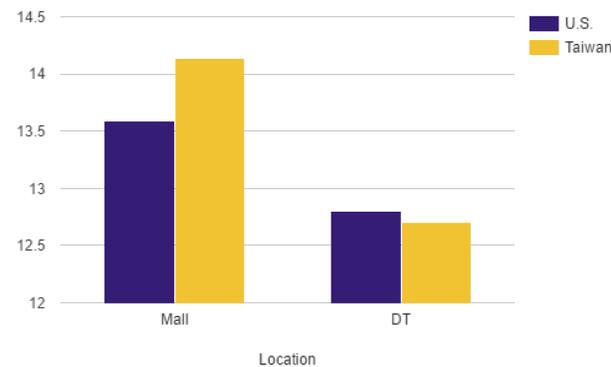
This study compared walking speed in a smaller city, Des Moines, Iowa, in the U.S. and a larger city in Taipei, Taiwan. We also investigated whether location, day of week, age, gender, ethnicity, and time of day had an effect on walking speed.

Method

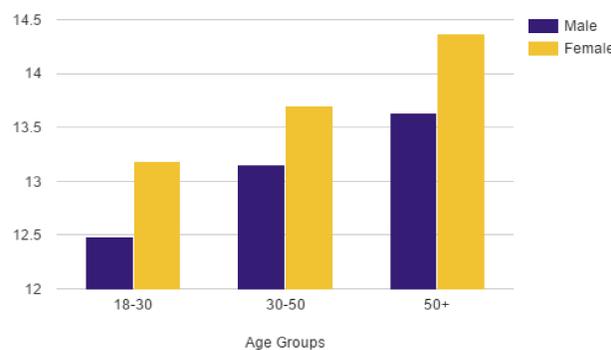
- Participants were pedestrians walking in public areas outside a mall and downtown area in Des Moines, Iowa, and Taipei, Taiwan, chosen by convenience sampling through naturalistic observation.
- Participants were timed walking 60 ft using an iPhone stopwatch. Observations were made at:
 - Local malls (Jordan Creek Mall in Des Moines and Bellavita mall in Taipei)
 - Downtown areas (801 Grand in Des Moines and Taipei 101 in Taipei)
 - On a Monday and Friday
 - During business hours at 12pm and 5pm
- Weather was also recorded.

Pedestrians	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
United States	18-30: 95	Female: 153	White: 201
	30-50: 94	Male: 102	African-American: 9
	50+: 66		Hispanic: 13
Taiwan	18-30: 141	Female: 144	Asian: 20
	30-50: 110	Male: 186	Undetectable: 12
	50+: 79		White: 10
			Black: 1
		Hispanic: 0	
			Asian: 315
			Undetectable: 4

Walking Pace in Seconds by Country and Location



Walking Pace in Seconds by Gender and Age



References

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Results

- Pedestrians ages 18 to 30 walked at the fastest pace on average at 12.879 seconds ($SD=2.502$), whereas those in age group 30 to 50 on average walked at 13.408 seconds ($SD=2.753$), and those 50 years old and older walked at 13.983 seconds ($SD=3.205$), $F(2, 582) = 7.20, p = .001, \eta^2 = .02$.
- Gender affected walking speeds, with women walking at a slower pace ($M = 13.626, SD = 2.945$) than men ($M = 13.0391, SD = 2.625$), $F(1, 583) = 6.45, p = .01, \eta^2 = .01$.
- There was no difference in pace by day of week: Monday ($M=13.525, SD=3.040$) vs. Friday ($M=13.142, SD=2.535$), $F(1, 584) = 2.72, p = .100, \eta^2 = .02$.
- Controlling for gender and age, people downtown ($M=12.744, SD=2.513$) walked faster than those in shopping areas ($M=13.905, SD=2.955$), $F(1, 579) = 25.88, p < .001, \eta^2 = .04$.
- There was no significant difference in pace by country: U.S. ($M=13.124, SD=.170$) vs. Taiwan ($M=13.501, SD=.149$), $F(1,584) = 2.74, p=.099, \eta^2 = .08$.

Discussion

Overall, there was no significant difference in walking pace by country in the U.S. and Taiwan. Although there were no differences, the speeds of walking paces recorded in the Taiwan and U.S. samples in this study were similar to those in a previous study on pace of life in 31 countries (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). A difference in this study's results could be due to the possible increase in industrialization over the years since the previous study creating a smaller walking pace gap between the U.S. and Taiwan.

When controlling for gender and age, people at the mall locations of both countries walked slower than those in the downtown areas of both countries, women walked slower than men, and older people walked slower than middle aged and younger people. Women tend to be involved in more collectivistic social roles on average (Cuddy et al., 2015), and people in mall areas tend to be more relaxed and involved in recreational activities. People in downtown areas may be under pressure running errands or involved in business matters.

Recording walking speeds myself by hand may have introduced error (see Doyen, Klein, Pichon, & Cleeremans, 2012); future research should use automated timers if possible.

We found no significant differences in walking pace by country, but when controlling for gender and age in both countries, women in mall areas tended to walk slower overall.