

Thrill and adventure seekers: affective organization of personal meaning of extreme weather

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Abstract: The aim of the article is the analysis of the personal meaning of extreme weather among a Thrill and Adventure Seekers. There are two affective motives, which play an important role in the analysis of personal meaning of extreme weather: (1) the striving for self-enhancement, (2) the longing for the unification with nature. Furthermore, the process of meaning construction can be examined on the basis of two types of emotions: positive and negative ones. In the research on the personal meaning of extreme weather a modified version of H. Herman's Self-Confrontation method and the Thrill and Adventure Seeking Scale of M. Zuckerman's were used. 130 students ($M = 20.40$; $SD = 1.5$) were asked about personal experiences concerning the elements of nature: the thunderstorm, the fog, the heavy rain, the strong wind and the snowstorm. The results have indicated that a Thrill and Adventure Seekers in contact with severe weather conditions tend to reveal: score higher on the level of desire for self-enhancement, the level of positive emotions or the level of the longing for the unification with nature and score lower on the level of negative emotions than controls.

Keywords: Risk Taking, Sensation Seeking, Valuation Theory, Weather

1. Introduction

Nature offers - from biological point of view - food, water or many drugs (Parsons & Daniel, 2002). Also psychological benefits are very important: the possibility of experiencing the beauty of nature, the opportunity to learn, discovering and exploring of the nature or so simply - nature is source of relaxation (Van den Berg, Koole & Van der Wulp, 2003).

Nature also gives the opportunity to experience the exciting and terrifying moments of own life. Among nature man has the opportunity to knowing own strengths and limitations. Particularly difficult or even extreme weather conditions seem to favor surviving adventures, which in everyday life are impossible. In contact with a wild nature: hurricane wind, rain, snow storm are "waking up" mechanisms that in daily life remain in "sleeps". Many people are avoiding such situations but some of them are looking for challenges in wilderness - they have high score on sensation seeking trait. (Zuckerman, 1994).

Sensation seeking trait has been defined as "seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience"

(Zuckerman, 1994, p. 27). Sensation seeking trait can be measured via standard self-report questionnaires. This trait can be partitioned into four dimensions: thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), experience seeking (ES), disinhibition (Dis), boredom susceptibility (BS), and total sensation seeking (total SSS) (Zuckerman 1994). Particularly dimension thrill and adventure seeking has shown it is associated with exploration of wilderness. Adventurers love the thrill of risk and engage in high-risk activities in wilderness, such as: climbing or kayaking (Jack & Ronan, 1998).

The one of most important factors of wilderness is extreme weather. Phenomena such as intense heat and strong cold, high winds and very low or high atmospheric pressure are the core of wild nature. Such aspects of weather may induce strong emotions: fear, anger, anxiety or trouble (Denissen, *et al.*, 2008).

Phenomena of severe weather pressure create challenging situations for people. As such, the question of how humans cope in these circumstances would appear to be an intriguing one. Surprisingly though, the research in this has not focused on the individual traits which regulate people's assessments of severe weather conditions. In this article affective organization of personal meaning of severe

weather conditions among a thrill and adventure seekers will be analyzed.

The base of affective organization of personal meaning is theory proposed by Hubert Hermans (Hermans & Hermans, 1995).

2. Valuation Theory

Inspired by the works of James (1980) and Merleau-Ponty (1945) Hermans developed Valuation Theory as a framework for the study of personal experience (Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). The theory describes the self as an organized process of valuation. The process implies a spatio-temporal perspective. The individual orients to past and future from a present situation. Three perspectives (past, present, future) create formal structure of a experience. In these structure experiences are organized: the some experiences are more important than other. The individual has the capacity for self-reflection and organizes these experiences as a part of a system of personal meanings.

The core of Valuation Theory is the concept of valuation (Hermans & Oleś, 1996). Hermans and Hermans-Jansen (1995) describe a valuation as “any unit of meaning that has a positive (pleasant), negative (unpleasant), or ambivalent (both pleasant and unpleasant) value in the eyes of the individual” (p. 248). Personal valuations are subjective constructions. During different periods of one’s life some valuations are accorded a more important than other because the individual’s reference point is changing. The Valuation Theory emphasizes the unique way each person organizes life experience.

Each valuation includes a specific pattern of affect – in situation when people value an experience; they feel something in relation to that experience. When we know which feelings evoke valuation, we know something about the valuation itself. This also implies that the affective pattern is connected with each valuation.

Hermans distinguished two basic affective motives into consideration to characterize the valuation system: the striving for self-enhancement (S Motive) and the longing for contact and union with surrounding world (O motive). Each valuation can have positive connotation (P) and negative connotation (N). In other words - each valuation includes four basic indices: Index P is the sum of the positive affect terms. Index N is the sum of the negative affect terms; Index S is the sum of the rating scores of the affect terms relating to self-enhancement. Index O is the sum of the rating scores of the affect terms that signify contact or union with others (Hermans & Oleś, 1999). (See *Materials*).

The Self Confrontation Method was developed as a means to assess a person’s valuations (Oleś, 1992).

The purpose of this study is the analysis of affective organizations of personal meaning of extreme weather conditions: a thunderstorm, a heavy wind, a fog, a strong rain or a snowstorm among the Thrill and Adventure seekers. The first question refers to the affective component

of the elements of severe weather conditions. Do different elements correspond with different affective experiences? For a thunderstorm I expect more N affect and low P affect than the fog, the heavy rain and the strong wind

The second question deals with the affective organizations of personal meaning of extreme weather among the Thrill and Adventure seekers and the Thrill and Adventure avoiders. I expect higher score on P, S and O affect in group of the Thrill and Adventure Seekers and lower score on N affect in the Thrill and Adventure Seekers than in the avoiders group.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 130 Polish students ($M = 20.40$; $SD = 1.5$). (63 women and 67 men). The research was conducted at the Pomeranian University in Slupsk (Poland). All the subjects had taken the National Security course.

3.2. Materials

3.2.1. Thrill and Adventure Seeking Scale

The Polish adaptation of the 4th version of the Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) by Marvin Zuckerman, provided by Zofia Oleszkiewicz-Zsurs (1986) was used. The Polish version consists of 68 items making 6 scales: general tendency of sensation seeking (G), thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), experience seeking (ES), disinhibition (DIS), boredom susceptibility (BS), intellectual stimulation requirement – (I). The respondents have to choose one out of two opposite statements. For each diagnostic answer, one point is given. In this study used only Thrill and Adventure Seeking Scale.

3.2.2. The Self Confrontation Method

The Self – Confrontation Method was used in polish adaptation of Oleś (1992). The Self – Confrontation Method based on valuation theory, has been devised to asses a valuations with attention to the affective properties of these valuations (Hermans & Oleś, 1999). Original version of The Self-Confrontation Method consists of two parts: the construction of valuation and the connection of valuations with a standard affect terms.

In this study each participant has got the list of extreme weather elements (these elements were treated as valuations). List of elements contains five elements of extreme weather: thunderstorm, fog, heavy rain, strong wind snowstorm.

Concentrating on a list elements of extreme weather subjects are asked to indicate on a scale of never (0) - rare (1) usually (2) – always (3) to what extent they experience each affect in connection with the particular elements of severe weather conditions.

List of affects used in this study consisted of 16 feelings: Index P: Joy, Satisfaction, Enjoyment, Happiness; Index N: Anxiety, Fear, Unhappiness, Worry; Index S: Power,

Energy, Proud, Strength; Index O: Feeling unity with nature, Feeling of being of part of nature, Feeling of beauty of nature, Intimacy with nature (feelings in index O were specially adopted to this study).

4. Results

Step one was to compare the affective indexes of elements of severe weather conditions. See table 1.

Table 1. Affect indexes and element of extreme weather. One-way analysis of variance.

INDEXES	Thunderstorm (a)		Fog (b)		Heavy rain (c)		Strong wind (d)		Snowstorm (e)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
P	1.71	.95	.087	1.08	1.10	1.18	.87	1.23	1.35	1.15	4.30	a-b**,a-d*,b-e**, d-e**
N	1.49	.83	.89	.97	1.04	1.10	1.44	.93	1.08	1.01	9.46	a-b**,a-c**, a-e**,b-d**, c-d**
S	1.18	.89	.92	1.10	1.03	1.13	1.02	1.16	1.10	1.11	.98	a-b*,d-e**
O	1.32	.96	.99	.96	1.11	1.07	.94	1.07	1.28	1.08	3.31	a-b*,a-d**,b-e*, d-e*

*p<.05; **p<.01

The strongest feelings (both positive and negative feelings and affective motives) induce the thunderstorm. The hypothesis was thus confirmed. The fog evokes relatively weak feelings in context of other elements of severe weather. Surprisingly, weakest differences between elements of nature exist in S motive. Conversely, index N is mostly differentiated by elements of bad weather.

Step two was to distinguish the Thrill and Adventure seekers and the avoiders' students. The criterion for this was a low or overhead quartile score on the scale established for the Thrill and Adventure Seeking Scale, where a low quartile score identified the avoiders respondents (N= 33) and the overhead quartile, the seekers ones (N = 33).

The results of affective organization of personal meanings of elements of extreme weather in the groups of avoiders and seekers, respectively, are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Affect indexes among Avoiders and the Thrill and Adventure Seekers. Student t test.

Indexes	Avoiders group		Seekers group		t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
P	.70	1.08	1.67	1.17	8.23	.01	.85
N	1.12	.95	1.35	1.19	1.98	.05	.20
S	.73	1.03	1.59	1.18	7.44	.01	.77
O	.87	1.14	1.65	1.11	6.73	.01	.70

The Thrill and Adventure seekers have scored higher on P index, S index and O index and have scored lower on N index than the avoiders' seekers.

Next step analyzed simultaneous influence of variables - elements of severe weather and thrill and adventure seekers on four feelings indexes. Analysis of variance not revealed statistical dependences.

4.1. Multivariate Analysis

A discriminate function analysis (DFA) was used to assess the capacity of variables for the prediction of the avoiders and seekers. The variables for the group

differences were included in the discriminate function analysis. The variables were: Index P, Index N, Index S, Index O.

One significant function was identified, with an eigenvalue of .19 and a canonical correlation of .40,

$\chi^2(4) = 65.75, p < .01$. Classification results indicate that 77 % of the group valuations were correctly classified, this being 79.45% the avoiders and 74.50% of the seekers.

5. Discussion

Thrill and Adventure seekers have scored higher on P index, S index and O index than the avoider's seekers.

Higher score on P index in adventurers group can be discussed from theory of Marvin Zuckerman (1994). M. Zuckerman distinguished people who prefer a strong stimulation that manifests a greater desire for sensations and there are those who prefer a low sensory stimulation. High sensation seekers tend to seek high levels of stimulation. Probably, extreme weather may satisfy the need for stimulation in group of sensation seekers. To them, wild nature and unpredicted weather are a place for experiencing adventure. Thrill and adventure seekers thus maintain a positive attitude toward new events which demand risk taking, perceiving them as a source of pleasant stimulation. They enjoy effort and physical activity in bad weather conditions and their values are those involving an exciting life and achievements.

It would appear that the results obtained in this study can be interpreted in the context of Michael Apter's theory (1984). Apter distinguished two basic states: the telic and the paratelic. With the telic state, the person is serious-minded, planning-oriented and seeks to avoid arousal. With the paratelic state, the individual is playful, prefers being spontaneous and favors a high level of arousal. Thrill and adventure seeking more often prefer the paratelic state.

Thrill and Adventure seekers have scored higher on S index than the avoiders seekers. The hypothesis was thus confirmed. S index expresses power, proud or looking for challenges. This result indicates that the characteristics for

Thrill and Adventure seekers are self-confidence, low emotional reactivity, strong even in rigorous circumstances. Probably their S motive for confronting severe weather arises from biological predisposition and expresses strong nervous system. For seekers group confrontation with the elements is a challenge. For avoiders group, confrontation with the elements is a danger rather than a challenge.

It would appear that the results obtained in this study can be interpreted in the context of Aron Antonovsky theory. Antonovsky introduced new notion - Sense of Coherence (SOC). The SOC is defined as: "a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environment's in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement" (Antonovsky, 1987, p.19). This notion is similar to the S index in theory of Hermans. From this perspective - the Thrill and Adventure seekers tend to believe that good things happen to them for a reason and those pleasant things will continue to them overtime (Antonovsky, 1987). They also perceive that resources are at one's disposal which is adequate to meet the - demands posed by the stimuli that bombard sensation seekers in extreme weather situations. High S index means that the Thrill and Adventure seekers have to show an emotional involvement and feel strongly about some unsafe situation in contact with severe weather conditions.

High S index can be interpreted from theory of Susan Kobasa. Kobasa (1982) introduced the concept of psychological hardiness. The hardiness moderates the relationship between stressful life events and health. Kobasa characterized hardiness as being included of three components: (a) *a commitment to oneself and job*, (b) *a sense of personal control* and (c) *a challenge*. Individuals high in hardiness are able to withstand the negative effects of life stressors. Life stressors are treated as an opportunity for growth rather than as a threat. In this context - S index among the Thrill and Adventure seekers is indicator of psychological hardiness. The Adventurous people not avoid elements of nature (*commitment*), believe that they can control behavior in severe weather conditions (*control*) and treat extreme weather as a challenge (*challenge*).

It is difficult to interpret score on O index. Group of the Thrill and Adventure seekers scored higher on O index than the avoiders group. Interpretation of this difference is difficult to explain. O index expresses and the longing for contact and union with surrounding world. In this context - the Thrill and Adventure seekers have are high score on connectedness to nature. Connectedness to nature has been described by Schultz (2002, p. 67) as 'the extent to which an individual includes nature within his/her cognitive representation of self'. The connection to nature is an important predictor of ecological behavior and subjective wellbeing. It means that the Thrill and Adventure seekers

treat nature as a valid part of own self and experience life satisfaction.

The results obtained show that there next index which distinguishes the Thrill and Adventure Seekers from the control group - N index. This result means that elements of extreme weather evoke lower negative feeling among two groups of the respondents. The group of the Thrill and Adventure Seekers reveals higher score on P index and lower score on N index than the avoiders seeking group. The hypothesis was thus confirmed. It means that the experience of anxiety or terror in contact with elements of nature is lower in sensation seekers group.

6. Conclusion

In summary, compared to the avoiders group, the Thrill and Adventure seekers have a positive attitude toward extreme weather conditions and perceiving them as a source of pleasant stimulation.

For seekers group confrontation with the elements is a challenge. They feel that nature is a part their psychological world and it induces lower negative emotions than in the Thrill and Adventure avoiders group.

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