

Does your community have a personality type?

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In Palm Beach and Broward counties, the proportions of open and conscientious people are roughly the same, according to a new typological approach that reveals more substantial effects than traditional approaches. Credit: Florida Atlantic University

Geographic sorting along ideological lines is on the rise. Counties and

regions of the United States differ in political ideology. But do they differ in personality as well? Further, are people who 'fit' their communities healthier, happier, or more highly achieving than those who do not?

In the context of these growing divisions and to address this question, a study by Florida Atlantic University's Kevin Lanning, Ph.D., senior author and a professor of psychology and [data science](#) in the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College on FAU's John D. MacArthur Campus in Jupiter, and collaborators used data from the Synthetic Aperture Personality Assessment to investigate the impact of person-community fit on education, health and well-being.

First, they assessed fit using the traditional methods of response surface analysis and profile similarity. However, in each of these approaches, scores for individuals are typically compared with community averages, raising interpretive challenges because there is inevitably greater variability among individuals than there is among communities.

As such, Lanning and his research team introduced a novel approach to conceptualizing person-community fit, predicated on the idea that communities, like persons, are diverse and can include multiple environmental niches.

In these analyses, researchers illustrate this idea with a simple typology, one in which they assign people to types based on their single-most extreme score across the set of the big five traits: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

For example, an 'extraverted' type is someone for whom the average response across the extraversion items is positive and relatively more extreme than that for any of the remaining traits; similarly, a 'stable' type

is someone whose most extreme average response was low in neuroticism. Communities were then described in terms of the percentage of people in each of the types.

Results of the study, published in the journal [*Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology*](#), showed that whereas traditional approaches have typically found only modest personality differences between communities, the new typological approach revealed more substantial effects. For example, the percentage of open-minded people in Manhattan is roughly twice that of people in Detroit, while those in Detroit are twice as likely as Manhattanites to be classified as conscientious.

In Palm Beach and Broward counties, the proportions of open and conscientious people are roughly the same. Among counties with more than 500 respondents, Bexar County, San Antonio had the highest proportion of agreeable people, while Manhattan had the highest proportion of open persons, but the lowest proportion of people who were agreeable or conscientious.

"It's important to note that when comparing different counties, small counties are inevitably more likely to show up at the extremes. In addition, our sample is unlikely to be representative of most counties. For both of these reasons, comparisons between individual counties should be made with caution," said Lanning.

Lanning's team also found some support for the claim that people whose personalities match many others in the community are happier (higher in well-being), more likely to engage in healthful behaviors, and attain higher levels of schooling relative to their parents.

In short, communities are diverse in terms of personality as well as demographics, and having like-minded people in one's community is

associated with positive outcomes.

"Just as the ethnic character of a community can be described by proportions of different ethnic groups, the psychological character of a community may, perhaps, best be understood by a set of proportions of psychological types," said Lanning. "To the extent that communities are diverse, people can 'fit' in multiple ways. One way to capture this idea is by describing both persons and communities in terms of types."

More information: Kevin Lanning et al, On person-community fit: Trait-, person-, and type-based approaches to measurement, *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.cresp.2024.100180](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2024.100180)

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