



A review of Environmental psychology and its Orientations

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Abstract

Environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the interplay between individuals and their surroundings. It examines the way in which the natural environment and our built environments shape us as individuals. The field defines the term environment broadly, encompassing natural environments, social settings, built environments, learning environments, and informational environments. Although "environmental psychology" is arguably the best-known and most comprehensive description of the field, it is also known as human Factors science, cognitive ergonomics, ecological psychology, ecopsychology, environment–behavior studies, and person–environment studies. Closely related fields include architectural psychology, socio-architecture, behavioural geography, environmental sociology, social ecology.

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Introduction

Environmental psychology was not fully recognized as its own field until the late 1960s when scientists began to question the tie between human behavior and our natural and built environments. Since its conception, the field has been committed to the development of a discipline that is both value oriented and problem oriented, prioritizing research aimed at solving complex environmental problems in the pursuit of individual well-being within a larger society. When solving problems involving human-environment interactions, whether global or local, one must have a model of human nature that predicts the environmental conditions under which humans will respond well. This model can help design, manage, protect and/or restore environments that enhance reasonable behavior, predict the likely outcomes when these conditions are not met, and diagnose problem situations. The field develops such a model of human nature while retaining a broad and inherently multidisciplinary focus. It explores such dissimilar issues as common property resource



management, way finding in complex settings, the effect of environmental stress on human performance, the characteristics of restorative environments, human information processing, and the promotion of durable conservation behavior. Lately, alongside the increased focus on climate change in society and the social sciences and the re-emergence of limits-to-growth concerns, there has been increased focus on environmental sustainability issues within the field.

This multidisciplinary paradigm has not only characterized the dynamic for which environmental psychology is expected to develop. It has also been the catalyst in attracting other schools of knowledge in its pursuit, aside from research psychologists. Geographers, economists, landscape architects, policy-makers, sociologists, anthropologists, educators, and product developers all have discovered and participated in this field.

History

The origins of this field of study are unknown, however, Willy Hellpach is said to be the first to mention "environmental psychology". One of his books, *Geopsyche*, discusses topics such as how the sun and the moon affect human activity, the impact of extreme environments, and the effects of color and form. Among the other major scholars at the roots of environmental psychology were Jakob von Uexküll, Kurt Lewin, Egon Brunswik, and later Gerhard Kaminski and Carl Friedrich Graumann.

The end of World War II brought about a higher demand for developments in the field of social psychology particularly in the areas of attitude change, small group processes, and intergroup conflict. This demand caused psychologists to begin applying social psychology theories to a number of social issues such as prejudice, war, and peace. It was thought that if these problems were addressed, underlying notions and principles would surface.

Although this period was crucial to the development of the field, the methodologies used to carry out some of the studies were controversial and explored challenging aspects of human behaviour. At the time, studies were being conducted in a laboratory setting, which caused some doubt as to their validity in the real world. Consequently, environmental psychologists began to conduct studies outside of the laboratory, enabling the field to continue to progress. Today environmental psychology is being applied to many different areas such as architecture and design, television programs and advertisements.



Orientations

- **Problem oriented**

Environmental psychology is a direct study of the relationship between an environment and how that environment affects its inhabitants. Specific aspects of this field work by identifying a problem and through the identification of said problem, discovering a solution. Therefore, it is necessary for environmental psychology to be problem oriented.

One important aspect of a problem-oriented field is that by identifying problems, solutions arise from the research acquired. The solutions can aid in making society function better as a whole and create a wealth of knowledge about the inner workings of societies. Environmental psychologist Harold Proshansky discusses how the field is also "value oriented" because of the field's commitment to bettering society through problem identification. Panyang discusses the importance of not only understanding the problem but also the necessity of a solution. Proshansky also points out some of the problems of a problem-oriented approach for environmental psychology. First the problems being identified must be studied under certain specifications: it must be ongoing and occurring in real life, not in a laboratory. Second, the notions about the problems must derive directly from the source – meaning they must come directly from the specific environment where the problem is occurring. The solutions and understanding of the problems cannot come from an environment that has been constructed and modelled to look like real life. Environmental psychology needs to reflect the actual society not a society built in a laboratory setting. The difficult task of the environmental psychologist is to study problems as they are occurring in everyday life. It is hard to reject all laboratory research because laboratory experiments are where theories may be tested without damaging the actual environment or can serve as models when testing solutions. Proshansky makes this point as well, discussing the difficulty in the overall problem oriented approach. He states that it is important, however, for the environmental psychologist to utilize all aspects of research and analysis of the findings and to take into account both the general and individualized aspects of the problems.

- **Systems oriented**

The systems oriented approach to experimenting is applied to individuals or people that are a part of communities, groups, and organizations. This approach particularly examines group



interaction, as opposed to an individual's interaction and it emphasizes on factors of social integration. In the laboratory, experiments focus on cause and effect processes within human nature.

- **Interdisciplinary oriented**

Environmental psychology relies on interaction with other disciplines in order to approach problems with multiple perspectives. The first discipline is the category of behavioural sciences, which include: sociology, political science, anthropology, and economics. Environmental psychology also interacts with the interspecializations of the field of psychology, which include: developmental psychology, cognitive science, industrial and organizational psychology, psychobiology, psychoanalysis, and social neuroscience. In addition to the more scientific fields of study, environmental psychology also works with the design field which includes: the studies of architecture, interior design, urban planning, industrial and object design, landscape architecture, and preservation.

- **Space-over-time orientation**

Space over time orientation highlights the importance of the past. Examining problems with the past in mind creates a better understanding of how past forces, such as social, political, and economic forces, may be of relevance to present and future problems. Time and place are also important to consider. It's important to look at time over extended periods. Physical settings change over time; they change with respect to physical properties and they change because individuals using the space change over time. Looking at these spaces over time will help monitor the changes and possibly predict future problems. There are a variety of tests that can be administered to children in order to determine their temperament. Temperament is split up into three types: "easy", "difficult", and "slow-to-warm-up". Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess, Herbert G. Birch, Margaret Hertzog and Sam Korn created an infant temperament test in the 1950s and rated them using nine temperament criteria. By finding out a child's temperament at birth, it enables us to know what to expect as the child progresses into adulthood.

Challenges

The field saw significant research findings and a fair surge of interest in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but has seen challenges of nomenclature, obtaining objective and repeatable



results, scope, and the fact that some research rests on underlying assumptions about human perception, which is not fully understood. Being an interdisciplinary field is difficult because it lacks a solid definition and purpose. It is hard for the field to fit into organizational structures. In the words of Guido Francesca to, speaking in 2000, environmental psychology encompasses a "somewhat bewildering array of disparate methodologies, conceptual orientations, and interpretations making it difficult to delineate, with any degree of precision, just what the field is all about and what might it contribute to the construction of society and the unfolding of history."

Environmental psychology has not received nearly enough supporters to be considered an interdisciplinary field within psychology. Harold M. Proshansky was one of the founders of environmental psychology and was quoted as saying "As I look at the field of environmental psychology today, I am concerned about its future. It has not, since its emergence in the early 1960s grown to the point where it can match the fields of social, personality, learning or cognitive psychology. To be sure, it has increased in membership, in the number of journals devoted to it, and even in the amount of professional organizational support it enjoys, but not enough so that one could look at any major university and find it to be a field of specialization in a department of psychology, or, more importantly, in an interdisciplinary center or institute"

Conclusion

The environment in which we live influences people's lives in many ways, but reciprocally this environment is also a product of human activities. Environmental psychology studies the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment. Traditionally, environmental psychology has focused primarily on studying the negative impacts of the environment on humans and the negative impacts of humans on the environment. The continuing trend towards integrative models and approaches is clearly illustrated in the chapters on urban environmental quality, place attachment, and quality of life. The chapter discusses three major challenges that apply to the field as a whole. These challenges address the need for further integration, further development of theories and models, and further engagement of environmental psychologists with environmental problems.

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