Environmental Psychology

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Introduction

The conceptual framework of environmental psychology developed in the work of the founders of psychology in the 19th century, but only formed as its own area of research in the 1960s. Environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary field that examines the interplay, interrelationships, and transactions between humans and their physical surroundings, including built and natural environments. Rather than a specific branch or specialized sub-discipline of psychology, environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary social science which draws from geography, anthropology, sociology, public policy, education, architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, education, and psychology, especially social and developmental psychology. Environmental psychology is also known as environmental social science or environmental behavior among other monikers. The field of environmental psychology consistently pushes the boundaries of mainstream psychology in its call to account for contextual factors beyond human behavior, perception, and cognition only. It continues to act a key contributor to work on critical psychology through its use and development of interdisciplinary research related to real world issues.

Definition

Environmental psychology is the study of how people relate to and define their sense of space and place, and how space and place relate to and define people. Beyond the most commonly used environmental psychology, other terms or versions of the field include environmental social science, environmental behavior, ecological psychology, ecopsychology, environmental sociology, urban anthropology, behavioral geography, psychogeography, human factors science, cognitive ergonomics, architectural psychology, socio-architecture, environment and behavior studies, human-environment relations, person-environment studies, social ecology, and environmental design research. First formerly articulated in the work of Lefebvre (1973) and Harvey (1973, 2009), the field has always extolled theoretical views that see space as produced in the way it is perceived, conceived, and lived, rather than pre-existing and total. Environmental psychology's participatory, problem-solving, and agentic orientation develops from the field's efforts to do research beyond the lab and in the context of everyday lives and places.

Keywords and Concepts

Environmental psychologists are equally concerned with built environments (urban and otherwise), natural environments, and the relationship between humans and both types of spaces.

As such the concepts developed by and related to environmental psychology range across such environments and can best be grouped into their different areas of focus:

environmental perception and experience; behavior and environment; emotional relationships to place; and socio-political relations between people, place, and space.

The most often used keywords within environmental psychology include the broadly used terms *environmental perception* and *environmental experience*, as well as *life space* which is primarily used within psychology, the *production of space* within social theory, and *place identity* that is used across psychological and social theories.

Environmental perception describes the way humans perceive and take in their environments, while environment experience addresses the interplay between cognition and received knowledge that is made useful and/or personal. Such research helps to reveal processes at work in cognition. Both perception and experience heavily inform notions of personal space, the immediate area surrounding a person which is psychologically regarded as one's own (see Sommer, 1969). Similarly, Lewin's (1943) concept of the life space describes the internalization of external environmental factors and stimuli into a sort of force field in which the person lives their life. Lewin felt that the external environment or field, per a Gestalt psychological framework, is dynamic that changes over time, across spaces, and with experience, and, as such, people change over time as well. Huge advances in this regard were made by Heft's (2001) work in integrating the multiple approaches and ideas of environmental perception and behavior under the umbrella concept of ecological psychology.

In an effort to understand how our environments affect our behavior and vice versa, studies of behavior and environment formed both with and against notions of environmentalism determinism, i.e. that environment determines behaviors. Barker (1968) posited the concept of behavior settings whereby certain settings inform if not enforce certain types of behaviors, i.e. when entering a classroom as students, we are inclined to sit at desks. He based this concept on over a year's worth of observations by himself and his team of the entire population of a small town in the Midwestern US in the 1940s. Subsequent research on behavior settings argued against total environmental determinism and instead suggested that, while the concept has merit, human-environment relations are not merely reactive (Wicker, 2002). Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances is particularly helpful in studies of environmental perception and behavior. Affordancesare the qualities afforded an object or environment that allow an individual or group to perform an action or series of actions. For example, a bowl can be an eating tool to an adult, as well as a drum or hat to a child.

The relation of place and identity has been on longstanding import in environmental psychology because it gives words to the meaning of an individual's or group's environmental sense and experience. In her review of the study of the emotional relationships to places, Manzo finds that "affective relationships to places 1) encompass a broad range of physical settings and emotions; 2) are an ever-changing, dynamic phenomenon, 3) are both unconscious and conscious, and 4) exist within a larger socio-political milieu" (2003, p. 48). The most well-known concept regarding the study of place & experience of place-making and experience of place-making in environmental psychology is place identity, which Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983) define as a sub-structure of a person's self-identity consisting of cognitions developed in their everyday lives and

physical spaces. In other words, place identities are the ways identities form in relation to our environments (c.f. Manzo 2003). In a related vein, place attachment (Altman & Low, 1992) defines the ways people bond to places and the effects of such attachments in identity development, perception, and behavior. Environmental consciousness was coined by Rivlin (1990) as a term to recognize the significance and meaning of a physical place and its meaning so that it can be addressed through the lens of the relationship and transactions between place and identity.

Environmental psychology also draws upon and informs a number of socio-political concepts regarding people, place, and space as a problem-oriented approach to the field necessarily relates to social and political concerns. Most importantly, environmental psychology builds from a perspective that space is socially produced. Lefebvre (1991) defines the production of space in how space is all at once perceived, conceived, and lived (see also Harvey, 1973). Harvey's (1973, 2005) concept of the geographical imaginationdefines how we imagine and think about space, and, in turn, enact spaces our everyday lives. As such Harvey argues that the geographical imagination is also a tool to be used in order to produce new kinds of spaces and places, and to break free from old, limiting models, systems, and ideas.

While environmental psychologists employ a number of methodologies including participant observation, interviews, visual analysis, GIS mapping, and surveys, mental mapping, also known as cognitive mapping, is particularly characteristic of the field. Other methods include environment behavior mapping, transect walks, and post-occupancy evaluation.

History

Throughout the development of psychology as a field, environment often has been used described as the 'context' in which a person dwelled, worked, and/or leisured. However, more exacting studies of human-environment relations began with the work of the field's founders, including John Dewey, William James, Jakob von Uexküll, and Charles Pierce. For example, Dewey's (1896) landmark work on the reflex arc denied the separation between stimulus (outside of the person and in the environment) and response (from within the person) by proving the interrelatedness of events, environments, and people. As such, cause and effect, much like people and space, are connected rather than distinct.
With the emergence of social and developmental psychologies in the first half of the twentieth century, work on psychological studies became more attuned to the role of environment. A signature focus for mid-century psychology, social psychologists like Kurt Lewin struggled to understand how war came to pass, particularly the violent atrocities of World War II. The role of place and context became amplified in these studies of culture and nation through studies of violence and peace. At the same time, major developmental psychological theorists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Urie Bronfenbrenner all paid special attention to the way children developed not only relation to other individuals and groups, but also through physical settings, material tools, and sociocultural contexts.

The environmental crisis and the radically charged ideas of going beyond laboratory studies in psychology provided a groundswell for the congealing of environmental psychology as a sub-discipline unto itself. The first program in environmental psychology was founded at the

City University of New York's (CUNY) Brooklyn College in the early 1960s; the only Ph.D. granting environmental psychology program continues to reside at the CUNY Graduate Center soon after. However, the aim of environmental psychology as expressed by the collective work of these scholars and their research sought to confront pressing problems of everyday life in ways that connect the experience of the individual to complex environmental systems. Shortly thereafter, Proshansky, Ittleson, and Rivlin (1970) released the seminal Environmental Psychology: Man and His Physical Setting. Those working on environmental psychology or the field under one of its other monikers included psychologists Roger Barker, Egon Brunswik, J.J. Gibson, William Ittleson, Stanley Milgram, Harold Proshansky, Leanne Rivlin, Robert Sommer, and Joachim Wohlwill; anthropologists Edmund T. Hall and Amos Rapoport; geographers Peter Gould and Yi-Fu Tuan; architect Christopher Alexander; urban planner Kevin Lynch; and social theorist Guy Debord. The interdisciplinary nature of environmental psychology was clear as these scholars drew upon the work of well-known human-environment scholars across disciplines. For example, Debord's (1955) psychogeography took up the study of conscious and unconscious laws and effects of our environments on human behavior and experience. Studies focused on issues of crowding, personal space, territoriality, environmental cognition, childhood spaces, institutional environments, and environmental stress. Since this time, the field continues to grow and draws centrally upon the work of geographers William Bungee and David Harvey, and social theorists such as Michel Foucault, Jane Jacobs, and Henri Lefebvre.

Environmental psychology became increasingly popular and a handful of programs were founded throughout the 1970s and 1980s, namely in the US and western European countries. The next generations of environmental psychologists included and draw upon psychologists Irwin Altman, Caitlin Cahill, Gary Evans, Robert Gifford, Harry Heft, Rachel Kaplan, Stephen Kaplan, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Susan Saegert, Daniel Stokols, Gary Winkel, and Allan Wicker; geographers Roger Hart and Cindi Katz; anthropologists Tim Ingold and Setha Low; sociologist Eugen Rochberg-Halton; architectural historians Dolores Hayden and J.B. Jackson; art critic Lucy Lippard; architects and planners David Chapin, Lynne Manzo, and John Seley; and social theorists Pierre Bourdieu and Donna Haraway.

Critical Debates

By the 1990s, Stokols (1995) pointed out the "paradox" of environmental psychology that persists today, i.e. with so much research relevant to and drawing upon environmental psychology, why has the field itself not grown, and why are the number of programs so few (see also Saegert & Winkel 1995)? Evans (1996) suggests that the disappearance of environmental psychology in the 1990s implied that the field had been adopted into mainstream psychology. However, Opotow and Gieseking (2011) found that many psychologists still assume the environment is background noise rather than a variable or component of study. As such, environmental psychology's contributions have been many in the last four decades, and still must be heeded and encouraged to grow.

Recent studies continue to challenge disciplinary and conceptual boundaries by highlighting the co-production of place and identity, the co-constitution of physical and virtual environments, the social production of the natural as well as built environment, and the

inter-relationships between public and private space. Topical areas of focus continue to grow and the prominent areas of research now include home and housing, children's environments and aging environments, restorative environments, wayfinding and movement, post-occupancy evaluation, sustainability consciousness and practices, and food environments. Marston (2000) points out that different scales may seem fixed but they are socially produced; she explicitly discusses the scales of the body, home, neighborhood, nation-state, and the global (see also Smith, 1996). Drawing upon this work, Pratt & Rosner (2012) went even further to rethink the inherent global-local / masculinist-feminist binary to scale through geographical research and literature studies. They described the levels of detail and power of a policy, problem, or study, ranging from the different but co-constituted scales of the intimate to the global.

Concepts of public and private are also socially produced and are the source of a rich literature which shows how these concepts are interrelated and interdependent, each helping to form the other. As international movements grow to combat inequalities and injustices, public space is often at the heart of these inquiries and contentious debates. Public space serves as the physical apparition of what is at stake in the representation of democracy and community in the social life and economic ownership of public spaces (see Low and Smith 2005). Breaking open the fixation on space alone in these public-private discussions, recent research has begun to increasingly address the body in space (see Ingold 2000). The most recent development of cultural spatialized embodiment is what Low (2012) calls embodied space describes the "person as a mobile spatial field...who creates space as a potentiality for social relations, giving it meaning, form, and ultimately through the patterning of everyday movements, produces place and landscape."

Grounded in a long history of co-research, environmental psychologists continue to work with research participants rather than study about them. As a result, the field has been informative of recent critical psychological research using participatory action research (PAR) designs. Even in its model-based studies which are performed to enhance reasonable and healthy behavior, environmental psychology orients itself in a contextualized approach to solving real world issues. For example, studies of wayfinding are performed to enhance productivity and sense of self rather than in an effort to control and manipulate. PAR work questions mainstream experimental approaches to psychology and hence calls for a rethinking of the epistemological structure and findings of psychological research and social science research as a whole.

Building from these participatory perspectives, critical debates presently relate to these core topics: whether or not and, if so, how "nature" is restorative and what are our roles in creating and sustaining nature? How do we become attached to place versus integrate ourselves into a place, and integrate a place into our lives? How do ecological approaches support (or perhaps thwart) more critical approaches? How is the affect of a place produced and shared? How are places and spaces embodied? Overall, these topics and issues point to environmental psychology's continued interest both in fine-tuning and expanding our understanding of environmental perception, behavior, cognition, and action.

International Relevance

The primary associations for environmental psychological research are International Association of People-Environment Studies (IAPS) in Europe; Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA); Man-Environment Research Association (MERA) in Japan; People and Physical Environment Research Organization (PAPER) in Australia and New Zealand; as well as the Society for Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), American Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA), Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC), Association of American Geographers (AAG), and American Anthropological Association (AAA). The core journals for the field include Journal of Environmental Psychology, Environment and Behavior, Journal of Architectural and Planning Research,Population and Environment, and, in the past, Architecture and Behavior. Other major journals publishing environmental psychological work include Journal of Social Issues,Qualitative Inquiry, Journal of Architectural Education, and Environment and Planning D: Society and Space.

Future Directions

In a review of the status of the field, Stokols (1995) put forth a list of future research concerns that environmental psychology must tackle: 1) environmental change at the global level; 2) intergroup relations and crime; 3) effects of new technologies on everyday life; 4) health promotion; and 5) aging. While the field has already begun to confront these dilemmas, much more remains to be done about these and those early problems and issues that are still present, such as crowding. In the 75th anniversary issue of the Journal of Social Issues, Opotow and Gieseking (2011) suggested that psychological conceptualizations of the environment should include but must extend beyond environmentalism to multiple ways of thinking about sustainability within the physical environment. Environmental psychologists, like geographers, understand that most of the world's population will be based in urban areas so that tending to urban concerns is as paramount as addressing environmental policy. Many of the concepts and keywords of environmental psychology build heavily upon concepts of territoriality and presume the ability to claim and occupy space; however, histories of oppressed groups show that such an ability is not always possible, and these perspectives should be taken account of in future research. A new generation activisms in the form of Arab Spring and Occupy re-inspire work on territoriality, indigeneity, and occupation, while calling attention to the critical work needed to help confront inequalities and injustices.

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