

Environmental psychology



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We've all heard of environmental preservation, but understanding the field of environmental psychology relates to so much more than just keeping the grass green. Environmental psychology studies how humans relate to one another as well as their surroundings, so it can refer to man-made environments as well as natural ones. Environmental psychologists try to determine what makes humans comfortable and how we can adjust our surroundings to reduce stress and enhance quality of life for as many people as possible.

Their work has a natural tie-in with conventional environmentalism because they believe that unspoiled nature can provide one of the best backdrops for human life. Whether we are aware of it or not, we react to our environment. Environmental psychology as a formal discipline came into being in the 1950s, when researchers were primarily seeking to improve mental hospitals. Previous to this, architects were rather self-involved, they built the structure to fit their own personal requirements and completely ignored the human element that would inhabit it. Researchers found that traditionally-designed mental hospitals actually aggravated problem behavior in mental patients.

With a little adjustment, a better environment could be created that would soothe the patients and make their issues easier to handle. While some of us may classify ourselves as mental patients and others may not, we all share this innate desire to have beautiful, calm surroundings in which to thrive. A great deal of the environmental psychology discipline is devoted to how environment affects society. One of the first great pioneers of environmental psychology was Robert Barker, observed in 1947 that

citizens of Oskaloosa, Kansas associated certain surroundings with certain behaviors. For example, when in church they assumed their a church behavior, a in school their a school behavior, a and so on and so forth. Each successive environment carried with it a character or behavior model.

Humans build expectations around important environmental settings and these expectations become entrenched in societal beliefs, lying dormant until triggered by the appropriate environment. Ultimately, the main goal of environmental psychology became to change the way society approaches its buildings and landscapes. They proved to the world that when human beings are surrounded by parks and trees and flowers, their minds function more efficiently and their moods become more positive. Children learn better in beautiful, natural surroundings. The science of environmental psychology is not too distantly related to the ancient Chinese belief in feng shui.

This system sets forth a series of laws by which adherents may guide the flow of vital energy. They do this by placing objects, including walls and doors, in auspicious locations. It is thought that when a person's environment is properly arranged, his or her life-energy also arranges itself properly and this can bring health, clarity of mind, and inward peace to the individual. There is a touch of feng shui in the small Japanese zen gardens that some people use as recreational tools.

Originally they were life-sized gardens built on harmonious proportions in order to relax those who wandered through them. Environmental psychology has not only validated but also added, in its own modern way, to these ancient traditions.