

Lab 1. Introduction to people - environment research

Purposes:

This first lab is an example of one way of doing research in the field of environmental psychology.

Procedures:

1. Students will introduce themselves, with a brief one-liner or whatever about "who" they are.
2. Students will:
 - a) Work in groups of three (use the a, b, c method of determining group membership).
 - b) Find a public space setting on campus which contains people, one research group to a setting.
 - c) For a period of 10 minutes, UNOBTRUSIVELY observe and describe the setting. (Remember the research ethics involved).
 - d) Identify a **problem** in the relations between the persons and the physical setting, and
 - e) Develop a **hypothesis** about why the problem is occurring.
 - f) Extrapolate from the hypothesis what their underlying, more general **theory** is.
 - g) Collect some **data** to document the identified problem. Because this procedure is strictly one of observation, some measurements may have to be estimated - distances, for example. Still, the data should be something that can be counted, and the data should actually be written down--it will be an Appendix to this lab report.
 - h) Return after no more than one half hour and **report** the following:
 - 1) which public space situation was observed,
 - 2) what environmental problem was observed,
 - 3) how and what data was collected,
 - 4) to what extent the data documents the hypothesized problems,
 - 5) what their broader theory is,
 - 6) how the problem relates to theory, and
 - 7) proposed solutions to the problem.

Students' reports should consist of a brief (5 minutes maximum) verbal report, presented to the class, based upon the points just outlined (in h). All 3 students should present at least part of the oral report.

Some instructions:

Intrude on the setting as little as possible, so that you do not become a factor in the behavior that occurs there ("Heisenberg principle"). Do not bother in any way, or even speak to, anyone in the setting in this purely observational study. No names of any persons are to be recorded. Be sure the observation occurs in a public place.

Remember that real studies take months to do a proper job. We nevertheless must do our best in a short period to do our study.

The data collection should involve some form of measurement, counting, or the like; in a quasi-objective manner (i.e., without inference). By its very nature measurement involves frequency, duration, intensity, or any combination of these. Of course, some measurements may require estimation, but all data should be actually recorded in writing, to get a feel for the process.

Are the problems inferred due to the setting or to the persons in the setting? What are the implications of each attribution of "blame" in this sense?

You may well have trouble coming up with theories. This is to be expected. Original scientific ideas are difficult to come by, and doing good research is difficult.