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Environmental Dispositions and the Evaluation of Architectural Interiors

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The Environmental Response Inventory (ERI) was developed, in part, to assess dispositions toward everyday physical environments and to aid in explaining variance in response to settings. The eight ERI scales were examined and resultant hypotheses were tested in a design involving evaluative ratings of 10 everyday public building interiors briefly presented in sequences of color slides to 118 participants. Settings were arranged in three levels of generality. Results support the ERI as a promising tool. Biographical items also correlate with ratings. Environment evaluation is discussed as a complex phenomenon, in which rater differences play a significant part.

The last decade has been a time of rapid development in the literature seeking understanding of individual differences in response to the environment. Since Craik's (1968) schematization of the problem, many investigations have sought to relate differences in preferences for or judgments of places to personality traits, social and physical context (e.g., Fisher, 1974), culture (e.g., Sonnenfeld, 1966), special training or education (e.g., Hershberger, 1969), and biographical differences among observers (e.g., Canter & Wools, 1970).

This study examines personality traits ("environmental dispositions") and biographical information as correlates of lay building evaluations. Previous work in the area has employed traditional personality measures. For example, Henschen and Hershenson (1975) demonstrated relationships between scores on two inventories (The Study of Values and the Strong Vocational Interest Blank) and preferences for famous architectural exteriors. Scales of the FIRO-B appear to be related to preferences for smaller and more enclosed interior spaces (Friedman, 1974). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) present evidence that extraversion, neuroticism, arousal-seeking, and affiliative tendencies are associated with the approach and avoidance of verbally described settings.

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