

**THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON WAYFINDING
CUES IN UNFAMILIAR BUILDINGS**

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Building disorientation increases visitors' anxiety, damages the reputation of the organization, and reduces efficiency in visitors and staff. European Americans are better at recognizing and remembering focal objects in scenes than background information compared to East Asians. Combining these two literatures, I conducted an experiment manipulating focal and background wayfinding cues in interiors to test whether European Americans would rely more on focal cues and less on background cues than East Asians. I chose the hotel setting because many inhabitants are unfamiliar with these spaces, often from different cultures, and minimal signage is typical. To perform the same experiment in US and in Korea, I created navigatable virtual environments. Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no interaction between ethnicity and cue type in wayfinding performance. However, consistent with previous studies, European Americans remembered focal objects but did not associate them with their backgrounds. I also provided design guidelines for practitioners.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Giyoung Park was born and grew up in Seoul, Korea. After studying architecture at Hongik University in Seoul, Korea, she pursued a Master of Architecture degree at the University of Michigan where she focused on spatial relationships by altering degrees of openness and visual connections. While practicing architecture, she became more aware of the role of physical environment in human wellbeing as well as frequent user-designer gaps. In 2010, Giyoung started the Master of Science program in Design and Environmental Analysis at Cornell University; and in 2012, she started her Ph.D. program to study sociocultural processes in built environments.