

# Proxemics



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## Spacial Relations

Spacial relations is a complex subject that can be interpreted in many different ways. A clear explanation of spatial relations is easily understood with the study of proxemics. So what is proxemics? Well the term proxemics came from E. T. Hall, a researcher in 1963. Proxemics is the study of the nature, degree, and effect of the spatial separation individuals naturally maintain (as in various social and interpersonal situations) and of how this separation relates to environmental and cultural factors. Proxemics is made up of featured spaces: fixed space, semi-fixed, and informal.

Space around a person is set up into zones representing comfort and non-comfort. Fixed spaces are areas that are unmovable such as buildings and offices. Many simple things can change a comfortable zone in a fixed area such as color. The use of color can have a major impact on our comfort level. Restaurants, for example, focus on peoples' comfort level with how they paint their buildings. Fast food such as McDonalds or Taco Bell cause people to rush in, eat fast, and leave without a nice place to sit down because of their bright colors. Bright colors are disturbing to the customers and even the workers. Other restaurants such as Ruby Tuesday's and Apple Bee's stick with a nice color scheme that is both darker, mellow, and come off as a nice place to enjoy your food. Restaurants like these have a higher employee turnover than fast food in the food service industry.

Semi-fixed spaces serves as movable areas such as furniture. Office desks can be organized to a persons' comfort zone. Chairs and desks are just physical barriers but can be broken to protect personal space. As you might notice on a TV show or at a job interview, two chairs are usually always on an

angle and no more than 1 feet from the main desk. This set up helps keep a balance of dominance. A person at a desk compared to a person standing in front of him may feel less dominant and unequal. Other areas of an office, such as lamps and filing cabinet are usually placed in the corners because small areas, like corners, make a person feel enclosed and small.

Rearranging of furniture in an area helps keep balance over the persons' personal space and semi-fixed spaces.

Informal spaces is personal territory, and a big part of proxemics. Personal territory is made up of four categories: public, social, personal, and intimate. All of these spaces range differently in amount of space. For instance public spaces ranges from 12-25 feet. Social space ranges from 4-10 feet. Personal space ranges from 2-4 feet and intimate space ranges out to one foot and is used mostly while touching.

Personal space, most commonly used, can vary both culturally and ethnically. In Saudi Arabia, their social space is equal to our intimate space. If we were to back away from a person, we would be known as rude. In the Netherlands, their social space is equal to our personal space. Anglos communicate with each other, usually maintaining a distance of 36 to 48 inches, while Hispanic tend to stand closer to each other at about 18 inches. Anglos draw away during a conversation because they seem uncomfortable when they are too close to a conversation partner. The most widespread symbol of informal spaces across the world is a hand shake. For example, a handshake in Spain is usually a double grip, but to a German, it would cause confusion. Equally an even more stronger shake by a German would cause a Spaniard to get the idea of being “over-friendly.”

Individuals perceive a distance that they feel is appropriate for different type of messages and personal interaction. A violation of such space can cause serious effects on communication. A result of violation of personal space is social anxiety.

Social anxiety is the third largest psychological problem in the United States today. Social anxiety is the fear of social situations that involve interaction with others. Someone with social anxiety, for example, would feel uncomfortable with someone standing too close or thinking everyone is looking at them, and feeling self-conscious. A person feeling this way relates back to personal space, and what is ok and not ok to pursue.

Humans are like animals. They make their ownership and territory and defend it against others. While at work, many employees may feel invaded if someone stands behind them. They feel uncomfortable and on the defense to protect their area. Also, while riding in an elevator or subway, people have the tendency to keep themselves, or their territory, held in. This reflex reaction can decrease the defense of a person. Police attack a suspect's personal space to get their guard down. An officer has psychological advantage because invading the suspect's personal space by sitting too close, or standing right over them causes them to have a decrease in their defense and often confess because of invasion of their space.

Personal space also varies with females and males. From childhood, males and females are taught communicative behaviors that are acceptable for boys but may be considered completely inappropriate for girls. Their communication behaviors deal with their spatial issues. Males need more space than women. That is why men are often hesitant to get close such as

cuddling. The time of day is also a factor. Males need more space in the morning as opposed to women who need less. The reason men need more space is because most men suffer from situational anxiety. Certain situations cause them to freeze up or back off. A woman likes less space while something is bothering her and men like to be alone. Some bridges and barriers men face are trust and caring. Through trust, one learns how to cope with problems and resolve frustrations. Caring is often categorized by commitment. And the word commitment usually scares away men.

Spatial relations, proxemics, and personal territories are all intertwined together to form a similar explanation of communication between people. The simplest forms of social activity can become uncomfortable situations because of invasion or social, public, personal, and intimate territory. People constantly evolve from their environment, relationships, and areas. Wherever a person is placed, they establish a feature space and respond to protect it. The study of proxemics shows that people are more on a defense than offense. We need to take care of each other and realize what space area is right for a certain person, and how we can keep ourselves from invading it. Learning about each others spaces will enhance communication and our lifestyles.

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