

The perception of personal space



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Introduction

According to our textbook, personal space is defined as a portable bubble or buffer zone that we like to maintain between ourselves and the people around us. This invisible bubble may increase or decrease in size depending on what particular situation we are in. For example, at a movie theater, people tend to leave an empty chair in between them. At the library or cafeteria, many students will leave their backpack on the empty chair next to them and have the rest of their belongings take up the entire table. This gives a non-verbal signal to other students that they cannot sit there because it is invading their own personal space. Some people may want more personal space than others depending on what culture they have grown up in. For example, a person who grew up in a busy city like New York may be more accustomed to others invading their personal space especially being used to crowded places like a subway (Olarotimi 2014).

In our class lecture, we have talked the different ranges of distance zones: intimate (0-16"), personal (18"-4'), social (4'-8'), and public (8'+). Intimate distance is the space used for people that you love and cherish the most such as a best friend or significant other. Personal distance is the space used for people you know well such as friends and family. Social distance is the space that is used for strangers or people that you have had some interaction with such as a barista who always makes your coffee every morning. Public distance is the space used for large groups of people such as public speaking. There are many factors that can influence personal space

perception such as age, gender, culture, personality, anxiety, and status (Olarotimi 2014). According to the textbook, men tend to keep more distance from one another than women do.

Gender greatly affects how a person will react to one another in terms of personal space (Crowe 2011). Men tend to become more aggressive while women tend to come more passive when their personal space is invaded. In verbal and nonverbal communication, men tend to be less intimate and show more dominance and competitiveness while women tend to be more intimate and cooperative. Women are more intimate in their communication and tend to be more sensitive to nonverbal cues. There was one experiment that showed that the women were negatively affected by a speaker's body language more significantly than men (Crowe 2011). Men tend to perceive holding eye contact and physical touch as sexual attraction (Crowe 2011). Because of these gender differences, men and women perceive personal space differently. In children, older boys spent significantly more time at far distances and less time at close distances than younger boys (Melson 1977).

My very first encounter for this experiment was on campus at The Nugget. I walked over to a booth with a woman sitting on one side studying. My friend sat at a table close to the woman to observe. I said hi to the woman and sat at the booth next to her and she looked up, gave me a smile, and continued studying. As I was eating my food, I started staring at her study. I would stop staring occasionally then she started giving little side eye glances but she did not say a word. My friend told me that started lowering her head a bit more at her book and placed her arm on the table to cover her face when I was not looking. Once I was done eating, I said to her that I was really sorry

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if I made her uncomfortable with all of the staring and I mentioned that it was a little experiment for a paper on personal space. She completely understood and said not to worry about it if the experiment made her uncomfortable.

For my second encounter, I walked over to the other side of the room and sat next to a man this time who had an empty spot in front of him. My friend sat at a table that was close by. As I put down my stuff, the man did not look up at me at all. He just minded his own business and continued looking on his laptop. I opened up my laptop and started doing some work. I started glancing at him and looked away. My friend told me that whenever I looked away after he would glance at me. I put my elbow on the table and rested my chin on my hand and started blankly staring at him. At first he did not look up at all and then after a few minutes he starts asking me if I was okay. Then I told him that I was okay and I was sorry if I made him creeped out by my staring and that I was doing an personal space experiment for a paper. He said oh okay that makes a lot more sense now and then laughed. Then told him thank you so much for understanding and then I left went to find another table.

This time for the third encounter I walked over to the counter table that had one guy sitting there doing work with many empty sits next to him. I chose the seat right next to him and I put down my stuff and right away he started looking at me. I opened up my laptop and started playing music on my laptop without my headphones to see how he would react. He was not bothered by it since it was a pretty loud place anyway. My fourth encounter was at the on campus library in the quiet study room. I walked in there with <https://assignbuster.com/the-perception-of-personal-space/>

my friend and there were many desks that had only one person sitting in them. I chose to sit next to a man that had all of his belongings on his side. He gave me a stare as I was putting down my stuff but did not say anything to me. As I sat down next to him, he moved his book closer to him and angled his laptop. I pulled out gum and started chewing with my mouth open. After a couple minutes of chewing, he started sighing and getting a bit agitated. He did not say anything to me but I can tell from his nonverbal language with the sighing and the agitation that he was feeling bothered. He put on headphones probably to block out my chewing noises. I thought he was going to leave the table but he actually stayed the whole time I was there.

On my fifth encounter, I came out of the library and saw a girl that was sitting by a tree on her laptop. I walk over to the girl and sit right in front of her. The first thing she said once I sat down was can I help you? and I said, oh nothing I just wanted to study here. Then she said that there was spot on the side of the tree that had room for me. This situation got me thinking of a study showed that humans require more personal space in front of them as oppose to the back or to the side of them (Crowe 2011). After she told me to move, I told her that I only sat in front of her to try to see what reaction I would get for my paper on personal space. She said it was really interesting that I was doing a paper on this and I told her thank you for not feeling super bothered by what I did. On my sixth encounter, I went over to the Starbucks on campus and there was a woman studying at one of the two seat tables. All of her belongings were on the table but the chair in front of her was empty. Usually I would ask the person's permission first before sitting down

but since this was an experiment I did not bother so I can get a better reaction. So I went over there and pulled out the chair, immediately the woman looks at me with a slight annoyed look and says oh I'm sorry I'm already using this table. Then I apologized and said I just wanted to see how you would react to me sitting down at this table because this was just an experiment for my paper. The woman apologized for being a bit rude and told me good luck on my paper.

On my seventh encounter, I went to the mall with my friend and we took the elevator there. There was a mom in her stroller that was going into the elevator with us. My friend was in the back of the elevator observing while I stood next to the mom. I faced my body forward towards her and just stared at her doing the entire elevator ride. The mom just looked at me and smiled. My friend did not notice any other reactions that I did not notice. On my eighth encounter, we went to a makeup store. I stood super close to a woman that was by herself looking at the lipstick section. I quickly reached my hand over at the lipsticks the same time she did so that I can be in her way. Right away she made a confused look and said excuse me. Then she just walked away after she got her lipstick. On my ninth encounter, I went to the gym with my friend. There was a man was using the squat rack that I wanted to use and it is the only squat rack at the gym so I just stood right next to him while he was doing squats. He looked over with me with a side eye and put his weight down. Then he told me that he's finishing up. I said oh okay great and right as he started his workout again I continued to stand super close to him. He ignored me towards the end of his workout. Then

once he was about to leave, I apologized to him and said that it was a little experiment for a paper. He said it was all good and he left the area.

Violating personal space does not have involving a person standing super close to you. It can also involve someone giving you an unwanted stare. For example, a man that is at a far distance from a woman in a subway that will not stop giving her unpleasant stare. This situation may make the woman feel threatened and uncomfortable. Even though the man is not standing super close to her, her personal space may still violated because he would not stop staring at her. When personal space is invaded, people usually send nonverbal red flags to the invader to get them to leave them alone (Crowe 2011). For example, giving them a look or moving further away from the person. In a public elevator experiment, 86 males and 61 females were forced to violate the personal space of two male or two female confederates who were either directing or diverting their gazes (Buchanan 1976). The male group chose to violate the personal space of either sex who diverted his gaze while the female group chose to violate the personal space of the male who diverted his gaze and the female who directed her gaze when entering the elevator (Buchanan 1976).

A majority of people like to have more personal space especially with strangers because of safety reasons. For example, if you were standing in a building that was mostly empty and a random person you do not know just stood super close to you even though there are so many other areas where this person could have stood. The typical human reaction would be to feel uncomfortable and even feel like your life is being threatened. It is especially common for women to feel uncomfortable and threatened by a man's

presence at night. An example would be a woman taking an empty subway fairly late at night and the only other person in that subway is a man. That man has been violating her personal space by giving her perverted stares the whole subway ride and even moved to sit closer to her. This woman may start to feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. She might think that this man might try follow her once she leaves this subway. This goes to show that gender plays a huge factor in how an individual perceives personal space. Men may not perceive certain people as a threat the same way women do.

Conclusion

There are different ranges of distance of personal space that people use when encountering different settings: intimate (0-16"), personal (18"-4'), social (4'-8'), and public (8'+). There are various factors that can influence an individual's personal space preference. Within culture, someone that grew up American may prefer more personal space rather than someone from a Latin American background. Someone that grew up in a crowded city may not might their space being invaded as much as someone who grew up in a quiet town. Age also plays a big factor in how a person perceives personal space. For example, children prefer less personal space than adults. As terms of gender, men and women perceive personal space differently from one another. Especially since men and women communicate differently both verbally and nonverbally. Men tend to be less intimate and show more dominance and competitiveness while women tend to be more intimate and cooperative. Men tend become more aggressive while women tend to come more passive when their personal space is being violated After encountering all of the different people in all of different locations I went to, I have come to <https://assignbuster.com/the-perception-of-personal-space/>

notice that the men that I encountered did not verbally communicate as often as the women I encountered. I feel like because I was also a woman, it was comfortable for the woman to verbally communicate with me rather than with the men that I encountered.

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