

# Personal space assignment



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Breaking the Regular Personal space is an invisible boundary separating one from others to be normally content. When violated, one may feel discomfort, anxiety, or even anger. As humans, we set rules in our minds called customs. Many of these vary from culture to culture but some are universal. One of those universal rules is the idea of personal space. In America, we have a strong sense of personal space, especially when it comes to strangers invading that space. From what I have experienced in the social norm, violating personal space of various individuals has a great effect in today's society.

My first victim's space invasion was at the gym. After my brief run on the treadmill, I came near a girl I did not know that had a fresh white towel. I then wondered to myself what she would do if I used her towel. As we locked eyes, I asked her if I could borrow her towel (at this point I was exceptionally nervous). She awkwardly paused for a moment and said, " Surrreeee? " After I grabbed the newly towel I wiped the drip of sweat that profusely ran down my face. Her eyes opened as if she had just come into the world.

With satisfaction, I politely asked if I could keep the towel; the girl inquisitively nodded her head with approval. I then walked roughly five yards away and turned back around to let her in on what I was doing. I gave her towel back and then started asking questions. My first question was " What was going through your head when I asked to use your towel? " She replied in an awkward sense, " I thought you were weird for asking to use my gym towel! " The second question I asked was, " Why did you give me your towel in the first place? She then replied with little laughter, " I was so shocked from the strange question that I didn't have time to think of what I was

doing. ” I did not have many questions planned to ask her for this was my first encounter entering a stranger’s personal space. I then told her to have a nice day and walked away giggling as if I had made myself a fool. After experiencing this, I thought to myself how I needed to be more prepared for my next target. Walking to the bathroom, I looked upon the ping pong table and saw two foreign Chinese students engaged in a fast paced game.

My brain exploded with many ideas on how to depict my next norm exercise. The idea I came up with was to closely hover over the table; at the precise moment I would interrupt their steady played game by simply taking the ball away. Thinking to myself that this was a flawless exercise I went right to it. I came near the table, and positioned myself approximately centimeters away from the net. In following, I began to stare at the vibrant orange ball as if I was a curious dog going in for a treat. Doing this for some time, one of the young men politely asked if I wanted to play.

Ignoring his question, I continued to stare at the ball as it glided across the wooden table. Time went by and I felt the two young men become quite uncomfortable. The same guy then stopped the game and put the paddle toward my hand. He insisted that I’d join the game and play. I denied his kind gesture and asked “ Can I just hold the ball? ” Curious to why I only wanted the ball he questionably replied, “ Yes? ” So I swiftly took the ball from his left hand and walked away with it. Both kids demanded, “ No, No, No.... give us the ball back! ” I ignored their demands and continued to walk away until I was out of sight.

At that moment I decided to go back for questioning. As I walked toward them, I saw their heated faces and approached them with my arm extended out to drop the ball back on the table. I then let them in on why I was acting so obscure. Afterward I started asking various questions on what they thought. My first question I asked was, "What did you think when I took the ball?" One answered in a confused manner, "I think you're kind of ridiculous." Following that question I asked, "Do you think it's weird for an American to do something like that, or did you think anything about my race at the time?" He surely replied, "No, No, No, I always play ping pong with Americans and they are pretty good at it." My next question was, "What if I legitimately took the ball?" He steadily replied, "I would just get another one." This reply to me shows how the Chinese don't really care too much and that they just want to move on. Proceeding to my next question I asked, "How did you feel when I was standing so close watching you guys play?" He replied, "I wanted to call the security guard or a cop." Then my last and final questions were, "What's personal space like in China? Can someone get really close to you like I did?" He replied, "It depends on the relationship between the people, if you don't know them, it's not good." I then shook the two young men's hands and thanked them for their time, and carried on. Unexpectedly, as I was walking out of the gym I saw many people strangely staring at me due to the fact that I (an American) was even talking to these pleasant Chinese kids. This made me think to myself how some Americans think it's weird to have a fellow American converse with different ethnic groups. Overall, I felt very confident with the data I received after this particular exercise.

Not only did I break their personal space barrier, but I also found out how people, that grew up in a different country react to such an odd encounter. Me being very pleased, I still wanted to do one more act of breaking the norm. Looking throughout the gym I noticed one thing most people had in common: headphones. I was very curious how someone would act if I asked to use their headphones. This not only broke their personal space by me tapping them on the shoulder forcing them to take their headphones off, but also would be asking to use something they were currently using and personally owned.

I tried to spot the nicest headphones, and the ones I picked were on a huge well-built man. Hesitantly approaching him, I tapped him on the back and he suddenly turned to me and shifted his head downward to where I was standing. He looked instantly irritated that I stopped his workout and made him take his headphones off. As we faced one another I asked, " Do you mind if I use your headphones? " He assuredly replied, " Defiantly not! These are way too expensive. " He then avoided me by putting his headphones back on and going right back to his workout.

A shot of awkwardness shot through my body and I rapidly left the gym. Through his eyes I went from being a " normal" person working out in society; to a " weird" person who you just ignore. Just a thought, but if I was a female this man would most defiantly given his prized headphones up. It just comes to a matter of what's normal in today's society. Violating all three of the personal spaces I did, made me realize how structured today's society is. People are so used to how steady and normal days flow, that they view different social interactions as being " Weird! " or " Awkward. It probably

wouldn't take you very long to vibrantly recall a time when your personal space was violated or is being violated. Maybe you were sitting in a restaurant and someone sat down at your table or perhaps you were settling in at a movie and someone sat right next to you. Regardless of the situation, when someone violates your personal space it may be extremely uncomfortable, but have fun and take advantage of the moment. It's not every day where people violate your social norm, so have fun with it! Differences in social society only make the society you live in more enjoyable and quite hilarious in my opinion.