

# UNIT III

## HUMAN SPATIAL BEHAVIOUR

With more than thousand studies reported on personal space (Hayduck, 1985) the expanded area of

human spatial behaviour has spurred considerable attention from scholars interested in the area of

environment and behaviour. Research on human spatial behaviour burgeoned from the popular work of

Calhoun (1962), Ardey (1966) and Lorenz (1966). However, it

was only after the appearance of two popular books entitled The hidden dimension (Hall, 1966) and

Personal space: The

behavioural basis of design (Sommer, 1969) that research interest among scholars sparked and more

richness and diversity to

the domain of human spatial behaviour was visible. Psychologists have explored the issue of human

spatial behaviour under three main areas: personal space, territoriality, crowding. These three areas for research are very much interrelated and interdependent. In this chapter we will explore the issues pertaining to personal space and territorial behaviour in detail and in the next chapter the issues of crowding will be discussed.

### Difference Between Personal Space and Territorial Behaviour

The concepts of personal space and territorial behaviour are interrelated. However, certain conceptual and methodological differences between these two concepts are noted by many scholars

(Altman, 1975; Sommer, 1969). For instance, Sommer (1969) has distinguished these two concepts

along the following lines:

1. Personal space is portable whereas territory is relatively stable and stationary.
2. The boundaries of personal space are invisible whereas

the boundaries of territory do not.

3. Personal space has the person's body at the centre whereas territory does not.

4. Intrusion into personal space leads to discomfort and results in withdrawal tendency. In contrast, territorial encroachment leads to verbal threats and physical fights.

In this section attempt will be made to define and

elaborate the salient aspects of personal space and thereafter the major ways of measuring personal space will be discussed. Furthermore, major research work done in the area of personal

space will be discussed and theoretical framework will be presented. Finally, application of personal space research and its relevance to the growing field of environmental design will be illustrated.

#### Conceptualization of Personal Space

Katz (1937) used the term "Personal space" for the first time. However, it was Hall (1966) who was

the first to coin the term "proxemics" which is more or less synonymous to personal space. Various

scholars have adopted the distance component of interpersonal relationship and behavioural aspect

of physical space in their operational definitions of personal space (Hall, 1966., Sommer, 1969, Proshansky, Ittelson & Rivlin, 1970;

Craik, 1970). Sommer (1969) defines personal space as "an area with invisible boundaries surrounding a person's body into which intruders may not come." In his famous book entitled *The hidden dimension*, Hall (1966) defines personal space as a small protective sphere or bubble that an organism maintains between itself and others. A number of scholars have severely

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Criticized the concept of personal space (Patterson, 1975; Altman, 1975; Knowles, 1980). These

scholars feel that the concept of personal space is misleading and inappropriate. Some of the criticisms are as follows:

1. The concept of personal space implies stability, while in fact it stretches and shrinks with environmental circumstances and relationship.

2. The personal space concept places heavy emphasis on distance and clearly excludes various

aspects involved

in social interaction like eye contact.

3. The concept of personal space exists only when interaction with others is involved. Thus, the concept

of personal space is interpersonal rather than personal. Despite criticism the concept of personal

space is still very popular and well established in the literature of environmental psychology.

Attempts are made to deal with some of the major

criticism and to broaden the application of the personal space concept. For instance, the personal

space is defined as an area with invisible boundaries surrounding a person's body and

any intrusion by others is not welcomed. Gifford (1987) has emphasized the distance component of

interpersonal relations in his operational definition of personal space. He suggested that personal

space is both an indicator and integral part of growth, maintenance and decline of interpersonal

relationships. Furthermore, some researches have suggested that the personal space bubble is not

circular but elliptical. It

is bigger in front and behind us than at the sides. Thus, it seems that people will generally

tolerate others coming closer to us

at the side rather than from front or behind (Cassidy, 1997). In short, personal space is conceived

as an envelope surrounding a person. The invasion of personal space by unwanted others leads to a

general tendency of withdrawal and discomfort. Personal space is not fixed and stable but it

changes considerably depending on context, interacting persons and circumstances. It is directly

linked to the communication channel and thus it is dynamic and active concept of human spatial behaviour.

## The Functions of Personal Space

The foremost guiding notion regarding the functions of

personal space is related to appropriate interpersonal spacing. Invasion of personal space results

from inappropriate interpersonal distance produces more than one adverse Consequence like stress,

anxiety and improper communication (Altman, 1975). Another important function of personal space is

mechanism of communication and can be understood completely with other aspects of non-verbal

communication such as orientation, touch, and eye contact (Cassidy, 1997). It was the influential

book of Heider entitled Wild animals in captivity where identification of four distinct personal

zones frequently used by animals is discussed. These zones were labelled as flight distance, critical distance, personal distance and social distance. The work of Heider stimulated Hall (1959)

who developed an insightful framework of 'proximics'. The "proximics" approach emphasizes the ways

of relating to the peoples and active involvement in the management of space to attain desired

level of interpersonal interaction with others. The interpersonal distance between interacting

parties is helpful in the understanding of the nature and level of relationships between them. In

addition, personal space is to a very large extent a function of our relationship with other person

involved and the society and culture to which we are

accustomed. In essence, we use personal space to communicate our relationship with others, to

protect our territory, and to

generally regulate our interaction with others.

Hall (1966) proposes the use of four personal zones in

social interaction between individuals. Each of which can be subdivided into near and far. A brief

is given below: description of these zones

## Intimate Distance

The interpersonal distance ranges from 0 to 18 inches. At this distance strong sensory inputs like

smell, body heat, sound and a feeling of breath combine to create inescapable involvement between

interacting parties. A typical behaviour

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at this distance is a very low level of voice. Hall (between near situations requiring body contact distinguishes (love making) and far distances which) requires being very close but not

contact depends on various aspects of social and physical setting)

in contact (whispering). This distinction is artificial because the setting.

## Personal Distance

The distance between interacting parties range from 1.5 to 4 feet. Usually, this distance is used



for most interactions between other people. Within this personal distance zone a 'close' phrase is

used for good friends or couples and a 'far phrase of interpersonal distance is used for friends and acquaintances involved in social interaction. Classmates usually interact in

the far phrase of personal space distance. The voice level between interacting parties is moderate

and sensory inputs are at minimum.

### Social distance

This distance zone range from 4 to 12 feet and is characterized by Hall as business distance. The

transactions are formal between people who are not well-acquainted or business representatives and

the level of voice is louder. The near distance would be used by those being introduced or for informal business transactions. In contrast, the far distance would be reserved for more formal business transactions or processes.

### Public Distance

This distance zone extends beyond 12 feet. Usually, this distance is maintained between speakers

and public. Examples of public distance are class lectures, public meeting of leaders. The level of voice is amplified.

The proxemics framework of Hall is very well articulated and developed. The conception of four distance zones is appealing for it illustrates certain interpersonal communication.