



Personal Space And Gender Difference – A Study on Inhabitants of Howrah District of West Bengal

KEYWORDS

Personal space, Gender difference, Inhabitants of Howrah District

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present investigation is to study the personal space as required by the individuals between the ages 21 to 30 years in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known person Opposite Sex. Accordingly, a group of 60 individuals were selected as sample from different areas of Howrah district of West Bengal. A General Information Schedule and two data sheets (Inter Personal Comfortable Scale) were used as tools in this investigation. Female group required more personal space than that of the male group specially in the context of interaction with Known Person Opposite Sex. Personal judgment and level of awareness may help the individuals to measure his/her personal space in the context of interaction with different persons in different situations.

INTRODUCTION

Personal space generally refers to the physical distance between two people in a social, family or work environment. It has two purposes: protection and communication. The size of the spatial zone necessary to fulfill the protective and communicative functions according to situational variables (attraction and the activity occurring) and individual difference variables (ethnicity and personality). Individuals find it aversive – i) when they are constrained to interact with another person under conditions of inappropriate (too much or too little) personal space, and ii) when their personal space is invaded by others. People like to maintain a certain distance from other people. How far one prefers to be from others depends on who they are and also the settings they are in. However, people may feel odd or uncomfortable if someone else 'breaks the rules' by being too close or too far away. The study of these unspoken rules of 'personal space' is called 'proxemics' and was pioneered by Edward Hall (1966). People try to maintain a balance between being uncomfortable close to and awkwardly distant from the people with whom they are interacting. Research has generally supported Hall's ideas, so friends typically stand closer to each other than acquaintances, people that are attracted to each other stand closer than those which are not and those that wish to appear friendly tend to choose smaller interpersonal distances. Of course there is some variation in how rigidly social distance is applied. Personal space is an infinitely flexible mechanism which is influenced by a wide range of cues in the situation, people's personal characteristics, nature of relationship and their social and cultural experience. Research has identified some of the factors which lead to difference in personal space requirements and hence, the difference in response. Gender difference has been identified, which suggests that males interacting with other males require the largest interpersonal distance, followed by females interacting with other females, and finally males interacting with females (Gifford, 1987). A number of other factors can influence the personal space, like, mood state, nature of relationship, illness, level of intimacy, societal norms, psychological makeup, population density, housing architecture, race, ethnicity etc. Litkouhi et al (2012) investigated The effect of gender, age, and nationality on the personal space preferences in children's hospitals among Iranian and German children and adolescents. The results

show that Iranian children, contrary to German children, prefer a space without any barrier, and that girls prefer closed spaces more than boys. Considering the above the present investigation has been designed to study the personal space as required by the subjects in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex and whether it varies with gender difference or not.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the personal space as required by the subjects in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex.
- To study whether the personal space as required by the subjects is differentially associated with gender difference or not.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis – I(a): Personal space in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex differ significantly as expressed by the male group of subjects between the ages 21 to 30 years old.

Hypothesis – I(b): Personal space in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex differ significantly as expressed by the female group of subjects between the ages 21 to 30 years old.

Hypothesis -II: Personal space in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex as expressed by the individuals between the ages 21 to 30 years is differentially associated with gender difference.

Hypothesis-III: Personal space in the context of interaction with Known Person Opposite Sex as expressed by the individuals between the ages 21 to 30 years is differentially associated with gender difference.

STUDY AREA AND SAMPLE

A group of 60 subjects were selected as sample from different areas of Howrah district of West Bengal. The pertinent characteristics of the subjects are as follows:

- Age: 21 to 30 years
- Gender: Both Male and Female.

- Educational Qualification: At least Madhyamik.
- Interested and co-operative.

TOOLS USED

- a) **General Information Schedule:** It consists of items like Name, Address, Age, Gender, Educational Qualification, Occupation etc.
- b) **The Interpersonal Comfortable Scale (IPCS):** IPCS of Veitch, Getsinger and Arkkelin (1976) was used to measure personal space of the individual. It consists of a circle of 18 cm. in diameter with 8 arms drawn from the centre. Each subject was required to mark on each arm the point at which he/she would like to stop the other person approaching him/her. The marked distance on all the 8 arms would be added and average would be considered as a single score.

ADMINISTRATION, SCORING AND STATISTICAL TREATMENT

Rapport was established with each subject separately. General Information Schedule and two data sheets (one for Known Person Same Sex and another for Known Person Opposite Sex) were administered to the subjects by giving proper instructions. Data were collected and properly scrutinized. Tabulation was done for personal space as required by the subjects in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex of male and female group separately. In order to find out personal space as required by the subjects, mean and SD were calculated for male and female group separately. Comparisons were made by applying t-test.

RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

The general characteristics data inserted in Table – 1 reveals the characteristic features of the subjects, under study.

Table -1: General characteristic features of the subjects under study

General characteristic features	Male (N = 30)		Female (N = 30)	
	f	%	f	%
1) Age (Mode Value)in years	22		22	
2) Educational Qualification				
a) Madhyamik	2	6.67	1	3.33
b) Higher Secondary	1	3.33	9	30.00
c) Graduate	20	66.67	12	40.00
d) Post Graduate	7	23.33	8	26.67
3) Occupation				
a) Student	18	60.00	19	63.33
b) Service	11	36.67	7	23.33
c) Business	1	3.33	-	-
d) Home Maker	-	-	4	13.33

Data inserted in Table – 2 reveals the comparative picture between the two situations, viz, in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex in connection with the personal space as required by the male group of subjects. Comparative picture reveals no significant difference between the two situations. Analysis of data further reveals that the mean score of the personal space as required by the subjects is comparatively less than one third of the total length in two situations respectively. The **Hypothesis - I(a) is rejected in this investigation.**

Table-2: Comparative picture between the two situations in terms of personal space as required by the male group of subjects

Male (Age – 21 to 30 years)				
Category	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Known Person Same Sex	30	2.36 cm.	0.81	0.35 *
Known Person Opposite Sex	30	2.29 cm.	0.68	

***Difference is insignificant**

Data inserted in Table -3 reveals the comparative picture between the two situations, viz, in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex in connection with the personal space as required by the female group of subjects between the ages 21 to 30 years. From the mean score it can be said that personal space as required by the subject is comparatively less in the context of interaction with known person same sex than that of the opposite sex. Thus, the **Hypothesis - I(b) is accepted in this investigation.**

Table-3: Comparative picture between the two situations in terms of personal space as required by the female group of subjects

Female (Age – 21 to 30 years)				
Category	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Known Person Same Sex	30	2.24 cm.	0.91	2.30 *
Known Person Opposite Sex	30	2.70 cm.	0.61	

***p<0.05**

Data inserted in Table - 4 reveals the comparative picture between the male and female group of subjects in terms of personal space as required by them in the context of interaction with known Person Same Sex. Comparative picture reveals no significant difference between the two groups. Research finding shows that males need a larger amount of personal space than females (Sussman and Rosenfeld, 1978). Here, the **Hypothesis – II is rejected in this investigation.**

Table-4: Comparison between male and female group of subjects in terms of personal space considering known person same sex

Known Person Same Sex (Age – 21 to 30 years)				
Category	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	30	2.36 cm.	0.81	0.55*
Female	30	2.24 cm.	0.91	

***Difference is insignificant**

Data inserted in Table – 5 reveals the comparative picture between male and female group of subjects in terms of personal space as required by them in the context of interaction with known Person Opposite Sex. From the mean score it can be said that female group need more personal

space than that of the male group when interaction with known person opposite sex. Comparative picture reveals significant difference between the two groups. Thus, the **Hypothesis -III is accepted in this present investigation.**

Table -5: Comparison between Male and Female group of subjects in terms of personal space considering known person opposite sex

Known Person Opposite Sex (Age – 21 to 30 years)				
Category	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Male	30	2.29 cm.	0.68	2.41*
Female	30	2.70 cm.	0.61	

* $p < 0.05$

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, it can be said that personal space varies with the gender difference in the context of interaction with Known Person Same Sex and Known Person Opposite Sex. In this context, it can further be said that female group are more aware than that of the male group regarding personal space. There is a difference between male and female group of individuals when they are interacting with Known Person Opposite Sex. People may feel discomfort, anger, anxiety when their personal space is encroached by others. So, adequate personal space is required for healthy living. Personal judgment and awareness may help the individuals to measure his/her personal space in the context of interaction with different persons in

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