DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 097 596 CG 009 221

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TITLE Proxemic Behavior as a Function of Race and Sex.
PUB DATE Aug 73
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; Distance; Individual Development; *Racial Differences; Research Projects; *Sex Differences; Social Influences; *Social Relations; *Space Orientation

ABSTRACT

The utilization of personal space as a function of race and sex was the subject of this investigation. The specific focus of the study was to discover if blacks within American society learn and enact different personal space definitions from those of the majority culture. A 2 x 2 factorial analysis of variance with repeated measures on two factors was employed. Subjects were exposed, via video tape stimulus material, to four social interaction scenes in which the race and sex of the model and confederate were systematically varied. Results showed significantly different preferences for social interaction distances between black and white subjects. Interpretation of these results is discussed from the possible causative factors to be found in the social psychology of American society. (Author)

PROXEMIC BEHAVIOR AS A FUNCTION OF RACE AND SEX

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In recent years a considerable body of knowledge concerning man and his interaction with the space that surrounds him has been generated from the research of social scientists. The noted anthropologist, Edward T. Hall, has commented upon the different cultural customs that have their roots in man's orientation to time and space. Hall coined the term "proxemics" to refer to "the study of how man unconsciously structures microspace-- the distance between men in the conduct of daily transactions, the organization of space in his houses and buildings and ultimately the layout of his towns" (1963, p. 1003).

Hall reported observations that clearly delineate differential proxemic behavior patterns among German, Arab, French, and English cultures. Watson and Graves (1968) in a study that employed a sample of Arab and American college students who represented various regions of their respective countries, found that Arabs differed from Americans on such proxemic behavior determinants as closeness, confrontation, touching and loudness of talking. Little (1968) found that there were no significant differences between the ordering of distances for different social transactions among five national groups which included Americans, Swedes, Greeks, Southern Italians and Scots. However, he did find a significant difference among nationalities as to the mean distance at which the various interactions were judged as taking place.

It is evident from these studies that differences in social interaction

patterns exist between nationalities. It can be inferred from such studies that proxemic behavior is a learned phenomenon. Unfortunately, the empirical literature is deficient in regard to the differences in proxemic behavior patterns existent among subcultural groups living within a society in which the predominant culture is not their own. A few studies have attempted to investigate the social spacing patterns existent between blacks and whites within the American culture but there has been no research directed toward assessing differential spacing relationships that blacks exhibit intraculturally.

Campbell (1968) found that black college students in a "relatively liberal" college preferred seating themselves together rather than integrating themselves around the classroom. Campbell's interpretation of these findings were inferential of a high degree of racial prejudice by the black students toward the white students. An equally potent interpretation would be that the observed behavior of the black students was more the result of long term friendships that had developed in social settings outside of the college classroom. In contrast to Campbell's data, Proenza and Strickland (1965) found that black college students exhibited significantly less social distance toward white students than white students displayed toward the black students.

Leibman (1970) studied the effects of race and sex across three experimental conditions. She found that irrespective of race and sex people in general avoid intrusions of personal space whenever possible. In her study, Leibman observed an interesting spacing pattern with respect to the race of the confederate. The distancing behavior of the white subjects was not influenced by the race and sex of the confederate. However, the

black female subjects were significantly influenced by the race of the confederate and showed less discomfort due to intrusion by the black male confederate than by the white male. Leibman concludes that the black subject's preference for personal space intrusion is more a function of race than sex. In contrast to the behavior of the black subjects, Leibman's data demonstrated that the personal space boundaries of the white subjects were governed more by the sex of the confederate than by the race of the confederate. In this regard white females position themselves closer to females than to males.

There is additional evidence to support the notion that blacks and whites within American society learn societal norms of spatial distancing in relationship to each other. Employing a cross-sectional design, (Koslin, Koslin, Paragament, and Bird, 1971) studied the developmental changes in the objective (normative) and the subjective (personal-affective) social distance judgments that children make in regard to themselves and in regard to others as a function of race and sex. The results of this study revealed that among children, interpersonal social distance increases as a function of age. With increasing age, children of both races preferred closer interaction distance with persons of their own race and increased interaction distance with persons of the opposite race. An interesting finding of this study reveals that black females preferred closer interaction with white females than with their same sex and race compatriots in grades 1-4. The major conclusion to be drawn from this study is that social polarity as a function of race increases with age.

The above studies seem to suggest that white and black subjects utilize personal space across race in a similar fashion. However, the above studies do not address the issue of how blacks use microspace at the intra-cultural level. The focus of this study is directed toward establishing a body of knowledge that is specifically related to the proxemic behavior of blacks within the American culture. It is expected that blacks will share closer interaction distances with each other than what members of the majority culture will enact. The term proxemics is used in this study to describe the manner in which individuals of different race and sex structure space within the context of a projected dydadic social interaction.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for this investigation consisted of 10 black males, 10 white males, 10 black females and 10 white females. The subjects were all undergraduate students solicited from the student body of the University of Massachusetts. Subjects were essentially volunteers who met the sex and race criteria requisite to the study.

Stumulus Material, and Procedure

A video tape recorder and a television monitor were employed to present to each subject the appropriate segments of pre-recorded stimuli. For each subject, a stimulus set was composed of four modeled social interaction scenes. In each series, a model moved progressively closer to a stationary confederate of the same sex and race of the subject; and alternately, of the

opposite race and sex of the subject. Following this procedure, each subject was exposed to the four possible combinations of a 2x2 factorial design with each factor having two levels. An illustration of the stimulus set for each black female consisted of : (black female--black male, black female--white female, black female--black female, black female--white male). In each of the four combinations of model and confederate shown the subject, the advancing model was always of the same sex and race of the viewing subject.

Models for the video taped stimulus sets consisted of two black males, three black females, three white females, and three white males. The models were graduate or undergraduate students with the exception of one of the female models, who was the receptionist.

Subjects were given a prepared answer sheet which consisted of four scales, one scale for each of the stimulus situations which they were to view. The scales consisted of six numbered points. The numbers on the scale corresponded respectively with each of the following measured distances: 203 centimeters, 152 cm, 122 cm, 76 cm, and 38 cm. The selection of the distance criteria was based on Hall's (1966) definitions of social interaction distance. The terminal distance of 38 cm was selected because the angle at which the stimuli were recorded made Hall's 26 cm for the close phase of social interaction appear much farther away on the television monitor than what it would appear in vivo.

Numbers corresponding to those on the scale of the answer sheet were taped to the wall above the model's head. Subjects were instructed to

Mark on their answer sheet the number appearing above the model's head that represented the distance at which they felt comfortable to interact verbally with the confederate. Subjects were told to imagine themselves to be the model advancing toward the confederate. The rationale for using a video taped, semi-projective technique for studying personal space was based on the conclusions drawn by Haase and Markey (1971). These authors reveal that studies employing active projective and semi-projective methodologies correlate more highly with a subject's actual behavior than do passive tasks.

Subjects were shown the stimulus tape individually or in groups of two. The individual scenes of each stimulus set were designated A, B, C, D, and were randomly varied in the order of presentation. The distance in centimeters that subjects identified as representing the most comfortable interaction distance for them was used as the dependent variable in the data analysis. This data was analyzed by means of a 2x2 factorial analysis of variance design (Winer, 1962).

Results

The results of this analysis have been summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

There was a significant main effect for race of subject ($F = 7.06$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .025$). White subjects prefer closer social interaction distances than black subjects. The main effect for race of stimulus revealed that white models were approached more closely than black models

($F = 17.21$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .001$). The main effects for race of subject and race of stimulus, however, are altered by the interaction effects.

There was a race of subject x race of stimulus interaction ($F = 23.81$, $df = 1/36$, $p < .001$). With regard to the black stimulus condition, there was no differential response between the black and white subjects. However, with regard to the white stimulus, black subjects positioned themselves farther away.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Further, there was a race of subject x race of stimulus x sex of stimulus interaction ($F = 5.93$, $df = 1/36$, $p = .025$). When the stimulus was black, males positioned themselves closer to the females and the females positioned themselves closer to the males. However, when the stimulus is white, the male subjects make no discriminative choice between males and females, and the females position themselves closer to other females.

Insert Figure 2 about here

The main effect for sex of stimulus and all remaining interactions in the analysis were not significant.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study clearly suggest that race and sex are important determinants of preferred social interaction distances. The findings presented here revealed that white subjects prefer closer interpersonal interaction distances than black subjects. This finding is

supportive of the Koslin, Koslin, Paragament, and Bird (1971) study.

The greater distancing behavior exhibited by the black subjects may have its determinants in the social psychology of American society. White subjects have more freedom and fewer restrictions placed on their mobility within American society than does his black counterpart. Having been reared in an environment in which the black person has been taught to fear and not trust the white man, it is conceivable that blacks have developed a more cautious approach to interpersonal relations and structure the use of microspace accordingly.

The interpretation of the main effect which implied that white subjects preferred closer interaction distances than did the black subjects must be altered when the race of subject by race of stimulus interaction is examined. In this interaction, there is no differential preference for interpersonal interaction distance between white and black subjects when the race of the stimulus is black. However, a reversal of this pattern is observed when the stimulus is white. Under this condition, black subjects position themselves farther from the white stimulus than did white subjects. Considering the fact that the black students within the sample are among a small minority of black students on a predominately white university campus, and taking into account the current concern for racial pride and identity and the black separatist philosophy that is currently prevalent among young blacks, it seems logical that a desire to present a cohesiveness on the part of the black subjects may be an influential determinant of the observed behavior. In addition, these differences may well represent learned, cultural patterns of interaction between whites and blacks.

Of equal interest, but more difficult to explain is the sex of subject x race of stimulus x sex of stimulus interaction. In this interaction, when the stimulus is black, all subjects showed a preference for closer interaction distance with opposite sex stimuli than they exhibited for same stimuli. However, when the race of the stimulus is white, male subjects across race exhibit equal distance preferences for interpersonal interactions. The females preferred closer distances with other females. Why the race of the stimulus produced such a differential response with respect to the males and the females in this study is a matter for speculation. One possible explanation of the distancing behavior exhibited by both the males and the females under the black stimulus condition may be that the subject's response is a reflection of learned social norms that blacks and whites are to maintain segregated social patterns. Koslin, Koslin, Paragament, and Bird (1971) found that racial distance increased with age for both males and females. The implication of this finding is that such an increase in distance is a reflection of the internalized normative values of the society.

The obvious similarity in age of the models and subjects; the restriction of only black and white subjects as participants in the study; and the relatively undefined nature of the experimental condition are all factors that no doubt contributed to the observed response. The fact that black stimuli provoked such a response and not the white stimuli perhaps reflects the current struggle of blacks to obtain equal rights in America. The ramifications of this quest for equality by blacks is articulated in the media more often in language of defense than it is in the positive

language that would enhance the situation. At this point in American history, the black man poses a threat to white America as it has never before experienced.

This interaction becomes even more complex when one tries to account for the behavior of the males and females under the white stimulus condition. The fact that the males did not make any discriminative choices of interaction distance under the white stimulus condition may also be reflective of the norms of the society. The sex roles prescribed by American society dictate that males are more aggressive and females passive. Such a sex role definition places more responsibility on the male to make social contacts with the female and, at the same time, makes social contacts between males much easier to initiate. So, in a traditional sense, the white male in this society becomes the pivotal point around which other social interaction distances are defined.

The behavior of the females under this condition might be interpreted to be a reflection of learned social behavior. The females may have preferred closer interaction distances with other females because of learned societal values. Generally speaking, females are permitted closer interaction distances in this society than are males. Females are permitted to hug each other in public places and to walk down the street arm-in-arm. Such behavior is taboo for the male. Additionally, females have been traditionally forced into the passive role. In this society, females traditionally have not been allowed the freedom of approaching the male.

The behavior of the black females with respect to the white male may have an added dimension. The black female's attribution of more distance to race than to sex may be indicative of a more deeply ingrained psychological phenomena which has its origin in American society's conception of the black man and black woman's sexuality. The consequence of such mythical and pathological thinking has historically been the treatment of black women as sexual playthings by white men. Hereton (1965) writes:

> . . . but it has been the Negro woman, more than anyone else, who has borne the constant agonies of racial barbarity in America, from the very first day she was brought in chains to this soil. The Negro woman through the years has suffered (and endured) every sexual outrage (with all the psychological ramifications) that a "democratic" society can possibly inflict upon a human being (p. 165).

Slaughter (1971) states: "The reality of many black women's lives has been the result of the white man's unbridled, predacious view of femininity and womanhood" (p. 309). Baldwin (1963) writes: "Protect your women; a difficult thing to do in a civilization sexually so pathetic that the white man's masculinity depends on a denial of the masculinity of the black man" (pp. 90-91).

The observed distancing behavior on the part of the black female may indeed represent a fear of the unknown which is compounded by an

historical image of the white man's treatment of the black woman as a sexual toy and something less than human. Such an interpretation is supported by current trends in interracial dating patterns observable on university and college campuses with only a small percentage of minority students. The pattern is essentially one in which black male and white female dating is a fairly common practice, whereas, the white male and black female dating practice is more restricted. The fact that there are fewer white man - black woman dating couples is not solely accounted for by a reluctance of black women to date white men, but also, is explainable by the fact that few white men ask black women for dates. The reasons are rooted in part in the success orientation of our society and the negative sanctions placed upon interracial dating. An additional comment which supports the above discussion is recorded by Willie and Levy (1972). They report that white males with whom they talked spoke of having guilt feelings about past exploitation of black women and fear that their motives will be misinterpreted. There was also the feeling of being turned down.

In summary, the results of this study showed significantly differentiated preferences for social interaction distances between black and white subjects. Further, a significant difference was found between approach distances to black vs. white stimulus persons. Both main effects are modified by the occurance of two higher order interactions indicating that the nature of preferences for interaction distance is a complex phenomenon involving non-uniform patterns of response of black and white subjects to black and white stimulus persons.

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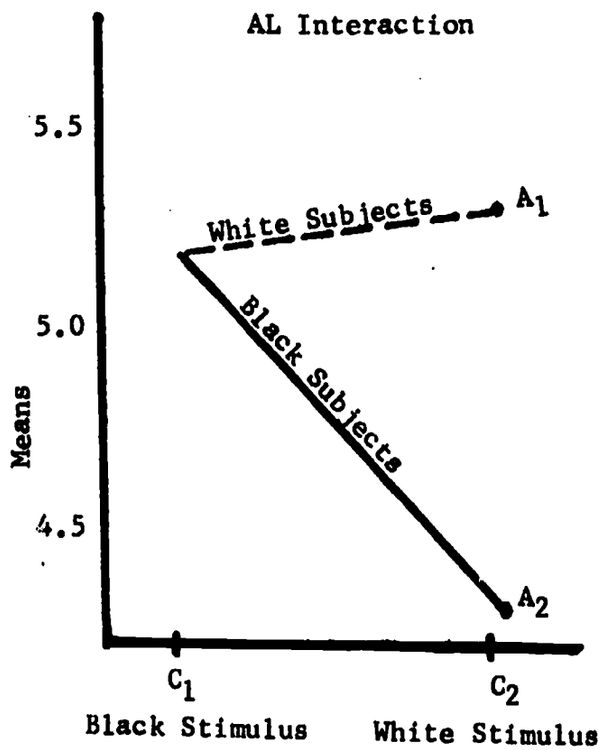
AL Interaction
5.5
5.0
4.5
Means
White Subjects
A1
Black Subjects
A2
C1
C2
Black Stimulus
White Stimulus

Figure 1

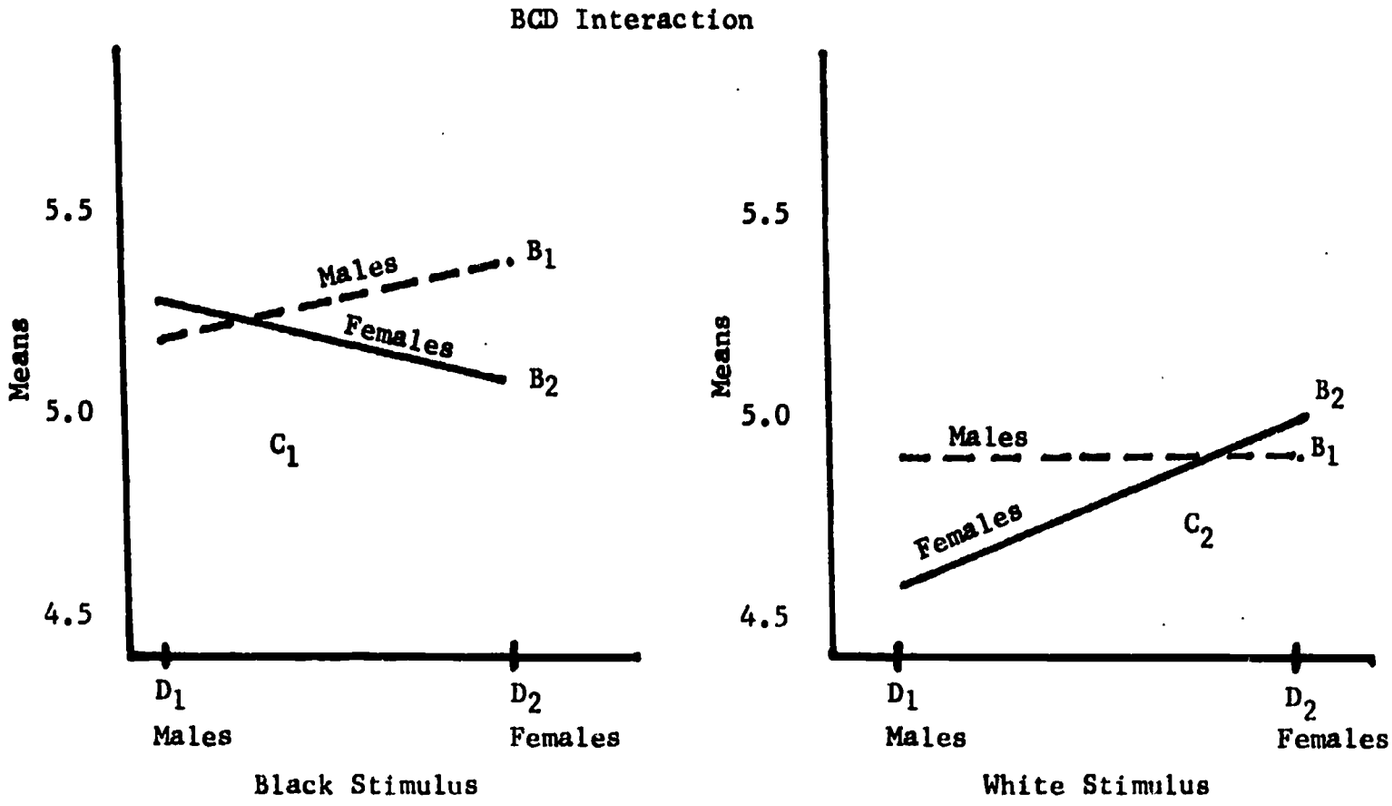
BCD Interaction
Means
5.5
5.0
4.5
Males
Females
B_1
B_2
C_1
D_1
Males
D_2
Females
Black Stimulus
Means
5.5
5.0
4.5
Males
Females
B_2
B_1
C_2
D_1
Males
D_2
Females
White Stimulus

Figure 2

TABLE 1

Analysis of variance of preferred distance by race & sex

SOURCE	df	SS	MS	F
Between Ss	39	57.41		
Race of Subject (A)	1	9.03	9.03	7.06*
Sex of Subject (B)	1	.63	1.60	
A x B	1	1.60	.63	
S/G (Error a)	36	46.15		
Within Subjects				
Race of Stimulus (C)	1	7.23	7.23	17.21**
A x C	1	10.00	10.00	23.81**
B x C	1	.00	.00	
A x B x C	1	.03	.03	
C/Ss/G (Error b)	36	15.25	.42	
Sex of Stumulus (D)	1	.40	.40	
A x D	1	.23	.23	
B x D	1	.03	.03	
A x B x D	1	.40	.40	
D/Ss/G (Error c)	36	17.45	.49	
C x D	1	.23	.23	
A x C x D	1	.10	.10	
B x C x D	1	1.60	1.60	5.93*
A x B x C x D	1	.03	.03	
CD/Ss/G (Error d)	36	9.55	.27	

* p = .025

** p = .001

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1: Means for each level of A at each level of C.

Figure 2: Means for each level of B at each level of D for C_1 and C_2.

FOOTNOTE

The author acknowledges the counsel and encouragement of Dr. Richard F. Haase in the completion of this research project.