

## Personal Space and Privacy: Implications for Correctional Institutions

*Incarceration involves not only the protection of society from inmates' antisocial behaviour but also punishment in the form of deprivation of personal liberty. The deprivation of personal control over events and space, even the limited space permitted in prison, and the creation of large proportions of communally used but non-owned space have readily observed consequences on behaviour. Those consequences, which can involve hostility, aggression, lack of co-operation and rejection of responsibility, can have measurable and serious consequences for correctional institutions. The following article discusses the perception and experience of personal space and privacy. This discussion, though not directly focused on corrections, is clearly applicable to relationships and behaviour that occur in correctional settings among and between both staff and inmates.*

The consideration of design in the development of plans for correctional institutions is not a luxury. The design of a building or space can assist in controlling and guiding behaviour, make correctional staff more comfortable in performing their difficult tasks, reduce the amount of stress and tension experienced by inmates, and generally optimize the possibility that inmates can be rehabilitated and resocialized rather than just incarcerated. Inmates' behaviour, sometimes ascribed to their characters, may be equally a function of their physical environment.

Human behaviour and the design of spaces are inextricably linked. Human behaviour and the design of spaces are inextricably linked. We respond to aspects of our environment without even knowing it. In fact, our responses to the environment are so ingrained that it is difficult to tell that they are actually **responses** to something other than internally motivated behaviours. For example, we unconsciously drop our voices when we enter a formally appointed room; we automatically choose a seat near a window and just as automatically place our belongings around us to preserve an adequate "bubble" of personal space. Personal Space Personal space refers to the amount of physical space people need around themselves to feel comfortable and not subject to invasion by others. It also refers to the ways in which spaces are "personal," that is, identified with a person - the way a place or space (an office, room, cell, desk or house) is identified as one's own. I. Personal Distance and Proxemics People have strong feelings about controlling access to their persons. This is manifest in the amount of space people choose to have surrounding them when dealing with other people. The amount and nature of the space needed depends on the identity of the other person or people, the nature of the situation and the arrangement of the environment, as well as on other environmental factors.

The feelings about personal space that we have in North America are not always shared with people from other cultures. In India, for example, the amount of personal space accorded in a public situation is much less than the amount we take for granted in North America. These differences can sometimes be found in the ergonomic specifications that are developed and adhered to by designers and architects to ensure that the furniture, buildings and equipment they design "fit" human proportions. For example, the North American standard for the recommended width for two people facing each other across a dining table is 10% more than the Indian standard.

"Proxemics" describes the distancing aspect of personal space, that is, the way behaviour is organized around space and distance from other individuals. Personal distance affects animal as well as human

behaviour. Animals will arrange themselves within the available space in ways that make them feel most comfortable, some species huddling and others avoiding contact. Whereas animals regulate the space between them in an instinctive way, the cues for people to seek contact with others or to maintain distance are usually situational - for example, friends stand or sit closer together than strangers.<sup>(1)</sup> The emotional characteristics of a situation can also dictate the kind of distance people prefer: people in a joyful or celebratory mood seek closer contact, as do people who are confronting an external source of danger such as an earthquake, fire or other natural disaster, or the threat from a person in a hostage-taking situation.

Observations of animal behaviour show that every animal species has a "flight distance" and a "critical distance." The flight distance is how close the animal will let an individual of another species come before it flees. The critical distance is the space the animal will allow until it attacks. Animals clearly demarcate these critical distance zones by their behaviour.

In humans, the regulation of space and distance is a mixture of instinct and socialized behaviour. The observation of personal space conventions is part of the basic foundation of social interaction. When other people ignore these conventions, we feel threatened or offended. We may explain their behaviour as the result of mental illness or aggression. A person of the opposite gender who violates our personal space may be regarded as sexually aggressive. Even if we do not try to explain the deviant behaviour, it makes us uncomfortable and usually makes us modify our own behaviour. We may become aggressive ourselves in response to this violation of convention and personal boundaries.

There are four kinds of distance described by Edward T. Hall<sup>(2)</sup> which are normally used when people relate to others. These are general rules that are modified under particular circumstances, and the distances given are those that are observed in North American cultures. The actual distances used by people are likely to differ among cultures and subcultures, as suggested above. For a designer of any space, whether it be an institution or a more personal space such as a house or apartment, knowledge of the basic rules governing distance is important. It is even more important for designers charged with creating spaces that people will share, as with work or living spaces.

**1. Intimate distance** is a "bubble" around a person that ranges from actual contact to 18 inches. Wilson<sup>(3)</sup> calls the close phase of this zone (from zero to six inches) the distance of lovemaking, wrestling, comforting and protecting: this distance is reserved for lovers, family, small children and very close friends.

The common exception is when people are forced into close quarters, for example, in an elevator or a bus. When this happens in North America, people tend to wrap an invisible cocoon around themselves. They may bring their arms and legs close to their bodies, wrap their arms around themselves, remain immobile or maintain strong muscle tone to defend against the touch of strangers. Another way people maintain their personal distance in close quarters is by avoiding giving "signals" of intimacy; for example, they might avert their eyes so that they do not come into direct eye contact with someone standing within the space normally reserved for intimate interaction.

**2. Personal distance**, from 1.5 feet to about four feet, is a zone within which people can touch each other

but where contact is not necessary. This bubble of personal space generally surrounds people in their interactions with those known to them: it is a comfortable space within which people can discuss personal matters. A stranger or acquaintance who comes closer than this is perceived as invading personal space.

Hall noted that the interaction distance between two people in Latin America differs from that in North America. Latin Americans cannot talk comfortably with one another unless they are very close to the distance that evokes either sexual or hostile feelings in North Americans. When they move close, we withdraw: they think we are cold, distant and unfriendly, and we think they are intrusive. This has more implications for interaction in the United States, where a large proportion of the population is Hispanic, than it does in Canada. An interesting research question would be whether French Canadians have a different social distance setting than English-speaking Canadians, or whether Native Americans' social buffer zones differ from those of non-Native Americans.

Again, this personal space is violated in a number of situations, for example, in a classroom or movie theatre where people you may not know are sitting right next to you. The perception of being invaded depends on the person's **orientation in space**: the amount of space required depends on where in the 360-degree space (or bubble) around you the other person or people are. The personal-space bubble is not evenly spread out all around but rather is larger in front of you. Thus it would be considered a rude invasion if a stranger walked up to within a foot or two of your face, but someone standing close to your side or to your back would not be a problem unless the person actually touched you. Even then, we have a tolerance for people jostling us if it is a momentary event.

**3. Social distance** includes a close zone of four to seven feet, within which impersonal interaction takes place. People who work together use close social distance as do people at a casual social gathering. At this distance, speech and facial expressions are clearly perceived, so communication can be efficient and accurate. When designers arrange seating in public places where communication is required or desirable, people are seated within this range so they can see and hear one another.

At the far phase of seven to 12 feet, more formal business and social discourse are conducted. The office arrangements of important or high status people are sometimes designed to keep visitors at this distance - chairs at the opposite sides of a standard desk keep people's heads about eight or nine feet apart.

At around 10 feet, the presence of another person does not require acknowledgement or conversation. So for example, in an office, a receptionist or secretary can attend to other work if a waiting visitor is seated at least 10 feet away.

**4. Public distance** includes a close zone that is between 12 and 25 feet and a far zone of more than 25 feet. Even the closer zone is in the range of "noninvolvement." You can pass people you know within this distance and acknowledge them, but not stop to exchange greetings. This is a more formal zone and voices must be raised somewhat in order to be heard. In the far zone, voices and actions have to be exaggerated in order to be perceived accurately. Public figures are usually surrounded by a distance of 30 feet or more from the crowd or audience.

A variety of modifications and exceptions to these "rules" or conventions have been noted through behavioural observation. People can tolerate a closer distance in open-air settings than in closed settings; extroverts seem to tolerate physical closeness better than introverts; and, in general, people who have difficulty relating to others appear to have larger body buffer zones,<sup>(4)</sup> or personal space bubbles. Researchers who have observed behaviour in correctional facilities found that almost all violent inmates had larger body buffer-zones, or personal space bubbles, than nonviolent inmates. Thus the violent inmates required more space around them when in contact with others, particularly for the personal space zone directly behind them.<sup>(5)</sup> This rear zone appears to be elongated, trailing behind the inmate. The unusual shape of this buffer zone may be a function of the dangers inherent in living a violent lifestyle where physical threat is always a possibility.

There are also gender differences in the way personal space is handled. When intrusion is avoidable, people will intrude on the personal space of a female rather than that of a male.<sup>(6)</sup> People will stand closer to a woman than to a man and will approach nearer to a woman before stopping.<sup>(7)</sup> This may be a function of the perceived lower status of women in our culture, or it may be linked to people's perception that men are more likely to use violence or aggression to defend their space.

## II. Personalized Space

Personal space also refers to a place or space that is identified as one's own - an office, room, desk or house. An important part of the feeling of possession is the right to personalize a space, to adapt it to your own needs and desires. This is something designers must keep in mind, but it is often sacrificed for uniformity, in order to control costs or people, or simply due to a lack of imagination. Employees persist in personalizing their work spaces, even when they work in an office or agency where there are directives against it - it seems to be a human imperative.

Inherent in this concept of personal space is status, that is, the ranking of people and groups through socially controlled means. It is usually easy to tell the socio-economic status of a family by the kind of home they live in, or whether they have a home at all. Other kinds of more socially determined status can be indicated by the style and appointments of clothing and personal spaces. In business and public agencies, for example, rank or status is reflected in the kind of office a person is assigned - its location, size, whether it is shared and the type of furniture it contains. Designers must allocate such things as floor space, window locations and furnishings in a manner that goes beyond the practical or functional ways to divide space, to include ways that have an impact on the emotionally sensitive issue of designating status.

Several issues inherent to the notion of personalized space help determine how people respond to physical settings. People have predictable reactions when their territory is invaded or threatened and when they are required to share space. These reactions and issues are discussed below.

### Territoriality

Humans' sense of territoriality is just as strong as that of animals. It is just lightly masked by manners and social conventions. If you have ever taken a parking space from someone who thought it was "theirs," or had someone "steal" yours, you know that territoriality extends far beyond your own office, room or home. Infringement on, or invasion of, someone's territory can bring out highly aggressive feelings and sometimes violent behaviour. This is in part because our sense of self-worth is tied up in being able to control access to our persons. In our culture, people of higher rank or status are permitted to touch or come close to those of lower rank, but the privilege is not reciprocal. Invading or taking over one's space

is equivalent to suggesting that he or she is of little consequence: it can be used as a demonstration of power. Personal Property and Possessions People have clear reactions to others' infringement on what is theirs or what they think is theirs. Our reactions when we arrive home to discover that an intruder has broken in and touched or taken our possessions include outrage, fear and a clear sense of violation and disgust; we feel almost as if the intruder touched or invaded our bodies. The sense of territoriality about possessions even extends to places or things that are temporarily ours, such as a seat on an airplane or a place in a queue. Group Property and Possessions Feelings nearly as strong as those mentioned above are engendered by group property and possessions. Neighbourhood committees, teams and schools all are the object of group territoriality. People are motivated to defend their common resources. Even when people have internal disputes, they will band together to fight a common enemy. In fact, psychologists have found that the best way to create cohesion in a group is to have a common enemy or a cause for which the group can work as a team. The classic "Robber's Cave" study in early social psychology research showed clearly that even in cases where people have hostile and negative feelings about others, bonds can be formed when there is a common cause.<sup>(8)</sup> Young children at a summer camp were divided into two competitive teams for games and recreational events. When the competitive spirit got out of control and the children developed hostility to one another, the camp directors "engineered" a breakdown of the camp's water system. All the children had to work together to repair the system, and this had the effect of mending the split between the two former rival groups. In a similar way, a threat to a residential area (a city proposal for a heavily travelled access road or plans to pave over a park or yard) can create a neighbourhood out of people who formerly cared little about one another. This process is assisted if the area has clear boundaries or a clear identity, for example, a name. No-Man's-Land Feelings of ownership are related to people's willingness to take care of a place or object. When people do not exercise territoriality, either as individuals or as a group, there is cause for concern: a place or object that is "no one's" is generally not well cared for or considered, precisely because it does not belong to anyone. This is sometimes why a place or object is vandalized. When people are working or living in an impersonal space, their behaviour becomes depersonalized and does not adhere as stringently to normal social controls. For a designer, one way to circumvent this is to involve the users in the planning of a space or facility. People involved in the planning seem to operate as if the space or place belongs to them and they will act more co-operatively and responsibly, for example, reporting that a drinking fountain is overflowing or an outside door will not close. Sharing Sharing property or space can be difficult, in part because we have such strong ingrained feelings of possession and territoriality. This is particularly true in our culture, which assumes that each person will have her or his own space, furniture, equipment and other items. We are not used to having to allow others to use our things, or having to ask for or arrange to use things belonging to others.

One of the reasons it is difficult to share is that in early childhood, we develop a sense of self based partly on our possessions. When we realize that something can belong to "me," we begin to get a better idea of who this abstract "me" is. Identification with one's possessions is strong and does not fade after childhood. Even in adulthood, we frequently see ourselves reflected in our things, and these reflections give messages about ourselves to others. This is why the visible manifestations of status can be so important to us. In a prison or correctional institution, the number and types of possessions inmates can bring from home are limited. In leaving possessions behind, they lose part of their identity. The loss of identity, which can be exacerbated by the required uniformity of accommodation and behaviour, can

undermine an inmate's self concept and create antisocial or erratic behaviour. The loss of outward signs of identity and status may also necessitate the establishment of status within the inmate population through other means, such as physical aggression, participation in the drug subculture or refusal to cooperate with correctional staff. Boundaries Designers can help reduce the friction caused by territoriality by clearly defining boundaries and rights whenever possible. When hallways, rooms or decks are shared, a clear demarcation of the boundary and an indication of what is public or shared space and what is private space can help people get along better. Perhaps even more important, a clear indication of the transition between public and private spaces makes both indoor and outdoor space safer for users.<sup>(9)</sup> For example, in apartment building hallways, the placement of plants or decorations outside individual doorways extends the private spaces out into the hall. The suggestion of ownership and surveillance makes it less likely that criminal or antisocial behaviour will take place there.<sup>(10)</sup> Privacy Privacy can be defined largely in terms of the need to be alone when we live or share spaces with other people. We need privacy precisely because we live and work constantly in the company of others. In many cases, the only place a person can be assured of privacy is in the bathroom or the car. The issue of privacy becomes even more crucial, however, in correctional settings, which generally offer fewer spaces for privacy. Even the inmate washroom facilities in correctional institutions generally do not afford privacy.

### I. Living Together

Group living is the norm in our culture: people live in couples, for example, in families and in such residential settings as dormitories and correctional institutions. Group living supports human endeavour, but it also causes stress. Most sources of stress are beyond the realm of the designer, but some aspects of living together can be improved by good design.

There are a variety of issues involved in living with others. These concern the development of relationships and safety, as well as territoriality and personal space as discussed above.

One of the most clearly established precepts of social psychology is that people generally make friends and establish relationships with those who are in physical proximity. Places can be designed to support or discourage the formation of friendships by having common spaces, hallways and entry-ways available for use by all residents or users of the space. The idea is to promote traffic flow in particular directions by having focal points in places where people will meet and interact with each other.

One of the most important functions of living space is the provision of personal safety and security, that is, protection from intruders. Safety also includes security outside the living place, or safe passage to and from the dwelling.

There is a link between personal safety and friendship formation: places designed to encourage the formation of relationships among residents will automatically be safer places. This is because people look out for one another if they are friends. In addition, friendship formation tends to encourage people to take a "we" attitude about the space and to take responsibility for communally held space and for the things that go on there.

### II. Working Together

Lack of privacy or control over personal space or over events occurring in the workplace affect an individual's sense of well-being, much in the same way that invasion of their personal space is perceived as a threat or annoyance. Some researchers have looked at the relationship between job stress and the workplace among white collar workers. A common finding is that the productivity of these workers has declined during the time that office automation and information processing capabilities increased. When these new facilities are introduced into an office, they may

require more communal use of space; they also can raise the level of frustration and feelings of loss of control, with the result that the levels of frustration and stress can rise while the level of productivity falls.

Some designers have suggested that creating workplaces that are more satisfying from the human point of view will result in improved productivity - by making people happier at work, you can make them better workers. It has been estimated that, over the life span of a typical office building, 90% of the costs are for employee salaries and benefits, and 10% are for the design, construction and operation of the structure itself.<sup>(11)</sup>The "sick building syndrome" is only now being recognized as the result of serious flaws in the way large office buildings are designed, constructed, heated and ventilated.

In 1987, over 170 million salary dollars in Canada were lost because of absenteeism.<sup>(12)</sup>Orientation and training for a new professional or technical staff member can cost an organization between \$8,750 and \$17,500 per year.<sup>(13)</sup>If employees leave their jobs because their lack of control over the work space leaves them frustrated and unproductive, it may be wiser to invest in the design of the structure to satisfy employee needs.

It is possible to design work space so that it allows for more personalization of space, if not privacy. Deasy<sup>(14)</sup>has made a few recommendations<sup>(14)</sup> for designers and management:

- identify each person's workplace with a name tag, even stations where there is rotation of staff;
- provide lockable storage space for personal belongings;
- arrange work stations so that the worker faces oncoming traffic and is not placed where traffic is concentrated (unless it is an information or reception area);
- provide individual control over light and temperature;
- provide window views, even if they are over a distance from the work station;
- provide flexible furnishings that are height-adjustable as well as adjustable in relation to each other;
- allow for personalization through pictures, plants or awards; and
- provide for facilities that are easy to clean and maintain, especially for rotation work stations where work space is shared.

**Conclusion** The sense of personal space and privacy is an integral element in human behaviour and interaction. When spaces are designed without keeping these imperatives in mind, those using the space - the residents, staff, clients or inmates - are forced to operate in ways that make them uncomfortable. They may not understand or even perceive the reasons for their unease, but it is clear that their discomfort will manifest itself in strained interactions and relationships. It may even increase general levels of tension and aggressive behaviour. Within correctional facilities, a wide variety of people must perform a great range of tasks and operate within complex role-relationships. If correctional settings can include design features that can make these tasks and relationships easier, both inmates and staff will benefit.

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