

Using Projective Techniques To Measure Interaction Distance:

A Methodological Note

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During recent years a fairly substantial literature has developed regarding the concept of personal space (Evans & Howard, 1973). However, numerous methods have been devised to measure this variable, ranging from observations of naturally occurring interaction distances to projective and simulation techniques. Researchers thus far have reported that relationships between the various methods have ranged from moderate to weak (Aiello, 1976; Aiello, DeRisi, Epstein, & Karlin, 1977; Aiello & Thompson, in press; Dosey & Meisels, 1969; Duke & Nowicki, 1972; Haase & Markey, 1973; Knowles & Johnsen, 1974; Pedersen, 1973; Rawls, Trego, & McGaffey, 1968).

A study was carried out to examine the relationship between direct observations of behavior and subjects' attempts to duplicate that behavior through projective and simulation measures. Thirty pairs of unacquainted females served as subjects. A subject pair was led into the experimental room and asked to have a discussion on a prearranged topic. During this interaction period, an observer unobtrusively recorded judgments of interaction distance, using an adaption (Aiello & Aiello, 1974) of Hall's (1963) proxemic behavior scale. Following the discussion period, the subjects were led to one of three projective measures: felt board placement, doll placement, or approach (the approach measure included approaching from different angles). The order in which the measures were given was counterbalanced and predetermined. For each of the three projective measures, the subjects were asked to place their figures or approach as they themselves had stood during the conversation.

We found that none of the projective or simulation measures was significantly related to the actual, observed distance behavior during the beginning

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of their conversation; and, in fact, these measures tended to be negatively correlated. The average correlation of the obtained r 's between the actual distance and the projective techniques (doll placement, felt board placement, direct approach, 45° approach, and 90° approach) was $-.23$. This pattern was repeated for the other distance measures. The relationship between the actual distance at the end of the conversation and the projective measures was slightly higher, but still did not reach statistical significance. These findings are particularly interesting considering the fact that subjects were specifically requested to attend to and replicate their behavior.

The results of the present study suggest that investigators must exercise caution when relying on projective measures as indicative of spatial behavior. Our data suggest that the processes involved in interaction are far removed from subjects' realm of awareness and, even when asked to duplicate their behavior, they cannot produce an accurate representation. It is possible that the projective measures tap a cognitive component reflecting expectations of spatial arrangements that is only marginally related to actual behavior. Additional research efforts are required before this dimension can be more specifically defined.

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