THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

CLOTHING AS A DETERMINANT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE PREFERENCES

by

GISELE LOUISE LANDRY

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF CLOTHING AND TEXTILES

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

October, 1975

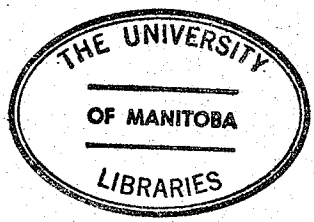
"CLOTHING AS A DETERMINANT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE PREFERENCES"

by

GISELE LOUISE LANDRY

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all those responsible for the completion of this thesis, especially my advisor and committee members, Mrs. Cecilia Gonzales, Dr. Raymond Perry and Mrs. June Jackson, respectively. Also, to the Clothing and Textiles Department, for their financial support for the photography.

In addition, I am most grateful to my fellow graduate students, and to my family, for their continued encouragement throughout this "ordeal."

It would be remiss of me to leave out the one person perhaps most responsible for this accomplishment. To Harold McGee, thanks for introducing me to the whole concept of proxemics.

My gratitude is also extended to Miss Dianna Koss for her patience during the long photography sessions, and to Mrs. Grace McIntyre for her very capable typing.

Finally, to Dr. Nicky Hamid, sincerest thanks for the permission to use your most appropriate cartoons.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

CLOTHING STYLE AS A DETERMINANT OF SOCIAL DISTANCE PREFERENCES

The aims of the study were to determine if particular clothing styles elicit the social-psychological distance responses of Intimacy, Casualness, or Remoteness between strangers, and to determine whether there is a difference between males and females in their distance responses toward clothing styles. Therefore, clothing style as a determinant of social distance preferences was investigated using ninety male and ninety female subjects at the University of Manitoba.

The independent variables considered were sex and clothing style, and the dependent variable studied was social distance preference. Subjects were asked to respond to a selected clothing style on the social distance instrument developed for the study. Their responses were recorded, and a two-by-three-by-three analysis of variance was used to interpret the results of the variables at the various levels.

The social distance measure developed for the study yielded significant results among the Intimate, Casual and Remote distances investigated. Findings also showed a significant effect between sex and style of dress, and

between sex and social distance. However, no significant relationship was found between Mod, Straight, and Grubby clothing styles and Intimate, Casual and Remote social distances, nor between male and female subjects in their distance preferences toward the clothing styles.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Distances are considered in either of two general contexts, in actual physical dimensions or in the less tangible, psychological context. Yet the element of distance is only vaguely considered during a social interaction. This occurs, despite the fact that physical spacing is a distinctly inevitable dimension of all interpersonal encounters. In fact, Hall (1963:147) has drawn the analogy that our treatment of space is not unlike our treatment of sex, we know it is there but we don't talk about it.

Several theories have been developed to explain why one person interacts at a closer or farther distance than another (Bogardus, 1938). These variations in the use of space have been studied by social scientists and architects alike. Hall (1968;1966;1963) considers proxemic behavior, or one's use of space, as a medium of non-verbal communication. The significance of this phenomenon has extended to the areas of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and architecture.

Similarly, clothing has been considered a medium of non-verbal communication (Hall, 1959; Rosencranz, 1965).

This notion has been studied by both clothing researchers and social scientists with interesting results. The socio-psychological focus of clothing research however, has dealt mainly with the following aspects: awareness and role theory (Ryan, 1966); for example, one's role in society may be indicated by a uniform. Other research has dealt with the aspect of personality (Knapper, 1969), in that the way one dresses may reflect certain personality characteristics. Although the communicative aspect of clothing has been discussed by Rosencranz (1962, 1965), and Horn (1968), the degree to which clothing symbolism affects a perceiver's overt behavior toward a wearer has not been extensively investigated.

Regardless of the techniques used to communicate, accurate interpretation must take place to ensure that the communication is successful. Two members of a society must interpret a verbal message in the same way in order to understand each other. Similarly, such non-verbal media as distance, stance and movements must be correctly translated to be meaningful, thereby eliciting the appropriate response from an observer.

Successful communication with clothing as a medium is facilitated by several factors. Most important among these are a mutual understanding by observer and wearer of dress cues, a fairly accurate interpretation of these cues by the observer, followed by the expected and desired response. With this in mind, one should realize that clothing, like

any other non-verbal communicative device has its limitations. It is the accurate interpretation of the message being transmitted.

Studies have shown that appearance affects evaluations, and impressions of personality (Hamid, 1968; Ryan, 1966; Little, 1965). First-impression formation is a step in the perception process, by which one acquires an understanding or knowledge of an object or person. Research has shown that brief contact between individuals may result in the formation of these first impressions (Argyle and McHenry, 1971; Ryan, 1966). The perceptual process also involves the organization of past events which act as points of reference for future experiences. As a result, an observer tends to be highly selective to particular stimuli, or cues, to further assist his organization of new perceptual experiences.

According to Hastorf, Schneider and Polefka (1970), the interpretation of stimuli imposes order on social interactions, by limiting the amount and content of future experiences, for example, uniforms indicate occupation. It therefore follows that the interpretation of clothing stimuli will contribute order to social encounters. On the other hand, distance behavior is an interpretation and response toward stimuli which functions to maintain the social order. How then, do clothing stimuli affect distance responses?

Considerable research has been done on person percep-

tion, impression formation, and clothing symbolism as well as on social distance, yet no studies have yet been made on the effect of clothing on interpersonal distance.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of related literature is given in two separate sections. The first section is a review of pertinent research in the area of social distance behavior, and the second section, a discussion of relevant information and research on the socio-psychological aspects of clothing and appearance.

Related Social Distance Research

Social scientists have long been studying the factors which contribute to physical spacing in human encounters. Emory S. Bogardus (1938), a sociologist and pioneer in "social distance" research, first cited these factors as: (a) differences in temperament and biological make-up; (b) differences in personal tastes; (c) differences in culture patterns and (d) lack of acquaintance and knowledge of the subject or person (1938:467). He explained that social distance is the result of the attracting and repelling forces between stimulus persons.

Man does not interact socially without the element of physical spacing. In fact, each individual is known to have his own "personal space," or "bubble," the boundaries

of which are not observable. These boundaries however, have been found to expand and contract depending upon the nature of the environment surrounding an individual (Hall, 1966:121; Sommer, 1959:68).

In the time since Bogardus first probed into the characteristics of social distance behavior, several researchers have taken an interest in this phenomenon. Some studies in the fields of anthropology and architecture have shown comparable social distance behavior patterns.

Edward T. Hall, an anthropologist (1963b, 1966, 1968), has coined the term "proxemics," which generally is defined as the study of man's cultural use of space (1966:1). It is chiefly a study of the relationships existing between the observations made and the theories developed regarding social distance behavior. Hall has also investigated this phenomenon cross-culturally.

However, where Bogardus (1959) sought to determine prejudicial attitudes toward various racial and ethnic groups, Hall chose to study the subtle nuances in the behavior of these groups which inadvertently led to certain prejudices. For example, in Hall's study (1966) members of the English, French, German, and Arabic cultures were observed for <u>characteristic</u> behavior, especially interpersonal behavior, differing from our own. Obvious features, such as the typical closeness of Arabs in interaction, stood out as facilitating distance behavior in intercultural social encounters.

On the basis of these observations, Hall has formulated the theory that members of different cultures may interpret sensory stimuli differently. He explains that this phenomenon occurs due to learned variations in conceptualizing. That is, members of one group may see objects in a context, while members of another group may see these objects only in relation to each other (1968:90). This phenomenon has been explained by Hastorf, Schneider and Polefka (1970:6) as a function of one's cultural upbringing.

Other cross-cultural studies by Watson (1970), Watson and Graves (1966), and Triandis and Davis (1965), have supported Hall's theories and observations regarding the attitudes and actions associated with proxemic behavior. However, even within one's own society, there are various techniques by which the use of space is directed.

In 1964, Robert F. Murphy investigated the use of the veil by the Tuareg people of North Africa. "The veil, though providing neither isolation nor anonymity, bestows facelessness and the idiom of privacy upon its wearer and allows him to stand somewhat aloof from the perils of social interaction while remaining a part of it" (1964:1257). This is a cultural nuance involving the veil to symbolically introduce distance between themselves and those with whom they are interacting. The veil not only allows the wearer to manipulate social spacing, but also provides cues to help members of the society recognize appropriate distance responses.

Some studies have shown that an individual may have distorted perceptions even within his own culture or society. This was illustrated by Sommer (1969), who studied the schizophrenic's use of space. His findings revealed that patients suffering from this disorder would manifest either extreme withdrawal or come too close to a male decoy in an experiment (1969:69-70). A case in point was cited by Horowitz (1965) in a study of human spatial behavior. A young male, a chronic schizophrenic, would insist that the left side of his body, especially his left arm, did not belong to him. "He would often bump into people with his left side, seemingly by accident, but this never happened on his right side" (1965:23-24).

Sommer concluded that persons afflicted with the personality disorder of schizophrenia inhabit different sensory worlds, thereby causing them to utilize inappropriate distance responses.

Perhaps one would associate this type of social distance behavior with Bogardus's personal taste factor. Differences in personal tastes, he said, can cause adverse sensory reactions (1938:467). These reactions are sometimes evident toward people with obvious physical handicaps who elicit either extreme avoidance, or extreme helping behavior. However, the avoidance aspect has also been found to hold true for persons who do not have visible handicaps. Research by Kleck, Buch, Goller, London, Pfeiffer and Vukcevic (1968), has revealed that stigmatized

persons (those described as having epilepsy) elicit greater distance responses from subjects than do non-stigmatized persons (1968:111).

In 1970, Patterson and Sechrest conducted a study to determine the effect of interpersonal distance on impressions of personality. A front row classroom setting was used giving distance approximations of two, four, six or eight feet between the subject and confederate. Results indicated that interpersonal distance did indeed, affect the formation of impressions. Male confederates were rated more dominant than female confederates, while female confederates were considered more extroverted than males (1970:164).

More recent studies by Little (1965) and Brien and Ryback (1970) substantiated Bogardus' claim that lack of acquaintance and knowledge of the subject or person is a contributory factor to social spacing.

Research by Little has established that the degree of acquaintanceship can affect interpersonal distance. His findings supported his prediction that there would be an increasing rank order of distances of interactions between two friends, two acquaintances, or two strangers. The type of setting, suggesting different social situations and differing degrees of proximity, was also considered a variable affecting interpersonal distance. The three settings used in the study were: a living room, an office waiting room, and a street corner. The findings revealed

that for both sexes, figures of strangers in an office waiting room produced maximum distance, while friends on a street corner produced the minimum distance (1965:241).

Brien and Ryback (1970) report that people generally consider themselves psychosocially "closer" to others who are liked, positive, attractive or perceived as similar. Known as a psychosocial orientation, it pertains to the psychological determinants of a person's willingness to accept or associate with certain designated "others" in situations varying in intimacy (1970:23).

The following study of Klukken (1971) also reflects a similar relationship to Bogardus' acquaintance factor. Klukken investigated the effect of topic intimacy on interpersonal distance and found that in a naturalistic, as opposed to experimental setting, interactions of high topic intimacy with a stranger resulted in greater distances than those of low intimacy (1971:38). Thus, Little (1965) and Klukken (1971) have pursued the fourth factor mentioned by Bogardus with substantiating results. And although four factors have been demonstrated as contributing to social distances, it is perception, or the understanding derived from experience, which allows an individual to make appropriate distance responses.

Distance responses are not always conscious and it is these unconscious patterns of behavior which have been observed and studied by Sommer (1959; 1969). For example, seating arrangements in different physical and attitudinal

environments such as libraries, cafeterias, and lounges, were observed, where interactions during conversation, co-operation on some form of work, or competition were studied. Sommer found that subjects overwhelmingly chose a corner-to-corner, or face-to-face arrangement for casual conversation at a rectangular table (1969:68), but where sofas were used, either side-by-side, or face-to-face arrangements were most often observed (1961). In this study however, seating depended largely upon the distance between the sofas and whether they could be moved. Increasing the distance between facing sofas often led subjects to sit side-by-side.

These observations have interesting implications for designers and architects alike, and the concept of space has long been a concern of architects. Hall (1966), Sommer (1969), and Watson and Graves (1966), as social scientists, have sought to bridge the gap between architecture and the social sciences. Although man has devised methods of structuring his environment, he has made gross errors regarding optimum space requirements for different types of individuals. Great increases in population have led to overcrowded cities. Homes are smaller with fewer rooms, while high-rise apartment buildings have contributed to increased population per unit area (1966:160). The incidence of crime has also increased considerably in recent years, and a tremendous paradox exists between man's search for an efficiently structured environment and his rebellion against this

system. Granted, the element of space may not be the sole problem, but neither can it be overlooked as a contributing factor. The need for optimum spacing is an inherent part of our social lives.

Summary: Social distancing is basically an overt demonstration of one's degree of acceptance or rejection of the "other" in any given situation.

Several factors may strongly influence the degree of proximity allowed in social interaction. These include: (1) degree of acquaintanceship, (2) topic intimacy, (3) physical setting and (4) attitudinal environment. Conversely, studies involving the manipulation of distances in social interaction between subjects and an experimental confederate, have produced effects in impressions of personality.

Research has disclosed a number of contributing factors to variations in the use of space. However, no direct investigation has yet been made regarding the effect of appearance on the social distance behavior of interacting strangers.

Related Socio-Psychological Research in Clothing and Appearance

In recent years, studies in the clothing area have used a distinctly more socio-psychological approach. Several investigations, focusing on basic psychological

theories such as personality and self-concept, perception, motivation, attitudes and interests, role theory, and related behavior have yielded interesting data. Hamid (1967, 1968, 1969, 1972), has made interesting contributions in this field. Ryan (1966) discusses the role of clothing in impression formation, and the identification of a wearer and his role in society. Meanwhile, other research concerned with such concepts as symbolism and awareness - concepts of communication - have illustrated how clothing does help facilitate a successful interaction. This is especially true where certain types of dress can identify a wearer's occupation.

The area of psychology most relevant to the present study is that of person perception. Perceptions are known to take place over a wide range of experiences providing cues to appropriately confront new experiences.

Lefkowitz, Blake, and Mouton (1955) illustrated how the perception of a person's attire determined whether pedestrians would follow him in violating a traffic signal. "Significantly more violations occured among pedestrians when the non-conforming model was dressed to represent high social status than when his attire suggested low social status" (1955:706). The pedestrians used the model's clothing as a means of determining their own legitimacy in violating the traffic signal.

Several studies on impression formation have been conducted by clothing and psychological researchers alike.

Ryan (1966) and Hoult (1954) found that impressions of persons changed as a result of changes in clothing, and that behavioral responses were based on these various impressions. Ryan (1966) further discovered that perceptions of an individual's mood and certain personality traits can vary with clothing. She stipulated however, that variations exist among different viewer's perceptions in relationships with the wearer, and in the types of situations which affect clothing-based perceptions.

Hamid's (1967) earliest study dealt directly with the effect of contact, or social distance, on dress stereotypes. He looked at the categorizing responses to a set of four

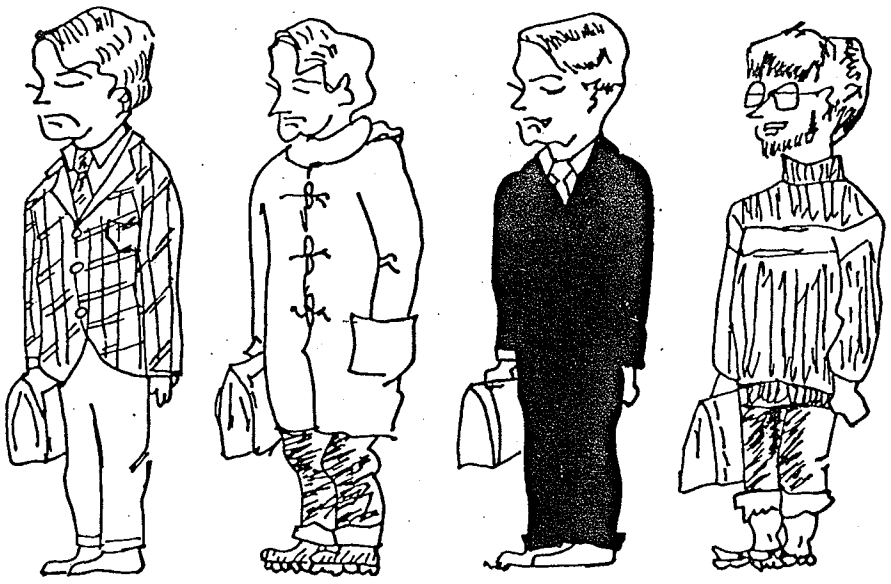


FIGURE 1

CARTOONS OF FOUR STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT MODES OF DRESS

*By permission of Dr. Paul N. Hamid, April, 1975.