

Personal space as real concrete measurable phenomenon

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We considered from an experimental point of view the hypothesis of the existence of a personal space suggested from the literature on nonverbal communication. We define personal space not only in terms of interpersonal distance and in relation to attention, but as a psycho-physiological characteristic like a personality trait of the subject that defines parts of his personal territory. Personal space is a concrete physiological phenomenon organizing the relationships with the spatial environment, strictly related to the organization of bodily concrete experiences of the ego structure. By asking subjects to modify their postural attitude, we also observed the presence of relevant modifications of personal space. We asked 30 undergraduate psychology students, males and females, to indicate if they could perceive and define space around themselves. They were also asked to indicate the dimensions and the shape of their space. When subjects gave positive responses, the experimenter measured the dimensions of the perceived space with a centimeter tape rule. The subjects were considered as center of eight spatial directions: anterofrontal, posterior, right and left lateral, and 4 obliques. The eight dimensional axes were placed imaginatively in horizontal plain perpendicular to the subject at the level of the xifoid apophysis of the sternum. Results seems to confirm the hypothesis. 24 subjects (80%), perceived a well defined and measurable personal space. For each subject a graphic representation of the area of the perceived space is given. Therefore the phenomenon of the personal space has been connected with the problematic of narcissism, examining the relationship between personal space and normal dimensional narcissistic development studied through the Questionnaire of Scilligo. Interesting relationships between shape and extension of personal space and some Scales of narcissistic development (Assertivity, Projectivity and Creativity) appeared.