

### Introduction:

In this activity, participants engage in conversation at various proxemic distances and reflect on how they, their partner, and the conversation are impacted by distance. The activity concludes with a debrief that encourages participants to consider how their cultural backgrounds inform their culturally embedded proxemics rules.

### Facilitator Notes:

This activity can be facilitated quickly, within 15 minutes, however if you would like to add more cultural study in proxemics, consider assigning pre-work and engaging in a discussion before facilitating this activity, or include a lesson and discussion on proxemics immediately following facilitation of this activity. The following sources (or one of your choice) may be used to inform a lesson (also in [Links](#)):

Hall, E. T. (1963). A system for the notation of proxemic behavior. *American anthropologist*, 65(5), 1003-1026. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/668580>

Rakhmankulova, A. (2020, September 25). "Don't stand so close to me!" How does your culture affect your attitude to personal space?. [Article]. LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/dont-stand-so-close-me-how-does-your-culture-affect-rakhmankulova/>

Lawrence, T. W. (2017, December 27). *When does close become too close?*. Psychology today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/culture-conscious/201712/when-does-close-become-too-close>

### Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize how culture informs proxemic behavior and articulate their own cultural rules for using distance and space.

### Time:

15 minutes.

### Group Size:

Pairs.

### Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

### AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

#### Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

### Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

### Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

### Other Skills:

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

### Activity Instructions:

1. Introduce the activity by telling participants that you will do an activity together demonstrating how we use space. Based on the number of participants you have, you will need everyone to pair up, minus 1-3 observers. Ensure that you have an even number of participants after assigning 1-3 participants to be observers (or requesting volunteers). If you have a small group (5-7 people), consider assigning only 1 observer. If it is a larger group, it can be very enlightening to bring in multiple perspectives from 2-3 observers.
2. Once observers have been assigned (or volunteer), instruct the remaining participants to pair up.
3. Instruct observers to take mental (or physical) notes on what they notice throughout the duration of the activity.
4. Partners should split up - one partner should be on each side of the room, forming two lines on either side of the room. Instruct partners to begin a conversation from the longest distance they are able to (opposite sides of the room). Gradually ask participants to slowly move toward one another in conversation until they are as close as they can be.
5. After a couple of minutes, the activity will conclude. You can end the activity when partners are conversing as close as they can be.
6. Debrief as a group using your own questions or a combination of the below questions, based on Thiagi (Thiagarajan, 2018).
  - Participants:
    - What happened?
    - How do you feel?
  - Observers:
    - Share with everyone what you noticed throughout the activity (e.g., What happened? How did it make you feel?)
  - Observers and Participants:
    - What did you learn?

- How does your cultural background impact how you respond to this activity?
- How do you think these cultural rules came to be? Who or what taught you these rules and how?
- How do you think you might respond if you came from another cultural background?
- How might this activity look different (in terms of participant internal feelings and outward behavior) across cultures?
- How does this relate to the real world? What if someone in real life violated your own culturally embedded proxemics rules? How would you react (both in internal feelings and outward behavior) depending on the context (e.g., at work, at school, in a public social setting, etc.)?
- How might this inform how you interact with individuals who come from different cultural backgrounds from you?
- How will your learnings inform how you move forward from here?

Thiagarajan, S. (2018, May 26). *Debriefing*. [Article]. LinkedIn.  
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/debriefing-sivasailam-thiagarajan/>