

## Privacy : A Decisive Factor In Design...

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### Abstract

Privacy, like territoriality, is a process that is at once an extremely important dimension of our daily lives, yet one we often manage at a low level of awareness. To accomplish our privacy goals, we must be skilled at balancing our own desires, those of others, and the physical environment.

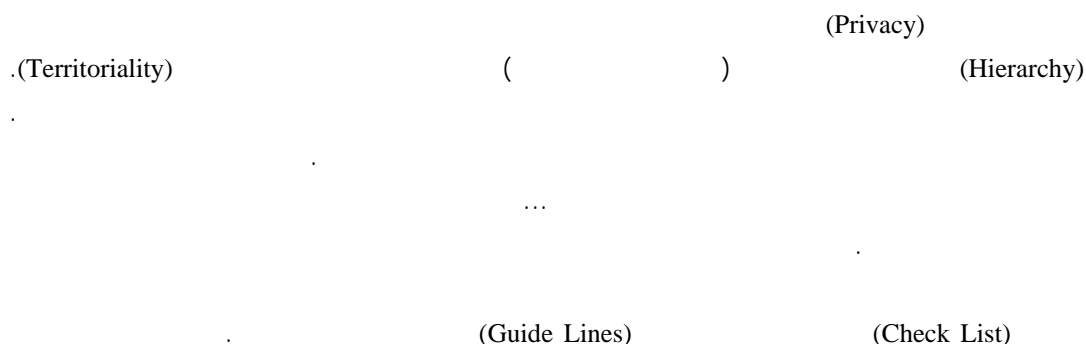
Privacy is a relatively new concept. While the word "privacy" first appear in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the meaning most closely related to how the word is used today did not emerge for another four hundred years. (Gordon, 2004).

To many people, privacy means one of two things. One of these is being apart from other people. The other is being sure that other individuals or organization do not have access to certain information about them. These two everyday meanings represent only part of the meaning of privacy. For example, one view of privacy in environmental psychology is that privacy processes sometimes lead individuals to seek more social interaction.

Dictionaries tend to provide an excellent insight into the way a word is commonly used defines privacy as "The quality or state of being apart from company or observation; freedom from unauthorized intrusion," and does not specify whether this relates to people or data (Websters, 2003). "The state or condition of being alone, undisturbed, or free from public attention, as a matter of choice or right; freedom from interference or intrusion. (OED, 2003).

The invasions of privacy occur when someone physically intrudes on us or when someone collects information about us that we do not want them to have. Some of us need more privacy than others; some of us need different kind of privacy; all of us need more privacy at certain times and less at others. Privacy is closely tied to territoriality, crowding, and personal space. It is even related to how we speak, to our nonverbal, and to our developmental processes. It is intimately involved with other important psychological processes, including emotion, identity, and our sense of control.

All of these faces of privacy are interesting in their own right, but understanding privacy serves a larger purpose: assisting in the design of better-built environments. We cannot accomplish this goal without knowing how to measure privacy, what personal and situational factors influence it, and how privacy is related to other behavior processes.



### What is Privacy?

We have seen that privacy means many things to many people. Probably the best definition of privacy yet developed is one by Irwin Altman, where he says, "Privacy is a selective control of access to the self or to one' group". (Altman, 1967). Altman's definition captures the essence of privacy- the twin themes of management of information about oneself and the management of social interaction. That is, "access to self" may refer either to information about oneself or to social interaction with oneself.

Altman's definition also has room other dimensions of privacy. One involves the number of individuals encompassed. We normally thinks of individuals seeking privacy, but as Westin (1967) has pointed out, we sometimes seek to be alone with one or more selected others. At other times, we get together in-groups, excluding others. That is why Altman's definition includes one's group.

On the other hand, privacy could be defined as "the ability to control interactions, to have options, and to achieve desired interactions". The underlying statement is that ability to control the information which we receive from the surrounding environment, whether they are visual, auditory, or physical contact.

The term selective control used by Altman suggests that a person or a group determines the degree and type of privacy required according to the cultural context (situation), time, the standing pattern of behavior, the aspirations of the person involved, and the present needs of the person. This means that a person chooses with whom he interacts, the nature of the interaction, and the amount of information revealed. People do that to achieve an optimal level of privacy suitable for the situation or activity they are engaged in. The optimum degree of privacy has two extreme effects, with loneliness on one end and crowding on the other.

### **Functions Of Privacy**

In general, privacy serves two functions; the achievement of self identity, and the management of interaction between self and the social environment. Westin (1970) identified four purposes served by privacy: personal autonomy (a sense of the self), where one distinguishes the self from the other as an independent person, emotional release (a getaway from various roles) where a person is free from the eyes of others, self evaluation (the integration of experience and plans for the future), and communication. The first three fall under the first function, while communication falls under the second. (Van Dorst, 2005).

### **Privacy Mechanisms**

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of privacy threats is that in each case significant reduction of risk can be achieved by modification of users behavior, a higher awareness and more active participation in control.

Altman (1975) identified various mechanisms through which people maintain the optimal privacy. They could be typed as follows:

- Verbal Mechanism as the use of a straight foreword sentence such as "please, I want to be alone". In order for the message to be clear and effective, the verbal content and the paraverbal cues should work together to avoid misunderstanding. Here the nature of the interaction and the degree of privacy required should be taken into account.
- Nonverbal mechanisms are also used to regulate interaction. Among them are body gestures (e.g., extended arms), facial expressions (e.g., smile or frown), and eye contact. A combination of verbal and nonverbal mechanism can be used together.

As for the environmental privacy mechanisms, the use of the physical environment gives a clear example. The use of territorial markers to define a territory is a clear example. The use of territorial markers to define a territory is a clear example of a way for maintaining privacy. The use of fences, walls, and signs are exemplars of a way to control interaction in different territories and then achieving different levels of privacy. (Altman, 1975).

### **Measuring Privacy**

Those who would measure privacy well must carefully consider its complex definition. To be comprehensive, the measure should include both the social and the informational themes, acknowledge that pairs and larger groups may seek privacy as well as individuals, note that privacy may vary across the various communication channels as

well as over time, and recognize that privacy-seeking may actually lead an individual to search for a party to attend.

Privacy may be measured as a behavior, as a belief, as a value, as a preference, and as an expectation. No comprehensive measure of privacy has yet been developed. Most privacy investigations have actually studied perceived privacy, using surveys, questionnaires, or interviews. After all, in order to study privacy behavior by field observation, the investigator is almost forced to violate the subject's privacy! The naturalistic observations of privacy focus on schools, other institutions, or offices, where either age or location of the subjects decreases the likelihood that sensitive areas of behavior will be under surveillance. Subject's self-reports of their privacy behaviors, values, preferences, and expectation from the foundation of psychological research into privacy.

An important aspect of many forms of liveability is the control over social interaction an individual has. The motivation and attitude towards social interaction is formed by physical reconditions. A survey on these preconditions in different type of neighborhoods leads to a model called privacy zoning. Privacy zoning relates control on social interaction to different layers of "public space". (Van Dorst, 2005).

## **The Privacy-Territoriality Relationship**

### **(Territoriality as a functioning factor)**

Territories are geographical areas that are personalized or marked in some way and that are defended from encroachment. (Sommer, 1969). Altman identifies three types of physical territories: primary territories, secondary territories and public territories. (Altman, 1975). The concept of territoriality is most commonly used to refer to the consistencies in the ways in which animals and humans govern the space around them. Territoriality can be defined as "the action by which organism lays claim to an area, personalizes it, and defends it against members of his or her own species". (Altman, 1975).

Any territory can be characterized by a feeling of possessiveness and by attempts to control the appearance and use of space. Using the term territorial functioning to refer to the complex system of sentiments, cognition's, and behavior that are very much place specific and socially and culturally determined. The functions of territoriality are:

- **Social Organization:** According to Edney (1976), territoriality can promote predictability, order, and stability. (Edney, 1976). An example of social organization is the establishment of status, or dominance, hierarchies in the social order of the group. It develops a socio-spatial system in which each area has its clear social classification, with different activities and different degree of control.

Territories are helping in making a clear mental map. If this clarity is absent, what is left is a no-man's land; an anonymous terrain. The regulation of social interaction in the living environment, therefore, can be supported by the physical environment. On the one hand, the users must have control over whether they inter into or avoid social interactions. On the other hand, the physical environment must be legible and thus clearly indicate the status and accessibility of the users. (Van Dorst, 2005).

- **Psychological Benefits:** There are various psychological benefits for territoriality. "... territoriality can provide security, both physical and psychic, and a sense of well being; it provides a threat-free environment in which a territory holder can control and manipulate sensory simulation; and it provides both an identity and a way of communicating that identity". People in their home exhibit greater feelings of relaxation and control. Territoriality develops a sense of belonging and attachment. People tend to personalize their territories by means of territorial markers. (Gifford, 1987).

People's territorial behavior is the behavior and cognition of a person or group, based on the perceptual possession of a physical space.

- Preservation and regulation of privacy: Territoriality helps defining areas where a person can control the amount of environmental inputs and exert control over other activities.

Privacy and territoriality can be perceived as one of them to be primary, with the other process serving the individual's interests in the primary process. For example, Altman views privacy as the central concept among the processes. Personal space and territoriality are, in his model, mechanisms by which a person regulates privacy. (Altman, 1976). Others have adopted different views- for example, that privacy is a process meant to serve our territorial interests. According to Taylor and Ferguson who conclude that neither privacy nor territoriality is more fundamental. Rather they are linked on an equal basis as follows. Desiring privacy, an individual seeks a particular kind of territory. Once established in that territory, however, not only privacy needs but other needs are also served by the individual's possession of the territory. That is, privacy is foremost at some stages in the sequences of social behavior and territoriality is foremost at others.

The perception of privacy and legible territories is crucial for understanding the interaction between individual, social environment and physical environment. The secondary territories (like in Altman's definition, 1975) can take many forms. In a survey on Tunjungan neighborhood in Surabaya, Indonesia, there was a system of many territories uncovered. The inhabitants of the neighborhood appreciated their social environment due to a subtle system of zoning of indoor and outdoor space. A complex 'privacy zoning' was observed, this is a spatially that allows individual users to regulate their social interaction, and thus their privacy. (Van Dorst, 2005).

Across situations, when people need for privacy and need for territoriality rose, the tendency to experience crowding also rose. Because privacy and territoriality are both associated with the tendency to feel crowded, it might conclude they are the same things. However, privacy orientation and territoriality orientation was not correlated. This suggest that although they both lead a person to feel more crowded, they do so far different reasons.

The formal clear boundary between private property and public space (or secondary territory) is, in practice, a subtle transition.

### **Influences On Privacy**

Differences in privacy behavior, beliefs, values, preferences, and expectations originate with differences in personal characteristics and differences in situations. Some of us, because of our culture, personality, or other characteristics, require more privacy or express our privacy needs differently from others. Some situations, regardless of who is in them, engender greater or lesser privacy needs. First of all, personal factors will be examined:

#### **Personal Influences:**

Differences in a person's background are related to privacy needs. Individuals who grew up in homes they felt were crowded prefer more anonymity and reserve as adults. Those who had spent more time in cities preferred more anonymity and intimacy. Wanderers (those are farther from the place where they grew up) prefer less intimacy, as we might predict of individuals who found a reason to leave their families and friends behind.

Also, Gender appears to play a role in some of the issues related to privacy. Many, if not most, studies on gender and privacy have focused on behaviors that sexually objectify women such as the use of skirt-cams, pretexting, familial abuse and societally imposed modesty. (Allen, 2000). A recent study by Information Technology Association

of America found that women felt half as safe as men online, in several areas including the control over disclosure of their private information. (ITAA, 2003).

#### **Situational Influences:**

Personal characteristics influence privacy, but so does each situation we find ourselves in. In general, our preferences for and satisfactions with privacy vary with the situation, that is the physical setting or the social atmosphere. The environment itself might lead an individual to have greater privacy preferences or lower satisfaction with privacy.

#### **Cultural Influences:**

Do individuals from different cultures require the same amount of privacy, or do some cultures desire more than others? First, there is no doubts that different societies appear to vary widely in the amount of privacy those members actually have. In some Arab societies, families want to live in houses with high solid walls around them. Elsewhere, housing patterns can be quite different.

Many cultural differences in privacy exist. For example, homes in Arabian society are constructed so that the residents of the house cannot see their neighbors from any part of the house, thus insuring the privacy of the neighbors. (Al-Sabt, 1995).

#### **Privacy And Human Behavior:**

Privacy is influenced by personal and situational factors. In the course of human activity, it is also linked with other important behavior processes. According to Westin (1967) who described most of these essential functions. First, privacy is clearly related to communication. Both the informational and social themes of privacy are deeply involved with communication. Second, privacy is intimately connected to our sense of control, or autonomy. Being able to choose solitude or the company of others endows us with a sense of self-determination; not having that choice makes us feel helpless. Third, privacy is important to our sense of Identity. Solitude and intimacy, in particular, can be used to evaluate our progress in life, who we really are, what our relationship to other is and what it ought to be. Fourth, privacy allows for emotional release. In private we can weep, make faces at our selves in the mirror, sing loud crazy songs, and talk to ourselves. (Allen, 2000).

Westin's four functions of privacy provide a good framework for researches the relation between privacy and other human behaviors. On the other hand, privacy is connected to more than these four functions, like we saw previously the essential relation between privacy and territoriality. The four processes are all part of the way we manage social space. They overlap in important ways, yet remain distinct in others. How we adapt to space is an important privacy-related issue, as is the link between privacy and developmental factors.

#### **Conclusions**

The goal of the designer must be to give everyone as much as possible. This does not mean constructing houses, offices, schools, institutions, and outer spaces so that each person has a separate compartment! Actually it is that privacy means openness to others as much as it means being closed to others. The important thing is to live and work in settings that allow an individual to choose openness or not. On the other hand, it is true that the arrangement of the physical environment creates both opportunities and limitations for human behavior. The built environment affects us by certain degrees in various ways.

In creating this environment the designer should take into consideration; the fact that the performance of the built environment does not only depend on physical characteristics of the setting, but on the interaction of the physical characteristics with needs and requirements of the users.

Due to the nature of architectural training, our knowledge is mainly limited to the technical aspects of the design. It is important to encompass an understanding of privacy

needs, territoriality, habit, interaction distances, and other factors. So, the ultimate aim of housing design process is to create an environment, which facilitates behavior needed or desired by people to achieve their goals through being concerned with the issues of humans, environment, and their interaction. For example, any residence is already a relatively private space, outside the residence itself, privacy may vary as a function of design in multiunit housing projects. Within the house, different levels of privacy are needed for different family members. Of course, if a house is very large, privacy is not a problem unless it is so large that family members become isolated and alienated from one another. But the problem is insufficient space or poor arrangement of the available space.

These considerations could be:

- Defining and considering the Hierarchy of spaces on the large scale of neighborhoods and the small scale of buildings and personal spaces (public, semi-public, semi-private, private).
- Understanding the behavior, social, cultural, physical, and emotional needs of people and their range of interaction.
- Providing and confirming the sense of control, security, and privacy through confirming the means of territorial, physical, and symbolic markers.
- Providing different levels of privacy for different members of a group who have various needs and desires.
- The importance of people participating and taking their role in the design process of housing projects and the environment.
- Understanding the change and development of the socio-cultural factors and developing new approaches.

More research should be done to understand why the behavior does not match the concern regarding privacy. Finally, it is the aim of architecture to create meaningful places. The good intentions of architects and planners and their technical knowledge are not enough to produce the desired needs and a better environment. In order to create such meaningful places, human consequences have to be considered.

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