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## Intergender Distancing Behavior: A Field Experiment

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INTERGENDER DISTANCING BEHAVIOR:

A FIELD EXPERIMENT

BY

DIANE MALUSO

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

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## Abstract

This study investigated intergender distancing behavior in a naturalistic interpersonal situation. During four evenings, the 1,942 people who passed through the lobby of a College of Continuing Education building were unobtrusively observed as they chose to approach or not approach male or female confederates standing next to identical or different signs, handing out demographic questionnaires. Actual participants in this study were the 526 persons (286 women and 240 men) who did approach confederate stimulus persons. During two evening sessions young men and women (in their early twenties) were stimulus persons and during two other evening sessions older men and women (in their mid-forties) were stimulus persons. Passers-by who took questionnaires could choose to return or not return them to a collection box. It was predicted that men would approach female stimulus persons less often than they would approach similarly aged male confederates handing out material; that this difference in men's gender-based approach would be greater when the stimulus persons were apparently handing out different material than when they were handing out the same material; and that this difference in men's gender-based approach would be greater when the stimulus persons were in their forties than in their twenties. It was also predicted that women would not differ significantly in their approach of young or older male and female stimulus persons under any of the conditions. Findings did not support these hypotheses. Contrary to prediction, men did not base their approach of young or older stimulus persons on gender in any of the conditions. Women consistently approached young and older women significantly more often than they approached similarly aged men. An interpretation of these findings which proposes that social norms and other situational variables are possible predictors of intergender distancing is

presented. The necessity for examining the circumstances under which interpersonal distancing occurs is discussed.

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## Intergender Distancing Behavior

The intent of this research was to investigate overt behaviors of men and women which achieve interpersonal distance from same- and other- gender persons. When such behaviors systematically achieve interpersonal distance more often from one gender than from the other, they may be said to demonstrate sexist discrimination.

The American Heritage Dictionary (Morris,1979) defines sexism as: "1. prejudice against the female sex [and], 2. any arbitrary stereotyping of males and females on the basis of their gender." Lengermann and Wallace (1985) define sexism as a belief that the separate and inferior status of women is natural and right. In both popular culture and professional literature the term sexism is traditionally used to describe negative reactions to women but not to men.

An examination of these and other definitions of sexism reveals that although most definitions focus primarily on attitudinal components (prejudice) and/or on cognitive components (stereotyping), a third, behavioral component is implied in a complete definition of sexism. Such a three-part definition of interpersonal sexism in social-psychological terms has been proposed by Lott (1985), who distinguishes among three related but independent components:

a. *Prejudice* against women, the attitudinal component of sexism, as exemplified by hostility or misogyny;

b. *Stereotyping* of women, the cognitive component of sexism, a set of beliefs about women which assumes their inferiority; and

c. *Discrimination* against women, the behavioral component of sexism, expressed as avoidance or distancing behaviors which achieve separation from women.

Much of the social-psychological research pertaining to sexism has focused on the attitudinal component (e.g., Landrine, 1985; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972) or on the cognitive component (e.g., Martin, 1984), i.e., on prejudice or stereotypes. The body of literature focusing on the behavioral component of sexism may be said to include examinations of sexual aggression (e.g., Malamuth, 1986; Johnson, 1980); sexual harassment (e.g., Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982); incestuous assault (e.g., Butler, 1978); wife battering (e.g., Giles-Sims, 1983); and institutional discrimination (e.g., Clayton, Baird, & Levinson, 1984).

Although distancing behaviors have long been investigated by social psychologists interested in status, power, and intergroup relations (e.g., Allport, 1954; Bogardus, 1925), few researchers have examined interpersonal avoidance and distancing behaviors as examples of sexist discrimination in face-to-face situations. More general research pertaining to distancing behaviors has found, for example, that people who want to seem friendly choose smaller distances than those who do not want to seem friendly (Patterson & Sechrest, 1970); friends prefer to stand closer together than do strangers (Ashton, Shaw & Worsham, 1980); and people who are sexually attracted to each other stand close together (Allgeier & Byrne, 1973). In a review of the literature, Evans and Howard (1973) concluded that "the preponderance of data suggest that persons who are friendly with each other or wish to communicate a positive affect will tend to interact at smaller distances than those who are not friendly" (pp. 336 f.).

Some social-psychological studies of racism have examined distancing as manifestations of racist behavior. One such study (Ward, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974) found that White male participants interviewing Black and White confederates sat further away from Blacks than from Whites, made more verbal

errors when speaking to Blacks than to Whites, and terminated the interviews of Blacks sooner than the interviews of Whites. The investigators interpreted these behaviors as racist discrimination. Crosby, Bromley, and Saxe (1980) reviewed several unobtrusive studies of racial discrimination and found that verbal self-reports of prejudice did not always predict observed discrimination. In most of the studies they reviewed, participants exhibited racism in overt behavior more than they did in self-report measures. This pattern of findings suggests that unobtrusive observations of discrimination behavior are more reliable measures of racism than self-reported attitudes or beliefs.

Investigations of interpersonal distancing behaviors between men and women have reported conflicting results. Henley (1977) found that higher status persons in general (including men vis a vis women) are likely to intrude on the personal space of subordinates but that subordinates do not intrude on the personal space of persons in superior positions. Hall's (1987) review of the literature on nonverbal behaviors, however, concluded that there is insufficient evidence to support Henley's generalization. In a laboratory study, Lott (1987) found that men tended to distance themselves more from a previously unacquainted partner of the other gender than they did from a partner of the same gender whereas women behaved similarly toward partners of both genders. While working on a neutral task, men were observed to make negative statements about and turn away from their partners significantly more often if their partner was a woman than if their partner was a man. Men also accepted advice significantly less often from female partners than from male partners. Women who participated in Lott's study did not exhibit any gender-related distancing behaviors, and self-report measures of attitudes did not suggest that men or women would respond

differently to same- and other-gender partners. In a second study, Lott (in press) examined the behaviors of prime-time television characters and found that a sample of male TV characters were reported by trained student observers to distance themselves from female characters significantly more than from male characters. Female TV characters were found not to exhibit such differential behavior. In a third study, Lott, Lott, & Fernald (1989) examined the behavioral intentions of men and women using a Photo Choice Task. They found that men who were both younger and older than 30 years old chose a woman for a hypothetical interaction significantly less often than they chose a man; women over 30 years old did not base their choices on gender and; women under 30 years old chose women for a hypothetical interaction significantly more often than they chose men. The authors also found that number of choices of men over women was significantly and positively correlated with adherence to sex role stereotypes and to adversarial sexual beliefs, and that this pattern of individual differences was similar for both genders.

In other work relating to distancing behaviors, Snyder, Kleck, and Strenta (1979) found that non-handicapped participants were more likely to discriminate against physically handicapped individuals by distancing if their choice of a seat could appear to be based on some other motive. Drawing upon this methodology, the present writer conducted a pilot study in which college students were observed in a situation in which they could choose to approach or not approach male or female confederates handing out demographic questionnaires. College-aged men and women confederates stood next to identical or different signs ("URI Background Information" and "URI Descriptive Information") and offered questionnaires to passers-by. In one condition, either a man or a woman confederate handed out questionnaires

alone. In a second condition, passers-by could choose to take a questionnaire from either a man or a woman who were both standing next to the same sign, and in a third condition, both a man and a woman were handing out questionnaires but standing next to different signs. Under these conditions, men passers-by made their choice based on gender ( $X^2 [3, N=212] = 13.94$ ,  $p < .01$ ), whereas women did not ( $X^2 [3, N=123] = 2.66$ , n.s.) but, contrary to what had been predicted, men approached women more often than they did men. Although this finding was contrary to the hypothesis, men's differential response to women and men was greatest, as had been predicted, in the condition in which they could choose between two different signs, and least in the condition where a man or woman confederate was handing out surveys alone. No effects were found attributable to the signs or to left-right positions of the confederates.

In order to neutralize the appearance of the confederates in the above study, they dressed in dark-colored clothing and coats, wore no make-up or jewelry, and were instructed to keep their facial expressions bland. Despite these efforts, the men passers-by may have approached the women confederates more often than the men confederates because of sexual cues. Both passers-by and confederates were young persons in their twenties, and the study was conducted on a college campus.

The present study was designed to further examine men's distancing behaviors toward women by replicating the second and third conditions of the pilot study while varying the age of the confederates (stimulus persons). Some stimulus persons were women and men in their mid forties while others were women and men in their early twenties. The present study was conducted during four evening sessions at the URI College of Continuing Education, where most of the passers-by were persons older than thirty. Passers-by were

observed as they chose to approach or not approach a man or a woman standing next to identical or different signs ("URI Background Information" and "URI Descriptive Information"), handing out questionnaires. In one condition, passers-by could choose to take a questionnaire from either a man or a woman standing next to identical signs, and in a second condition, from either a man or a woman standing next to different signs. During two evening sessions young men and women (in their early twenties) were stimulus persons and during two other evening sessions older men and women (in their mid-forties) were stimulus persons. Passers-by who took questionnaires could choose to return or not return them to a collection box (labelled "URI Information Questionnaires") located in the Student Center of the College of Continuing Education.

### Hypotheses

This study tested the hypothesis that under sexually neutral conditions, men are more likely to approach unacquainted men than unacquainted women (thus distancing themselves more from women) whereas women do not differently distance themselves from women and men. It was further hypothesized that men are more likely to distance from women and approach men if the choice can be masked as choice between other stimuli, and if the choice is between older rather than between younger persons. It was predicted that: (1) men will approach female confederates (stimulus persons) handing out questionnaires less often than they will approach similarly aged male confederates (stimulus persons) handing out material; (2) this difference in men's approach to male and female stimulus persons will be greater when the stimulus persons are apparently handing out different material than when they are handing out the same material; (3) this difference in men's approach to male and female stimulus persons will be greater when the

stimulus persons are in their forties than in their twenties; and (4) that women will not differ significantly in their approach to young or older male and female confederates under any of the conditions. Approach behavior was operationally defined as accepting a postcard questionnaire from a confederate.

No hypotheses were made concerning the return of postcard questionnaires since it was expected that the return rates would be quite small, permitting only informal analyses for trends.

## Method

### Selection and Training of Confederates and Observers.

Confederates and observers were recruited from psychology classes at the Kingston and Providence campuses of the University of Rhode Island. They were naive as to the nature of the research questions and hypotheses..

Two White male and two White female confederates over forty years old were selected and matched as closely as possible for age (mean age =44.5 years old), height, clothing style and color, and general demeanor. Two White male and two White female confederates in their early twenties (mean age =20.0 years old) were selected and matched on the above variables. Four observers were selected and trained to count the number of passers-by who approached the confederates. Two pairs of observers were trained to observe approaches to the two confederates and to use hand-held counters. One of each observer pair was trained to keep track of the number of men who approached a confederate stimulus person, while the other observer was trained to count the number of women who approached that same confederate. A fifth observer was trained to count the total number of men and women who passed by the confederates with or without stopping. A training and practice session was held for confederates and observers.

### Participants

The 1,942 persons (1002 women and 940 men) who walked through the lobby of the College of Continuing Education building in Providence on the four nights of the observations were potential participants in the study. They were unobtrusively observed in a naturalistic situation as they approached or did not approach confederates handing out postcard questionnaires. These persons were students and/or staff members at the College of Continuing Education. Actual participants were the 526 persons (286 women and 240 men) who did approach participants; they constituted twenty-seven percent of all passers-by. Table 1 shows the number of people who were potential and actual participants on each of the study's four evenings. Since participants were observed in an unobtrusive manner which involved no solicitation or coercion, and since no attempt was made to identify individual participants, it was not necessary to obtain their informed consent.

### Procedure

The study was conducted during four consecutive evenings in the lobby of the College of Continuing Education building in Providence. Four twenty-minute sessions separated by five-minute breaks were held each evening. Each condition was presented twice nightly during two different twenty-minute sessions. Table 2 shows the order of presentation of conditions on each of the four evenings. Trained observers were always positioned a discreet distance from the confederates.

Condition one: Unmasked Choice On day one, during one twenty-minute session, one older male and one older female confederate were positioned five feet apart and each stood next to a sign which said "URI Background Information". Each confederate handed out postcards to all who approached them. Two trained observers counted men and women who approached the



Table 1

Number of Potential and Actual Participants

	Potential		Actual	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Day One	239	233	38	37
Day Two	234	190	105	53
Day Three	253	243	97	93
Day Four	276	274	46	57
Total	1002	940	286	240

Table 2

Schedule of Condition Presentations

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
<u>Stimulus Persons</u> <sup>a</sup>	Older	Young	Older	Young
<u>Session 1</u>				
Condition <sup>b</sup>	Condition 1	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 2
Male Position Sign <sup>c</sup>	Male Right Background	Male Left Descriptive	Male Left Descriptive	Male Left Background
Female Position Sign <sup>c</sup>	Female Left Background	Female Right Descriptive	Female Right Background	Female Right Descriptive
<u>Session 2</u>				
Condition	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 1	Condition 2
Male Position Sign	Male Left Descriptive	Male Left Descriptive	Male Left Background	Male Right Descriptive
Female Position Sign	Female Right Descriptive	Female Right Background	Female Right Background	Female Left Background
<u>Session 3</u>				
Condition	Condition 2	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 1
Male Position Sign	Male Left Background	Male Right Background	Male Right Background	Male Right Background
Female Position Sign	Female Right Descriptive	Female Left Background	Female Left Descriptive	Female Left Background
<u>Session 4</u>				
Condition	Condition 2	Condition 2	Condition 1	Condition 1
Male Position Sign	Male Right Descriptive	Male Right Background	Male Right Descriptive	Male Left Descriptive
Female Position Sign	Female Left Background	Female Left Descriptive	Female Left Descriptive	Female Right Descriptive

Note.

<sup>a</sup> Young = mean age 20.0 years old; Older = mean age 44.5 years old.

<sup>b</sup> Condition one = Unmasked Choice; Condition two = Masked Choice.

<sup>c</sup> Background = "URI BACKGROUND INFORMATION";  
Descriptive = "URI DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION".

male confederate while two other trained observers counted men and women who approached the female confederate. A fifth trained observer counted the total number of men and women who passed through the building entryway with or without stopping. During a different twenty-minute session on day one, the same older male and female confederates were positioned as in the first session but stood next to a sign which said "URI Descriptive Information". On day two, a young male and female confederate pair duplicated the conditions of day one. On day three, a second older male and female confederate pair duplicated the conditions of day one, and on day four a second pair of young male and female confederates duplicated the conditions of day one.

Only passers-by who approached the confederates by themselves were counted by observers. No count was kept of people approaching confederate(s) in groups of two or more. Confederates were trained not to engage in conversations with passers-by, except to respond to queries about the source of the postcards with, "I don't know. I'm just handing them out."

Condition two: Masked Choice On all four evenings of the study, the male and female confederates were positioned exactly as in condition one except that during one twenty-minute session each evening the sign next to the female confederate said "URI Descriptive Information" and the sign next to the male confederate said "URI Background Information" while the reverse was the case during a different twenty-minute session each evening. The sequence of conditions was varied across the four evenings, and the design was balanced for sign and left-right effects, as indicated in Table 2. Persons taking cards from each confederate were counted as previously described.

#### Demographic Questionnaire

During all conditions, confederates handed out postcards which contained

instructions to return the card to a collection box inside the student lounge. Postcards asked participants to provide the following information: a) age; b) sex; c) College of Continuing Education status: faculty / staff / student (undergraduate or graduate) / community member; d) if student, major field of study. A copy of this brief questionnaire is shown in the Appendix.

The postcards were coded by condition so that the experimenter would know which type of stimulus person the participant approached for a questionnaire and under what condition (See Appendix).

### Results

This study utilized a design in which the dependent variable was number of approaches and the independent variables were gender of the persons doing the approaching, gender of the stimulus persons, age of the stimulus persons, and masked or unmasked choice conditions. To analyze differences in frequencies, Chi-Square is appropriate.

The first predictions tested were that under sexually neutral conditions, men are more likely to approach unacquainted men than similarly aged unacquainted women whereas women do not respond differently on this dimension to women and men. Other predictions were that this differential in men's behavior is greater under conditions in which choice between approaching a man or a woman can be masked as choice between other stimuli, and that men will be more likely to distance from women and approach men if the choice is between older rather than between younger persons.

To test these hypotheses, separate 1X2 Chi-Squares were obtained independently for men and women participants to analyze differences in the number of men and women who approached young male and female stimulus persons in each of the two conditions (unmasked choice and masked choice)

and the numbers who approached older male and female stimulus persons in both the unmasked choice and masked choice conditions. Table 3 presents the frequencies of men's approach behaviors and the related Chi-squares and Table 4 presents this information for the women participants.

#### Analysis of Men's Approach Behaviors

The prediction that men will approach male stimulus persons more often than similarly aged females was not upheld. As can be seen in Table 3, in the unmasked choice condition with young stimulus persons, men approached 39 men and 24 women ( $X^2 [1, N= 63] = 3.57, n.s.$ ); in the masked choice condition with young stimulus persons, men approached 23 men and 24 women ( $X^2 [1, N= 47] = .02, n.s.$ ); in the unmasked condition with older stimulus persons men approached 27 men and 39 women ( $X^2 [1, N= 66] = 2.18, n.s.$ ); and in the masked condition with older stimulus persons men approached 31 men and 33 women ( $X^2 [1, N= 64] = .06, n.s.$ ). The sum of these four independent Chi-Squares ( $X^2 [4, N= 240] = 5.83, n.s.$ ) supports the null hypothesis of no difference.

The data also failed to support the prediction that men's differential approach to women than to men would be greater in the masked choice than unmasked choice condition. For both young and older stimulus persons, no significant differences were found in men's approaches toward males and females when the stimulus persons appeared to be handing out the same material or when stimulus persons were handing out different material.

Again, contrary to prediction, the age of stimulus persons did not influence men's behavior. For young stimulus persons, 62 men took cards from a man while 48 men took cards from a woman ( $X^2 [1, N= 110] = 1.78, n.s.$ ) while for older stimulus persons, 58 men took cards from a man and 72 from a woman ( $X^2 [1, N=130] = 1.51, n.s.$ ).

An overall Chi-square of men's approach behaviors toward male and

Table 3

Men's Approach Behaviors

Number of Questionnaires Taken From Young Stimulus Persons				
	From Male Stimulus Person	From Female Stimulus Person	Chi-Square	p
<u>Condition One</u>				
Unmasked Choice Identical Signs	39	24	3.57	n.s.
<u>Condition Two</u>				
Masked Choice Different Signs	23	24	.02	n.s.
<u>Total</u>	62	48	1.78	n.s.
Number of Questionnaires Taken From Older Stimulus Persons				
	From Male Stimulus Person	From Female Stimulus Person	Chi-Square	p
<u>Condition One</u>				
Unmasked Choice Identical Signs	27	39	2.18	n.s.
<u>Condition Two</u>				
Masked Choice Different Signs	31	33	.06	n.s.
<u>Total</u>	58	72	1.51	n.s.
Total Chi-Square = 5.83 <sup>a</sup>				n.s.
df = 4				
Number of Questionnaires Taken From All Stimulus Persons				
	From Male Stimulus Person	From Female Stimulus Person	Chi-Square	p
<u>Grand Total</u>	120	120	0.0	n.s.

Note. <sup>a</sup> Total Chi-Square obtained by summing the four individual Chi-Squares for each combination of condition and stimulus person age (e.g. 3.57 + .02 + 2.18 + .06).

Table 4

Women's Approach Behaviors

Number of Questionnaires Taken From Young Stimulus Persons				
	From Male Stimulus Person	From Female Stimulus Person	Chi-Square	p
<u>Condition One</u>				
Unmasked Choice Identical Signs	40	61	4.37*	< .05
<u>Condition Two</u>				
Masked Choice Different Signs	21	29	1.28	n.s.
<u>Total</u>	61	90	5.57*	< .05
Number of Questionnaires Taken From Older Stimulus Persons				
	From Male Stimulus Person	From Female Stimulus Person	Chi-Square	p
<u>Condition One</u>				
Unmasked Choice Identical Signs	24	35	2.05	n.s.
<u>Condition Two</u>				
Masked Choice Different Signs	27	49	6.37**	< .01
<u>Total</u>	51	84	8.07**	< .01
			Total Chi-Square = 14.07**	a
			df = 4	< .01
Number of Questionnaires Taken From All Stimulus Persons				
	From Male Stimulus Person	From Female Stimulus Person	Chi-Square	p
<u>Grand Total</u>	112	174	13.44***	< .001

Note. <sup>a</sup> Total Chi-Square obtained by summing the four individual Chi-Squares for each combination of condition and stimulus person age (e.g. 4.37 + 1.28 + 2.05 + 6.37).

\* =  $p < .05$ ; \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ .

female stimulus persons of both age groups in both the masked and unmasked choice conditions (obtained by performing a 1X2 Chi-square on the sum of all men's approaches of men and on the sum of all men's approaches of women) indicated that men's approach behaviors were not based on the gender of the stimulus person. Overall, men approached men and women with equal frequency (120 approaches;  $X^2 [1, N= 240] = 0$ , n.s.). Men's approaches to men and women are presented graphically in Figure 1.

#### Analysis of Women's Approach Behaviors

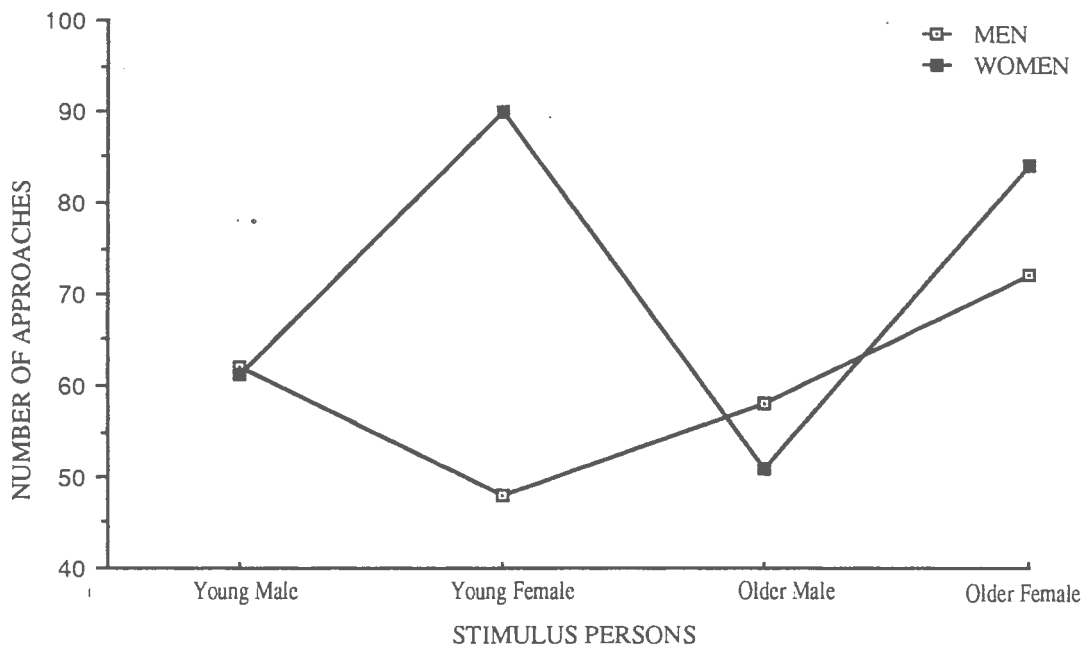
Women's approach behavior was predicted not to be influenced by the gender of either the young or older stimulus persons in either the unmasked or masked choice conditions. As can be seen in Table 4, this was not substantiated by the findings. Instead, it was found that women approached young female stimulus persons (90 approaches) significantly more often than they approached similarly aged men (61 approaches) ( $X^2 [1, N= 151] = 5.57$ ,  $p < .05$ ). With young stimulus persons, in the unmasked choice condition when stimulus persons appeared to be handing out the same material, 40 women approached a man while 61 approached a woman ( $X^2 [1, N= 101] = 4.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ), but no significant difference was found in women's approach of young men and women in the masked choice condition (21 approached a man, 29 approached a woman;  $X^2 [1, N= 50] = 1.28$ , n.s.)

Women also approached older women significantly more often than they approached similarly aged men. Across both choice conditions, 84 women approached an older woman whereas only 51 women approached an older man ( $X^2 [1, N= 135] = 8.07$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This tendency for women to approach older women rather than older men was strongest in the masked choice condition where 49 women approached an older woman whereas only 27 women approached an older man ( $X^2 [1, N= 76] = 6.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In the unmasked choice



## Figure Caption

Figure 1. Men's and Women's Approaches of Male and Female Stimulus Persons



condition, no significant difference was found in women's approaches of older women (35 approaches) and older men (24 approaches) ( $X^2 [1, N=59] = 2.05, n.s.$ ).

An overall analysis of women's approach behaviors toward men and women (collapsing across age and choice conditions) indicated that women approached women significantly more often than they approached men. Overall, 174 women approached women and 112 women approached men ( $X^2 [1, N=286] = 13.441, p < .001$ ). Figure 1 graphically compares women's approach behaviors toward women and men with men's approach behaviors.

#### Analysis of Postcard Return Rates

The number of postcard questionnaires returned by men and women constituted a second dependent variable. Since the number of postcards returned was expected to be small, no predictions were made. Altogether, 51 postcards were returned, 28 by women and 23 by men. Table 5 shows the number of postcard questionnaires returned as simple frequencies and as percentage of postcards taken under the different conditions. Both men and women returned the same percent (9.6%) of cards taken from all stimulus persons. Both women and men returned proportionately more cards taken from women than from men; women returned 11.3% and men returned 11.4% of cards taken from women whereas women returned 7.9% and men returned 7.6% of cards taken from men.

Both men and women returned proportionately more cards taken from older stimulus persons than from young stimulus persons; men returned 12.4% and women returned 11.5% of cards taken from older stimulus persons whereas men returned 6.5% and women returned 7.7% of cards taken from young stimulus persons.

#### Discussion

In this study of intergender distancing behaviors, it was expected that

Table 5

Postcard Questionnaire Return Rates

By Men				
Postcards Received From Young Stimulus Persons				
	<u>From Male Stimulus Person</u>		<u>From Female Stimulus Person</u>	
	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken
Condition One <sup>a</sup>	2	5.1%	0	0.0%
Condition Two	1	4.3%	4	16.7%
Postcards Received From Older Stimulus Persons				
	<u>From Male Stimulus Person</u>		<u>From Female Stimulus Person</u>	
	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken
Condition One	3	11.1%	3	7.7%
Condition Two	3	9.7%	7	21.2%
By Women				
Postcards Received From Young Stimulus Persons				
	<u>From Male Stimulus Person</u>		<u>From Female Stimulus Person</u>	
	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken
Condition One	3	7.5%	5	8.2%
Condition Two	1	4.8%	3	10.3%
Postcards Received From Older Stimulus Persons				
	<u>From Male Stimulus Person</u>		<u>From Female Stimulus Person</u>	
	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken	Number of Cards Returned	Percentage of Cards Taken
Condition One	2	8.3%	5	14.3%
Condition Two	3	11.1%	6	12.2%

Note. <sup>a</sup> Condition one = Unmasked Choice, identical signs;

Condition two = Masked Choice, different signs.

men would distance themselves from women but that women would *not* distance themselves from men during face-to-face interpersonal interactions between strangers in a naturalistic setting. These expectations were based upon an analysis of sexism (Lott, 1985) in which sexist discrimination in face-to-face situations is defined by behaviors that achieve distance from women. Previous empirical studies in a variety of settings have supported Lott's model (Lott, 1987; Lott, in press; Lott, Lott, & Fernald, 1989).

In the present study contradictory findings were obtained. Women consistently distanced themselves from similarly aged young or older men and they did so even when their choice could not be concealed as a choice between two different questionnaires. Men, on the other hand, did not base their approach behaviors on the gender of the stimulus persons; they did not approach women less (or more) than men. It is possible that the present study's findings are the result of the particular methodology employed. It may be that the stimuli used (persons handing out questionnaires) is not appropriate for the study of gender-based approach and distancing behaviors. Another plausible explanation for the contradictory findings of this research is the presence of particular situational variables in the naturalistic environments of the present study which may have affected participants' behaviors.

Further, in considering the present study's results, it is important to examine the nature of predictors of object-oriented social behavior. Attitudes toward another person, beliefs about that person, social norms, intentions, expected consequences, and situational variables have all been cited as predictors of behavior toward another person (Fishbein, 1967; Bagozzi, 1978; Bentler & Speckart, 1979; Bandura, 1986). Of these variables, social norms, expected consequences, and situational variables can be considered in the

present research.

Social norms may motivate individuals to behave in socially acceptable ways. For example, in a study of interracial aggression, Donnerstein & Donnerstein (1973) found that White persons who feared censure would be less likely to discriminate against a Black person than those who did not fear censure. Similarly, we may expect that if an individual is aware that his or her environment is not supportive of sexism, he or she may be less likely to overtly discriminate against women than persons in an environment that does support sexism. The present study was conducted on a campus which has a considerably larger population of women students than men. Although this does not guarantee an environment free of sexist discrimination, it is probable that such an environment does not support overt exclusionary practices (such as distancing) directed toward women. In such an environment, individuals are more likely to include and to approach women than in more traditional environments. If this is so, then it is likely that the observed differences in individuals' intergender distancing behaviors exhibited in this study and previous studies can be partially explained by differences in social norms. In the present study, the finding of a greater than expected frequency of approach toward women by persons of both genders may be related to a campus environment that is unlikely to support the overt exclusion of women.

Patterns of intergender distancing may also be influenced by the consequences individuals expect to receive for distancing and approach behaviors. In the present study, participants' expectations of positive consequences of approaching women may have increased the likelihood of approaching a woman. In Lott's (1987) laboratory study the consequences of behavior included winning a prize. In the present study there were no similar rewards and no important expected consequences of approaching a

stimulus person. It is possible that a lack of salient consequences of approaching stimulus persons affected the patterns of intergender distancing behaviors found in the present study.

There are other factors that may explain the different patterns of intergender distancing behaviors found in the present study and those found in Lott's studies as well as in the previously cited pilot study by the present author. Specifically, during the four evenings of data collection, it was observed that there were signs in the hallways about a man who had been seen in the building exposing his genitals to women. The signs advised women on campus to take precautions against the possibility of sexual assault and informed them that a new security force had been employed. An article in the student newspaper that was circulated during the week of the investigation mentioned a sexual assault that had occurred a few months previously, as well as the man who had exposed himself. The article advised women to be alert to the possibility of sexual assault, to employ the buddy system when using the rest rooms, and to allow the new security guards to walk them to their cars. It seems likely that a climate of fear existed for women in this research setting. Such a climate may have motivated women to distance themselves from men. In neither the pilot study nor in Lott's (1987) laboratory study were there any such signs, articles, or security guards present.

As has been previously noted, the term sexism typically refers to men's negative reactions toward women, not women's negative reactions toward men, just as the term racism refers to White's negative reactions toward Blacks, not Black's negative reactions toward Whites. Similarly, other "isms" like classism, ageism, heterosexism, and ableism have in common descriptions of negative attitudes, beliefs, and actions of individuals with greater social power directed toward those with lesser power. Men in our society have

greater power and social status than women, Whites have more than Blacks, etc.. This study suggests that there are circumstances under which less powerful people, in this case women, distance themselves from more powerful people. To better understand intergender distancing, it may be necessary to systematically study the predictors and consequences of the behaviors of the relatively less powerful which serve to achieve separation from more powerful people as well as vice versa. For instance, what are the predictors of Blacks' behaviors that achieve distancing from Whites? Under what conditions and in response to what social norms do Blacks distance from Whites? Two general questions that can serve as a framework for further investigation of interpersonal distancing are: what variables are related to behaviors which achieve separation from other individuals; and what are the consequences of such behaviors for both individuals.

Studying men's and women's intergender distancing behaviors in a naturalistic setting was one of several steps toward an understanding of the predictors of interpersonal sexist discrimination. It was expected that changing the setting of interaction from a college campus mostly populated by men and women aged 18-22 years old to one mostly populated by individuals over thirty years old would change the pattern of distancing behaviors observed, but the extent to which these behaviors changed was not expected. This research was originally intended as a contribution to an understanding of men's distancing behaviors that achieve separation from women; it was not expected that women would distance themselves from men. That women *did* distance from men is an important finding. Understanding the pattern of women's behaviors that achieve separation from men is another step toward understanding women's lives. Future research should systematically examine the variables related to women's behaviors that achieve separation from men.



These variables may include fear of sexual assault or harassment, negative attitudes toward men, stereotyped beliefs about men, and particular settings in which such fears, attitudes, and beliefs are heightened. Such research should also investigate the commonalities and differences between distancing behaviors of lower status and of higher status individuals as well as commonalities and differences between gender-based, race-based, and other status-based distancing behaviors.

Any investigation of social behavior should consider the context in which the behavior of interest occurs and ask not only *whether* a behavior occurs but also *under which conditions* the behavior occurs. In order to understand behaviors which achieve intergender distancing, it is necessary to examine the influence of situational variables on those behaviors. It is not enough to ask whether individuals distance themselves from women and from men, for to do so is to risk incorrectly generalizing from a too narrow context. A fuller understanding of intergender distancing can be gained from asking under which conditions individuals distance themselves from women and men. The present study set out to answer whether individuals distance themselves from women and men, and has instead become a first step toward an understanding of the conditions under which intergender distancing occurs.

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## Appendix

Postcard QuestionnaireCopy of Postcard Questionnaire

URI INFORMATION	
Please Complete:	
Age ____	
Check one: Man ____ Woman ____	
Status (please check one):	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate student
<input type="checkbox"/>	Graduate student
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff
<input type="checkbox"/>	Faculty
<input type="checkbox"/>	Community member
If you are a student, what is your major? _____	

Postcards coded on reverse.

Coding of Postcard Questionnaires

	<u>Code</u>	<u>Day/Stimulus Person</u>
<u>Condition one:</u>	101A	day one, first male
	101AA	day one, first female
	102B	day two, second male
	102BB	day two, second female
	103C	day three, third male
	103CC	day three, third female
	104D	day four, fourth male
	104DD	day four, fourth female
<u>Condition two:</u>	201A	day one, first male
	201AA	day one, first female
	202B	day two, second male
	202BB	day two, second female
	203C	day three, third male
	203CC	day three, third female
	204D	day four, fourth male
	204DD	day four, fourth female

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