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Efficacy of Gender-Bound Non-Verbal Behaviors in Interpersonal Communications

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Abstract

This study is intended to investigate the effect of gender on individuals' non-verbal behavior in dyadic, i.e. two-sided, communicative situations. It is postulated that the methods and patterns of individuals' non-verbal behavior exhibited in dyads consisting of female-female (F-F), and male-male (M-M), as well as male-female (M-F) addresses would probably vary. An observational probe comprising 30 participants including, 10 M-M, 10 F-F, and 10 M-F was carried out. Two interviewers, one male and the other one a female implemented the interviews with participants. The male interviewer held the interviews with 20 participants in M-F and M-M and the remaining 10 participants in the F-F group were interviewed by the female interviewer lasting for 20 minutes during the conversations. The results revealed that the interlocutors in dyads between various groups encompassed different paradigms and patterns of non-verbal behavior, concerning self-touch, body orientation, body posture, and eye contact.

Keywords: *Dyadic interlocution, gender, individuals' non-verbal behavior, observational probe,*

Introduction

The investigation launched to explore non-verbal communicative behavior has been conducive to a large body of research literature documenting the complexity of the non-verbal ideas and messages that co-occur with human interactions and relations. Although individuals' non-verbal behavior does not accompany with prescriptive paradigms and rules, as verbal behavior does, researchers concur that non-verbal behaviors show a suggestive story (Hall, 1984) and contain significant information. The common knowledge in communicative research indicates that certain human traits have an important effect on non-verbal behavior. Among those, the ethnic, cultural, and social background of a person, as well as age and education can be enumerated. Specially, gender is of key importance due to the differential virtually implicitly representative rules that sound to be or are believed to come into effect for males and females (Hall, 1984).

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Gender differences, however, could be altered by other traits of an individual, including social power (Carney & Le Beau, 2005), as well as cross-cultural differences (Birdwhistell, 1970; Kupperbusch, 1999).

In preceding studies, gender has been regarded as a possible source of diversity in non-verbal communication and has been approached only in passing. But contrary to this reality, a general prejudice perpetuates that males can be easily discriminated from females by their non-verbal behavior (Wastl, 2004). Among other investigators, Hanna (1988), Moir (1990), as well as Webbink (1981) portray notions of non-verbal behavior of various sexual orientations and identify particular traits which, as a rule, are different from the common stereotyped gender roles in the actual surrounding culture. This paper is intended to approach the issue of if and how gender gets involved in the non-verbal style of expression in an individual.

Literature Review

Nonverbal Behavior: The Issue of Gender Differences and Sexual Orientation

A study conducted by Ambady, Hallahan, (1999) on 30 participants, whose behavior was assessed by 3o observers each, revealed that the sexual orientation of the given observed participants is truly speculated more often than chance would surface. The authors had questioned the observers to make inference about the sexual orientation of the observed individuals from their shares of their non-verbal behavior (like gesturing and seating positions during an interview, sampled in muted video clips of 12 seconds and one or two seconds, respectively). The general conclusion they arrived at from this study was that information on sexual orientation was passed on via behavioral cues and the sexual orientation could be diagnosed with some skills of accuracy, in particular, when dynamic information was on tap.

The finding, however, according to which the sexual orientation of individuals can be correctly induced from their non-verbal behavior, was confronted by other similar studies. Carroll and Gilroy (2002) failed to establish a single behavioral entity as a basic evidence of a homosexual orientation. They had not only asked their participants to make inference about the sexual orientation of other tested participants, but, in addition, also to account for their criteria for this assessment in an inventory. Based on their results, Carroll and Gilroy moved along the study that the co-occurring inferences and actual sexual orientation were mostly due to the fact that homosexuals had altered their behavior after they come out to others. As a repercussion, many homosexual men and women adapted their behavior and oriented themselves to social stereotypes, so that the total picture of the non-verbal communication of a homosexual male looked rather female, while lesbian women were inclined to take on masculine patterns of behavior (Webbink, 1981).

Gender and body posture

Body posture as a compound and complex behavior is believed to convey the general impression and the gender of an individual (Heller, 1997) and has been marked as one of the most

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outstanding examples for the communication and connection between gender-specific behaviors and the descriptions of social powers (Cashdan, 1998). Thus, for example, based on the stereotype at least, male superiority or dominance was donated by a virtually wide-stretched and relaxed body posture. A recent meta-analysis by Hall (1984) affirmed the finding that power pertained to positions and postures openness. It looked, however, that the surmise of power-related body positions and posture was stronger when it comes to discerned social stereotypes and role expectations than that of observed behavior. Additionally, the findings of the meta-analysis implied that social status and gender-related effects of nonverbal behavior were not corresponding, as previously supposed.

In an earlier review, Hall (1984) presented a number of investigations reporting significant gender differences which were in favor of males for all broad behaviors, like holding legs open, having arms not on the side, sprawling and wide knees. These dissimilarities have been reported right through the research literature. Henley and La France (1997) stated that females generally occupy less space than males as the direct result of the way they assume a position. Other researchers back up this impression in their own probes (Eigler, 2002). For example, when one is looking at pictures from advertising, it came to light that men were usually portrayed with their legs apart from each other, no matter if they were sitting or standing. There existed very few pictures of men reclining, but a great numbers of photos of females who were, reclining, sitting or squatting down on the ground.

Tannen (1997) put forward that female opt to face each other directly during a talk and to opt for their seats accordingly, while males were mostly observed to make their communication at an angle. An earlier experimental research conducted by Fisher and Byrne (1975) implied that females felt more ease when it came to communicating with a newcomer or stranger in an across position, while males opted for the nearby position in the same situation. Although these observations had been stated to be quite consistent with earlier reviews (Hall, 1984), they were not unanimously affirmed by other researchers (Scherer, 1984). Eigler (2002) concluded that Tannen's observations were usually true whenever dyads of the same sexes were under observation, but not when individuals of opposite sexes were communicating with each other. Further empirical evidence implied that familiarity could play a significant role with the effect that females communicate with female friends in nearby positions, while males conversed with their friends in across positions. This pattern of assuming positions, however, was not noticeable in talks and interactions with less familiar individuals (Fisher & Byrne, 1975).

Self-Touch Phenomenon

Regarding self-touches, there exists some research on if differences with regard to self-touch could be gender-bound, but we did not see any empirical work on self-touch and sexual orientation. As a result of a literature review, Hall (1984) encapsulated observations which indicated that females exhibited a vaster amount of self-touch than men. However, Hall (1984) argues, this may refer to display of self-consciousness pertaining to unfamiliar or disconcerting social situations. While males grow accustomed to this state of awkwardness by enhanced

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frequency of posture changes, at least, self-touch could be first viewed as an outlet for anxiety in females directed by the fact that female outfit and hairstyles were more intricate and required more attention and correction (Knapp, 2002). A study explained by Maier (1992) supports this observation as it affirmed that females ran their fingers through their hair more often than men did. When males touched themselves, this mainly included the upper parts of their bodies or their throats (Davis, 1981).

Gaze and Eye Contact

Eye behavior is likely to be the one facet of non-verbal communications that has been under investigation most thoroughly. It consists of the aspects of 'taking a glance at somebody' or gaze or establishing an 'eye contact.' Glancing at people denotes to look at their face and/or in the eyes of another individual. Whenever this look is simultaneous an eye contact is established and, hence, reciprocal (Scherer & Wallbott, 1984). In all studies containing gender differences as a quasi-experimental variable one result remained unchanged—in conversational situations females looked at their counterparts more than males did. This finding was repeatedly affirmed by a vast number of studies (Suwelack, 1998; Eigler, 2002; Knapp, 2002; Maier, 1992; Scherer; Tannen, 1997). Not only did females look at other people's face more often, but more intensely (Eigler, 2002; Tannen, 1997) and for longer continued periods of time (Suwelack & Wengler, 1995). This was true apart from if the partner in the conversation was a male or a female (Scherer & Wallbott, 1984). Additionally, female participants also were looked at more often than male participants (Hall, 1984).

Concerning interpersonal conversation, Hall (1984) gleaned in her meta-analysis indicates more gaze was observed in females as interlocutors and listeners, while males gazed more when they were talking. Given these findings, it would be plausible to anticipate that the differences between the sexes should be highest whenever dyads of the same sex are juxtaposed to compare to each other, which signifies, in other words, that gaze between female–female dyads should be more intensive when compared to male–male dyads (Eigler, 2002; Hall, 1984). The problem remains unsolved, however, how the amount and the direction of gaze can be construed, since, according to Hall (1984), it would be difficult to untangle the two contrasting facets of affiliation and dominance. The postulation that power by itself determined gaze, however, had been convincingly disputed by Hall's (2005) meta-analysis of the matter as they fail to find any overall relationship between gaze and power.

In discussing the gaze, the difference between gaze frequency and gaze duration needs to be taken into consideration. Observed male participants looking at, looking away and interrupted their eye contact more often than females did, which was attributed to the greater amount of activity in males. Thus, the count of gaze frequency could be greater for males than for females, except for duration. It is not quite obvious, however, how this could be accounted for, since Hall (1984) truly proposed that a rise in the number of glances could signify a stronger inclination to avert or break gaze which would indicate a tendency to shun (continuous) eye contact. Regarding

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that holding a long lasting mutual look between males was generally attributed to an aggressive element. It is sensible to suppose that the social norms of displaying affiliation and hostile intents among males presumes an inclination to turn eyes and body away from the other individual rather than towards him (Tannen, 1997). This inclination could rise in heterosexual male when they begin to interact with homosexual males, and when they are conscious of the fact that a longer eye contact is utilized as a 'sign of recognition' among homosexual males (Hanna, 1988; Webbink, 1981).

Research Question

The following research question is aimed to guide the present investigation: Do the patterns of individuals' non-verbal behavior in conversational dyads differ, considering body orientation, body posture, and eye contact, and self-touch with regard to the gender of the interaction partners?

Methodology

An observational investigation was carried out with a total of 30 participants, 10 female to female (F-F), 10 male to male (M-M) and 10 male to female (M-F) interactions in a dyadic manner. Subjects were interviewed by two interviewers, one female and the other male. These subjects were Iranian university students ranging from 20 to 28 years old. The twenty participants in M-F and M-M groups were first interviewed by the male interviewer and the ten subjects in the F-F group were interviewed by the female interviewer during 20-minute conversations. The pre-arranged seating comprised three chairs and a low table having arm rests and upholstered seats. The low table allowed for an exact observation of the expected nonverbal behavior to take place. The table was square-shaped to prevent the length of its sides from influencing the subjects' seating preference. The subjects could opt for their seat themselves at an across position or an angle. In addition to the seating arrangement, there existed a few additional chairs on the side, as well as a blackboard, and bookshelves to make it resemble a more 'natural' and to discourage excessive eye contacts owning to the absence of anything else to look at. There existed some drinks on the table, put at the subjects' free disposal. The environment which surrounded the interview situation had not to give rise to any indisposition.

The interviewers, having interacted with the participants personally in dyads on topics they were interest in, like fashion, fitness, or sports, each lasting for 20 minutes and brought their nonverbal patterns of behavior under observation while having talks, marked down these observed nonverbal behaviors. In the continuation of this study they will later be presented descriptively.

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Results

The results produced from this study will be elucidated separately for the facets of body orientation, body posture, gaze, and self-touch, and eye contact. The results are explained for dyads as the related unit thanks to the clear interconnection of the behavioral data gleaned in the interviews interactive situations.

Table 1

Illustration of the Observed Body Posture

Part of the body	Male-Male (M-M)	Female-Female (F-F)	Male-Female (M-F)
Torso	Upright posture being against the back of the chair	Backward : reclining back rested into the back of the chair	Forward slanting to nearly upright position
Arms	Arms were rested on the chair arms and not making contact with the torso	Openness: One or both arms were extending and were put either behind head or body	Both arms were closed and were touching torso
Upper Legs	No contact made between knees and upper legs resting approximately in a parallel way	Upper openness: Spreading out, knees pointing outward and closed	Legs rested on top of each other but closed
Lower Legs	Relaxed and rested on the floor forming an angle of 90 with the upper legs	Lower openness: extending past the chair immediate space , stretched out and forming an angle varying between the obtuse angle of 90-180	Relaxed and nearly being folded under the chair, forming an angle of less than 90 with the upper legs
Legs	Legs were put on top of each other and were in contact at knees and lower legs were apart from each other	Legs put on top of each other, contacting at either ankle or knees	Legs rested on top of each other and lower legs were virtually in contact

Table 2

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Algorithm for the specification of the Gender-based Category from the accumulated grading and ratings of the four facets of position.

Gender-based Category	Amalgamation of individuals' measure for body posture
Any mixture including three M-ranking and ratings	
M-M	Any mixture having three N ratings and two M ratings
F-F	Any mixture having three N ratings and two M ratings
M-F	Any mixtures having three F ratings

Table 3
Classification of eye contact and gaze, Body Orientation, and Touch Eye contact, Gaze, self-touch, body orientation

Body orientation	Eye contact/ Gaze	Self-touch
Neutral (N): Shoulder position varied between complete parallel and pointing	Any eye contact made by gaze total duration at the partner	Any touch commenced with the hand to any part of the body or the clothes of the person
Full face (F): both shoulders and torso were in self-touch	Duration a participant was gazing at the other partner	Self-touch to one's face
At an angle (M): One shoulder pointing toward the partner and torso with a right or left or slanting at an angle of 90 or wider.	overall duration of mutual eye contact towards the partner	

Discussion

The present observational probe has investigated the question of if nonverbal behavior or posture in a dyadic conversation is established by the gender-based issues. While other differential facets, including socio-metric status and power have been viewed in communicative behavior studies, gender as a personal feature has not been much explored as a key factor in nonverbal behaviors and expression. The research question motivated the probe concentrating on how the nonverbal expression and behavior in dyads was affected by the gender of the partaking subjects in four chosen realms of nonverbal behavior, like body orientation, body posture, gaze, self-touch, and eye contact. An overall of 30 dyadic conversations were made and observed. Findings revealed that M-M dyads showed more neutral body postures, fewer and shorter direct eye

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contact at the partner, more self-touches to the face and to other parts and, shorter eye contact. Dyads consisted of M-F, and F-F interlocutors which shared most features which were looked into here.

Unlike popular ideas and belief, it was not found that male imitate the behavioral patterns of the opposite sex. M-M participants in this probe assumed a neutral posture whereas M-F participants behaved within the relevant gender stereotype. The partners' mutual orientation in the conversation pivots around the construction of the dyad. Participants in M-F and F-F dyads tended to assume the position in a way that provides full face communication, while in M-M dyads; the mutual orientation was off the full face. The data implied that the female participants were assisted to show various patterns of body orientation in the M-F dyad as contrasted to the similar M-M dyad. Results regarding touching behavior revealed that in M-F dyads, more self-touches came about to one's own face and more body parts' touches took place. Regarding eye contact and gaze it was evidenced that in dyads including one or more F-F or M-M participants , partners did not look at each other as often and as long as in dyads with M-F make-up. The hypothesis stating gender noticeably impacted nonverbal behavior was corroborated by the data.

As it came out, distinct patterns of nonverbal behaviors and expression were outstanding in the interactions, when a F-F or M-M dyad contributed to the interaction. It may not be conclusively solved if this was solely due to the behavior of either the female or the male partner in the dyad. Looking at the patterns of behavior, however, in M-F dyads, there sounded to be some indications that the female partner in a combined dyad exhibited various patterns of behavior compared to similar F-F dyads. This is surprising, because the speakers had not been told about the role of gender in the investigation. The study suffered some limitations. As nonverbal communication is regarded, it is obvious that gender is simply one of many factors deciding nonverbal behavior. Additionally one must bear in mind that the findings of this investigation cannot be generalized, unless the target sample is comparable to the participants in the sample in terms of level of education, age, cultural, ethnic and social background.

It is of key importance in interpreting the findings that all male and female participants had experienced such free face-to-face interactions in the sample without being bashful and reserved. The sample size requires to be raised before more conclusions to arrive at. On account of the design of the study, and the small sample size the dyad was employed as the main unit of exploration; larger samples may be the next needed step to check out the dissimilarities in nonverbal behavior between male and female participants more closely. However, the fact that significant dissimilarities in the nonverbal expressions may be identified despite the small sample size and the large differences are encouraging. The selected facets of coding system and nonverbal behavior came out to be both valid and reliable and may be utilized in further research.

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