7

Misunderstood Non-verbal Cues in Close Relationships: Contributions of Research over Opinions

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The possibility of reading another's body language is sometimes too alluring to avoid. Promises of being able to "see" a relational partner's true intentions, having insight into whether he or she is cheating on you, knowing who is the boss in the relationship, recognizing his or her actual commitment level, or detecting their romantic and sexual interest are quite tantalising. Unfortunately, there is a difference between what patterns of non-verbal communicative behaviour might reveal about close relationships in general and the non-verbal behaviour exhibited by a specific individual in a close relationship. Research might shed light on the former but cannot make predictions about the latter. This does not stop talk shows from bringing on guests to "read" people or news organizations from presenting experts who can dissect a politician, person of

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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R. J. Sternberg, A. Kostić (eds.), *Nonverbal Communication in Close Relationships*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-94492-6_7

interest, or celebrity's conduct. Magazine writers offer tips and quizzes about the telltale behaviours of a host of traits pertaining to those on the dating scene or in loving relationships for entertainment purposes ostensibly, while readers might assume they are immutable facts. Romantic comedies and dramatic films depict close relationships that writers have imagined and created, perhaps inspired by their own personal experiences, but viewers may see these relationships, and the concomitant behaviours and non-verbal communication wisdom shared by the characters in the films, as reality for most people. The challenge continues to be how to tell the difference.

Knowledge about how scholars conduct studies and analyse non-verbal communication can aid in helping people to differentiate lay opinion and anecdote from scientific research findings. Additionally, the juxtaposition of examples of lay advice and public conceptualizations, generalizations, and biases with what we know from research conducted on non-verbal behaviour in the realm of relationships can further illuminate what is misunderstood and understood about non-verbal communication in close relationships.

Distinguishing Lay from Scientific

During our daily interactions, we encounter people making claims about the meaning and significance of ours and others' behaviours. These assertions may come from well-intentioned strangers, friends, family members, and co-workers dissecting the attributes of your loved one's behaviour on social media or from experts a news organization recruited to comment on an instance of intimate partner violence by a sports figure or the supposed rejection of a politician by a spouse who refuses to hold hands in public, to name a few. Judgements of the accuracy may be based on a feeling, intuition, the reasonableness of the claim, or consistency among a panel of analysts. There is a danger here that people might mistake these sorts of analyses as facts about non-verbal communication and how they operate in close relationships.

To avoid this pitfall, familiarity with how non-verbal communication and close relationships are examined in scientific research is useful.

Scholars who study non-verbal behaviour use systematic methods that are orderly, planned, and documented to allow others to see how the study was conducted and to be able to replicate the study in the future. This may take two general forms: a grounded approach and a hypothesis-testing approach (Hecht & Guerrero, 2008). In the grounded approach, scholars pose research questions about an aspect of non-verbal communication and then the non-verbal behaviour is studied, observed, described, and organized in an attempt to answer the posed research questions. In the hypothesis-testing approach, scholars are attempting to rule out that chance explains a particular pattern of behaviour. They often do this by making predictions about non-verbal behaviour and then determine whether there is evidence to support the predictions. They collect data and estimate the probability that a certain outcome occurred. If this exceeds a predetermined benchmark, then the researchers conclude that there is evidence, within a reasonable degree of certainty that the outcome observed does not exist by chance alone.

Armed with this fundamental knowledge, it is possible to recognize when something does not meet the rigour of a scientific investigation. First, a basic tenet of the scientific method is that it involves a priori questions or predictions. Researchers ask questions or make educated guesses ahead of seeing any data. They do not want to be influenced by knowing a result. Thus, when you hear someone explaining a person's behaviour after the fact, there is reason to be suspicious that the claims that person is making to discuss another's behaviour is conjecture. It is very easy to state factors that caused an outcome, when you already know the outcome. The factors used to explain a known result may be coincidental or may be overstated. If a mom pleads in a press conference for the safe return of her kidnapped child and is later discovered to have killed her own child, then it is easy for a so-called expert, post hoc, to say these specific non-verbal behaviours the mother exhibited showed that she was lying. The validity of the expert's assertions is debatable because we are already aware of the outcome: the mother was known to have lied when the expert provided an analysis.

When an outcome is known and there are no predetermined questions to focus observation or predictions to test, bias is introduced which can color our perceptions. For example, Levine, Asada, and Park (2006)

demonstrated that when people were told that the person they would be watching in a video clip was deceptive, the viewers thought the person they watched exhibited less eye contact, than when people were not given any information on whether the person in the video clip was deceptive. Participants watched the exact same video clips but saw two different degrees of eye contact, depending on whether they thought deception occurred or when they did not have that prime.

Second, scientific research on non-verbal communication and close relationships examines a group of people, many couples, or several instances, and not a solo individual, a single couple, or a sole instance. Scientific claims are about what is likely to happen overall, and not in a specific case. An individual person can report a contradictory experience. An undergraduate student who hears a professor discuss a research finding might dispute the results by saying that it does not apply to their situation. This is correct. The research finding might not apply, but this does not make the research finding necessarily incorrect. It highlights a misunderstanding when the student assumes a research result should apply to all cases, including their particular situation. Rather, a research finding is making a generalization about most people (who are like those who were studied and in the manner they were studied), not about a given instance. Individual cases vary. Scientists recognize this and are upfront that their claims are not about a specific individual. Thus, inherently, if someone is making a claim about your non-verbal behaviour in particular, this again is speculation about the non-verbal behaviour. Consider, for example, Van Raalte, Floyd, and Mongeau's (2021) finding that married couples who spent more time cuddling over four weeks showed improvements in their relationship satisfaction than married couples who spent more time together during meals or who did not change their behaviour. These researchers are not claiming that if you and your spouse engage in more physically affectionate touching, you both will be happier in your marriage. They are stating that, on the whole, married couples who engaged in more cuddling reported more relationship happiness than couples who did not. On the whole versus a single instance is the difference here.

Third, another aspect of scientific research to be attentive to when hearing claims about non-verbal communication in close relationships is probability. Probability is always involved. There is a chance that

scientists could be wrong. Scientists do not rely on a single study, but look across many studies to draw tentative conclusions about non-verbal behaviour in close relationships. Scientists do not talk in absolutes, but they point to what the evidence indicates or supports in general while acknowledging that there is room for error. Science is an accumulation of knowledge that progresses over time. And, corrections, modifications, and refinements are an integral and fundamental part of the scientific process.

When studying non-verbal communication in close relationships, there are a multitude of researcher-driven decisions that make findings from a single research study tentative. Researchers make choices about how they will collect data, whether it is through self-reports, observer assessments, or physiological measurements. When observers are used, researchers also decide on whether the observers will be trained or untrained, whether they will be strangers who do not know the people they are observing or known others such as relational partners, friends, and family members. Researchers make decisions about where, when, how often, and how long they will collect the data. They decide on the measurement scheme they will use, the unit of analysis they will examine, and what type of data they will include.

As White and Sargent (2005) pointed out, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with the decisions researchers make when conducting a study of non-verbal behaviour. When people are observed in an experiment, they are aware they are being studied. This may change, intensify, or de-intensify their behaviour. Experimental studies introduce controls to be able to isolate the variables of interest, and there may be questions about the ecological validity of the study. Sometimes researchers visually record non-verbal behaviours, but the camera will only capture what is in its viewfinder and not the rest of the surrounding context. When scholars ask people to report on their behaviours, those people may not be fully aware of what they do and when they do it, or they may be biased toward recalling certain types of behaviours. When observers' assessments differ from the actual participants in a study, scientists will need to reconcile those impressions. When researchers connect people to equipment that will record physiological measurements, the unusualness

of the situation may inhibit or impede some behaviours the participants might normally exhibit or introduce new behaviours.

Even when a naturalistic observation is conducted, there are trade-offs. When researchers try to observe people's behaviour without interfering and affecting the people they are observing, this means they have access to only certain types of non-verbal behaviours and may not be able to view others (Hertenstein et al., 2006). They may more readily see public and socially sanctioned behaviours and not those within the home or bedroom. For example, naturalistic observations of touch among adults have not captured aggressive or socially inappropriate touches in their descriptions (e.g., Heslin & Alper, 1983; Jones & Yarbrough, 1985). However, we do know that these forms of touch do occur from self-reports of violence experienced in relationships (Christopher & Lloyd, 2001) and from observations of young children at playgrounds who may be less constrained by societal standards (Guerrero & Ebesu, 1993). Reports of naturalistic observations of adults do not reveal these sorts of behaviours.

Examination of close relationships necessitates additional researcher decisions. Scientists must define the close relationship they will study, which will inevitably include some and exclude others. For instance, close relationships might be defined by a feeling experienced or behaviours enacted by one or both partners. They may be determined by the length of time the couple has been together at a certain relationship stage or the overall length of time they have known each other. Close relational partners who participate in research studies often report high levels of satisfaction in their relationships, even when not recruited with that characteristic. This is understandable, especially if the study is labour-intensive, if a couple needs to come to a study location multiple times, or if the research will span a longer period of time. People in less happy and less stable relationships may choose not to participate in research to avoid having their relationship scrutinized, and they may be prone to dropping out of longitudinal studies. There may also be differences in how they view and interpret the non-verbal behaviours of their relational partners. Indeed, Noller (1992, 2005) demonstrated, using a standard content methodology, that people in distressed marriages made more errors when

decoding the non-verbal behaviours of their spouses and made more negative judgements about the intentions of their spouses than those in non-distressed marriages.

All of these researcher decisions have consequences for how scholars frame the claims they make regarding non-verbal communication in close relationships. Researchers, when reporting their results, are careful to match how the study was conducted when relaying the findings. For example, consider one non-verbal communication area about relationships that often interests the public: men's supposed preoccupation with women's physical appearance. You might hear lay people talking about sex differences between men and women that are associated with physical attractiveness research. Typically, a version of the findings that is repeated is that men care about good looks, but women care about good earning potential of romantic partners (and not their looks). The research, however, does not support this claim and the imprecision in paraphrasing what was actually found in studies of this nature sets up an either/or fallacy. The actual research findings do not demonstrate that a person either sees physical attractiveness as important or sees income potential as important. This is a false choice. Instead, when sex differences and characteristics of mates were found in studies (and there is controversy on that aspect in the research literature, see Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel, & Hunt, 2014; Eastwick, Neff, Finkel, Luchies, & Hunt, 2014; Meltzer et al., 2014), the comparison between men and women is on ratings or rankings of various attributes. Indeed, when asked to rank order traits or rate preferences for a mate, men will place being physically attractive higher than women, and women will place good income potential higher than men (Buss & Barnes, 1986). When asked to indicate the importance of each attribute in a mate or an ideal partner, men tended to score physical attractiveness as higher in importance than women; and women tended to score good earning potential higher in importance than men (Buss, 1989; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). However, this does not mean that women judge physical attractiveness as unimportant when selecting a mate. Both men and women place importance on the physical attractiveness of others, but men just do so to a greater extent than women.

Additionally, when scholars conduct research, they are also attentive to past work in the area to situate their study in the body of knowledge accumulated and to know the current thinking on the subject matter. When findings become discussed in the public sphere, however, sometimes the research of a scholar that has since been refined as a matter of scientific progress is missed and then is reified. Non-verbal communication's impact is one that is oft-repeated but is a mistaken claim (Burgoon, 1994; Burgoon et al., 2010; Lapakko, 1997). The faulty assertion is that non-verbal communication accounts for 93% of a message's meaning while verbal communication accounts for only 7%. Sometimes, people will further apportion the 93% figure into meaning stemming from 55% facial non-verbal cues and 38% vocal non-verbal cues. These claims are based on Mehrabian and colleagues' initial work in the 1960s (Mehrabian & Ferris, 1967; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). Subsequent research, however, and commentary on these numbers, even by Mehrabian himself (as cited in Lapakko, 1997), have disputed reliance on those figures for several reasons. For example, Mehrabian's research was focused on the communication of attitudes and feelings and not on all communicative messages. The manner in which the research was conducted did not allow language or the verbal component to vary to be able to affect message meaning substantially. Further, the verbal, facial, and vocal cues were never actually compared in a single study. Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) proposed that such a study could be conducted in the future when discussing their research.

All this points to the idea that scientific study of non-verbal communication in close relationships is not infallible. There are choices that are being made that can affect the certainty with which scholars might make claims about non-verbal communication in close relationships. Researchers, however, readily acknowledge this and note there is a margin of error in any finding and that it is an accumulation of knowledge and a preponderance of evidence that gives more credence to claims that are being made. This recognition that there is a probability that the researchers could be wrong and that there are limitations to theirs and every study are hallmarks of scientific thinking. When someone speaks as if something is factual without any recourse, plug your ears and run the other way.

Some Non-verbal Misunderstandings

Now let us consider a few specific examples of non-verbal behaviours that can be misused or misjudged, leading to misunderstandings when thinking about communication in close relationships or when thinking about those who desire to have close relationships. This might happen when seeking to reconcile assumptions about longer eye gaze during initial romantic encounters, the role of non-verbal behaviors in the sexual consent process, observers' judgements versus people's self-reports of close relationship status and dynamics, and cross-cultural differences in non-verbal behaviours in close relationships.

The Advice to Make Eye Contact on a First Date

People may wax poetically about gazing into their lover's eyes. People may ruminate about the lingering gazes of mutual attraction and sexual tension when a relationship was new. The romantically inclined might feel the charge of excitement and intrigue at the prospect of a potential connection when meeting someone's interested gaze from across a room. Films and dating reality shows might intensify the focus on the eyes by featuring close-ups of peoples' faces as they exchange looks with a suitor. The assumption undergirding these examples is the positive messages thought to be conveyed with sustained eye contact. When this type of eye contact is not present, people may be anxious about it. For example, Spalding, Zimmerman, Fruhauf, Banning, and Pepin (2010) examined the relationship advice in the question-and-answer columns of five top-selling magazines targeted at men. One particular question they pointed to was related to a man who was perplexed by women who avoided eye contact with him when he thought they were interested in him. He wondered if the lack of eye contact signalled other issues such as timidness or conceitedness. Findings from research on non-verbal communication during courtship and the initiation of relationships as well as research on the functions of nonverbal communication provides some insights into these dynamics and generally tempers the notion that more eye contact is necessarily better eye contact.

Non-verbal communication research does demonstrate that longer gazes can enhance attraction, signal more intimacy, and reflect liking of another compared to shorter gazes or averted gazes (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1999; Palmer & Simmons, 1995). Kleinke, Staneski, and Berger (1975) also showed that a lack of gaze was viewed as inattentiveness to another person. However, there are important exceptions to the more-eye-contact-is-good and the less-eye-contact-is-bad mindset. In the case of courtship and flirting, research indicates that eye contact may be fleeting, intermittent, and sustained (Moore, 2010). Kleinke (1986) concluded after reviewing research on gaze that moderate amounts of eye contact were preferred over extensive gazing or no gazing at another person when assessing people's liking of another. Burgoon et al. (2010) noted that when heavy gazing is combined with negative facial expressions, intimidation and aggression are likely interpretations of that non-verbal cue combination and not affection.

Additionally, scholars have consistently demonstrated that the eyes can serve multiple functions in communication (Burgoon et al., 2010; Patterson 1991). These include not only expressing affection and intimacy, but also managing interaction and conversations, exerting influence and control, forming impressions, and aiding in accomplishing various goals. As such, eye contact can be misunderstood. Assuming longer gaze, mutual or otherwise, is desirable can be problematic in some situations.

For example, prolonged eye contact might hamper conversational effectiveness. Research has demonstrated that eye contact serves an important role in turn-taking and regulating conversations. Burgoon et al.'s (2010) discussion of the research on eye behaviour during conversations indicates a complex but routinized set of behaviours that are synchronized precisely. Eye contact, be it one-sided gazing, mutual looks, and gaze aversion, aids in the smooth coordination of signalling who has the conversational floor and who is listening and engaged. Knapp, Hart, Friedrich, and Shulman (1973) found that the most frequently used non-verbal behaviour to end conversations was breaks in eye contact. Sustained eye contact can disrupt the process by which we manage conversations and this can make interactions feel awkward and clunky. This may be particularly problematic for romantically interested but newly acquainted

others out on their first date. Ebesu Hubbard, Aune, and Lee's (2018) research indicated that smooth, relaxed, and coordinated interactions were particularly important for having satisfying conversations during initial interactions. Additionally, other research has shown that being behaviourally in sync can increase feelings of intimacy, closeness, and sexual desire (Sharon-David et al., 2019). Thus, on the whole, too much eye contact may be counterproductive to having a successful first date, but eye contact that is appropriate and in sync with other non-verbal cues and the rest of the conversation can increase liking (Maxwell et al., 1985).

The Policy to Communicate "Yes" if You Are Interested in Sex

In the effort to reduce or successfully prosecute instances of sexual violence, particularly sexual coercion and rape, legislation, university policies, and educational interventions have been adopted in support of affirmative consent (Beres, 2020; Novack, 2017). Affirmative consent generally stipulates that agreement to engage in sexual acts between people must be given prior to the act, voluntarily, consciously, continuously, and clearly (Little, 2005). Affirmative consent explanations are often accompanied with the dictum, "yes means yes". One challenging aspect to this standard is the role of non-verbal communication in the process and whether non-verbal behaviour sans verbal behaviour can be clear, and if it can be, then by whose judgement and whose judgement will determine the non-verbal behaviour's meaning.

Reviews of research on the role of non-verbal communication in sexual encounters indicate that there are important considerations that may be overlooked or underappreciated in affirmative consent decrees (Pugh & Becker, 2018). For example, Hickman and Muehlenhard (1999) found that both men and women most frequently reported indicating agreement to engage in sexual activity with no response or not resisting the activity. Hall (1998) noted that ongoing consent was rarely given for all individual sexual behaviours, and when permission was asked, it was often at the onset of sexual activity and before sexual intercourse and was given non-verbally. Hall also found that when verbal and non-verbal cues

in response to someone initiating sexual activity co-occurred, this tended to be for more intimate activities such as intercourse and oral sex.

Vannier and O'Sullivan (2011) examined diaries they asked young adults in committed heterosexual relationships to keep and discovered that initiations of sexual activity were primarily non-verbal in nature as well and partners generally responded in reciprocal fashion. Participants described non-verbal invitations being met with non-verbal responses, and verbal invitations being met with verbal responses. Vannier and O'Sullivan also reported that the majority of the non-verbal initiation strategies and responses shared by the young adults in their study were indirect behaviours, such as smiling, hugging, and kissing a partner. Vannier and O'Sullivan concluded that in committed heterosexual young adult relationships, actions matter more than words during the seeking and responding to sexual invitations. Beres, Herold, and Maitland (2004) reported similar results for same-sex relationships when initiating and responding to invitations for sex. Responses to asking for and giving consent to engage in sexual activity were communicated primarily through non-verbal means rather than verbal, and this was especially true for men when they responded to other men who desired sex with them.

Bedera (2021) reported on interviews with college men about their sexual encounters in long-term and short-term relationships. Bedera concluded that the men appeared to endorse the notion embodied in affirmative consent policies but described indicators of consent during their actual sexual encounters that were primarily physical and non-verbal in nature. Bedera reported that nearly 40% of the cues the men reported relying upon as an indicator of consent were ambiguous and non-sexual in nature. The two most common among them were moaning and engaging in eye contract. King, Fallon, Reynolds, Williamson, Barber, and Giovinazzo (2020) similarly found that about a third of college men rated several non-verbal cues (e.g., dancing closely with grinding and kissing with tongues), some of which that did not involve intimate touching and could occur in non-sexual friendships (e.g., not moving away), as indicating some degree of sexual consent. King, et al. also reported that when combinations of non-verbal cues were present, both college men and women saw this as indicating sexual consent when compared to single non-verbal cues.

Another way the communication of consent was examined is through their portrayal in films. These films may reflect, reinforce, or influence the sexual behaviour of viewers. If films teach its audience about sexual consent, they appear to be teaching audiences to do so non-verbally. Jozkowski, Marcantonio, Rhoads, Canan, Hunt, and Willis (2019) conducted a content analysis of mainstream films released in 2013. They focused specifically on how sexual consent and refusals were depicted. Unsurprisingly, they found that characters in these films showed sexual consent most often non-verbally and implicitly. They also discovered that there were two common consent patterns displayed by characters: implicit non-verbal behaviours followed by explicit non-verbal behaviours or implicit verbal behaviours followed by implicit non-verbal behaviours. These researchers also reported that refusals to engage in sexual activity were typically portrayed as non-verbal or as an explicit verbal behaviour. Jozkowski et al. further examined relationship status and found that sexual activity in established relationships were most frequently depicted without a consenting process but skipped to showing established relational partners already engaged in sexual behaviour as compared to other relationship types (e.g., novel relationships).

Thus, public policies requiring and encouraging the communication of clear agreement to engage in sex must account for the fact that sexual consent is regularly conveyed non-verbally and implicitly and consent in established relationships may be different than newly formed ones. Moreover, the non-verbal behaviours relied upon for consent may not mean "yes" to sex by all parties.

Distinguishing Observers from Relational Partners' Reports on Haptic Behaviour

Sometimes what is seen is not what is actually occurring in relationships. For example, in public settings, if you see a pair of people from different sexes sitting together and touching each other, you might think that they are romantically involved. Paparazzi make a living by photographing celebrities in potentially compromising situations when they hold hands, kiss, or hug someone who is not their primary romantic partner. Research

on haptics or touch in public settings demonstrates that sometimes observations of behaviour can be misleading. For example, Afifi and Johnson (1999, 2005) coded the behaviour of different-sex friendships and heterosexual daters in college bars. They found that some forms of touching behaviour were exhibited by both friends and daters. They reported that these touches were observed with relatively equal frequency between friends and daters and they did not differentiate the type of relationship. Those types of touches, sometimes intimate in nature, included fully embracing each other, leaning one's head on the other, patting or rubbing the other's shoulders or legs, and holding each other's hands. Observations of non-verbal behaviour to determine what is happening in a close relationship and the reliance on single cues increase the need to verify judgements.

In another instance, when people are asked to observe people holding hands or review photographs of people holding hands, researchers commonly found that those in the upper hand or lead hand position were the men in the romantic relationship and implied or conferred the status of being the more dominant person (Chapell et al., 1998, 1999; Pettijohn II et al., 2013). However, when relational partners are doing the hand holding themselves and dominance in the relationship is determined through actions other than the hand holding or through relational partners' self-reports, the lead hand dominance connection washes away and it appears that height is the better predictor of who has the lead hand in couples (Che et al., 2013; Ebesu Hubbard et al., 2018).

These studies point to misunderstandings that can happen when we observe non-verbal behaviour from a distance and examine individual cues in relative isolation. Close relationships are not always what they appear to be non-verbally.

Non-verbal Cultural Blinders

Cultures can vary along several dimensions. Burgoon et al. (2010) identified five cultural dimensions that are tied to non-verbal communication: individualist/collectivist cultures, high-/low-power distance cultures, feminine/masculine cultures, immediate/non-immediate cultures, and

high-/low-context cultures. The latter two of these seem particularly relevant to non-verbal communication in close relationships. People from immediate cultures are more non-verbally immediate in that they engage in more physical touch, stand closer to each other, make more eye contact, face each other more directly, and speak louder than people from non-immediate cultures (Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2002). Someone in a high-context culture privileges the physical context, environment, and non-verbal cues. They also rely on people's judgements and interpretations for understanding meaning. Someone in a low-context culture privileges the verbal messages themselves and values clear and explicit language (Hall, 1981).

Misunderstandings can happen when people's cultural differences clash in a close relationship. For example, Tili and Barker (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews of couples in intercultural marriages in which one partner was Caucasian American and one partner was Asian. Their analysis of the interviews revealed that a common theme that influenced marital couples' communication with each other was reflected in high-context and low-context cultural differences. Caucasian American spouses showed low-context culture preferences in that they wanted their Asian spouses to more directly communicate with them and say what was on their minds. Asian spouses exhibited high-context culture preferences in that they wanted their Caucasian American spouses to be able to see their meaning through their non-verbal behaviours and contextual cues without needing to directly verbalize their specific thought or feeling.

Research has provided evidence that cultures share both similarities and dissimilarities in their communicative behaviours and this pattern holds true for nonverbal cues in close relationships. For instance, Sorokowska et al. (2021) conducted a sweeping study on haptic behaviour across 45 countries. They specifically examined interpersonal affective touch (e.g., kissing and hugging) in close relationships (i.e., intimate partner, female friend, male friend, and own child). People from China reported the lowest frequency of affective touch over the past week with an intimate partner, as well as with their own child. South Koreans had the lowest reported frequency of affective touch with a female friend. People from Poland had the lowest reported frequency of affective touch with a male friend. Karandashev, Zarubko, Artemeva, Neto, Surmanidze,

and Feybesse (2016) compared cues associated with romantic physical attraction for four European countries. They found that the non-verbal cues associated with romantic attraction reported by people from Portugal, Georgia, Russia, and France shared similarities, especially for facial animation and pleasantness, but there were also some differences. For example, Portuguese, Georgian, and Russian men's romantic physical attraction to women was increased by women's expressive face and speaking. Georgian men also included women's smiles and laughter, and their facial structure as factors which increased their romantic physical attraction to women. For Russian men, they included women's smiling and laughter and their lips as increasing their romantic physical attraction, while singing was a factor that decreased their romantic physical attraction. For women from Portugal, the factors that increased their romantic physical attraction to men were men's eyes and body, and their romantic physical attraction was decreased by men's dress. For women from Georgia, it was an expressive face and speaking, smiles and laughter, and good skin which increased their romantic physical attraction to men. For women from Russia, romantic physical attraction was increased by men's expressive face and speaking, smiling and laughter, their body, and their dancing. For people from France, the only factor of those studied that significantly contributed to increasing their romantic physical attraction was body, and this finding only pertained to men's attraction to women.

Cultural differences can change how we interpret non-verbal behaviours in relationships. These differences can challenge our notions of what is important and how we judge our partner's behaviours.

Conclusion

Understanding how research on non-verbal communication in close relationships is conducted and attention to the match or mis-match between what claims are made and whether there is scientific evidence that tested those claims are worthy efforts. These endeavours can help to reduce misunderstanding, misinterpretations, and overreaching proclamations about the role of non-verbal behaviour in our relationships with others.

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