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Negative Emotions, Facial Clues, and Close Relationships: Facing the End?

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Love

Does the word *love*, despite its frequent use, signify the same or different terms in the conceptual system of every individual? Both laypeople and scientists seem to be confronted with this question, so relying on the non-verbal signals is the strategy explicitly or implicitly chosen by many people when they want to conclude whether they are loved. Besides this, each of us establishes different forms of relations and experiences different kinds of love. This refers to different categories of interpersonal relationships, such as parental love, love by a partner or a friend, and to those

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within which this complex emotion can have different forms. Some people are more capable of a more subtle differentiation of these categories than other people. Experts are probably equally puzzled by this question, as are some laypersons. Several theories are offered to understand partnership love.

Baumeister and Bushman (2011) refer to the classification of *passionate* and *companionate* love. Passionate love involves the existence of an exquisite desire and longing for one's partner, the feeling of excitement with the very encounter with him/her and the need for physical closeness, including intercourse. There is no similar excitement in companionate love or affectionate love, and the partner is more viewed as a soulmate. Companionate love is associated with loyalty, dedication, mutual understanding, and caring. They conclude that the latter kind of love is the building block for a successful long-term marriage.

These two types of love are vital for relationship development. As passion decreases in a relationship, there is the potential for a gradual transfer from a romantic into a companionate love (e.g. Acker & Davis, 1992; Hatfield et al., 2008; Tucker & Aron, 1993). Such an idea also has its theoretical support. According to the triangular theory of love by Robert Sternberg (1986), love consists of three components: *intimacy, passion*, and *decision/commitment*. Intimacy "refers to feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships" (p. 119). "The passion component refers to the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationships" (p. 119). "The decision/commitment component refers to, in the short term, the decision that one loves someone else, and in the long term, the commitment to maintain that love" (p. 119). Depending on the fact which of these components is prevalent, Sternberg (1986) distinguishes eight types of love: nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love, and consummate love. *Nonlove* refers to a series of relations that do not include either of the above-mentioned components. *Liking* implies a relationship that contains only the first component, intimacy. Therefore, it is viewed as a friendship filled with closeness and warmth. *Infatuated love* includes the experience of passionate excitement, with the lack of intimacy and decision/commitment. *Empty love* is a type of relationship that has commitment but does not have passion and intimacy, which usually characterises

the final or near-final stage of a long-term relationship. An individual has decided to love another individual, and he/she is dedicated to that relationship but feels neither closeness nor passion towards him/her. *Romantic love* implies the presence of intimacy and passion—an individual feels passionate excitement, as with infatuation, but also feels an intense emotional attachment to the partner, which does not exist with infatuation. Companionate love is characterised by deep friendship, which is present in long-lasting relationships with significantly reduced passion. *Fatuous love* represents a relationship in which commitment is developed based on the experienced passion, but it usually has a short lifespan due to the lack of intimacy. In *Consummate or complete love,* there is a combination of passion, intimacy, and commitment. An individual feels passionate toward a partner, to whom he/she has a strong emotional attachment. The individual is dedicated to that relationship.

These three components differ, depending on the degree of stability within the relationship. Intimacy and decision/commitment are under voluntary control to a higher degree (especially decision/commitment) and have greater stability over time than the passion component. However, for an individual to have control over the first two components, he/she has to be aware of them, which is something people are not able to do. Although they feel warmth and concern for the partner's welfare and happiness, it is important to understand and recognise these components. The author emphasises the complexity of this phenomenon. Love should be observed with its specific quality. Love obtains its significance in people's implicit theories.

In an attempt to define partnership love, Hazan and Shaver (1987) utilised John Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. They represented love as a combination of three control systems of behaviour: *attachment, caregiving, and sexual behavioural system.* While describing these systems, Bowlby (1969) states that each of them, although they appear automatic, also possesses cognitive-behavioural mechanisms, which enable monitoring and correcting the primary strategy, directed towards the achievement of the set goal, while adjusting to the environmental requirements, that is, the context. The goal of the first system is the feeling of protection and safety, the second system is focused on the reduction of suffering and the encouragement of growth of another individual by experiencing his/

her state, while the third one refers to the fulfilment of the partner's sexual desires. If an activation of primary strategies does not fulfil the goal, there is an activation of the secondary ones: hyperactivation and deactivation. According to Hazan and Shaver (1987), stable partner relationships are characterised by an optimum functionality of all three systems, while their dysfunctionality leads to conflicts, dissatisfaction, and instability of the relationship. Hyperactivation of the first system is reflected in over-emphasising the unavailability of the attachment figure, that is, the partner's excessive dependence and attempts to control and attract attention (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002). On the other hand, deactivation implies alienation, focusing, and relying on oneself to avoid rejection by the attachment figure. The hyperactivation of caregiving system is manifested through an individual's assertive attempts to give attention and support; the hypersensitivity is in observing the signals of other people's needs, while neglecting one's own needs, which leads to a higher level of stress in both partners. On the contrary, deactivation implies lack of empathy, insensitivity to the needs, and distancing oneself from the partner when he/she needs attention. With the hyperactivation of the third control system, an individual overemphasises the significance of sexual intercourse for the relationship, insists on it, and becomes overly sensitive to each signal he/she receives from a partner, which may indicate either presence or the lack of sexual interest. All that increases anxiety and creates tension in the relationship. In deactivation, an individual rejects his/her sexual needs, distances from the partner when he/she shows interest in sex, and inhibits sexual excitement.

Need to Belong

An inborn tendency to belong and be intimate represents one of the most fundamental human needs that shape emotions, cognition, and behaviour. This tendency to belong motivates us to search for a soulmate. We establish a close and stable relationship as we discover the desired elements of similarity in a particular individual. The achieved closeness satisfies the need for belonging and, at the same time, encourages the awakening of positive feelings. The image of oneself then becomes

overwhelmed by a sudden increase in self-respect and self-confidence with the increased sense of accomplishment and achievement. Although most people feel confident, uncertainty within the relations may worry them.

Despite the beginning enthusiasm and hope that the achieved closeness will remain stable over time, many people are worried over the relationship's future. In trying to free themselves from the uncomfortable threat, people sometimes resort to the idealised projection of perfect, unchangeable, and "unique" closeness. The harmonious functioning of the partnership dyad indeed rests on an intrinsic tendency of both members to be happy, which does not exclude an occasional possibility of experiencing negative emotions, which should be handled carefully and with understanding. Over time, however, partners notice that the companionship is exposed to different changes, especially when it comes to emotional dynamics and the functioning of the dyad. Some of these mutually synchronised changes can empower and increase partnership closeness, while, on the contrary, emotionally desynchronised changes usually cause an unstable, vulnerable, and weak connection.

For decades, those who have studied the nature and functions of emotions have emphasised their important role in all kinds of relationships, from those related to business, friends, and family to intimate relationships in which emotions have an immense significance (Ekman, 2003, xiii). According to Tomkins (1962), emotions are the generators that motivate us and contribute to the quality of our lives. There is a tendency to multiply positive emotional experiences and decrease the negative ones. We are sometimes unable to achieve this despite great effort, especially in important relationships.

Emotions are essential because they have the power to create outcomes of our relations, connect us with others, make us more distant, or completely separate us from them, and influence positive and negative characteristics of our relations, and their future. Living in harmony with emotions implies a serious knowledge of the phenomenology of emotions. Persons who understand the nature of emotions, their antecedents and functions, and recognise emotions and their changes within themselves and others and learn to regulate and control them, can easily manage their relations and outcomes.

Paul Ekman's fifty-year dedication to the systematic research of emotions has provided powerful support to the development of this area and has encouraged many scientists to dedicate themselves to the studies of emotions. The theoretical hypotheses and empirical discoveries by Paul Ekman have enriched the scientific knowledge on the nature and functions of emotions (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011), which is why his work has become an inevitable guide in understanding important phenomena of emotional experience, primarily in the field of expressing primary emotions (Ekman & Keltner, 2014). Ekman's approach has also become our platform for analysing facial communication of emotions within the interactions of close individuals (Ekman, 2016).

Toward Emotions

Although it is generally known that emotions have an undoubted significance in our life, thus making it sometimes better, fuller, and more meaningful, and occasionally completely different, we should pay attention to Ekman's observation, which he has revealed in the introduction of his book "Emotions Revealed" (2003, xiv): "It still amazes me that up until very recently we – both scientists and laymen – knew so little about emotion, given its importance in our lives. But it is in the nature of emotion itself that we would not fully know how emotions influence us and how to recognize their signs in ourselves and others."

This remark by Ekman most certainly refers to some earlier periods during which there was a visible disharmony between the importance of emotions in life and the incomplete understanding of their nature and the power they have over us. Why are emotions so difficult to understand and sometimes impossible to know? Ekman believes that the nature of emotion is "responsible" for this state, that is, the *promptness* it awakens. A rapid appearance of emotions often does not make us aware of why we feel and act in a certain way. Due to the promptness of that appearance, we also lose control over situations and events that incite emotions, or behaviours they cause.

Although emotions can be excellent allies in most situations, providing us with a lot of energy, we sometimes understand that our emotional

reactions may be inappropriate for some social situations. The emotional response itself can be inappropriate when it comes to the category of the experienced emotion, its excessive intensity or expression. If we were "oriented" more toward internal emotional states and if we carefully analysed the types of events that incited certain emotions in most situations, we would be more aware of *when* we become emotionally excited and *how* we behave in that case. This could help establish certain control and implement changes that make easier not only our life but also life with others. Ekman believes that anyone who thinks about the benefits of regulating one's emotional behaviour can invest some effort into learning to be constructive and ready to bring changes into everything that makes us emotionally inadequate but allows certain corrections. Many of us are sometimes ashamed of our negative and inappropriate emotional reactions, which have disrupted important interpersonal relations. These inappropriate reactions can leave feelings of guilt and regret, which is the first step toward our willingness to change something (Ekman, 2003, xiv, p. 17).

Verbal Versus Non-verbal

Verbal communication occupies an important place in all kinds of social interactions, regardless of the participants, their relations and goals, and their mutual influences and changes (Havelka, 2012). When used adequately, which primarily implies using a shared code, language can provide a good flow, quality, and a successful outcome of an interaction. In such conditions, conversation partners exchange clear and precisely articulated verbal messages which are based on the optimum number of relevant information spoken at the right moment. An ideal outcome and the basic quality of such verbal communication is the rich exchange of spoken messages composed in a way that is both understood and accepted by the participants.

However, the presence of specific differences can disrupt the willingness of conversation partners to continue the conversation and connect among themselves adequately. Differences that make verbal communication more difficult can emerge due to educational, generational,

individual, socio-cultural, and contextual factors. These factors are sometimes difficult to overcome (Havelka, 2012).

Communication with others does not only imply relying on the spoken words, although their speaking capacities are what makes people different than other species. Besides language, conversation partners also use numerous non-verbal signals combined with speech. The non-verbal elements of behaviour are crucial to interaction (Argyle, 2017). A diverse and intriguing collection of non-verbal signals, often sent without an individual's conscious and voluntary intention, becomes a form of behaviour that the conversation participant trusts. Rot (2010) believes that spontaneity and involuntariness of non-verbal behaviour support the hypothesis on the validity and reliability of these signals. Unlike that, spoken phrases can be planned in advance, carefully constructed, and often completely inconsistent with reality, but therefore in accordance with the current interests of the conversation partners.

Sometimes, the interaction participants are not either brave enough or willing to talk about their delicate inner states. Instead, they rather choose a non-verbal context, utilising lack of specificity and unstable connections between signs and meanings, to only *hint* at inner states, without any verbal articulation.

In some situations, however, relatively non-specific and uncertain meanings of non-verbal signals can provide protection from unpleasant exposure. However, non-verbal expressions can be the source of miscommunication. This is only one of the reasons that makes this kind of interactive situation very complex. Added to the complexity of non-verbal communication is the spectrum of a number of different non-verbal signals (e.g., facial expression, physical contact, glance, gestures, body position, tone of voice), as well as the many messages that are transferred by these signals, including messages about emotions, interpersonal attitudes, and individuals' honesty. Participants, therefore, carefully monitor the course of interaction and react at the right moment to the sent non-verbal signals by adequately connecting them with appropriate meanings while responding in the given relation and broader social context.

The dyad interaction between close individuals is performed through both verbal and non-verbal, while the communication channels can act either individually or together. In this chapter, our interests are focused

on the exchange of non-verbal, or more precisely, facial messages in partner relations, which is why it is now necessary to reflect on the communication tools of the face.

Closer to Face and Its Signals

Even within the communication from which we do not expect significant gains and do not give special significance, our view is focused on the face of the conversation partner. The face can be the source of useful information about the person with whom we communicate. The degree of closeness and attachment increases or decreases interest in facial expressions. The analysis of facial communication of close individuals reflects a frequent exchange of non-verbal signals and an effort to notice, differentiate, and successfully decode them. Frequent and direct face-to-face communication provides an opportunity to distinguish visible facial expressions, which are treated as the indicators of the quality of the relationship. High interest in the partner's face rests on the belief that facial expressions are tightly connected to an individual's inner states, expectations, motives, and particularly, emotions. Although we can count on the direct connection between the inner state and its external manifestation in many situations, there are circumstances in which that connection is lost. Every facial behaviour, which is a product of intentional manipulation of signals, and not the expression of an actual experience, compromises the above-mentioned connection and questions the reliability of the source of information.

The face is a multi-signal system that often produces numerous facial configurations that are similar in appearance but that can have completely different meanings (Ekman, 1993). The one who observes the face has a double assignment—to deal with similarities and differences in the appearance of facial behaviours, and then discover and differentiate the messages sent by those behaviours. Due to the complexity of facial behaviours, the promptness of appearance, and the tendency to combine both, at some point, interpretation of facial signals can be challenging. Despite that, the opportunity to obtain information sent by the face needs an investment of effort. The additional difficulty in understanding facial

behaviour is the simultaneous use of both verbal and non-verbal channels of communication. Conversation partners usually pay more attention to speech content and less to non-verbal behaviour, while some of the messages that come from the face can disappear after being easily missed (Ekman et al., 1982; Buck, 1988; Kostić, 2014; Kostić & Chadee, 2015).

Although facial signals research has been undertaken on the transfer of different messages, including information on gender, age, the state of physical and mental health, (Harper et al., 1978; Knapp et al., 2014), the most frequently researched facial expressions are those connected to emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1971, 1982; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Kostić, 1995; Kostić et al., 2020). As a complex stimulus, the face relies on different types of facial signals—static, slow, artificial, and rapid (Ekman & Friesen, 2003). *Static* facial signals point to identity and particularity; *slow* signals indicate its maturing and ageing; *artificial* signals show aesthetic and health-related interventions; and *rapid* signals convey internal experiences. A "calm" face does not show any movement and depicts personal characteristics but attracts attention. In contrast, a "face in motion" completely fascinates us with its ability to express the most delicate and sensitive states. Our fascination with the nature and functions of dynamic facial signals, the changes they produce on the face, as well as the meanings they convey, led us to consider especially fast signs. Additionally, the dual nature of messages (informative and communicative) warned of the caution and careful distinction of reliable spontaneous expressions directly related to inner states from those that were not (Ekman, 1997; Kostić et al., 2020).

The category of dynamic, *rapid* facial signals contains several sub-categories—facial expressions of emotions, facial emblems, facial manipulators, illustrators, and regulators, and each of the stated sub-categories plays a separate role within social interactions. In this way, facial expressions are used for sending messages on emotions and interpersonal attitudes, while the use of regulators starts, manages, and shapes the interaction, and illustrators provide greater vividness and interest in the conversation. In situations in which speech is not possible, instead of words one can use facial emblems that transfer meanings understood by the conversational partner. There is one more sub-category of rapid facial signals (i.e., facial manipulators), which speak of discomfort, trepidation,

anxiety, and expectations of those who interact (Ekman & Friesen, 1969, 2003).

Rapid facial signals occur due to short-term changes in the neuromuscular activity of the face with a duration, at times, of a split second. Depending on the strength of the contraction of facial muscles, the changes of the face are noticeable. When muscle contractions are weak, changes are slight, difficult to notice, and require careful observation or recognition through touch. Instantaneous facial movements, which are the result of the change in the facial muscle tone (facial expression), signal different emotions of an individual. Although they can also be the source of information about interpersonal attitudes, including emotions (Kostić, 2014; Ekman, 1982; Kostić et al., 2020). Facial expressions of experienced emotions are correctly treated as involuntary facial configurations which primarily have an informative function (Ekman & Keltner, 2014). However, there is also a communicative-interactive function of facial emotional expressions that facilitates the dynamic of social encounters (Ekman, 1982; Kostić, 2014; Ekman et al., 1982). The origin of facial expressions has always been the subject of debates and disagreement among scientists. Nativists have claimed that it is inborn, that is, universal facial behaviour, and relativists that it is acquired and culture-specific. There is, however, solid empirical proof (Ekman, 1973, 1997, 1999; Ekman & Scherer, 1984) that the expression of seven primary emotions has a phylogenetic basis and shows through universal facial expressions (Ekman, 1992a). This means that independently of all differences (including gender, age, education, social stratum, social class, nationality or cultural affiliation), individuals who feel happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, anger, disgust, or contempt show these feelings with the same specific facial expressions. According to Izard (1990), public situations with a prescribed regulation and control of emotional behaviour could be an exception.

Emotional Bonds

At the end of the 1970s, scientists showed a significant interest in researching different aspects of emotional communication of close individuals, utterly crucial for the lives of partners who usually share the same space

and face an array of wonderful and challenging moments in their relationships. Levinger (1980) investigated in close relationships possible changes during short or long intervals of union and identified several stages, from initial attraction to relationship-building, its decline and end.

Starting from the point of view of his practice dedicated to marital problems, Gottman (1979) revealed a positive connection between the non-verbal competence of a partner and marital satisfaction, thus identifying different styles of communication that depend on satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the marital relationship. Gottman has emphasised that it is necessary to work on the improvement of communication skills, that is, on non-verbal sensitivity of marital partners. The results of Gottman and Porterfield's research (1981) also pointed out that long-term partners develop personal systems of meaning on which they base their interpretations of the partner's behaviour and which are often completely different from the interpretations of professional observers.

Considering the significance of emotional exchanges within a partnership dyad, we will consider potential ways of responding to changes in the experience of closeness or changes in the quality of the existing status of attachment. Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 497) write about the "belongingness hypothesis", according to which "human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships". They believe that every change in the status of belonging to another person, regardless of whether it is real or possible, has positive and negative emotional implications for closeness, with the former increasing and the latter reducing closeness. In the same article, the authors mentioned above note that it is justified to expect that, in stable circumstances, a strong attachment to another individual and their feeling of acceptance and inclusion will produce positive and very intense feelings. On the contrary, a long-term dissatisfied or only partially satisfied need for belonging will be the source of different negative emotions. Also, noticing rejection and significant changes in the level of closeness, will lead to the same negative emotional effect. We conclude that the awakening of many strong emotions can be positively and negatively connected to belonging.

The attachment to another individual encourages numerous *positive* feelings (happiness, satisfaction, joy, enjoyment, bliss, thankfulness,

compassion) whose occurrence speaks of the relationship's continuous stability and success. Baumeister and Leary (1995, p. 508) concluded that stable close relations are an essential or even necessary precondition for the occurrence of the feeling of happiness, while the lack of close attachment is a potential source of the awakening of negative feelings (sadness, depression, jealousy, loneliness, guilt, fear). Other authors also emphasise the significance of belongingness and loneliness in influencing psychological health (e.g., Mellor et al., 2008; Townsend & McWhirter, 2005). For example, Mellor et al. (2008) have found that the discrepancy between the need to belong and satisfaction with personal relationships is associated with loneliness, which has confirmed Baumeister and Leary's "belongingness hypothesis". McAdams and Bryant (1987) believe that individuals who have established intimacy in social relationships also enjoy happiness more intensely and the subjective feeling of bliss.

What jeopardises most the quality or the survival of a close relationship are *negative* emotions. What happens when partners feel the decrease in closeness or experience a more frequent exchange of negative emotions and even overt hostility? Do they manage to correctly recognise facial signs or, at least, hints of negative emotions and emotional distance from their partner? There are situations in which the partners deny feeling negative emotions and reduced partner closeness. Then they may try to hide their negative feelings or show them as more positive than they are, lying and saying that everything is fine. Hiding or falsifying emotions leads their partner on the path of wrong judgements. A careful observation of emotional exchange and noticing potential deviations from the usual expressive style in showing emotions should be a necessary precondition for judging the relationship.

What Makes Stable Relationships Different from Unstable Ones?

Gottman and DeClaire (2001) give special significance to the emotional connection involving exchanging emotional messages and sending and receiving signals that demonstrate an understanding and caring about the

partner's feelings. They speak about "bids". "A bid can be a question, a gesture, a look, a touch – any single expression that says, 'I want to feel connected to you.' A response to a bid is just that – a positive or negative answer to somebody's request for emotional connection" (p. 4). These authors have concluded that husbands do not respond to 19% of these signals from their wives within a stable relationship. On the contrary, husbands headed for divorce are not responsive in 82% of the cases. When it comes to women, in a stable relationship unresponsiveness is 14%, and in an unstable one, 50%. Similar differences are also noticed when we monitor the frequency of establishing connections during short time intervals (100 vs. 65 during a 10-minute interval). Emotional needs that an individual wants to satisfy through close relations are the need for inclusion, the need for experiencing an achieved control over one's life, and the need to be liked by others. Every relation develops through exchanging these emotional messages, that is, their acknowledgement when they occur and a positive response to them (*turning toward*). A timely and positive response to them will lead to further dependence on a relationship, which will be filled with a richer exchange of bids regarding intensity and frequency. This does not mean that one partner responds to every bid of the other partner. In such a relationship, there are many opportunities for establishing connections. On the contrary, a negative response through sarcastic comments and other forms of hostility (*turning against*) and neglecting and ignoring (*turning away*) will make a relationship *empty* and unstable. The research by Gottman and DeClaire (2001) has even shown that this second form of interaction jeopardises the relationship's survival more quickly than the first one. Survival is significantly jeopardised by a relationship in which one partner continually turns towards the other's bids while the other partner constantly turns away or against. In such interactions, the former partner most often gives up relatively quickly, decreasing further bids.

In every relationship, certain disagreements shape the characteristics of partner communication and exchange, depending on the stability or instability of their relations. Gottman and DeClaire (2001) noticed that establishing an emotional connection by responding to emotional needs, emitted through bids, during everyday interaction, equips partners with good feelings, which also enables them to understand each other better

when there is an argument. When this happens, negative emotions also occur in stable and happy relationships. However, partners still stay connected and engaged with each other. This connection is manifested through greater expressions of humour, affection, interest, mutual respect, and the absence of negative feelings, such as contempt. On the contrary, the other two forms of interaction, in which there are negative reactions to the expression of emotional needs of a partner (*turning against*) or they are completely absent (*turning away*), are, in fact, not resistant to negative emotions. Their arguments are accompanied by hostility and defensiveness.

Gottman and DeClaire (2001) believe that sending and recognising bids are skills that partners can master. Some patterns of behaviour established in partnership relations can have their roots in insensitive parental responses to child's signals. These authors give the example of a wife who did not send signals to her husband that her emotional needs have not been satisfied. She occasionally reacted angrily when overwhelmed with frustration. She should have learned how to send a bid for connection, while her partner should have realised that her anger could have been that bid. Ascribing true meaning to her reactions would have made the husband more willing to help her develop the skill of signalling her own needs. Not only can anger, but sometimes sadness and fear, can signal a need for connection.

Bids can be verbal and non-verbal. Some of the non-verbal bids are *affectionate touching* (e.g., a handshake, a kiss, a hug), *facial signals* (e.g., smile or rolling one's eyes), *playful touching* (e.g., tickling, dancing, a gentle bump), *affiliating gestures* (e.g., opening a door or pointing to a shared interest), *vocalising* (e.g., laughing, grunting, sighing in a way that invites interaction or interest) (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001, p. 31). Responses to these bids can be manifested similarly.

Positive reactions to bids can be different: *nearly passive responses, low-energy responses, attentive responses,* or *high-energy responses,* but the recipient always gets a clear message—that they have been heard by a partner, that the partner is interested in them, and that a partner is by their side and wants to help them.

When an individual turns away from connecting bids, this is often done by focusing on a certain activity which he/she has performed until

then (*preoccupied responses*), by completely ignoring the bid, by being silent or focusing on irrelevant details from the bid (*disregarding responses*), or by speaking about something which is not related to the topic introduced through the partner's bid (*interrupting responses*). Often, an individual fails to respond to bids not because he/she may not care about the partner or not recognise the bids. However, an individual who has sent a signal and has been deprived of an adequate reaction feels lonely, isolated, and rejected. Upset, he/she becomes increasingly sensitive to the signals of rejection, and, therefore, prone to a wrong interpretation of the partner's behaviour, thus confirming his/her own assumptions, which, in addition, influences negatively his/her self-confidence and self-respect. The individual feels defeated, which could result in further biddings and efforts in the relationship. Turning away from bids of connection may lead to disrupted relationships with the manifesting of anger and contempt, and defensive behaviours and the dynamics towards the breakdown of the relationship.

The third possible reaction to the partner's bids is turning against him/her. It consists of a very heterogeneous group of forms, but the outcome is the same, the establishment of the connection is refused. One of the forms is reacting with the facial expression of contempt (*contemptuous responses*), which leads to a superior stance in relation to the partner, thus hurting him/her by expressing disrespect and establishing distance. *Belligerent responses* are also one of the patterns that cause the situation of turning against bids. It refers to the behaviours used to wrongfully attack a partner, provoking him/her to confrontation or argument regardless of the content of communication. The third way in which an individual can turn away from the bid for connection is similar to the aforementioned, although it is less hostile (*contradictory responses*). *Domineering responses* are those in which an individual responds to the given bid by trying to establish control over his/her partner, thus taking a more dominant position with the intention to incite retreat and subordination of the partner. The fifth form refers to *critical responses*, in which the partner's signals are responded to by manipulative criticism, that is, by the one which refers to his/her personality instead of specific behaviour. *Defensive responses* are those in which a partner distances himself/herself from the responsibility for the bidder's words by taking the position of an innocent victim, even

when the sent message does not contain the signs of an attack. Although Gottman and DeClaire (2001) believe that partners who respond to the signals in this manner do not intend to hurt another individual, but that such reactions are often the consequence of certain factors which are outside the partnership relation, the bidder is hurt and rejected, even more than the period when he/she experienced turning away. Facing these reactions can produce fear and lead to the avoidance of conflicts in the future. Such relationships, in which one of the partners suppresses his or her feelings to maintain peace, can last relatively long and be stable but not happy.

Contempt

Gottman's work on "fixing and strengthening" marital, friendly, and business relationships has convinced him that words cannot express everything that an individual feels. In his view, it is necessary to sharpen the skill of noticing, differentiating, and decoding different groups of non-verbal signals, including signals that occur on the face (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001).

When a relationship is considered particularly important, the face of a close individual is experienced as a precious source of sometimes pleasant and sometimes unpleasant information. Thanks to their multi-signal ability, faces "speak" to us about experienced, suppressed, or simulated emotions. Some facial clues signal support, affection, and approval, while others indicate reluctance, hostility, resentment, rejection. Frequently used, these signs can indicate successful or unsuccessful, stable or unstable partnerships. It is evident that besides the signs of love and respect which make us happy the most, facial expressions can also confirm disrupted closeness, worn-out connection, fading love, loss of trust, and disrespect. Gottman (1994) believes that frequent negative interaction in which partners are exposed to constant criticism, hostile attitudes, and facial expressions of contempt, produces a defensive reaction, and also undermines and imbalances communication, thus awakening the partner's anxiety that the relationship is close to an end.

Starting from the fundamental human need for belonging and the most suitable models of partnership communication, consideration is now given to the disruptions of interaction with close individuals. The "verbalisation" of facial communication of negative emotions and its appearance and timely observation can signify the quality, course, and fate of partnership relations. The facial *expression of contempt* is one of the most "verbal announcers" of a marital crisis, discordant and undermined communion, and disruptive partnership relationship. Coan and Gottman (2007) state that contempt is a complex and multi-meaningful emotion used for expressing deep disrespect, aversion, and superior power over one's partner. An individual who expresses this emotion has the *intention* to hurt and humiliate his/her partner, showing that he/she sees an irreparably incompetent, stupid, unfit, and inferior person in the partner. However, this situation becomes more significant when it is constantly repeated. It is difficult for partners to abandon the interaction in which they are used to frequent exchanges of contempt and sneer signals. The response to this situation is most often a defensive response, sending a message of guiltlessness (Gottman, 1994).

Margolin, John, and Gleberman (1988) have found that in conflict situations, during confrontations, women are equally as men prone to express contempt and anger toward their violent husbands. Kernsmith (2005) believes that a frequent expression of contempt during an argument is positively connected to higher willingness of both partners to react violently, which is also confirmed by research results presented by Sommer, Iyican, and Babcock (2019). However, an individual who is angry at his/her partner can react violently but that will not initiate a similar violent reaction in the other individual, as concluded by Sommer, Iyican, and Babcock. According to the findings of Coan and Gottman (2007), the expression of contempt is usually followed by sarcasm, sneering, and eye-rolling.

In his attempt to point out how important it is to focus on a more serious study of contempt, not only as an expression of superiority, but also as a feeling that "speaks" about the characteristics of the marital communication, especially in conflict situations, Ekman (2003, p. 181) directs us toward very interesting findings presented by Gottman and Levenson (1999, 2004). In particular, their long-term studies of many marital

interactions revealed that women whose husbands had expressed contempt were overwhelmed with dissatisfaction. They thought more often that their problems were difficult, serious, and nearly unsolvable, which probably worsened their health during the following four years. This was not the case when husbands expressed only disgust or anger. Gottman and Silver (1994) stated that frequent expression of contempt and expressed hostility represent forms of permanent psychological abuse, an indicator of gravitation towards divorce or a relationship break-up.

If a facial expression of contempt is able to destroy a partnership relation, and even anticipate its ending, this would have to be rooted in a long-term negative view of the individual with whom one lives. The partner who this emotion is directed against and who recognises it experiences it as an attack on his/her own personality and self-esteem. It turns out that *contempt* is a destructive emotion because it increases and expands the existing conflict, thus introducing unpleasant forms of arguments and, perhaps, a similar response, instead of calming the situation or reconciliation. If the facial expression of contempt is directed against you many times during frequent arguments with your partner, you have received information, including rejection.

Social exclusion (rejection) produces negative emotions, which authors describe as *social pain* (Driscoll et al., 2017; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). MacDonald and Leary (2005) have defined this phenomenon as "a specific emotional reaction to the perception that one is being excluded from desired relationships or being devalued by desired relationship partners or groups" (p. 202). The results of seven experiments whose subjects were informed that the other participants had allegedly socially rejected them exhibited a lower level of prosocial (helping) behaviour (Twenge et al., 2007). The rejection caused their emotional response intended to protect them from the unpleasantness experienced, and those emotions temporarily reduced their capacities for compassion and understanding others and the need to help them.

Let us go back to the situation of partnership interaction in which someone from this dyad observes the partner's face and realises that he/she has been rejected. He/she emotionally responds to the information about the rejection and loses the capacity to listen, understand, and be tolerant and compassionate (Ekman, 2010), and to return the

communication to a "safer" level. Can we forget instantly a message of contempt sent by our partner?

Analysing the nature, expression, and function of contempt, but believing that this emotion has not been explored enough, Ekman (2003, p. 182) pointed out that the awakening of someone's contempt is caused by individuals and their behaviour. The antecedents of contempt are never unpleasant smells, tastes, or touches, as is the case with the causes of disgust. In most cases, the expression of contempt is exclusively associated with the experience of one's own superiority over another person. Referring to Miller's observation, Ekman states (2003, p. 181) that the subordinates can feel and express contempt towards their superiors, as it happens in some interactions between women and men, adolescents and adults, and employee and their bosses. By expressing contempt, the subordinate wants to show that they are not worthless and inferior and do not deserve this kind of message. For those who experience it, contempt is not a negative emotion, and it can even produce a pleasant experience. The primary function of contempt is not an adaptation, but a clear manifestation of power, status, and belief in one's value compared to the much or slightly less valuable characteristics and capacities of others. There are those who nurture a contemptuous interpersonal attitude towards their environment, enjoying their own superiority and haughty behaviour, and sometimes unsupported high self-esteem while trying to maintain their imaginary status of being and incomparable individuals. It is interesting that the social environment sometimes views these persons with admiration and respect, considering only their interpersonal style of treating others.

Although the intensity of contempt can vary, as with any other emotion, it does not reach the highest intensity of disgust even to its full extent. With contempt, it is very hard to identify some internal sensations (Ekman, 2003), unlike specific sensations associated with disgust (in one's throat, for example) or anger (increased blood pressure and pulse).

Ekman (2003) drew attention to the existence of specific unilateral facial changes during the experience of contempt: raising one's chin, and then stretching and lifting one corner of the lips (see Photos 9.1 and 9.2). With increased intensity of this emotion, the changes in the face become more strongly expressed and, therefore, more visible. During a powerful
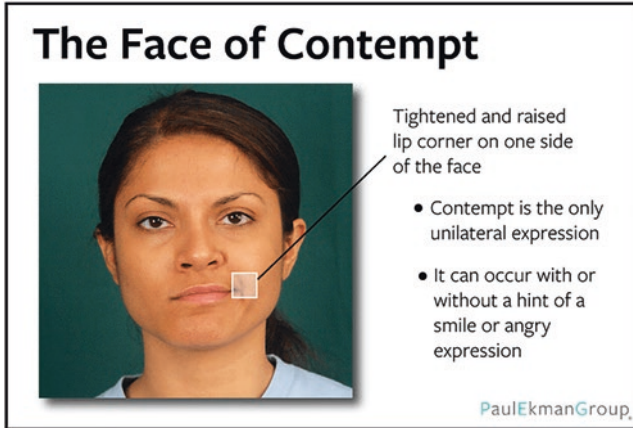
Photo 9.1 Facial expression of contempt (What is Contempt? – Paul Ekman Group. https://www.paulekman.com). (This photo has the permission of Paul Ekman (personal communication, September, 14, 2021))
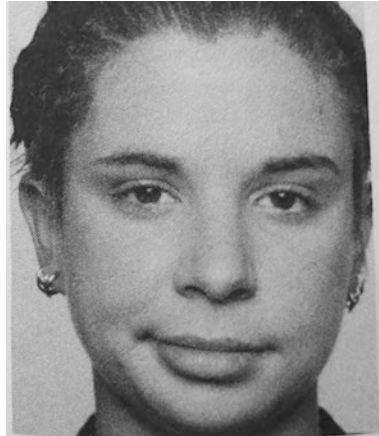

Photo 9.2 Facial expression of contempt (Ekman, *Emotions Revealed*, 2003, photo H, p. 185). (This photo has the permission of Paul Ekman (personal communication, September, 14, 2021))

expression of contempt accompanied with the elevation of one lip corner, there is a slight gap between the lips on that side. Empirical findings from cross-cultural studies, including isolated cultures, show that contempt has been the last emotion to join the list of six basic universal emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1986; Ekman, 1994, 2003; Ekman & Heider, 1988). We are now convinced that despite earlier disputes (Russell, 1991), the facial expression of contempt represents a universal specific configuration, highly recognisable in different cultures (75%). Similar results have also been obtained by Matsumoto (1992).

Contempt Smile

According to Ekman, a smile is one of the most frequently used facial expressions (Ekman, 1992b, pp. 151, 153; Ekman & Friesen, 1982; Ekman et al., 1981), that is, an expression experienced by observers as simple and easily recognisable, although they are often difficult to interpret. A smile occurs due to the contraction of one facial muscle (zygomatic major), which pulls the corners of the lips towards the cheekbones. However, numerous kinds of smiles (18 smiles), which are different in their appearance and meaning, indicate the complexity of interpretation. Some of them are felt smile, false smile, fear smile, contempt smile, compliance smile, miserable smile, Chaplin smile, dampened smile, flirtatious smile, embarrassment smile, coordination smile, and listener response smile. A smile is also a convenient way to mask an emotion we would like to hide because it is not appropriate to show it at a given moment. A smile is relatively easy to perform and does not require a particular skill. It is a simple stretch of one's lips.

From the array of the aforementioned smiles, we will single out a *contemptuous smile* (see Photo 9.3). This smile is sometimes incorrectly interpreted as an expression of positive feelings. In a contemptuous smile, the contractions of facial muscles tighten the corners of the lips, thus making them bevelled upwards, similar to the smile expressing positive feelings. It is this similarity that creates confusion and deceives the observer. Another similarity between a contemptuous and a genuine smile is the dimple which sometimes also occurs during an expression of positive
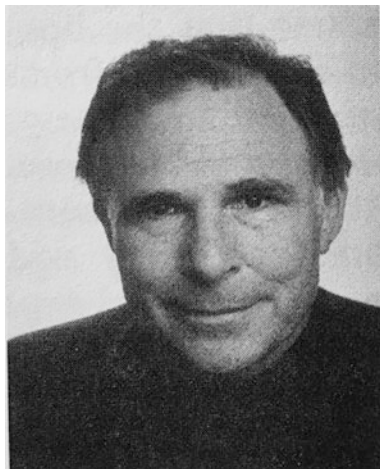
Photo 9.3   Contemptuous smile (Ekman, *Telling Lies*, 1992b, p. 152). (This photo has the permission of Paul Ekman (personal communication, September, 14, 2021))

feelings, with protrusions in lip corners and around them. According to Ekman, the most significant difference between a contemptuous smile and a smile expressing pleasure or joy is the tightness of lip corners which can never be noticed with a truly experienced smile. Ekman (1992b, p. 153) notes that there is also a unilateral variant of a contemptuous smile, which contains visible changes in the lifting and tightening of a lip corner on one side of the face.

The Recognition of the Facial Expression of Contempt

Successful identification of any emotion implies knowing specific characteristics of its facial expression and relevant signals of the emotions with which it is usually combined (Ekman, 1984). Facial signs of mixed emotions that a partner experiences at the same time as contempt can represent a problem in an accurate interpretation of the whole facial configuration. Let us repeat that identifying an emotion becomes even

more complicated due to the quickness with which it appears on the face and disappears. Suppose facial expressions last longer or shorter than that. In that case, it is a sign that these are not experienced but simulated emotions, which requires the ability to make a difference between honest and fake behaviours.

The next problem in the successful decoding of the facial expression of any emotion, including contempt, is the intensity of visible changes on the face. A stronger intensity of an emotion produces more visible changes, and its identification is easier. However, if contempt has recently been awakened and is being developed, its intensity is not strong enough, and the changes are subtle and hard to recognise (Ekman, 1984). Knowing the partner's style of expression contributes to the success in interpreting facial behaviour.

Due to their personal style of expression and what the situation demands, people control their facial expression of an emotion, which makes successful decoding of expressions harder. In marital arguments, for example, in their desire to protect themselves, their status or a relationship, partners tend to conceal or falsify negative emotions, including emotions of contempt, disgust, anger, and they deny having even experienced them at the given moment. The most important task of the other partner is to recognise the signs of both honest and dishonest facial behaviours.

Despite significant differences in the facial appearance and antecedents of contempt and disgust, it is not easy to successfully differentiate between these two emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 2003). For instance, if a partner experiences a combination of both emotions, signals of both contempt and disgust will appear on the face. This combination can make the differentiation between them more difficult, especially if there are signs of anger or some other emotions. The problem of distinguishing between contempt and disgust can occur due to apparently similar facial changes in the lower part of the face. When the rise of the upper lip, which is characteristic of the expression of disgust, does not have the same strength on both sides of the face, which makes the expression of disgust asymmetrical, the observer can think that it is a sign of contempt, although it is not. However, the typical facial configuration for contempt implies tightness and slight lifting of the corner of the upper lip exclusively on

one side of the face. When contempt and disgust are mixed and represent one whole, changes can be seen in the wrinkled root of the nose, which is characteristic of disgust. If the emotion of anger is "added" to this configuration, which is not rare, the observer notices visible changes in the appearance of the upper and lower parts of the face. Eyebrows would be lowered and closer to each other, the upper eyelid elevated, while lips would be pressed together (Ekman, 2003, p. 185). Despite a different social function, these three mutually experienced and facially expressed emotions (i.e., contempt, disgust, and anger) are connected by their negative evaluation. Rozin (1999) justifiably called them the "triad of hostility". Compared with anger and disgust, contempt is a colder, less intense, but longer-lasting emotion (Miller, 1997).

How Does Facial Contempt Affect the Individual Against Whom It Is Directed?

Knowledge of nature and functions of contempt as well as the successful recognition of emotions with which it is combined, do not contribute to the understanding of effects which this cold emotion incites in the individual against whom it is directed. In their article "The Psychology of Self-Defense: Self-Affirmation Theory", Sherman and Cohen (2006) analysed possible reactions of an individual who feels socially excluded from a group or a friendly or romantic relationship. Someone's rejection or exclusion from an important relationship represents a threat to that individual's integrity. The individual experiences reduced adequacy, problematic and difficult adaptation to the given situation, which decreases his/her self-discipline and ability to make judgements. This situation leads most people to defensive behaviour (Twenge et al., 2003; Baumeister et al., 2005).

Sherman and Cohen (2006) conclude that defensive behaviour whose goal is to protect and strengthen the individual's integrity directly is often "responsible" for an unreal and distorted image of the given situation. The person loses his/her capacity to be constructive. Defensive behaviour protects the integrity of an individual but quite often inhibits adaptation

by limiting and sometimes preventing the inflow of new experiences and information. Suppose an essential part of identity is jeopardised. In that case, an individual will hardly adapt to the fact that he/she is rejected and will comply with his/her unfavourable position in a previously romantic dyad of close individuals. This powerful defensive reaction protects the individual's integrity but can jeopardise and disrupt his/her relationships with others.

However, Sherman and Cohen (2006) believe that there are better and more constructive ways to protect jeopardised integrity and strengthen or regain one's self-respect. An individual who chooses better ways of responding tends to find alternative possibilities for self-change. New fields of self-affirmation (see theory of self-affirmation, Steele, 1988) help an individual overcome different kinds of biased defensive responding (i.e., rejection of threatening information, denial, avoidance of a threat in any manner) and deal with threatening knowledge and events without relying on defensive strategies.

Certain people can carefully evaluate the quality of a partnership relationship and the level of the feeling of closeness. They can talk with their partner to resolve problems or identify alternatives. Then, they may probably, as one alternative, step out bravely from the relationship and leave for new experiences. Therefore, if contempt on the partner's face sends a message: "You are not worthy of me!", that message could be utterly reciprocated.

Positive Side of Negative Emotions

Negative emotions are useful in the perpetuation and sustenance of relationships. The role of emotions and their expression via facial and other non-verbal cues are functional in human interaction and quite often used to send a message that a partner may feel uncomfortable in expressing verbally. Negative emotions in interpersonal relationships send the message that the relationship is not going in the right directions. Additionally, the partner may attempt to provide signals of dissatisfaction within a relationship, not only as a sign of termination but as a message of wanting changes to some aspects of a relationship. The misinterpretation,

ignoring, taking for granted, reactance or resentful responses to negative emotions may shift the relationship into a downward spiral. Negative emotions such as anger, sadness, distress, and fear can, therefore, be positive in a relationship by motivating one toward the resolution of a problem and directing attention to the source of the issue (see Maslow, 1955; Plutchik, 2003; Frijda et al., 1989). These emotions are normally identifiable via facial expressions. Baker, McNulty, and Overall (2014, p. 102) note that from an evolutionary psychological perspective emotions focus our attention to the origin of the problem. They put it in this way:

> Experiencing negative emotions in the face of a problem can benefit individuals by helping them to recognize and understand, and thus be more likely to address and resolve, that problem (Frijda, 1986; Levenson, 1999; Tooby & Cosmides, 2008). Although the amount and severity of problems can vary across relationships, nearly all people acknowledge experiencing problems that have negatively affected their relationship at some point. (e.g., McGonagle et al., 1992)

In fact, some researchers have argued that the non-expression of negative affect states can be equally detrimental to a relationship. Yoo, Clark, Lemay, Salovey, and Monin (2011) note that anger, for example, as unpleasant as it is, allows the partner to express needs, vulnerabilities, unjust treatments, block goals, and frustrations.

Moving a relationship from one of a possible negative outcome towards a positive direction requires intervention and an understanding of the dynamics that may have led, in the first place, to the emergence of negative emotions. Equity theory (Adams, 1965; Polk, 2022) provides some insights into relationships and affect states. Equity theory is a social exchange theory and as all social exchange theories articulate, the rewards, costs, investments and profits are crucial for the healthy relational development. Distributive justice, both parties feeling equitable fairness after evaluating their input-output ratios, is essential to a harmonious relationship. But quite often in the wide range of interacting situations in relationships, one partner may over-benefit and the other under-benefit in one situation than another. Not all situations are equally reward weighted and, therefore, over-benefitting can derive accumulated rewards at the

expense of the other partner who would be experiencing under-benefitting. As the rule of distributive justice is continually violated, and feelings of unfairness and inequity emerge, the non-verbal expressions of contemptuousness, anger, sadness, distress, frustration, guilt are not uncommon between partners. As inequity persists, negative affect states impact the emotions, moods, cognition, and behaviors associated in the relationship. Negative facial cues may signal to the deeper circumstances that lie within the inequities in a relationship.

Equity sensitivity determines the degree of emotional reactions towards inequity. Huseman, Hatfield, and Miles (1987) identify three equity sensitivities. These are benevolents, equity sensitives, and entitleds. Benevolents are less reactive to violations of the role of distributive justice and are more accommodating to under-benefitting. Entitleds feel a need to over-benefit while equity sensitives are motivated to equitable distribution and distributive justice in a relationship. Therefore, not everyone will respond similarly in the face of inequity. Expressions of facial anger, contempt, fear, or sadness may be a signal that a partner's well-being is being neglected (Sell et al., 2009). Within the context of equity theory, this expression is an attempt to re-establish a fair distributive justice. Sensitivity towards the negative emotional expression and positively responding in the context of the equity framework would push the relationship in a direction towards fairness with the potential of addressing the source of the negative facial reaction.

There are relational harmony strategies that partners can consider in response to relational strain. After assessing and determining cause of relational problems, a partner may adopt a number of strategies intended to strengthen the relationships including rebuilding trust, forgiveness, apologies, developing compassion. Forgiveness in relationships is one way of resetting and redirecting the affect state and increasing positive facial expressions. McCullough (2000, pp. 44–45) notes:

> When an offended relationship partner reports that he or she has not forgiven a close relationship partner for a hurtful action, the offended partner's perception of the offense is posited to stimulate relationship-destructive. … Conversely, when an offended relationship partner indicates that he or she has forgiven, his or her perception of the offense and offender no longer create motivation to avoid the offender and seek revenge.

Such changes in conceptualisation of partners and interaction dynamics would change the facial messages towards a positive direction. Worthington's (2021) five steps to forgiveness creating positive emotions and facial expressions are relevant. He refers to these five steps as the REACH process to achieving emotional forgiveness and they are:

R=Recall the Hurt
E=Empathise (Sympathise, feel Compassion for, Love) the Transgressor
A=give an Altruistic Gift of Forgiveness
C=Commit to the Emotional Forgiveness One Experienced
H=Hold on to Forgiveness When Doubts Arise

Additionally, apologies, empathy and perspective taking (see Davis, 1983; Batson, 1991; McCullough, 2000) are concomitants to forgiveness and allow interacting partners to be able to forego with an understanding and respect for each other. Ma et al. (2019) discuss the significance of trust within a relation and the efficacy of apology in the rebuilding of relational trust (see also Schniter & Sheremeta, 2014). The authors hypothesise about the negative emotions associated with trustworthiness, apologies and trusting behaviour arguing that apologies would be less effective in relational rebuilding when partners experience intense and prolonged negative emotions. Transgressor's negative emotions and trustworthiness were partial mediators in the rebuilding of trust. Rumination diminishes the propensity towards rebuilding of positive interpersonal interaction. There is a negative relationship between rumination and forgiveness. The more we ruminate about a negative relational issue the less forgiving we become, and suppression of these negative affect and cognition may contribute to avoidance and revenge (McCullough, 2000). Ruminating and suppression are quite often reflected non-verbally.

Negative emotions and the associate facial expressions, in fact may be exceedingly useful to a relationship. As Baker, McNulty and Overall (2014, p. 106) point out, "Negative emotions may benefit relationships by (1) leading to a better understanding by the partner, (2) eliciting support from the partner, and (3) regulating the partner's behaviour".

Our attachment, love, emotions, facial expressions, and many other factors create a complex psychological social exchange interactive

structure. The fuel of negative emotions and the complexity of relational problems and the concomitant facial expressions can ignite and inflame the emergence of negative relationships. But negative emotions and facial feedbacks are not all negative. They can positively guide us away from facing the end.

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