

Males in a Romantic Relationship are More Interpersonally Sensitive

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Is Jay more interpersonally sensitive than Tom?



Background

The ability to perceive and respond to those around you is a valuable skill, and is a fundamental aspect of successful communication. Interpersonal sensitivity is defined as the ability to perceive accurately, and respond to others (Hall & Bernieri, 2001). Interpersonal sensitivity has been shown to improve if a person is motivated and exposed to situations that allow for practice. A person who is in a relationship will have the motivation to accurately interpret and respond to the other person. In addition, simply being in a relationship provides continuous practice that allows for improvement. Therefore, in this study we set out to investigate if males in a relationship would be more interpersonally sensitive compared to males not in a relationship.

Hypothesis

We hypothesized that males in a relationship would score higher on tests that measure interpersonal sensitivity compared to males not in a relationship.

Method

Participants:

64 male participants enrolled in a 10 week psychology research practicum at Oregon State University. 28 males were in a relationship, 36 were not.

Procedure:

During week one participants filled out the Relationship Questionnaire, indicating current relationship status. Each then filled out the Interpersonal Perception Task (IPT), the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy 2 (DANVA 2), and the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (PONS).

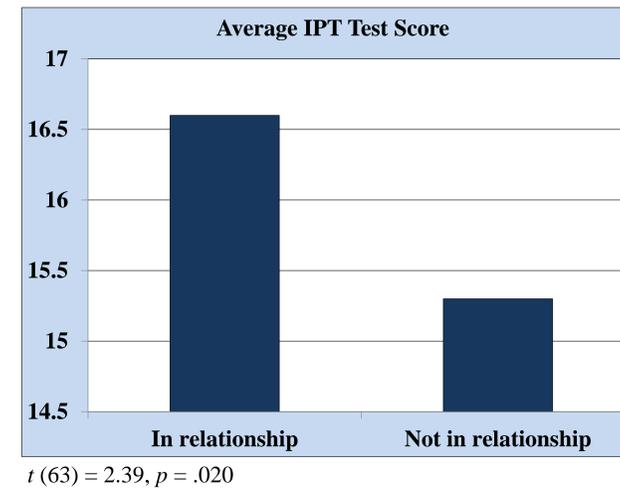
The Interpersonal Perception Task



Fig. 1
Viewers reach inferences about common relationships, situations, and behaviors while viewing 30 short video clips.

What is the relationship between the man and the woman?

- a) they are lovers who have been together for about 10 months.
- b) they are lovers who have been together for about 3 years.



The Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy 2

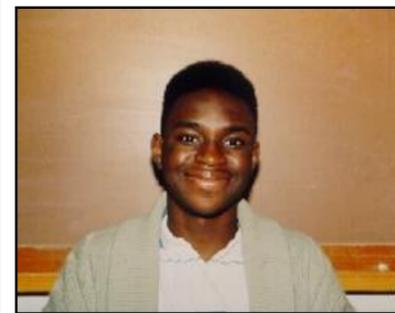
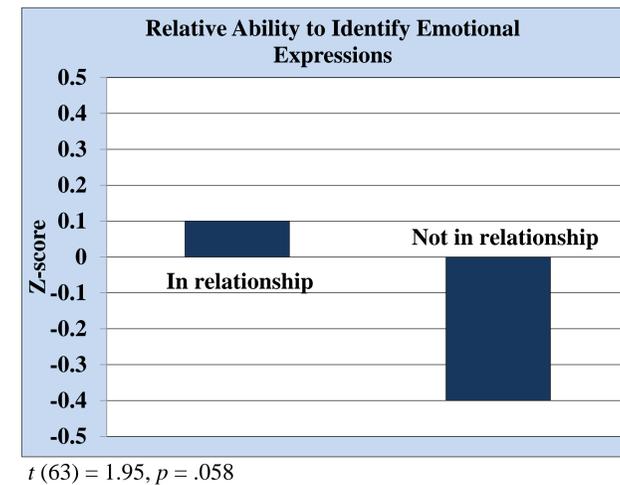


Fig. 2
Viewers are asked to identify the emotions from pictures of faces and posture, or a recorded voice

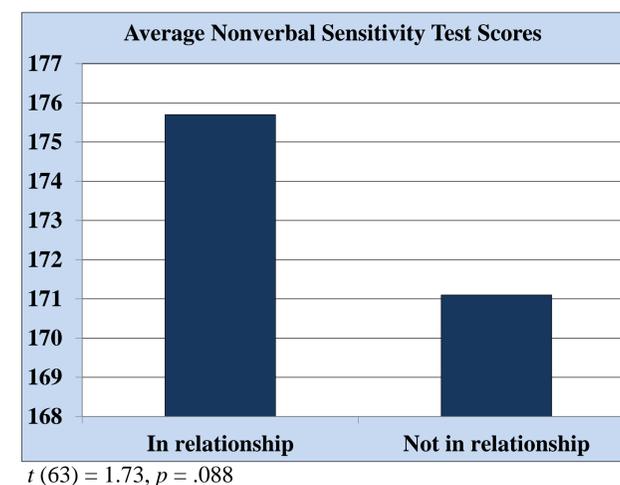
Which of the following emotions best characterizes this face?
Happy Angry Sad Fearful



Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity

Fig. 3
Each participant watched short video clips, and inferred the intended message from nonverbal behaviors.

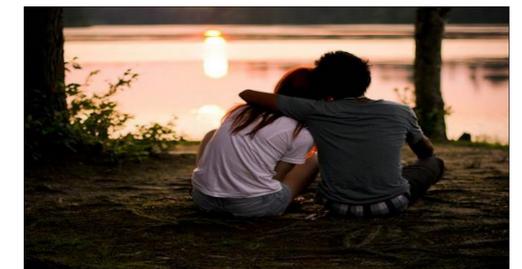
-  A. Criticizing someone for being late
-  B. Expressing gratitude
-  A. Admiring nature
-  B. Helping a customer
- A. Expressing deep affection
- B. Nagging a child



Discussion

We found that males in a relationship were more accurate at interpreting social situations, reading emotions and interpreting nonverbal behaviors. As previously mentioned, people have the potential to improve their interpersonal sensitivity through practice when they are motivated. A successful relationship requires good communication and mutual understanding. In a relationship, males might be more motivated to understand their female partner, and at the same time have more opportunities for practice.

If a man can detect when his girlfriend is angry, whether or not she likes his best friend, and if she is really not 'fine' even though she says she is, this man has the social skills he needs to succeed.



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Acknowledgments:

Thank you Allison Daley, Amber Fultz, Sabrina Bradshaw, Duy Nguyen, Ameer Almuaybid, and Alex Brunot.

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