The Compensation Theory in Nonverbal Immediacy Behaviors: An Examination
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Background
Argyle and Dean (1965) and Patterson (1973) proposed a compensation theory for nonverbal immediacy behavior. Psychological immediacy is expressed through four key behaviors: 1) Eye-contact, 2) interpersonal distance, 3) body orientation, and 4) trunk lean. These behaviors work together to maintain a state of equilibrium in terms of the psychological immediacy being experienced. If one behavior changes (e.g., an interactant leans backward), then another behavior will accommodate for this change to maintain equilibrium (e.g., eye-contact will increase).

However, compensation is believed to occur only under conditions where the psychological immediacy between interactants is constant. This study examined a context where the psychological immediacy was experimentally induced to increase throughout the course of the interaction.

Hypotheses
1. The nonverbal expression of psychological immediacy should increase throughout the course of an interaction in which participants are engaging in a Relationship Closeness Induction Task designed to increase psychological intimacy (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1999).
2. Due to compensation, however, the four behaviors should show a zero to negative interrelationship for a given level of psychological immediacy achieved between participants as induced by the experimental instructions.

Method
Participants and Procedure
There were 184 participants (121 females and 63 males). The interactions analyzed were those used in the study by Sommer and Bernieri (2015). Participants asked and answered questions that were designed to increase in intimacy (e.g., self-disclosure).

Coding
Trained research assistants coded the four nonverbal behaviors.

Mutual gaze (eye-contact). The 5 minute interaction was split into ten 30-second-long segments for coding mutual gaze.

Results
Contrary to predictions, results showed that the means of all four nonverbal immediacy behaviors decreased throughout interactions. Two behaviors, eye-contact and interpersonal distance, decreased significantly (see Table 1). A composite variable called immediacy total (IT) constructed from all four immediacy behaviors was found to decrease significantly throughout the intimacy building task.

Discussion and Conclusion
The data are consistent with a dynamic compensation between the intimacy in conversational topic (verbal) and immediacy expressed nonverbally between partners. The nonverbal expression of immediacy (IT) is appearing to compensate (decrease) for the experimental instructions that is compelling people to increase the psychological intimacy of their conversation, which is reflected in the progression of questions participants asked each other over the duration of the interaction (see Graph 2).

References

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