

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 intimacy 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 intimacy 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-sec long segments for coding mutual gaze.

Beginning		Middle				End			
00:30	01:00	01:30	02:00	02:30	03:00	03:30	04:00	04:30	05:00



Figure 1

The other three behaviors were coded from **snapshots**. Snapshots were sampled at three different times:

(Beg) 00:30, (Mid) 02:30, and (End) 05:00.

Interpersonal distance. Using pre-determined reference points on the background curtains, trained coders measured the distance from one interactant's head to the other's head (H2H) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

Body orientation. Trained coders estimated (in degrees) the angle at which a dyad sat in relation to each other using their shoulders. This reference point on the shoulder was roughly where the scapula, the clavicle, and the humerus bones meet (green lines in Figure 3).

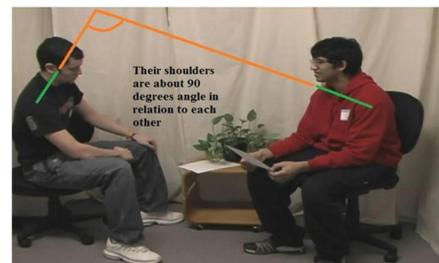


Figure 3

Trunk lean. Trunk lean was coded into three categories: Forward lean, neutral lean, and backward lean. Although not always a perfect line, the angle coded was between a line of the trunk (front side) of a person and a horizontal plane referencing the ground (see Figure 4).

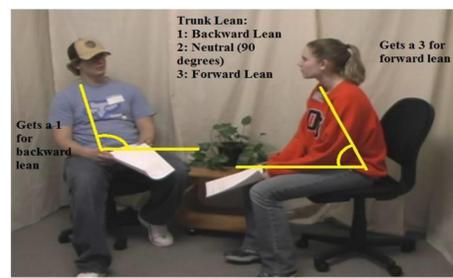
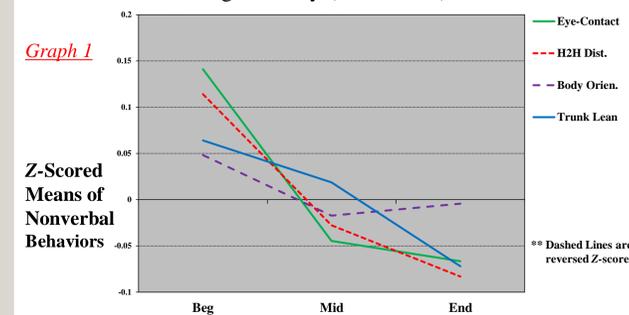


Figure 4

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 we called immediacy total (IT) constructed from all four immediacy behaviors was found to decrease significantly throughout the intimacy building task.

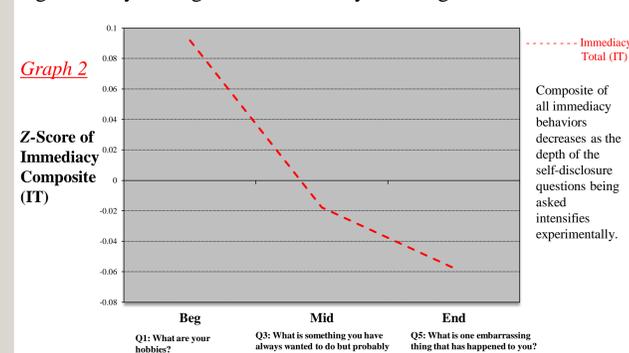


Table 1: The significance tests for changes of nonverbal immediacy behavior across time.

	Beg, Mid, End	eta	p <	Increasing Linear Trend	r	p <
	F(2,182)			Fcontrast(1,91)		
<i>Immediacy Nonverbal Behavior</i>						
Body Orientation	0.55	0.07	0.65	0.37	0.06	0.55
Eye-Contact	5.03	0.23	0.008	7.44	-0.28	0.008
Trunk Lean	1.5	0.13	0.23	2.34	-0.16	0.13
Head-to-Head Distance (H2H)	5.31	0.23	0.006	8.51	0.29	0.005
<i>Composite Variable</i>						
NVB Composite (IT)	6.81	0.26	0.002	10.72	-0.32	0.002

Notes: Distance was reversed before forming composite variables. Therefore, larger values for the composite variables reflect increasing nonverbal immediacy. Significant effects appear in bold text. Due to missing data, the df's associated with mutual eye-contact are (2,180) and (1,90).

Table 2: Intercorrelations of nonverbal immediacy behaviors within and across time.

	Eye-Contact (Beg)	Proximity/Reversed Distance (Beg)	Body Orientation (Beg)	Trunk Lean (Beg)
Eye-Contact (End)	.67***	.01	.21*	.06
Proximity/Reversed Distance (End)	.03	.81***	-.08	.50***
Body Orientation (End)	.30**	-.06	.64***	.13
Trunk Lean (End)	.03	.47***	.03	.68***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Notes: Correlations above the diagonal reflect the interrelationships of behaviors occurring at the beginning of the interaction. Correlations below the diagonal reflect the interrelationships of behaviors occurring at the end of the interaction. The diagonal correlations reflect the intra-dyad reliability correlations for that behavior over time.

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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