

# GENDER AND NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

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It is widely believed that women and men are fundamentally different from each other. Indeed, the belief that males and females possess different traits, abilities, and inclinations pervades all age groups, all time periods, and all cultures (Kite, Deaux, & Haines, 2008). Such beliefs, better described as stereotypes, have also been found to be highly resistant to change (Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995; Heilman, 2001). Two dimensions, communality and agency, capture a multitude of perceived differences (Bakan, 1966; Kite et al., 2008). Women are consistently characterized as having a consistent predisposition to be communal—to care for and attend to the well-being of others. The typical woman is thought to be kind, caring, sensitive, empathic, and emotional. However, men are believed to be primarily agentic and instrumental. The characteristic male is felt to be independent, confident, decisive, aggressive, and strong (Kite et al., 2008).

It is not surprising then that people believe that women and men show distinctive patterns of nonverbal behavior. For example, Briton and Hall (1995) found that people think that women are more nonverbally expressive and responsive than are men. Women are also thought to be better at sending and deciphering nonverbal messages. In contrast, males are believed to be louder and more interruptive and to show more restless body movements and dysfluent vocal behaviors, such as inserting filled and unfilled pauses while speaking. The issue here, as is the case with stereotypes more generally, has to do with the validity or accuracy of such beliefs. This chapter addresses just that question and two related

ones—namely, what gender dimension best describes differences that are examined, and if sex differences are found, to what are they to be attributed?

There is more to gender beliefs than simple assumptions such as the idea that women express more positive emotion than men (Shields, 1987). Not only are men and women believed to have different repertoires of nonverbal behavior, some nonverbal behaviors are understood a priori to be *feminine* or *masculine*. Therefore, crying—which is believed to be something that women do more than men (Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000)—denotes femininity in the crier (sometimes called effeminacy if the crier happens to be male). This *pregendering* of nonverbal behavior reinforces ideas about who (men or women) should exhibit which behaviors, and it impinges on what behaviors men and women choose to display when motivated to avoid being perceived as gender deviant. In fact, engaging in the appropriate nonverbal gender repertoire (and avoiding cross-gender behavior) is part of what some scholars refer to as “doing gender” well (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

## DECONSTRUCTING GENDER

A substantial body of empirical work has addressed whether and to what degree women and men differ in their nonverbal behavior. Nonetheless, many studies have been primarily descriptive of sex differences and only explanatory, if at all, after the fact. Although some researchers have contributed sophisticated and nuanced examinations of individual variation and

causal factors affecting gendered aspects of nonverbal behavior, we believe this extensive literature would benefit from first considering the relatively unexplored territory that becomes illuminated by deconstructing what goes into gender in the first place.

By deconstructing or problematizing gender, we mean expanding the typical binary category described by biological sex (i.e., male and female) and focusing instead on the multiple ways that gender can be understood. For example, one line of work argues that a key dimension known as sex-role identification or psychological gender (Bem, 1977) reflects the degree to which women and men identify with characteristics that society typically assigns to females and males. Regarding nonverbal behavior, the question then converts to whether a person's (male or female) degree of identification with feminine and masculine traits is reflected in his or her nonverbal behavior. An example of the standard question is whether women smile more than men. A sex-role identification question asks, instead, whether people who score high in femininity smile more than those who score low in femininity and/or more than people who score high in masculinity regardless of their sex.

A constrained sex-role identification (masculine sex-typed or feminine sex-typed) theoretically motivates men and women, respectively, to self-present in gender-normative ways and to avoid behavior that is considered more characteristic of the opposite sex (Bem, 1977). Androgynous men and women, in contrast, who identify equally with masculine and feminine characteristics are theoretically more flexible and less consistent in their nonverbal behavior because they have larger repertoire from which to draw, and thus they may freely engage in nonverbal behavior that is seen as stereotypical of the other sex if the situation calls for it (M. LaFrance & Carmen, 1980). Thus, studies exploring the interactions between biological sex and psychological gender arguably offer an expanded framework for understanding the relationship between gender and nonverbal behavior. A sole focus on biological sex is likely to yield findings that are more informative of the ways gender norms impinge on the behavior of men and women than they are informative about the ways in which men and women choose to adopt particular nonverbal behaviors.

Just as sex-role orientation (psychological gender) appears to moderate sex differences in nonverbal behavior, *sexual orientation* is also likely to interact with biological and psychological gender and to modulate gender differences in a variety of nonverbal behaviors. To date, researchers have shown surprisingly little interest in documenting these effects. Numerous common stereotypes suggest that gay men and lesbian women possess nonverbal "markers" that distinguish them from heterosexual men and women. Indeed, some research has confirmed that gay men readily recognize and utilize these cues to identify one another (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002). It turns out that straight people are also able to identify above chance which men are gay and which are straight from photographs of their faces (Rule, Ambady, Adams, & Macrae, 2008). Yet, whether the nonverbal behaviors of gay and lesbian individuals differ from those of heterosexual males and females (and if so, in what ways) remains essentially unexplored. Additionally, homophobic attitudes and vigilance on the part of heterosexual individuals (particularly men) to behave in hetero-normative ways may influence the nonverbal behavior of heterosexual individuals in ways that would not necessarily be predicted by biological sex alone. Thus, focusing exclusively on the nonverbal behaviors of heterosexual men and women will likely advance our knowledge of the ways in which heterosexual scripts and hetero-normative pressures modulate the nonverbal expressions of men and women, rather than increasing our understanding of the ways gender broadly construed is manifest in the display of nonverbal cues.

Biological sex, psychological gender, and sexual orientation not only interact in complex ways to produce unique patterns of nonverbal behavior but gender aspects of nonverbal behavior are also exquisitely sensitive to social context. For example, M. LaFrance and Carmen (1980) showed how the gendered nature of a task (instrumental or expressive) interacted with gender and sex-role orientation to determine vocal nonverbal behavior. The next section more fully discusses how context affects gender aspects of nonverbal behavior. For the moment, it is important to note one further way that emerges when gender is deconstructed. Some contexts are

also gendered not just in the sense that they are more likely to be occupied by females versus males but because the behaviors expected there are presumed to have a more feminine or masculine quality to them such that whoever temporarily resides in such spaces will more likely show the expected behavior regardless of his or her sex.

## CONSIDERING CONTEXT

As we will show, the presence of even small changes in a given setting can magnify or minimize the expression of nonverbal behavior differences in men and women, such that gender differences in a given domain (e.g., smiling) will be larger in certain contexts and smaller or even reversed in others. We have mentioned that both men and women strive to “do gender” well so as to avoid being perceived as gender-deviant (e.g., West & Zimmerman, 1987). This suggests that, to the extent that an individual feels that his or her behavior is being monitored or judged, he or she is likely to respond by behaving in gender-normative ways. Alternatively, the absence of observation by others may lighten the pressure to behave in accord with gendered expectations. In the first instance, sex differences may be more manifestly evident than in the latter instance. The key point is that certain aspects of the situation (e.g., the presence of observers) make gender norms and expectations more salient and, thus, trigger more gender-normative behavior. This has been shown for the behavior of smiling. As will be discussed in more detail, women tend to smile more than men, but this difference is even greater when participants feel that they are being observed by others (M. LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003).

There are two additional contextual factors that moderate the size of gender differences in nonverbal behavior. These have to do with the number of people who are present as well as how many of each sex are present (e.g., their sex composition). For example, research has found that men have a higher tendency than women to interrupt speakers and that this difference is especially large in multiperson compared to two-person encounters (Anderson & Leaper, 1998). Additionally, the largest sex differences for interruptions occur in mixed- rather than same-gender groups or dyads. Thus, these data

show that when it comes to interruptive behavior, a larger difference favoring males will be found for mixed-sex groups; in these conditions, men would be expected to interrupt the most, and women the least. The difference would be attenuated, and a much smaller effect would emerge in same-sex interactions involving only two people.

However, gender composition has the opposite effect on gaze behavior such that the largest gender differences emerge in same- rather than mixed-gender dyads (J. A. Hall, 1984; J. A. Hall & Gunnery, 2013; Yee, Bailenson, Urbanek, Chang, & Merget, 2007). Women tend to gaze at their interaction partners more than men do, and they also tend to be looked at more than men are. Both factors lead to the highest levels of partner gazing in female–female pairs. Similarly, some research suggests that touch behavior is more acceptable and expected in female–female dyads compared to male–male dyads (Derlega, Catanzaro, & Lewis, 2001). Thus, it is clear that an examination of gender differences in nonverbal behavior that fails to consider the number and gender of interaction partners will result in an incomplete or incorrect picture of how much males and females differ in their nonverbal behavior.

Finally, situational demands may override gender norms to affect sex differences in nonverbal cues. Various tasks and roles often prescribe particular nonverbal behaviors of whoever is called upon to engage in the salient activity. The effect of such situational demands is often to minimize sex differences in accompanying nonverbal behavior. For example, although women generally tend to smile more than men, this difference is greatly reduced when both male and female participants are engaged in caregiving activities (M. LaFrance et al., 2003). Likewise, although women on average orient their bodies more face-on with their interaction partners (J. A. Hall, 1984), both men and women orient their bodies toward one another (Fichten, Tagalakakis, Judd, Wright, & Amsel, 1992) when flirtation is the operative dynamic. However, there are social contexts in which gender polarization is assumed, and in that case, gender differences in nonverbal behavior are probably accentuated.

Finally, in some contexts, behaviors can become acceptable that are typically not regarded as such—for example, women touch other women more than

men touch other men, and both men and women consider male–male touch to be somewhat atypical and perhaps inappropriate (Derlega et al., 2001). However, in a stereotypically masculine context, such as contact sports, these norms are more lax; male–male touch is greater, and, though not eliminated, the size of the gender difference is substantially reduced (Kneidinger, Maple, & Tross, 2001).

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN NONVERBAL BEHAVIOR

We hope the preceding discussion demonstrates reasons for regarding gender as a multidimensional construct as well as the need to attend to context so as to understand why elaboration is needed regarding whether men and women differ in their nonverbal behavior. In this section, we discuss sex differences in specific behaviors, summarizing reliable findings from the existing literature. To do this, we draw on several meta-analyses, but we also cite and discuss individual studies that have taken a more nuanced approach to the question of gender and nonverbal behavior. Within each section, we also provide a brief discussion of remaining questions and avenues for future research.

We cover nonverbal behaviors that have received the most empirical attention: encoding and decoding accuracy, smiling, gazing, touching, interpersonal distance, body orientation, gesture and posture, and vocal nonverbal behavior (e.g., interrupting). However, we also include sections discussing some nonverbal behaviors for which the study of gender differences has been relatively minimal: gait, blushing, and crying. Finally, we devote a section to the discussion of gender differences in nonverbal behavior in the case of heterosexual flirtation, as it offers a social ritual where gender norms and expectations impinge on the nonverbal behavior of men and women as they interact with each other.

### Encoding Accuracy

Women are more accurate than men in producing and conveying nonverbal cues—that is, others are more accurate in reading women’s nonverbal behavior than they are at accurately reading men’s expressive behavior. Presumably, this is the case because

women are more expressive in general than men and/or the cues they send are more easily read. Overall, this sex difference is substantial ( $r = .25$ ; 35 studies in J. A. Hall’s, 1984, meta-analysis). Depending on how such a difference is observed, whether researchers measure the spontaneous nonverbal behavior of men and women, or whether men and women are asked to deliberately convey particular emotions or affective sentiments, women have an advantage over men in terms of the ability to produce nonverbal behavior that others can read as intended (J. A. Hall, 1984). This difference is stronger for facial expressions (e.g., smiling, frowning) than for vocal cues (e.g., loudness, pitch; J. A. Hall, 1984).

Meta-analyses show, however, that gender differences in encoding accuracy vary in size depending on other factors so that it is not always the case that women are clearer senders than men. For instance, sex differences in sending accuracy increase with age, such that there are greater differences among adult men and women than among boys and girls (J. A. Hall, 1984), and research indicates that this difference is mostly driven by a definite decrease in the accuracy of facial encoding by boys after 4 years of age (Buck, 1977). In addition, research on prepubescent children suggests that greater social competence among girls is associated with increased encoding ability, but the same relationship with social competence does not hold for boys (Custrini & Feldman, 1989).

It is worth noting that gender differences in encoding accuracy and overall expressivity do not appear to derive from a difference in how much women and men experience emotion. In other words, the reasons why women exhibit an advantage over men in the capacity and the tendency to be more nonverbally expressive are greater than a simple difference in how and how much men and women experience emotions. Although cultural stereotypes abound that women are more emotional than men (Fischer, 1993; M. LaFrance & Banaji, 1992; Shields, 1987; J. E. Williams & Best, 1990), empirical evidence for this gender difference in experienced emotion is inconsistent. In fact, even though women have been observed to be more spontaneously expressive than men, women

and men report experiencing the same emotions to the same extent (Barrett, Robin, Pietromonaco, & Eysell, 1998; Kring & Gordon, 1998; Robinson, Johnson, & Shields, 1998), and studies comparing the physiological reactions of men and women have found that, if anything, men's physiological responses to emotion-inducing events tend to be stronger than women's (Kring & Gordon, 1998). Thus, although women and men seem to experience the same emotions to the same degree, women are consistently more nonverbally expressive (and more readable) than are men.

The sex difference in encoding accuracy is likely due to changes in both male and female behavior: Men are more likely to suppress overt displays of emotion where women do not, but in some contexts, women actually amplify their expressive behaviors (M. LaFrance & Banaji, 1992; see also Hochschild, 1983). In support for male suppression, there is evidence that high expressivity by males is often perceived as questionable, and even young boys anticipate negative repercussions for openly expressing emotion (Fuchs & Thelen, 1988). As to whether femininity is associated with greater expressivity, Zuckerman, DeFrank, Spiegel, and Larrance (1982) found that more accurate encoders of intentional cues (facial and vocal) were those who scored higher on femininity and lower on masculinity.

### Remaining Questions

The finding that encoding accuracy decreases sharply in males during childhood suggests that socialization plays a significant role affecting the inclination or ability to display one's feelings and intentions nonverbally. However, except for Zuckerman et al.'s (1982) study noted earlier, little research to date has examined whether sex-role identification also affects encoding accuracy. In short, the degree to which a person identifies as feminine appears to predict encoding accuracy in both men and women. Narus and Fischer (1982) also found that androgynous males were more emotionally expressive than "masculine" men.

As is the case with several nonverbal communication modalities, researchers exploring gender differences in encoding accuracy have focused primarily on heterosexual men and women, whereas little is known as to whether sexual orientation

might moderate these differences. For example, the ability to accurately communicate nonverbally may be higher in gay men compared to heterosexual men and perhaps lower in lesbians than heterosexual women.

Additionally, although observers can more accurately identify emotional states from viewing female than male faces (Wagner, MacDonald, & Manstead, 1986), this pattern does not generalize to all emotions. For example, there is evidence that women are more likely than men to suppress the expression of anger, presumably because anger is seen to be incompatible with femininity or prescriptive gender stereotypes (Heilman, 2001; Lerner, 1985; Rudman, 1998). This suggests a possible interaction between sex-role identification and situation on the nonverbal expressions of men and women, such that depending on the situation (e.g., a baby shower vs. a competitive encounter), sex-typed (but not androgynous) men and women would be expected to differ the most in their nonverbal behavior.

### Decoding Accuracy

Women are also more accurate than men in correctly deciphering the nonverbal behaviors of others, regardless of the gender of the target person (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Hill, Raste, & Plumb, 2001; Chan, Rogers, Parisotto, & Biesanz, 2011; J. A. Hall, 1978, 1984; J. A. Hall & Matsumoto, 2004; Letzring, 2010; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979; Sasson et al., 2010; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003; Vogt & Colvin, 2003; but see Ickes, Gesn, & Graham, 2000, for contradicting results). This sex difference has been amply demonstrated in children and adolescents as well as adults (Boyatzis, Chazan, & Ting, 1993; McClure, 2000; Székely et al., 2011). In fact, both meta-analyses (J. A. Hall, 1978, 1984; McClure, 2000) and individual studies (L. M. Williams et al., 2009) have found that although age does not significantly moderate the effect of gender on decoding accuracy, the size of the gender difference tends to be somewhat larger among adults (ranging between  $r = .20$  and  $r = .25$  in J. A. Hall's, 1984, meta-analysis) than among children and adolescents ( $r = .18$ ; 60 studies in McClure's, 2000, meta-analysis). Cross-cultural research also indicates

that the country of the participant does not moderate gender effect size for decoding accuracy (J. A. Hall, 1978; Izard, 1971; Merten, 2005; Scherer, Banse, & Wallbott, 2001). Women's higher decoding accuracy also translates into their advantage at recalling other people's nonverbal behaviors, such as gazing, smiling, and self-touching (J. A. Hall, Murphy, & Schmid Mast, 2006). Although men tend to be generally less successful than women at accurately decoding the nonverbal cues of others (J. A. Hall, 1978, 1984), the sexes part company even more so when the nonverbal cues in question are ambiguous (Farris, Treat, Viken, & McFall, 2008). For example, in studies assessing the perception of nonverbal behaviors that may signal sexual interest, the data indicate that males tend to perceive significantly more flirtatiousness, promiscuousness, and seductiveness than female perceivers (ranging from  $r = .09$  to  $r = .20$  in the meta-analysis by B. H. La France, Henningsen, Oates, & Shaw, 2009). Some have suggested that these results are consistent with error management theory, whereby from an evolutionary perspective, it would be most advantageous for men to overestimate women's sexual interest because a false-negative (i.e., missing cues of sexual interest) would lead to a missed mating opportunity (B. H. La France et al., 2009). This presumably causes men to have a lower decisional threshold than women for labeling ambiguous behaviors as sexual (Haselton & Nettle, 2006).

The problem with this explanation, however, is that men "see" more sexual interest in both males and females (Shotland & Craig, 1988). Additionally, Farris et al. (2008) found that male participants mistook friendliness for flirtatiousness just as often as they misread flirtatiousness as friendliness, providing evidence for men's lower ability to accurately read the nonverbal cues of others.

Finally, some research suggests that, regardless of the gender of the perceiver, the accuracy with which specific emotions are decoded may differ greatly depending on the gender of the target and the specific emotions in question. For example, Plant, Hyde, Keltner, and Devine (2000) asked participants to interpret photographs of adults showing ambiguous anger/sadness expressions, and they found that female targets were rated as sadder and that male targets were rated as angrier, consistent

with gender stereotypes. Female targets' poses were rated as a mixture of anger and sadness even when unambiguous expressions were presented (Plant et al., 2000). Similarly, Hess, Adams, Grammer, and Kleck (2009) found that androgynous faces were more consistently and more quickly recognized as male versus female when they displayed anger versus happiness, respectively, which suggests that gender stereotypes of emotion may greatly influence observers' accuracy when decoding ambiguous facial expressions.

### Remaining Questions

As is the case for encoding accuracy, sex-role identification, namely, the degree to which a person self-identifies as feminine, appears to be a better predictor of decoding accuracy than biological sex—but, again, little research has seriously tested this idea. One study is illustrative, however. Trommsdorff and John (1992) examined the communal orientation and femininity of relationship partners as they decoded each other's emotions. They found that decoding was better to the degree to which perceivers had a feminine gender-role orientation.

Likewise, as is the case with other nonverbal behaviors, researchers exploring gender differences in decoding accuracy have focused primarily on heterosexual men and women, whereas little is known as to whether sexual orientation might moderate these differences. For example, the ability to accurately communicate nonverbally may be higher in gay men compared to heterosexual men. Similarly, some have proposed that perceptual accuracy provides gay men and lesbian women with self-protection from homophobic violence, as it increases the likelihood that they will identify other gay/lesbian individuals (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002). Other research has shown that gays and lesbians have higher accuracy than heterosexual men and women when judging sexual orientation based on nonverbal behavior and facial expression (Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999). However, it is not known whether this higher accuracy generalizes beyond the detection of sexual orientation—it is possible that gay men might have higher decoding accuracy than heterosexual men in general (and perhaps lesbian women might have an advantage over heterosexual women as well). These associations need to be empirically tested.

Although women's advantage in accurately reading nonverbal cues appears to be general, J. A. Hall and Gunnery (2013) have questioned whether this advantage holds across all attributions. Most studies on decoding accuracy typically ask participants to draw inferences about a target's emotional state, which is a domain in which women are socialized to have more interest than men and likely to develop a higher level of expertise (Brody, 1999). Thus, decoding accuracy is one area where contextualizing gender might prove fruitful. For example, research is needed to evaluate decoding accuracy in domains in which men's decoding accuracy might not differ from women's or, perhaps, might even be superior, such as accurately detecting the intentions of a rival from his nonverbal behavior during competitive or combative interactions. Some evidence for such an effect comes from research showing that men's recall accuracy for nonverbal behavior increases in competitive versus noncompetitive contexts (J. A. Hall & Schmid Mast, 2008). Interestingly, research on flirting behavior indicates that both males and females are better at decoding the sexual interest of men than women (Place, Todd, Penke, & Asendorpf, 2009). Thus, the contextual cues surrounding nonverbal behaviors (and their distinct self-relevance for men and women) likely impact the size of the gender difference in decoding accuracy.

### Smiling

Considerable research has examined gender differences in smiling in part inspired by the speculation that women's greater smiling reflects their low power relative to men (Henley, 1977). For reviews of that literature, see J. A. Hall, Carney, and Murphy (2002) as well as M. LaFrance et al. (2003). Women are found to generally smile more than men ( $r = .20$  in M. LaFrance et al.'s, 2003, meta-analysis of 418 studies). However, this effect increased or decreased in response to a number of factors. For example, age plays a key role, such that gender differences in smiling tend to be absent among young children, largest among adolescents, and smaller, though still present, in adults, and all but disappearing after late middle age. The meta-analysis by M. LaFrance et al. (2003) found the largest gender effect ( $r = .28$ ) among adolescents who were 13–17 years of age; among older

participants, the magnitude of the gender difference decreased steadily, and it was lowest ( $r = .06$ ) among older adults who were 65 years of age or older. Similarly, J. A. Hall's (1984) meta-analysis as well as more recent studies (e.g., DeSantis, Mohan, & Steinhorst, 2005; Dodd, Russell, & Jenkins, 1999; Else-Quest, Hyde, Goldsmith, & Van Hulle, 2006; Wondergem & Friedlmeier, 2012) have found no gender differences in the social smiling of young children.

The social context in which smiling occurs has also been found to substantially affect the size of the sex difference (M. LaFrance et al., 2003). Women smile more than men when the situation involves social engagement, and this is particularly evident when the context is marked by social tension. Accordingly, women's tendency to smile more than men is higher when they are being observed by others, when they are instructed to get acquainted, when they engage in self-disclosure, and when they experience embarrassment (M. LaFrance et al., 2003). These situations make communality more salient, which heightens the expectation for more feminine behavior. Of note, the size of the difference is smaller or absent in situations where males and females are engaged in the same task or occupy the same social role.

Psychological gender has also been found to affect the size of the sex difference in smiling. For example, M. LaFrance and Carmen (1980) categorized male and female participants according to their sex-role orientation (i.e., feminine sex-typed, masculine sex-typed, and androgynous; Bem, 1977), and they observed their nonverbal behavior. In this study, as expected, a main effect of biological gender emerged, such that women smiled more than men. However, androgynous men and women did not differ in their smiling; rather, the effect was driven by feminine women and masculine men, in which the former smiled significantly more than the latter (M. LaFrance & Carmen, 1980).

Although for many specific nonverbal behaviors there is a dearth of cross-cultural examination of gender differences, this is not the case with smiling. Studies have examined the sex differences in smiling across nations and within countries (M. LaFrance et al., 2003). Moreover, the size of this difference varies

considerably, with the largest difference reported with Canadian samples ( $r = .30$ ), and the smallest difference emerging in British nationals ( $r = .07$ ). Ethnicity also plays a role in U.S. samples, with Caucasians exhibiting larger differences ( $r = .22$ ) than African Americans ( $r = .13$ ; M. LaFrance et al., 2003).

### Remaining Questions

Whether sexual orientation might moderate the effect of biological sex on smiling in a similar way as sex-role orientation has shown to do (M. LaFrance & Carmen, 1980) remains an empirical question. It is possible that gay men might smile significantly more than heterosexual men, whereas lesbian women might smile less than heterosexual women. There certainly exist stereotypes about this, yet to date no research has examined this proposition empirically.

### Gazing and Eye Contact

In infancy, girls gaze at social stimuli more than boys (Connellan, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Batki, & Ahluwalia, 2000; Lutchmaya & Baron-Cohen, 2002), a pattern that is evident as well with older children and adults (J. A. Hall, 1984). The consistent finding is that adult women gaze at their interaction partners more than men do. In fact, the sex difference in gazing is even larger among adults ( $r = .32$  in adult men and women; J. A. Hall, 1984) than it is among infants and children, ( $r = .20$  and  $r = .19$ , respectively). It is worth noting that these patterns are most pronounced when the measure of gazing involves duration rather than the number of individual looks at another person (J. A. Hall, 1984). In fact, some investigators have reported the opposite effect when the measure involves frequency of glances. In short, men's gaze patterns are such that they look more frequently but for brief durations at their interaction partners than women do (see, e.g., Bente, Donaghy, & Suwelack, 1998).

Gender differences in gazing are also sensitive to sex composition of the interacting pair, such that the largest sex difference in gazing favoring females is observed when the comparison entails contrasting female–female with male–male dyads ( $r = .45$ ; J. A. Hall, 1984; Yee et al., 2007). J. A. Hall and Gunnery (2013) have suggested that this

is due to the contribution of both interactants. In addition to women gazing at their dyadic partners more than men, research shows that women are gazed at by others more than men are ( $r = .31$  based on six studies in J. A. Hall's, 1984, meta-analysis). Thus, because women tend to gaze more, and because individuals tend to gaze at women more, female–female dyads exhibit more eye gazing behavior than cross-sex or male–male dyads.

Although J. A. Hall and Gunnery (2013) have suggested that men are somewhat uncomfortable with eye-to-eye contact, they sometimes appear very comfortable staring down others when they are talking but look at others little when they are listening. Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltman, and Brown (1988) have shown, for example, that men exhibit a pattern called high-visual dominance: They gaze more at their interaction partners while speaking than while listening. This is especially true of men in high-power positions. Women, in contrast, tend to do the opposite: They gaze at their partners more while they are listening than when they are speaking. Again, we see the effect of context. Both sexes sometimes show visual dominance when they are in high-power roles (Ellyson, Dovidio, & Brown, 1992).

As with smiling, femininity and masculinity have been shown to moderate gender differences in gazing. In the study described earlier, M. LaFrance and Carmen (1980) looked at gazing behavior and found that androgynous men and women did not differ significantly from each other in gaze extent, but androgynous males gazed more than masculine males, and androgynous females gazed less than feminine females.

### Remaining Questions

It has been theorized that eye gaze is used in the gay and lesbian community for purposes of identity recognition (Nicholas, 2004), which attests to the possibility that gaze may add a function for gay men and lesbians that is not utilized by heterosexual men and women. Indeed, one study has demonstrated that eye-contact plays an important role for lesbians and gay men in identifying one another (Carroll & Gilroy, 2002). However, to date no research has systematically evaluated whether

sexual orientation moderates gender differences in duration and/or frequency of gazing behavior more generally.

Finally, the degree of cross-cultural moderation of gender differences in gazing behavior is unknown. In East Asian cultures, for example, eye contact is often construed as impolite, whereas averted eye gaze is seen as respectful (Knapp & Hall, 2010). Whether stringent norms about gazing lead to smaller (or even reversed) gender differences in gazing behavior in Eastern versus Western cultures is an empirical question.

### Touch

Who touches whom, in what ways, how much, and with what repercussions has been the subject of empirical scrutiny for more than 40 years starting with Henley's (1977) proposal that high-status people have greater license to touch a low-status person than the reverse. She reported that men touch women more than women initiate touch with men and saw this asymmetry as reflecting status differences. J. A. Hall's analyses have led her to conclude, however, that the reverse pattern is more reliable. Compared to men, J. A. Hall (1984, 2011) has reported that women generally touch others more than men do.

Subsequent efforts have attempted to specify the factors that might explain these discrepant patterns. Major, Schmidlin, and Williams (1990) posed that several factors could potentially account for the results. For example, age matters. For dyads younger than 30 years of age, male-initiated touch dominates, but the opposite (more female-initiated touch) is observed for dyads older than 30 years of age (J. A. Hall & Veccia, 1990; Willis & Briggs, 1992; Willis & Dodds, 1998).

The nature of the relationship also counts. Males appear to initiate touch more than females when the relationship is a nonintimate one and the setting is public. Among married couples in contrast, wives touch husbands more than the other way around (Smith, Vogel, Madon, & Edwards, 2011). Consistent with this, unmarried men are more comfortable with touch than unmarried women, whereas the reverse is true for married men and women (Hanzal, Segrin, & Dorros, 2008).

The sex composition of the relevant dyad also impacts which person touches which other person. Like gazing, male–male and female–female dyads differ most in interpersonal touching, such that female–female dyads exhibit the highest levels of interpersonal touch and male–male dyads the lowest (Kneidinger et al., 2001; Montemayor & Flannery, 1989; Stier & Hall, 1984). Women report feeling more comfortable than men with same-sex touch (Andersen & Leibowitz, 1978; Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, & Shores, 1992) but less comfortable with touch from strangers (Heslin, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 1983). Clearly, the meaning of touch differs for males and females when the encounter is a heterosexual one. The more females perceive touch as sexual, the less they perceive it as warm and friendly, whereas the more males perceive touch as sexual, the more they perceive it as warm and pleasant (Nguyen, Heslin, & Nguyen, 1975).

In a set of studies with college students, Roese et al. (1992) examined attitudes toward sexual minorities and same-sex touch, and they demonstrated that self-reported homophobia and discomfort with same-sex touch were correlated among male and female students. Moreover, the researchers covertly observed and recorded frequency of touch in same-sex dyads of students interacting in a cafeteria, and they later approached the dyads and asked them to complete a scale on homophobic attitudes. Homophobic attitudes were negatively correlated with frequency of same-sex touch for all participants. Male participants, in particular, had stronger homophobic attitudes than women, and they exhibited lower frequencies of touch (Roese et al., 1992). In another study, participants were asked to evaluate touching versus nontouching line drawings showing same- and cross-sex dyads, and the effect of participant sexual orientation on evaluations was examined (Derlega et al., 2001). Heterosexual participants (but not gay, lesbian, or bisexual men and women) rated touch in male–male dyads as less appropriate than touch among cross-sex or female–female dyads. Heterosexual participants also tended to infer higher levels of sexual involvement in touching versus nontouching drawings depicting cross-sex or male–male pairs compared to nonheterosexual participants (but no effect emerged for female–female pairs).

Taken together, these findings suggest high vigilance on the part of heterosexual men and women to same-sex touch, particularly with regard to male–male touch, likely stemming from negative attitudes toward homosexuality and sexual minorities (Roese et al., 1992) as well as from an increased tendency to perceive such touch as sexual (Derlega et al., 2001). There is, however, the noted exception to proscriptions against male–male touch, specifically in settings involving competitive sports. There, male–male touch is less inhibited and is more likely to emerge compared to other settings (although even in this context, male–male touch is less frequent than female–female touch; Kneidinger et al., 2001). One reason for this might be that the unambiguous nature of the sports setting might counter the tendency to perceive male–male touch as sexual (Derlega et al., 2001), thus deeming it more acceptable to heterosexual perceivers.

Gender differences in touch also depend on the type and quality of touch examined. Research has shown that men tend to touch more intimately and for longer durations than women (McCormick & Jones, 1989). Also, men touch women with the hand more than women touch men with the hand, but for nonhand touches, women touch more than men (DiBiase & Gunnoe, 2004; J. A. Hall & Vecchia, 1990). Interestingly, type of touch seems to interact with relationship status, such that effects emerge for men and women who are not in a relationship; but for married couples, women touch men more than the other way around, regardless of the type of touch examined (i.e., expressive and supportive touches; hand and nonhand touches; Smith et al., 2011).

Research has also identified differences in the accuracy or effectiveness with which men and women use touch to communicate with others. Among unacquainted participants, regardless of the gender of their interaction partner, women are more likely than men to successfully communicate sympathy using touch, whereas men are more likely than women to successfully use touch to communicate anger (Hertenstein & Keltner, 2011). This research also found that happiness tended to be successfully conveyed by touch in female–female dyads only (Hertenstein & Keltner, 2011).

In addition to interpersonal touch, research has examined gender differences in self-touch, which some regard as indicating self-consciousness. Compared to men, women touch themselves more ( $r = .22$ ; J. A. Hall, 1984; McCormick & Jones, 1989). Gender differences in self-touch have been examined particularly in the context of cross-sex flirting interactions. This research has typically found that women tend to self-touch during the initial stages of flirting, before contact is initiated, more so than men (Moore, 1995; Schefflen, 1965).

### Remaining Questions

Cross-cultural research on gender differences in touch has yet to receive the attention it deserves. One study focusing on men and women's attitudes toward same-sex touch found that women were more comfortable with this kind of touch in the United States as well as in Malaysia, Spain, and Chile (Willis & Rawdon, 1994). More than 50 years ago, anthropologist Edward Hall (1959) proposed that cultures varied in the degree to which they were oriented toward physical contact or not. For example, he noted that Southern European and Middle Eastern peoples preferred close interpersonal distances and more touching than people living in more northern climes. Nonetheless, no data currently exist on the degree to which gender might interact with these cultural patterns.

Many of the moderators that have shown to be important for other nonverbal behaviors (e.g., smiling) have not been systematically explored with respect to touch—such as the presence of observers. Also, whether sex-role orientation might interact with biological sex to determine touch behavior is not known. It could be the case that qualitative differences in the meaning of touch would emerge, such that masculine men might use touch most successfully and most often to communicate anger or dominance (as has been shown recently; Hertenstein & Keltner, 2011), whereas androgynous men might use touch to express a wider variety of emotions—such as sympathy.

Similarly, whereas some research has explored how attitudes toward sexual minorities influence attitudes toward same-sex touch, an understanding of how sexual orientation interacts with actual

touch behavior is lacking. Because the existing research suggests a high degree of vigilance on the part of heterosexual men with respect to same-sex touch, it might be expected that same-sex dyads among gay men would touch significantly more than male–male dyads among heterosexual men. For women, it is less clear that sexual orientation would interact with gender to influence touch behavior, but this is an empirical question.

### Interpersonal Distance, Body Orientation, Gesture, and Posture

Compared to women, men tend to adopt larger interpersonal distances with interaction partners ( $r = .27$ ; 17 studies in J. A. Hall's, 1984, meta-analysis). Not surprisingly, interpersonal distance is at its maximum in male–male dyads compared to female–female or mixed sex dyads. This has been shown cross-culturally both in the United States and Turkey (Ozdemir, 2008). Looked at from another angle, J. A. Hall's (1984) meta-analysis reported that people tend to set larger interpersonal distances when interacting with men than with women ( $r = .43$ ; nine studies). This was true of both adult participants as well as children, although relatively few studies have examined interpersonal distance in children (J. A. Hall & Gunnery, 2013).

With respect to body orientation, female adults as well as children tend to orient more directly toward their interaction partners than males, although this effect is smaller than other gender differences in nonverbal communication ( $r = .15$  and  $r = .12$ , respectively; J. A. Hall, 1984). Moreover, in the specific context of heterosexual flirtation, this gender difference in body orientation disappears, as both men and women orient their bodies toward the person of interest (Fichten et al., 1992). Some research has also found gender differences in body synchrony or *posture mirroring*—the spontaneous postural matching of interaction partners, which is believed to convey interpersonal rapport (Schefflen, 1964). M. LaFrance and Ickes (1981) examined the interaction between gender and sex-role orientation on body mirroring. They found that in same-sex dyads, feminine (i.e., sex-typed) females engaged in significantly more body mirroring than same-sex dyads of masculine males. However, among

androgynous pairs, the effect was reversed with male–male dyads showing more body mirroring than female–female dyads.

With respect to small body movements, results indicate that men tend to be reliably more fidgety and restless than women ( $r = .34$ ). However, women engage in more head nodding when interacting with others, a behavior sometimes referred to as a back-channel response, such as uttering “hmm” in reaction to a speaker's statement. Back-channel responses are used to convey that one is actively listening to an interaction partner. Women have also been found to use hand movements and gestures while speaking more so than men ( $r = .28$ ; J. A. Hall, 1984).

Like body orientation, women have been found to lean forward toward their interaction partner more than men ( $r = .16$ ; J. A. Hall, 1984; Helweg-Larsen, Cunningham, Carrico, & Pergram, 2004). Posture has also been described on an expansive-compacted dimension, and here men tend to adopt more relaxed postures (i.e., asymmetrically arranged arms and legs;  $r = .33$ ) as well as more expansive body postures (i.e., limbs reaching farther away from the body;  $r = .46$ ; J. A. Hall, 1984), whereas women, in contrast, typically maintain more restricted postures with legs close together and arms close to the torso. For example, observations of seated participants on an urban metro revealed that men more often sat in an open posture with their legs apart and their arms away from their sides while women sat in closed postures, that is with upper legs against each other and arms against the trunk (Vrugt & Luyerink, 2000). This sex difference in posture expansiveness has been linked with differences in dominance and social power. Body openness in adults is positively related to dominance (J. A. Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005), and research on children reveals that one of the key differences between dominant and submissive individuals is body expansiveness (Weisfeld & Beresford, 1982). With regard to adults, research has also found that expansive postures cause power-related feelings (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003) and behavior as well as changes in hormone levels normally associated with high rank (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010).

## Remaining Questions

As is the case with same-sex touch behavior, an understanding of how sexual orientation moderates gender differences in interpersonal distance and orientation as well body movement and posture is sorely lacking. Homophobic attitudes or greater vigilance to potential threat by heterosexual men may play a role in men's preference for greater interpersonal distance in same-sex dyads compared to women. Future research might examine interpersonal distance by varying dyadic composition and sexual orientation. It is plausible that interpersonal distance might be significantly reduced in male-male dyads of gay compared to heterosexual men. Similarly, research looking at hand gesturing during speech and expressive body movements might benefit from evaluating how sexual orientation might moderate gender differences. As with smiling, there are stereotypes expecting gay men to engage in more sociability, often expressed in more hand movements while talking compared to heterosexual men (Webbink, 1981), but whether this is truly the case remains to be examined empirically.

As the findings by M. LaFrance and Ickes (1981) suggest, femininity and masculinity might be better predictors of some of the gender differences discussed in this section than biological sex. For example, maintaining a compressed, upright body posture may be part of enacting femininity scripts, and thus androgynous women might be expected to display less restricted and more relaxed body postures compared to feminine-typed women. Similarly, many of the behaviors shown to be more common in women than men (such as maintaining closer interpersonal distance, orienting the body toward an interaction partner, head nodding, and forward leaning) are behaviors denoting social sensibility—a stereotypically communal characteristic. Thus, individuals with higher femininity scores might exhibit these behaviors to a greater extent regardless of their gender, and androgynous men and women might fall somewhere in between sex-typed men and women. More research is needed to address these possibilities.

## Vocal Nonverbal Behavior

In general, men speak louder than women and with more speech disturbances, such as filled

pauses—“ah,” “um,” or incomplete sentences (J. A. Hall, 1984; Schmid Mast & Sczesny, 2010). Research has also shown that men tend to be more talkative than women (Leaper & Ayres, 2007), although recent findings suggest that this tendency might be moderated by men's situational sense of power (Brescoll, 2011). In other words, men's tendency to surpass women in talking time (i.e., volubility) tends to disappear when men are experimentally induced into a low-power mindset.

As noted, women generally exceed men in the use of back channels while listening to others (J. A. Hall, 1984; Leaper & Robnett, 2011). In contrast, men are more likely than women to interrupt others' speech with the goal to take over the conversation, sometimes referred to as *intrusive interruptions*, rather than merely speaking at the same time as another person (Anderson & Leaper, 1998). Intrusive interruptions are more likely to discourage the original speaker from continuing. Thus, a relatively small gender difference when considering interruptions in general ( $r = .08$ ) becomes substantially larger when considering intrusive interruptions specifically ( $r = .16$ ; Anderson & Leaper, 1998). Similar to this, M. LaFrance and Carmen (1980) did not find a significant difference in interruptions by men and women when all types of interruptions were combined into a single index. However, when the researchers looked at interruptive statements (assertive) and interruptive questions (responsive) separately, clear gender differences emerged, with males making significantly more interruptive statements and women inserting more interruptive questions.

The number of interaction partners has been shown to moderate the size of the gender difference in the tendency to interrupt, such that men make more intrusive interruptions than women, especially in group settings (i.e., more than two interacting partners;  $r = .30$ ; Anderson & Leaper, 1998). The difference is almost negligible for dyads ( $r = .06$ ). The same trend emerged when considering any kind of interruption, though the difference tended to be smaller ( $r = .13$  in groups;  $r = .03$  in dyads). In Anderson and Leaper's (1998) meta-analysis, dyadic composition moderated the tendency for men to interrupt more than women, such that the largest difference emerged for intrusive interruptions

occurring in mixed-gender groups or dyads ( $r = .30$  in same-sex and  $r = .06$  in mixed-sex groups for intrusive interruptions, and  $r = .01$  in same-sex and  $r = .08$  in mixed-sex groups or dyads for overall interruptions; Anderson & Leaper, 1998).

Degree of familiarity between the interacting partners has been shown to moderate the likelihood that a gender difference in interruptive behavior will emerge. For intrusive interruptions, Anderson and Leaper (1998) found that gender effects were more likely when conversing with strangers ( $r = .19$ ) rather than familiar persons ( $r = .09$ ). Due to a limited number of studies examining intrusive interruptions among familiar persons, Anderson and Leaper were not able to examine different types of relationships (e.g., friends vs. romantic partners). For overall interruptions, however, they were able to compare friends, romantic partners, and other types of close relationships. They found the largest (albeit, relatively small) gender difference among romantic partners ( $r = .10$ ). Interestingly, among friends, the difference between men and women's overall interruptive behavior had the opposite direction, with women interrupting their friends more than men did but only very slightly so ( $r = .07$ ). Among other close relationship partners as well as among strangers, the pattern of gender differences for overall interruptions mirrored that for intrusive interruptions, although they were smaller in magnitude ( $r = .06$  and  $r = .08$ , respectively).

Finally, M. LaFrance and Carmen (1980) examined the interaction between psychological gender orientation and biological gender on two kinds of vocal behavior. Specifically, they looked at interruptions and filled pauses in both task-focused and emotionally expressive contexts. In general, masculine males emitted significantly more filled pauses than androgynous males and feminine females. Interruptive statements were significantly more common among androgynous men and women compared to sex-typed men and women (i.e., masculine males and feminine females). Importantly, context moderated these interactions, such that masculine males and androgynous females emitted more interruptive statements in the task condition than in the emotive condition, whereas sex-typed females made few interruptive statements in both contexts, and

androgynous males maintained a relatively high level of interrupting in both contexts. Thus, this research illuminates how biological gender, psychological gender, and gendered aspects of the specific context interact to determine nonverbal behavior in ways that would not be evident if all three factors had been examined separately.

### Remaining Questions

Whether the gender differences in vocal nonverbal behavior summarized here would emerge cross-culturally is for future research to determine. Politeness rules, the importance assigned to hierarchy or verticality within a specific culture, and level of gender equality all may exacerbate or ameliorate men's tendency to talk more and interrupt more than women. Similarly, whether these differences remain somewhat stable throughout the life span or fluctuate with age remains to be examined.

The impact of power and status on gender differences in nonverbal behavior also needs to be evaluated more thoroughly. To date, there is limited experimental evidence that power increases men's but not women's talking time (Brescoll, 2011). Whether power and status may moderate other gender differences in vocal nonverbal behavior—such as the use of back-channel responses, interruptive statements and questions, and filled pauses, and so forth—is a more open question. Men might curtail their interruptive behavior and speech time when interacting with a woman who holds greater power (i.e., she is perceived to have more expertise in a specific domain). For example, male patients interacting with female physicians may not engage in the same type of vocal nonverbal behavior that is generally found when looking at other types of interaction contexts.

### Other Nonverbal Domains

There are three remaining nonverbal domains that, for whatever reason, have not been as central to the study of nonverbal communication in general and gender aspects in particular as the domains we have covered thus far. The three domains are gait or global movement style, blushing, and crying. Because few studies have been designed to look at the ways these behaviors may differ in men and women, no meta-analyses are available for us to draw from at this point.

Gait or walking style, however, differs in men and women (Kerrigan, Todd, & Croce, 1998; Nigg, Fisher, & Ronsky, 1994; Troje, 2002), and perceivers can identify the gender of a walker with minimal cues with above chance accuracy (Brooks et al., 2008; Pollick, Kay, Heim, & Stringer, 2005). Swaying hips are perceived to be more likely characteristic of walking by females, whereas swaggering shoulders are perceived to be more likely displayed by men, and it is these perceptions that aid in the inference of the gender of a walking target (Johnson & Tassinari, 2005). Additionally, recent research suggests that the walking styles of gay men and lesbian women differ from that of heterosexuals in degree of shoulder swagger (a male-typical behavior) and hip sway (a female-typical behavior; see Johnson, Gill, Reichman, & Tassinari, 2007). Beyond replicating these basic effects, more research is needed in this area to understand how individual characteristics such as age and race may moderate gender differences in walking style. Moreover, in keeping with our theme of deconstructing gender, we recommend that future research examine whether gender differences in walking style are moderated by psychological gender. For example, do the walking styles of androgynous men and androgynous women differ as much as those of sex-typed men and sex-typed women? Likewise, do different contexts inhibit or magnify the differences between males and females in walking style?

Next, we turn our attention to research on blushing. The blush is most commonly caused by unwanted social attention (Leary, Britt, Cutlip, & Templeton, 1992), and it generally emerges as a reaction to situations that elicit “self-conscious” emotions, such as embarrassment, guilt, and shame. Women are thought to be more susceptible to blushing than men, but experimental research has not been consistent on this count (Drummond, 2013). For example, Shearn, Spellman, Straley, Meirick, and Stryker (1999) found no significant difference in the blushing reactions of men and women in an experiment in which they watched video clips of their friends or strangers or themselves singing (the last situation frequently used to trigger blushing responses). However, some self-report studies have found that women report blushing more than men report doing so (Bögels, Alberts, & de Jong, 1996; Neto, 1996)

There is also some evidence that females show more “coyness blushing” in a courting context (von Hooff, 2013), but again empirical verification has been slight. Future research examining actual blushing reactions as well as self-reported blushing propensity across different life stages might reveal interesting findings. For example, as is the case with smiling, it is possible that gender differences in blushing might vary with age, being slim in childhood, largest in adolescence, and relatively less pronounced in adulthood.

In closing, we turn to crying, where research on gender differences has been relatively more extensive than that for either gait or blushing. To begin with, there is abundant data attesting to the ubiquitous stereotype of the tearful woman versus the stoic man (Vingerhoets, 2013). Furthermore, studies focusing on the relationship between biological gender and actual weeping show that women cry more frequently than men do (for reviews, see Bekker & Vingerhoets, 1999, 2001; Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000). This sex difference is consistent across several cultures where it has been studied, even though the magnitude of the difference varies with the particular culture being observed (Becht, Poortinga, & Vingerhoets, 2001).

With respect to babies and young children, however, the results are mixed as to whether a sex difference exists in the first years of life (Vingerhoets, 2013). In fact, some data suggest that boys show a higher frequency of crying than girls and that it is not until 8 years of age that girls show the pattern of more crying than boys. Just why this divergence happens has been the subject of considerable debate, with some contending that boys are discouraged from crying after childhood, and others arguing that girls develop tearful crying because of its benefits (Vingerhoets, 2013).

### **Gender, Nonverbal Behavior, and Flirtation**

Heterosexual courtship interactions in Western culture involve a complex set of nonverbal behaviors by both sexes that are tightly and relationally scripted. Both sexes use nonverbal cues to signal sexual interest to potential romantic or sexual partners, and both engage in decoding practices to try to read the nonverbal cues that potentially signal the interest of another person. The whole nonverbal repertoire

is used in flirtation—gaze, smile facial expression, interpersonal distance, body orientation and posture, gestures, and touch. Depending on timing and sequence, nonverbal cues can communicate awareness, openness, and desire (or their opposites). As such, the critical dimension in flirtation situations is not so much how much a nonverbal behavior is displayed but that it is displayed and shown in close temporal proximity to other cues.

Although the stereotype of heterosexual flirtation often suggests that the male is the one to initiate interaction, nonverbal researchers contend that women perform the early nonverbal signaling (Grammer, Kruck, Juetter, & Fink, 2000). Females have been characterized as “selectors” who attract attention by displaying openness to interaction via laughing, head tossing, grooming behaviors, self-touching or caressing objects, and bodily keeping time to music (Guéguen, 2008; Schefflen, 1965). In particular, researchers have identified women’s coy smiles (half a smile accompanied by either downward facing eyes or darting eye contact) as especially flirtatious (Moore, 1995). Men, in turn, are more likely than women to actively approach a woman in response to her nonverbal cues (Grammer et al., 2000). In short, a successful flirtation is marked by a coordinated and reciprocated sequence of each party’s nonverbal behavior with that of the other.

The consensus then is that women are more active in their use of nonverbal cues to communicate romantic interest to men in the first stages of flirting rather than the other way around (Moore, 2010). However, the displayed nonverbal behaviors are more likely to be subtle so that, if necessary, both parties can subsequently deny that there was ever any communication of interest. In fact this female subtlety is so understated or ambiguous at times that researchers find that both males and females are more accurate at deciphering when a man is being flirtatious than when a woman is (Grammer et al., 2000; Place et al., 2009).

Fewer studies have focused on men’s nonverbal behavior in a flirting context (J. A. Hall & Gunnery, 2013). Renninger, Wade, and Grammer (2004) found that men who engage in brief, darting eye contact, as well as moving among locations frequently, touching other men (without being touched

in return), and exhibiting expansive body postures, were more likely to make contact with a flirting female than men who engaged in fewer of these nonverbal behaviors. Thus, whereas the nonverbal behavior of women conveys interest in a subtle way in a heterosexual situation, reflecting the belief that women are more receptive than they are active parties in a courtship, the nonverbal behavior of men signals assertiveness, in accord with scripts prescribing that men take a more active role in courtship. However, behaviors by both sexes are necessary for the interaction to be a successful one.

Once contact is established between flirting partners, men and women tend to differ in the way they use touch to communicate interest and to escalate the interaction. Women continue to self-touch more than men do, and they also touch their partner in brief and casual ways that are perceived to communicate playfulness and affection (McCormick & Jones, 1989). Men, in contrast, tend to touch more intimately and for longer durations, and their touches are perceived as more strongly sexual (McCormick & Jones, 1989).

### Remaining Questions

Future research needs to examine how flirting behavior is managed among gay and lesbian couples. It is also likely that psychological gender (i.e., masculinity/femininity) affects flirting behavior. More feminine heterosexual women might employ the subtlest nonverbal cues to signal interest to potential partners, whereas more androgynous women might take a relatively more direct approach. Similarly, more feminine lesbian women might favor flirting behaviors different from those preferred by more androgynous lesbians. For gay men, it is possible that flirting behavior might involve less subtle cues and a more direct approach, especially in safe contexts where gay identification is assumed (e.g., gay nightclubs). Clearly, the situation will dictate which scripts are more likely.

### CONCLUSIONS

Viewed through a gender lens, a review of the nonverbal communication literature shows that gender matters, although neither simply nor robustly.

The research literature on encoding and decoding accuracy, smiling and gazing, touch and body orientation, posture and gesture, gait, blushing, and weeping shows that gender is moderately implicated when predictions are made about the frequency of various nonverbal behaviors. Nonetheless, gender needs to be considered as a multidimensional construct rather than a stand-in for simple sex differences.

For one thing, psychological gender may be more critical than biological gender. In other words, nonverbal behaviors may often be telltale indicators of femininity and masculinity rather than manifestations of biological femaleness and maleness. The critical issue may thus be the degree to which any male or female personally subscribes to societal definitions of masculinity and femininity. In some cases, psychological gender dovetails with biological gender. Such would occur when a biological male or biological female strongly identifies with the tenets of masculinity and femininity, respectively. The confluence of sex and gender might be mistakenly taken as evidence of biological gender effects when the pivotal factor is actually consistency between psychological gender and biological gender. To the degree to which individuals do not strongly identify with societal gender norms, then we would expect less clear nonverbal differentiation between the sexes in one or more nonverbal behaviors.

Another aspect of the multidimensional nature of gender is the recognition that demands to behave in a gendered way are themselves variable. Sometimes gender differences are manifestly evident because the current situation induces participants to respond with gender-differentiated behavior. At other times, between-gender group differences may be minimal. This does not mean that the result nonverbal behavior is a random fluctuation—now you see it, now you do not—but rather that aspects of the situation make gender salient or negligible or somewhere in between. In the first case, we expect gender differences to be magnified; in the second case, factors other than gender affect the amount of observed nonverbal behavior, and subject gender recedes as an influential factor.

As a number of researchers have noted, not only is the impact of gender highly variable across situations but also that individuals are themselves highly variable in terms of their sensitivity to gender demands (Deaux & Major, 1987). This has the effect of producing substantial within-sex variation in nonverbal display. Depending on the circumstances, this means that within-gender variation may exceed between-gender variation, causing sex differences at the group level to be minimal. At other times, gender demands may be so salient that a substantial proportion of women and men comply with what they know to be the default patterns of gendered nonverbal behavior.

As Table 6.1 reveals, gender seldom operates alone in affecting the amount of observed nonverbal behavior in women and men. Take smiling for example. The data do show that women smile more on average than men. However, the data also indicate that the size of this effect covaries with a number of factors. Age is one of these moderators. Adolescents and young adults show a clear gender pattern, with females out-smiling males; however, among middle-age and older adults, this sex difference all but disappears. In similar fashion, the presence of social tension magnifies the gender difference in smiling. Women smile more than men when the atmosphere is tense, but that difference is significantly reduced when the atmosphere is relaxed. In short, individual differences and situational variations affect the degree to which gender differences in nonverbal behaviors are found.

One goal of the present review was to determine whether women and men differ in their nonverbal behavior. We looked for the presence and degree of a gender difference across a range of nonverbal behaviors and found a number of modest to moderate effects. However, another goal of the present review was to consider whether a series of variables might help explain when such differences appear and recede. Here, there was substantial evidence that gender-marked nonverbal cues, far from being fixed and stable, are malleable and flexible, responsive to even small changes in the social and psychological environment.

TABLE 6.1

## Gender Differences in Nonverbal Behavior

Nonverbal behavior/domain	Gender difference	Moderator(s)
Encoding accuracy	W > M	Age; channel (facial vs. vocal)
Decoding accuracy	W > M	Cue ambiguity; flirting context; target gender; specific emotion expressed
Smiling	W > M	Age; context (instrumental vs. expressive task; social tension); psychological gender; country; race
Gaze (general)	W < M	Gender composition of dyad; psychological gender
Visual dominance <sup>a</sup>	W < M	Power mindset/status
Other-touch	W > M	Age; relationship type; gender composition of dyad; type of touch (e.g., hand vs. nonhand)
Self-touch	W > M	
Interpersonal distance	W < M	Target gender
Orient body toward partner	W > M	Flirting context
Posture mirroring	W > M	Psychological gender; gender composition of dyad
Body restlessness, fidgeting	W < M	
Back-channel responses <sup>b</sup>	W > M	
Hand gesturing	W > M	
Forward leaning	W > M	
Expansive body posturing	W < M	
Restricted body posturing	W > M	
Speech loudness	W < M	
Speech disturbances	W < M	
Volubility	W < M	Power mindset/status
Intrusive interruptions	W < M	Group versus dyadic context; gender composition of group or dyad; relationship type; context (instrumental vs. expressive task); psychological gender
Filled pauses	W < M	Context (instrumental vs. expressive task); psychological gender
Hip sway	W > M	
Shoulder swagger	W < M	Sexual orientation
Blushing (general)	W = M	
“Coyness” blushing	W > M	
Crying frequency	W > M	Age

Note. W = women; M = men.

<sup>a</sup>Gazing more at an interaction partner while speaking than while listening. <sup>b</sup>Used to convey that one is actively listening to an interaction partner, such as uttering “hmm” in reaction to a speaker’s statement.

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