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## Self-Reported Reliance on Nonverbal Behaviour

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### Abstract

This study examined the sensitivity of self-reported reliance on nonverbal cues to actual changes in nonverbal behaviour. One hundred and twenty-seven high school students viewed two stimulus tapes, one tape containing counsellor responsive and the other tape counsellor unresponsive behaviour. The students rated the expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the target person, and indicated the degree to which they relied on nonverbal cues in making their judgments. The results indicated that participants who reported a higher reliance (in contrast to a lower reliance) on nonverbal cues showed a greater sensitivity to changes in nonverbal behaviour.

### Résumé

Cette étude a examiné la sensibilité de la confiance rapporté par rapport à soi-même à partir de comportements nonverbaux à des changements précis sur le comportement nonverbal. Cent vingt-sept étudiants de niveau secondaire ont visionné deux films stimuli dont l'un contenait une entrevue où le conseiller répondait aux comportements nonverbaux et l'autre film où le conseiller ne répondait pas aux comportements nonverbaux. Les étudiants ont évalué l'expertise, la véracité, l'attrayance de la personne cible et ont indiqué jusqu'à quel point ils se sont basé sur les comportements nonverbaux pour porter leur jugement. Les résultats indiquaient que les participants qui rapportaient un haut niveau de confiance (comparativement à un bas niveau) sur les comportements nonverbaux démontraient une plus grande sensibilité aux changements des comportements nonverbaux.

Recently, there have been several convincing demonstrations that nonverbal (NV) behaviour is a key element in influencing client judgments of counsellor credibility (e.g., Corrigan, Dell, Lewis & Schmidt, 1980; Tepper & Haase, 1978).

In order to obtain information about the client's perceived influence of verbal and NV behaviour, Lee, McGill and Uhlemann (1988) developed the Verbal/Nonverbal Reliance Questionnaire (VNRQ), which is a pencil-and-paper questionnaire asking subjects to indicate the influence of verbal and NV cues in making judgments about another person. Employing the VNRQ, Lee et al. (1988) examined how self-reported reliance on verbal and NV behaviour influenced clients' perceptions of counsellors. Thirty-two counsellors conducted a 20-minute counselling interview with clients, and immediately after the interview, the clients rated three attributes (expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) of the counsellor. They then indicated the degree to which they relied on verbal and NV cues in judging these attributes. The findings showed that

clients relied more on NV cues in judging counsellor attractiveness and more on verbal cues in judging counsellor expertness.

At present, it is unclear what actually is measured by VNRQ ratings of verbal and NV behaviour. The purpose of this study was to examine the sensitivity of self-reported reliance on NV behaviour, as assessed by the VNRQ, to actual changes in NV behaviours. It was predicted that the participants who report a greater reliance on NV behaviours would show a greater difference (i.e., greater sensitivity) in perceived expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of a target person exhibiting responsive and unresponsive NV behaviour.

#### METHOD

Two brief stimulus tapes, varying in the amount of responsive counsellor NV behaviour, were developed. One hundred and twenty-seven participant-observers viewed the tapes, rated the target person (i.e., the counsellor) on three counsellor attributes, and then indicated their reliance on verbal and NV behaviour in making their judgments. Based on the NV reliance scores, the participants were classified into high and low reliance groups and were compared in their sensitivity to the presence of varying amounts of responsive NV behaviour.

#### *Participants*

The original observers were 127 grade 12 students recruited from a rural high school in Ontario, Canada. Of the 127 students, 40 high and 40 low on NV reliance were selected on the basis of their NV reliance scores of the VNRQ.

The VNRQ was employed to assess participants' reliance on NV behaviour in rating the counsellor attributes. The participants were asked to report their reliance on four nonverbal cues (eye contact, smile, voice, and gestures) in judging three counsellor attributes (expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness). Specifically, the subjects were asked to assign numbers ranging from 0 ("did not rely") to 100 ("relied heavily") for each of the four nonverbal categories. Reliance scores for each participant were obtained by summing the scores for each category of nonverbal cues under each attribute. For the purpose of the present study, the arithmetic mean of the four NV category scores for each counsellor attribute was designated as an NV reliance score.

Each counsellor attribute was represented by four adjective-pairs on the Counsellor Rating Form — Short Version (CRF-S; Corrigan & Schmidt, 1983). The polarities of adjective-pairs as well as the position of nonverbal cues under each adjective-pair were randomized. Each adjective-pair was presented on a 7-point rating continuum, such that the total score for expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness ranged from 4 to 28, respectively. Based on NV reliance scores of the entire

group, the participants were classified into high and low NV reliance groups.

The high reliance group ( $N=40$ ) was composed of those participants whose NV reliance scores ( $M=70.50$ ) fell in the top 31% of the entire student sample ( $M=52.34$ ,  $SD=16.49$ ). The low reliance group ( $N=40$ ) was composed of those participants whose NV reliance scores ( $M=37.60$ ) fell in the bottom 31% of the group. The 47 participants whose NV reliance scores fell between the two groups were excluded from the final analysis of the data.

### *Stimulus Tapes*

The stimulus tapes were two 10-minute role-playing segments of a male counsellor interviewing a female client presenting the concern of choosing a college major. The counsellor and client were the same in both segments. Although the verbal content of the counsellor and client interactions was different in each segment, the level of counsellor verbal facilitation was not significantly different between the two tapes. The means for empathy ratings (Carkhuff, 1969) by two trained independent judges were 2.67 and 2.57 on a 5-point scale. The two tapes differed only in the counsellor's NV behaviour. In the *responsive* tape, the counsellor exhibited responsive NV behaviours (Claiborn, 1979; Haase & Tepper, 1972) which were defined as 80% eye contact, 8 smiles, 8 hand-and-arm gestures, and 8 head-nods. In the *unresponsive* tape, the counsellor exhibited unresponsive NV behaviours which consisted of 40% eye contact, 4 smiles, and 4 hand-and-arm gestures, 4 head-nods. For a validity check, 10 Master's levels counsellor-trainees viewed the two tapes, and independently counted the frequency of head-nods, smiles, and gestures, and the duration of eye contact. The responsive tape showed significantly higher ( $p<.001$ ) means on all four NV behaviours (i.e., eye contact, smile, gesture, head-nod).

### *Data Collection*

The participants, in small groups of 10, viewed the two tapes on one occasion. After each tape, the participants rated expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the counsellor and then indicated their reliance on NV cues in making their judgments. The order of the responsive and unresponsive tapes was counterbalanced to eliminate any possible order effect. (A pilot study indicated that changing the order of presentation of the two tapes had no noticeable effect on the observers.)

## RESULTS

Scores for the dependent variables (i.e., expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness) as assessed by the CRF-S were analyzed by a 2 (NV Re-

liance: high, low)  $\times$  2 (Tape: responsive, unresponsive)  $\times$  3 (Attributes: expertness, trustworthiness, attractiveness) analysis of variance with the last two factors treated as repeated factors. The multivariate  $F$  between Tape  $\times$  Reliance was significant,  $F(3, 76)=6.54, p < .001$ . Univariate interactions were statistically significant beyond the .01 level for expertness,  $F(1, 78)=19.48$ , trustworthiness,  $F(1, 78)=8.08$ , and attractiveness,  $F(1, 78)=9.57$ . As can be seen from Table 1, for all three attributes (i.e., expertness, trustworthiness, attractiveness), the participants gave higher positive ratings for the counsellor in the responsive tape than in the unresponsive tape. The mean differences between the responsive and the unresponsive tapes were significantly *greater* ( $p < .01$ ) for the high NV reliance group than for the low NV reliance group ( $M=11.29$  vs. 7.19 for high and low group, respectively).

TABLE 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Expertness, Trustworthiness, and Attractiveness Ratings on the Two Stimulus Tapes*

	<i>Responsive Tape</i>		<i>Unresponsive Tape</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>High nonverbal reliance group</b>				
Expertness	21.60	3.46	9.60	4.29
Trustworthiness	24.58	2.47	13.85	5.48
Attractiveness	22.18	2.92	11.03	5.47
<b>Low nonverbal reliance group</b>				
Expertness	16.25	5.12	9.30	3.83
Trustworthiness	20.23	4.59	13.13	4.45
Attractiveness	17.53	5.46	10.00	4.20

**Note:** Possible range of scores: 4 - 28 for expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, respectively, with the higher score indicating favorable perception of the target person.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the validity of self-reported reliance on NV behaviour by examining the sensitivity of the VNRQ in assessing experimentally manipulated behaviour. As was predicted, the self-reported reliance on NV behaviour as assessed by the VNRQ was sensitive to actual change in NV behaviour: that is, when specific NV behaviours of the target person were manipulated, those who reported a higher reliance on NV behaviour showed a greater change in the perceived level of expertness, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of the target person than those who reported a lower reliance on NV behaviour.

The findings of the present study clearly showed that self-reported reliance on NV behaviour, as measured by the VNRQ, may be a sensitive and convenient method of obtaining information about the contribution of NV behaviour in a client's perception of the counsellor. It appears that much reliance on NV behaviour is out of the immediate awareness of the client. Regardless, it seems that the VNRQ measures a person's self-reported preference for NV behaviour in making judgments about other people. It is important to note in this study that the self-reported reliance on NV behaviour was obtained under highly controlled laboratory conditions and with observers rather than real clients. However, these initial findings suggest that this instrument may be of use in studying the complexity of counsellor-client NV interactions.

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