

A Psychological Study of Non-Verbal Communication Differences Between Men and Women in Sri Lanka

Niromi Gunarathne

University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Non-verbal communication refers to the use of body language, facial expressions, gestures, and the tone of voice to convey meaning without the use of words. Non-verbal cues can include things like eye contact, posture, hand movements, and facial expressions. These cues can often communicate more information than verbal communication alone, and can also convey emotions, attitudes, and intentions. Non-verbal communication is a crucial aspect of human communication and can greatly influence how we perceive others and how we are perceived in return. It is also an important area of study in fields like psychology, anthropology, and communication studies. This research aims to psychologically investigate non-verbal communication differences between females and males in Sri Lanka. For this study, 100 girls and boys between the ages of 20 and 25 were selected from the two main faculties of the University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka, The Faculty of Management and Commerce and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. A sample of 50 girls and 50 boys was selected from each faculty using the random sampling. The observation method was used to collect data from students. In this research, a qualitative analysis method was used for data analysis. According to this study, same-sex and mixed-sex students randomly observed their communications with each other. During the data collection, students observed non-verbal communication methods such as hand and foot movements, eye contact, facial expression and, standing posture, distance during the conversation, and touching each other. Every part of this study, which was conducted using male and female university students, confirmed that women were ahead of men in non-verbal communication. Although academics have offered sociological, biological, and psychological reasons why women use more non-verbal communication tactics compared to men, according to the study, psychological reasons are more common. Accordingly, it was recognized that women use these non-verbal communication strategies to satisfy the natural characteristics of women, such as female attraction, the need to talk more, and the desire to join groups.

Key words: non-verbal communication, male, female, psychological, differences

I. Introduction

Non-verbal communication is the process of conveying information without the use of words. It is an essential component of human communication and plays an important role in social interactions, personal relationships, and even professional settings. Non-verbal communication includes gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice, among others. Women are known to be more proficient in non-verbal communication than men, and this study seeks to understand the psychological mechanisms behind this phenomenon.

Communication is an important way to express opinions, emotions, and feelings. Communication skills such as reading, writing, and speaking vary for people, and they are influenced by different settings and the ideas and information prevailing in society or among individuals. The purpose of communication is to teach and learn new knowledge and skills to be progressive. However, people's diverse natures and characteristics affect the way they communicate. Many people can communicate verbally, and many other individuals have the skills to consider nonverbal interactions. The right side of the brain governs nonverbal communication, and the left side rules verbal communication (Andersen, 1999). For instance, people who have experienced trauma on the right side of the brain also fail to learn facial expressions but can continue verbal communication. On the contrary, people whose left side of the brain is damaged cannot understand language, speak, or read.

Gender differences in communication have attracted researchers attention in sociology and linguistics. Several studies have shown that women are better at interpreting non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language than men (Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2000; Hall & Matsumoto, 2004). It has been suggested that this difference may be due to biological, social, and cultural factors. Diversity in gender roles is reflected in individual, interpersonal, and societal communication.

Research has suggested that there may be biological differences between men and women that affect their non-verbal communication abilities. For example, some studies have found that women have a larger corpus callosum, the bundle of nerve

fibers that connects the two hemispheres of the brain, which may allow for greater communication between the two sides of the brain (Gur et al., 1999; Witelson, 1989). Other studies have suggested that hormonal differences between men and women, particularly in the levels of testosterone and estrogen, may play a role in non-verbal communication abilities (Roney & Maestripieri, 2002).

Social and cultural factors may also contribute to the difference in non-verbal communication abilities between men and women. Research has shown that girls are generally socialized to be more expressive and emotionally aware than boys (Kring & Gordon, 1998; Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998). Additionally, women are more likely to engage in affiliative behaviors, such as smiling and nodding, which can facilitate social interaction and communication (Fridlund, 1994).

Emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others, has also been suggested as a factor that may contribute to the difference in non-verbal communication abilities between men and women (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). Research has shown that women tend to score higher on measures of emotional intelligence than men (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000), which may give them an advantage in interpreting and using non-verbal cues.

There is a growing body of research that suggests that women are better at non-verbal communication than men, and that this difference may be due to a combination of biological, social, and cultural factors. This study aims to further explore the psychological mechanisms that contribute to this difference and provide insights into how non-verbal communication skills can be improved for both men and women.

This research is important because gender stereotypes create identities and roles that are assumed to be fixed and natural, such as that girls are shy and soft-spoken while boys are aggressive and loud. The communication study offers a dynamic opinion that gender is not fixed but is a changing process. Hence this research, in continuation of past communication research, explores how communication creates gender.

Research Question

What are the differences in non-verbal communication skills between men and women?

II. Literature Review

Non-verbal communication is an essential part of human interaction and plays a significant role in how we communicate with others. Research has shown that women tend to be more skilled in non-verbal communication than men, and this difference may be due to several factors. This literature review aims to explore research on the various factors influencing non-verbal communication in male and female university students.

Several studies have suggested that biological factors may contribute to the difference in non-verbal communication abilities between men and women. For example, it has been found that women have a larger corpus callosum, which is the bundle of nerve fibers that connects the two hemispheres of the brain, than men (Witelson, 1989; Gur et al., 1999). This larger corpus callosum may enable women to process information more efficiently across the two hemispheres, enhancing their ability to interpret and use non-verbal cues.

Additionally, research has shown that hormonal differences between men and women may also play a role in non-verbal communication abilities. For example, one study found that women who were given a dose of testosterone performed worse on a task that involved recognizing emotions from facial expressions than women who were given a placebo (Derntl et al., 2009). This suggests that testosterone may have a negative impact on non-verbal communication skills.

Furthermore, studies have found that women engage in more affiliative behaviors than men, such as smiling, nodding, and maintaining eye contact. These behaviors can facilitate social interaction and communication (Fridlund, 1994). Women may also be more likely to use non-verbal cues to convey their messages, as they are often socialized to be less assertive in their communication style than men (Fiske, 1993).

Emotional intelligence, which is the ability to understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others, has also been suggested as a factor that may contribute to the difference in non-verbal communication abilities between men and women (Mayer et al., 1999). Research has shown that women tend to score higher on measures of emotional intelligence than men (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Mayer et al., 2000), which may give them an advantage in interpreting and using non-verbal cues.

Several studies have investigated the role of non-verbal communication in university settings. For example, a study by Henningsen and Henningsen (2009) found that non-verbal immediacy behaviors, such as eye contact and body orientation, were positively correlated with perceived teacher effectiveness among college students. Another study by Charalambous and

Karageorghis (2010) investigated the relationship between non-verbal communication and academic performance in university students and found that non-verbal cues such as posture and facial expressions were positively correlated with academic success.

There are several theories that attempt to explain why women have superior non-verbal communication abilities. In terms of gender differences in non-verbal communication, several studies have suggested that women tend to be more expressive than men, particularly in terms of facial expressions (LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003). However, there is some evidence to suggest that gender differences in non-verbal communication may be influenced by cultural factors. For example, a study by Klineberg and Hull (1979) found that gender differences in non-verbal communication were less pronounced in Japanese participants compared to American participants.

Also, in the following books, non-verbal communication and gender diversity can be identified. "The Nonverbal Advantage: Secrets and Science of Body Language at Work" by Carol Kinsey Goman - This book explores the role of nonverbal communication in the workplace and how it can impact professional success. The author specifically discusses the unique nonverbal tendencies of women and how they can be leveraged for effective communication.

"The Power of Body Language" by Tonya Reiman discusses body language's influence on communication and provides practical tips for improving nonverbal communication skills. The author examines gender differences in nonverbal communication and how women can use their nonverbal behaviors to convey confidence and assertiveness.

Accordingly, the literature suggests that women tend to be more skilled in non-verbal communication than men, and this difference may be due to a combination of biological, social, and cultural factors. Further research is needed to explore these factors in more detail and identify ways to improve non-verbal communication skills for both men and women. However, understanding the psychological mechanisms that contribute to this difference is crucial for effective communication and interpersonal relationships.

III. Methodology

The study will involve 100 girls and boys aged between 20 and 25. They all represented the two main faculties of the University of Sri Jayawardenepura, Sri Lanka, the Faculty of Management and Commerce and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. A random sample of 50 girls and boys from each faculty would be selected using the random sampling technique. This would ensure that the sample is representative of both faculties, and that each faculty has an equal chance of being represented in the study.

Data Collection Methods

The observation method was used to collect data from students. A few selected groups of students were observed sitting and resting at various places in the university. There, groups of only girls, groups of only boys, and groups of mixed students were observed. Thus, 50 boys and 50 girls were observed in the selected faculties. "Onwuegbuzie states that the observational method is suitable for this type of research. In this type of research, the researcher observes different groups of people without any interference and is not a member of the group" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010).

Data Analysis

After collecting the data, it should be analyzed by various methods. There are generally two methods of data analysis. They are quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. In this research, a qualitative analysis method was used for data analysis. According to this study, same-sex and mixed-sex students randomly observed their communications with each other. During the data collection, students observed non-verbal communication methods such as hand and foot movements, eye contact, maintaining facial expressions, sitting and standing postures, distance and space during conversation, and touching each other.

There were several limitations to this study. First, observation cannot directly test the cause of nonverbal behavior in an uncontrolled environment. Second, it is difficult to generalize the data because groups of students are observed at different locations at random. Similar behaviors of observed students change when they realize they are being observed.

The table below shows a summary of the data obtained from the study on the gender distribution of non-verbal communication differences, which was the main objective of the study.

Types of non-verbal communication	Male group of students	Female group of students	Mixed group of students	
			male	female
hand and leg movements	76%	93%	57%	84%

eye contact	55%	92%	63%	81%
maintaining facial expressions	44%	87%	51%	84%
Sitting posture	49%	74%	58%	74%
Standing posture	92%	88%	72%	65%
distance and space during conversation (yes)	28%	93%	24%	76%
touch	86%	43%	41%	11%

Source: Observations in the research for non-verbal communication, 2022

The table above shows that there are many differences in non-verbal communication between male and female students.

IV. Discussion

In this research, I observed six groups of women. Among the six groups of female students observed, one group had 09 girls and the other group had 08 girls, while the other groups had 06, 09, 07, and 05 girls, respectively. One of these groups was having lunch during the observation. But it was observed that some verbal communication continued through them. They were also observed trying to communicate certain things non-verbally as much as possible while eating. Some of the girls seemed to be communicating with each other without paying much attention to eating. It was observed that they engage in continuous communication with each other through facial expressions and eye contact, although the movement of the limbs is limited. None of the girls in the group found eating to be a barrier to their communication. Because every student in the group did not have verbal communication, they exchanged ideas non-verbally with each other.

The girls in the two other groups observed appeared to be engaged in some academic activity at the time. One girl was observed in both groups trying to explain something to group members. Meanwhile, other girls in the group were also observed responding to it through verbal and non-verbal communication. Some attention was observed in this group compared to the other girls. It was clear from their body movements that the other girls were paying close attention to the girl who was explaining something. The girls' non-verbal communication gestures were intense enough to clearly observe their attention and inattention. It was clear that the girls in the other three groups were engaged in some kind of friendly discussion through their non-verbal gestures. Their expressions showed that everyone was engaged in an open discussion about a very conversational topic. Differences in physical expression of facial expressions, touching of nearby children, eye movements, and hand gestures were seen in these three groups. Their non-verbal communication clearly indicated that they must be discussing some topic of common interest.

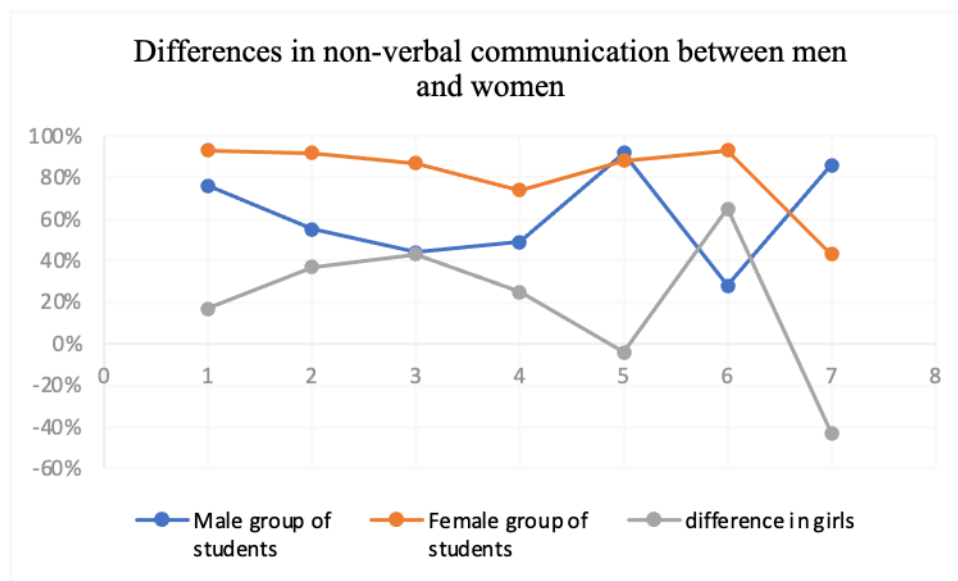
Also, some social facts about Sri Lankan culture are reflected here. In Sri Lankan culture, men and women are not treated differently. This implies that society has confirmed the freedom of women to live very normally anywhere in Sri Lanka, in any social situation.

Overall, male student groups at universities are not as common as female student groups. This is because more than 60% of the total student population of the university is made up of girls. All four male student groups observed were groups of less than ten students. And the duration of their group behavior was shorter than that of the girls' groups. Therefore, in a very short period of time, all their non-verbal communication had to be monitored. Students in three of the five groups were observed standing and communicating. It was more common for most boys to touch each other during communication. Facial expressions were not as well represented in boys as in girls. They could not be seen paying close attention to their discussions. Many members of the groups were seen working with their mobile phones. Therefore, the non-verbal features of communication were largely unrepresented. Heavy non-verbals, even in very brief communication No communication features are displayed. But hand and foot movements were more readily observed with verbal communication.

This study observed four mixed groups, one of which was in the open cafeteria. There were four girls and three boys. The other group sat on the wall on both sides of the main entrance of the university. Another group was in the summer huts built for the students. The last observed mixed group was on the embankment in front of the Faculty of Management. A common feature found in all these mixed student groups was a greater intensity of non-verbal communication than in single-female and single-male groups. Although the overall presentation was higher, the highest communication characteristics were in girls. In mixed-gender groups, both boys and girls were observed to use less non-verbal communication than in same-sex groups. But the common thing that can be seen there is that there are more non-verbal communication gestures in the girl's group compared to the boy's. It was also clear from the mixed groups that girls in particular used more non-verbal communication in their communication.

It may be due to the natural feminine characteristics of women. According to the previous literature investigation, this situation occurs in communication based on basic female characteristics, especially the need to gain attention to oneself in a group and the need to express one's opinion in a group.

Examining the non-verbal communication characteristics used in communicating with each other in male and female groups, as well as in mixed groups, revealed that girls used 26% more non-verbal communication strategies than boys. Girls were 17% ahead of boys in physical activity and non-verbal communication. In non-verbal communication, the non-verbal communication strategy that showed the highest gap between women and men was maintaining distance between each other during communication. It was revealed that girls are more concerned about this, and according to the percentage, it is around 65%. But the concern about the distance between each other in communication was not visible in the boys. Then the unique characteristic that reflected the difference in non-verbal communication between girls and boys was the manipulation of touch and facial expressions. Girls are less likely to touch their peers during communication. But it was clear that they were always trying to show their ideology with a stern expression on their faces. As discussed in the literature review, women have been found to have a larger corpus callosum, the bundle of nerve fibers connecting the two hemispheres of the brain, than men (Witelson, 1989; Gur et al., 1999). The study further supported the idea that a larger corpus callosum allows women to process information more efficiently across the two hemispheres, thereby improving their ability to interpret and use nonverbal cues.



In the literature review for this study, Meyer has discussed that women's emotional intelligence is based on their non-verbal communication, such as smiling, nodding. This fact was well confirmed during the analysis of the research data. Nonverbal communication concepts in this study confirmed that girls, especially boys, are more capable of understanding and managing their own emotions as well as the emotions of others compared to boys. Moreover, when examining the identified data related to body touch, it was also evident that women were more aware of the cultural influence on gender differences. It is not only a social factor but also an intellectual one.

V. Conclusion

According to this study titled A Psychological Study of Non-Verbal Communication Differences Between Females and Males, firstly Nonverbal communication plays a significant role in our daily interactions, and it is important to understand the differences between male and female nonverbal communication patterns. Every part of this study, which was conducted using both male and female university students, confirmed that women were ahead of men in non-verbal communication. Although academics have offered social, biological, and psychological reasons why women use more non-verbal communication tactics compared to men, according to the study, psychological reasons are more common. Women use all these non-verbal communication elements to satisfy their natural characteristics, such as self-attraction, the need to talk more, and the desire to join groups.

But the special point to be mentioned here is that it is difficult to identify the specific reasons for women's frequent use of non-verbal communication strategies only through this kind of observation. Further research in this area is needed to fully understand the complexities of nonverbal communication differences between genders.

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