



A Communication Coding System for Use in High Conflict Interpersonal Relationships

Norah E. Dunbar^{1*}, Jennifer J. Summary², Felecia F. Jordan Jackson³ and Rita Nassuna⁴

¹ Department of Communication, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA, United States, ² Department of Communication Studies and Foreign Languages, Florida SouthWestern College, Fort Myers, FL, United States, ³ School of Communication, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, United States, ⁴ Department of Communication Studies, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS, United States

OPEN ACCESS

Edited by:

Tien Ee Dominic Yeo,
Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong
Kong SAR, China

Reviewed by:

Soni Kewalramani,
Amity University, Lucknow, India
Dale Hample,
Western Illinois University,
United States

*Correspondence:

Norah E. Dunbar
ndunbar@ucsb.edu

Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
Health Communication,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Communication

Received: 27 January 2022

Accepted: 24 March 2022

Published: 19 April 2022

Citation:

Dunbar NE, Summary JJ,
Jackson FFJ and Nassuna R (2022) A
Communication Coding System for
Use in High Conflict Interpersonal
Relationships.
Front. Commun. 7:863960.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2022.863960

Conflict is a natural but uncomfortable part of all human relationships. Researchers and practitioners alike are interested in developing training and therapeutic methods for teaching couples and families healthy conflict management styles. However, the research literature offers little for practitioners in the way of specific verbal and nonverbal “skills” they can teach to their clients and patients. In this paper, we examine the work of Dr. Steven Winer, educator and practitioner in Communication, with a focus on anger management and conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships. We review the research literature on interpersonal conflict and compare it to the advice offered through Dr. Winer’s workshops, which he developed through years of viewing over 4,000 videotapes of communication behavior patterns exhibited by his clients during conflict role-play sessions.

Keywords: conflict interpersonal, nonverbal behavior, relational satisfaction, well-being, couple (spouses)

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is often an inevitable and uneasy phenomenon that all close personal relationships must manage in order to have a successful relationship. Canary et al. (1995) argue that relational partners must learn to negotiate conflict because the risk of psychologically or physically hurting each other is real, with potentially long-lasting outcomes. Managing conflict effectively has been at the forefront for researchers and practitioners who develop training and therapeutic methods for teaching friends, couples, and families healthy conflict management styles (Sillars et al., 1984; Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002). However, researchers and practitioners may not often interact and so the extent to which practitioners who teach applied conflict skills inform and are informed by empirical research is not well-known. In this paper, we examine the work of Dr. Steven Winer, educator and practitioner in communication¹, who conducted highly successful workshops, including training programs focused on improving communication associated with resolving conflict and managing anger in romantic interpersonal relationships.

¹This team of researchers was assembled by Dr. Steven Winer who taught us about his methods, showed us videos of his workshop sessions, and played practice games with us to teach us about his methods. He supplied a write-up of his RCT method but was not involved in the empirical literature review or our evaluation of his program. References to Winer’s method refer to those in his self-published 2021 book and also are drawn from personal communications with the author.

Winer approaches human communication as a systems approach. This system includes the verbal and nonverbal behavior, the muscles used in each behavior (Ekman, 2004), the biochemicals such as epinephrine, norepinephrine, and the psychology of communication. The focus of this paper is primarily on the verbal and nonverbal coding system developed by Winer (see Winer, 2021, for more details). The coding system he implemented is used to evaluate the communication behavior of clients in strong defensive and supportive conflict situations (Gibb, 1961). It is based on over 35 years of testing, observation, and evaluation with more than 4,000 clients in conflict situations. He used an iterative approach and modified his coding scheme continuously through trial-and-error with his clients.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CODING SYSTEM

After many years of developing his coding system using observational methods, Winer estimated that there were at least 40 different communication behaviors that can be used in conflict situations. This coding system isolates which specific communication behavior(s) a person uses to code and decode (interpret) safety and danger in a strong conflict situation.² This coding system is helpful in identifying which verbal and nonverbal behaviors contribute to success or failure in conflict situations. It also allows one to know what behaviors to employ themselves and which ones they need from their partner to resolve conflict successfully. These behaviors can include verbal statements, vocal cues, eye gaze, blinking rate, eye contact, facial and body movement, and spatial distance. Most use one primary behavior and one and two subsidiary behaviors, based on individual tendencies. Based on this coding system, Winer developed a training program for effectively resolving conflict and communicating anger in interpersonal relationships, which he refers to as Relationship Communication Training (RCT). The training program was originally designed for romantic couples but has been extended to other contexts such as helping professionals in the customer service industry and effectively redirecting bullies in elementary schools.

Much of Winer's work is based on empirical literature in interpersonal conflict, but that connection had not previously been made apparent. Thus, our goals here are two-fold. First, to connect his techniques to theory and research findings on conflict in close personal relationships; second, to examine the communication techniques in his practice that compose his coding system which are used to identify and defuse anger and other negative emotions during conflict. We believe that by doing so, we can help narrow the divide between theory and practice in communication and conflict resolution, while adding another tool that provides specific skills that can be learned to successfully navigate relationships in conflict.

²By "strong conflict," Winer means a conflict that is highly emotionally arousing with negative emotions like anger and fear preventing meaningful resolutions. We use this term to be consistent with his terminology.

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF WINER'S RELATIONSHIP COMMUNICATION TRAINING (RCT)

To connect practice and theory, we begin with a general history of Winer's training program. In 1984, Winer began leading workshops in California and New York. The participant demographics included middle to upper class, and mostly college-educated adults from a variety of ethnic groups. Clients were typically aged 30 or older and included singles and married couples, although all had been or were currently in long-term romantic relationships. All clients stressed that they wanted more in-depth information on how to effectively and constructively express anger and manage conflict while building stronger interpersonal relationships.

The RCT Series

The RCT is composed of seven series (each briefly described below), with each series containing several workshops, which involve identifying, understanding, learning, and changing the verbal and nonverbal behaviors clients use in strong interpersonal conflict. Each series had skills goals focusing on specific verbal and nonverbal communication and behavior that should or should not be employed to effectively manage conflict in interpersonal contexts. The training involved videotaping each client to identify the verbal statements and nonverbal behaviors in order to make clients aware of their own behaviors and help them adopt different more productive behaviors. Clients were encouraged to use their communication skills outside of the training and to share the outcome with the group in subsequent workshop meetings.

The goal of Series One was to increase the awareness and understanding of aggressive (threatening), passive (withdrawing), and assertive (non-judgmental) behaviors. In this series, each client was video recorded as they role-played a conflict situation. The recording was reviewed and they received feedback on their behavior that might be seen as aggressive, passive, and assertive. By the end of this series, each participant had specific examples of their own nonverbal and verbal behaviors. This information is the foundation for all other series.

Series Two focused on active listening. Winer identified verbal and nonverbal behavior needed to effectively listen to a partner's thoughts and feelings. Further, he addressed how to prepare oneself to listen assertively to a partner, and how to ascertain when it is safe to listen. Series Three focused on how one's past can influence the current conflict. Winer explained how in the session's strong conflict situation, we often inappropriately react to our partner, confusing them with a childhood memory, distorting them as the source of their reaction, and using the same passive or aggressive messages as we did in childhood. Series Four addressed the emotion of anger. The focus was to understand the significance of anger and what is usually underlying the anger (e.g., fear, pain, and/or an unmet need). Series Five focused on sharing feelings clearly and assertively. A goal was to teach the clients to share their feelings but not try to change or rescue them.

A step-by-step regression process was taught in this series to get to the real source of one's reaction from the past.

Series Six brings the previous five series together. The speaker would be asked to recall an event from the past where they started using passive or aggressive behavior. After going through the previous series, the sender would usually be more equipped to bridge the gap between the past and today in order to move on from the past to their partner today. Series Seven was the last in the series and was designed to bring clarity and healing from one's past (in childhood) to function better in relationships today. The goal is to help clients avoid reacting to their partner as the source of their anger, but more likely a trigger, and to make sure they are able to use this training in their everyday life to better manage and alleviate relational conflict.

RCT Sessions

Each of Winer's seven RCT series (described above) lasts about 8 weeks. Individuals or couples sign up for a series of weekly sessions which meet in groups of roughly eight people. Sessions last 3 h each and are conducted based on Winer's series training manual, described below. The reason for meeting in groups was for participants to provide and receive feedback on one another's communication and to help one another learn more assertive communication styles.

The first half of each session is used to present information on a specific communication skill described by Winer. During the second half of each session, clients volunteer to role-play conflict situations familiar to both participants. For example, in one scenario, one partner needs more attention and the other wants less. If that session is focused on vocal cues, Winer would tell the group to concentrate on voice elements displayed including, volume, speed, pausing, monotone, vocal patterns, and vocal variety, which had been described earlier in the session. All role-plays are video recorded with a split-screen so that following the role-play interactants' behavior can be viewed simultaneously for the purpose of comparing and analyzing each participant's "encoding and decoding" patterns (i.e., how they displayed and perceived their own and their role-play partner's verbal and nonverbal behavior during the conflict). For each video recording, with the exception of vocalics, the camera is positioned to record each role-play participant's specific behavior. Close ups are also recorded of various portions of the face including the mouth and jaw muscle, the eyes, and the movement of the torso. Because vocalics are not physically observable, when they are analyzed, a blank screen is featured so as not to have the visual image affect the reviewers' perception of the voice.

The first step involves role-playing a conflict situation, reviewing a recording of that role-play, and providing feedback from the participants, the session's clients, and Winer to the role-play participants. The feedback is focused on what behaviors helped or prevented the resolution of the conflict and whether the behavior was seen as aggressive (threatening or intimidating), passive (helplessness), or assertive (non-judgmental). Step two involves repeating the role-play and incorporating the suggested behavior changes based on the feedback. This role-play is also recorded.

Recording and reviewing the conflict exchanges are done to assess how participants interpret and express their emotions through verbal phrases and nonverbal cues. Following the analyses, Winer and the group give each client detailed feedback on any passive, aggressive, or assertive verbal and nonverbal behavior. Based on this feedback, the role-play participant fills out their conflict situation evaluation sheet (see **Appendix A**). After all communication behavior is evaluated, Winer, the group, and the client, assess the primary and secondary behaviors associated with aggression, passiveness, and assertiveness. The video recordings are given to each participant to take home, review, and return for the next session.

Theoretical Support

Winer's communication training is based on two theoretical frameworks which he developed by drawing on a variety of literatures. In this section, we discuss the two theoretical frameworks and how they were used in developing the RCT coding system and training program.

Theoretical Framework One: Defining Passive, Aggressive, and Assertive Behavior

The research on interpersonal conflict, identifies three styles of communication behaviors in conflict situations (Pipas and Jaradat, 2010; Maximo et al., 2011; Bocar, 2017; Tripathy, 2018). An *aggressive* communication style is made up of a domineering attitude and manipulation, commanding things to fall into place (Pipas and Jaradat, 2010; Tripathy, 2018). In a *passive* communication style, the communicator is indirect, always agrees, does not speak up, and appears hesitant to communicate their feelings (Bocar, 2017; Tripathy, 2018). An *assertive* style emphasizes dialogue, patience, respect for others, collaboration, as well as a willingness to hear each other out (Pipas and Jaradat, 2010; Maximo et al., 2011). The aggressive person shifts the cause of the conflict to their partner's responsibility. A passive person avoids conflict. Both of those behaviors give messages with multiple interpretations, therefore lack clarity and rarely help to resolve conflict. On the other hand, an assertive person shares information clearly without judgment. Non-judgmental information is often helpful in resolving conflict.

Winer describes aggressive behavior as those that seem threatening. It can be manifested by one person trying to change someone's actions, thoughts, and/or feelings, or attempting to convince their partner that they are the problem and that the partner needs to change to resolve the conflict. Aggressive communication can be in the form of a negative verbal statement, for example, using statements of certainty, and attempting to show that they know how the receiver feels better than the receiver themselves; a behavior akin to mind reading (see Coan and Gottman, 2007). Nonverbally, it can be expressed through behaviors such as speaking loud and fast, staring, closed mouth, fast and quick body movement, and being too close physically. An aggressive person is often closed-minded, a poor listener, has difficulty seeing the other person's point of view, often achieves goals at others' expense, is domineering overpowering, bullying, puts others down, doesn't acknowledge others point of view, and tells others who they think they are (Bocar, 2017; Tripathy, 2018).

Passive behavior is often expressed through withdrawal and can be displayed by enacting placating behavior, giving in during a conflict to avoid an argument, avoiding or not addressing the conflict, and showing disinterest. Nonverbally, it can be displayed through behaviors such as a timid voice, looking away, a closed mouth facial expression, little-to-no body movement, and leaning away from the receiver (Maximo et al., 2011). Winer draws from Bocar (2017) who states that, a passive person doesn't express true feelings, appears to believe that others have more rights than they do, hesitates, is apologetic, trusts others but not oneself, doesn't express their own needs and feelings, allows others to make decisions for them, doesn't get what they want, tries to sit on both sides of the fence to avoid conflict, clams up when feeling are treated unfairly, complains instead of takes action, and is self-effacing.

In comparison to passive and aggressive, assertive behavior involves handling conflict proactively. Both speaker and receiver communicate their statements without multiple interpretations, and neither avoids nor makes their partner responsible for the conflict. Assertive nonverbal conflict style includes gentle vocal cues such as a varied rate of speech, brief pauses, eye gazes but not staring, mouth slightly opened (in a relaxed manner), slow and gentle body movement, and physical distance between interactants that is not too close or far away. According to Bocar (2017), an assertive person knows that assertiveness doesn't mean you always win, but that you handled the situation as effectively as possible. Further, they contend that assertive individuals understand that they have rights and so do others, they state observations, avoid labeling and judgments, express themselves directly and honestly, and share their feelings and desires as soon as possible. They also take appropriate action toward getting what they want without denying the rights of others.

Winer reports that when most of his clients start the training, they tend to use passive and/or aggressive behavior in conflict situations. Winer also observed a so-called passive and aggressive dance of clients during conflict situations. Mellody (1989) refers to the dance as a co-addictive relationship between a "runner" and a "chaser," or a flight/fight ritual. Caughlin and Scott (2010) refer to this communication style as the demand-withdraw pattern in which one person demands or approaches while the other withdraws or avoids. Winer suggests that this interaction between the passive person and aggressive person usually prevents conflict from being resolved. The passive and aggressive dance happens, for example, when the aggressive person wants more time and closeness, and feels angry, hurt, and uncared for. They often become more aggressive and intimidating in their verbal behavior, pushing the passive person away. The passive person feels trapped or threatened and pulls away; thus, we have the fight/flight pattern. The dance dynamics are often counterproductive to both parties. The aggressive person might engage a loud and fast voice to get the passive person's attention. The passive person, in response, retreats by using a monotone voice and long pauses or silence. This dance can operate through words as well as through nonverbal communication such as vocalics, facial expressions, body movement, and use of physical space. This relational dynamic may make conflict more difficult to resolve.

In Winer's workshops, he suggests that clients become aware of if they tend to fight and/or flee, and acknowledge how passive and aggressive behaviors are present in their relationship. Here they learn to engage in more constructive assertive communication skills which will often stop the destructive fight and flight patterns.

Theoretical Framework Two: How One's Past Effects Present Relationships

The second theory of the RCT is based on that notion that a person learns their communication skills from parents, parent figures, or the primary adult custodians in their lives during their developmental years (Bowlby, 1958; Guerrero, 2017). According to Bradshaw (1988) and Goleman (2006), children learn early the assertive verbal and nonverbal behavior that signal rewards, such as love and caring, as well as passive or aggressive behaviors that signal danger with emotional and physical abuse. This is also the foundation of Bowlby's (1958) attachment theory that suggests our childhood caregivers create styles of attachment that continue to our adult relationships. Further, Roisman et al. (2001) found correlations between how adolescents described their relationship with their parents and how well they interacted with their romantic partners as adults. Consequently, when Dr. Winer asks his clients if their communication patterns are similar in any way to one or both parents, more times than not, the clients agree. When Winer asks, "do the partners you choose have similar communication skills to one or both of your parents?" His answer again is yes. Breaking free from unproductive communication styles learned in childhood is a challenge but is a strategy Winer uses to teach more constructive conflict management and anger expressions.

One of the assumptions of attachment theory is that secure attachments (in childhood) help us learn how to give the appropriate emotional response during interactions with others. It follows that absent these secure attachments, it may be difficult to respond in an appropriate way, especially during highly emotional interactions such as interpersonal conflict. Further, Infante et al. (1984) ground their model on Bandura's (1973) perspective of social learning and aggression, suggesting that patterns of verbal aggression (VA) can be learned. To this point, Infante et al. asserted that exposure to people who have used verbal aggression in conflict, may lead to the assumption that verbal aggression is acceptable and appropriate, thus the observer may model this behavior (i.e. use verbal aggression) in their own interpersonal relationships.

There is also evidence that the way parents communicate can affect adult children's (romantic) relational satisfaction (Sandor and Rosenthal, 1986; Davis and Latty-Mann, 1987). Parents or primary caregivers may use passive and or aggressive skills and pass these patterns on to their children. These destructive behaviors are often used by the child throughout their life and will likely be passed on to the next generation (McNaughton and Niedzwiecki, 2000). Martin and Anderson (1997), for example, studied two aggressive communication traits, VA, a destructive trait, and argumentativeness (ARG), a constructive trait. When examining maternal influences on the traits, they found a positive correlation between a mother's level of use of these traits, and

their daughters' and sons' levels of use of these traits. Similarly, Weber and Anderson (1997) found that despite fathers using more VA overall, it was mothers' use of VA messages that predicted their adult children's use of these messages in their romantic relationships.

Physical and emotional abuse can result from passive and aggressive behavior. Physical abuse may be easier to identify and describe than emotional abuse because of the explicit physical signs that emotional abuse may not have. Winer suggests that emotional abuse can be verbal or nonverbal attacking and withdrawing behavior such as the words someone uses, the person's voice (e.g., rate volume, vocal variety/monotone, etc.), facial expressions (e.g., looking angry or disinterested), eye contact (e.g., staring or looking away), body movement (e.g., too strong, too fast, or no movement), or physical distance (e.g., too close or too far away). When emotional abuse is manifested through these communication behaviors, it can lead to blaming the conflict on the other person, the other person feeling as if they are the problem, decreased self-esteem, and increased fear or anxiety. In conflict situations, one way that Winer helps clients overcome destructive patterns is to help them distinguish their parental relationships (which he calls a source of the conflict) from their current romantic relationships (which he refers to as the trigger of the conflict).

Distinguishing Between the Trigger and the Source

In Winer's work on conflict in romantic relationships, he uses Bradshaw's (1988) and Goleman's (2006) conceptualization of trigger and source to explain patterns of behavior often displayed by partners. According to Winer, a source is the person from whom rewards and punishments are learned. In childhood, the source is usually one or both parents. A trigger is a person they are (currently) in a relationship with that uses similar communication patterns as those from their childhood. For example, the speaker with painful childhood memories of their own may react strongly when they observe the same or similar behaviors in their romantic relational partner as they did in childhood. They confuse the trigger (their partner) for the source (their parent). Goleman (2006) argues that the distortion between trigger and source can happen within a fraction of a second. This process is rarely conscious to either party. Winer calls this process a Relationship Hijacking, because the parent is not present in the conflict but is affecting its outcome. You are being hijacked by your past without knowing you are distorting the present conflict, making the conflict more difficult to resolve. According to Bradshaw (1988) and Goleman (2006), the same conflict and results will likely continue to reoccur until the receiver can recognize that their partner is a trigger, not the source of their feeling. According to Winer, many clients said that understanding the difference between a source and a trigger was one of the most important concepts learned in the training program. He also emphasizes that one way for his clients to escape the past is to differentiate between their thoughts about the receiver (or cognitions) and feelings toward the receiver (or emotions).

The Difference Between Thoughts and Feelings

In strong conflict, the speaker will often believe they are sharing a feeling but instead they are sharing their thoughts about their partner. In his first session of training, Winer uses an exercise that clarifies the difference between the two. Winer role-plays an angry defensive conflict situation where it is Winer against the group. After each response from a client, Winer tells them their comment or feelings are wrong and they need to change to resolve the conflict situation. After the role-play he writes on a board displaying a "T" representing a thought and an "F" representing a feeling. He then asks clients, what they are feeling toward him. Each time a thought is shared about Winer's behavior, he puts a check under the T; each time a feeling is shared, he puts a check under the F. Usually, the ratio is approximately 8 to 2, thoughts to feelings, respectively. Winer then defines the difference between a thought and a feeling in a conflict situation. Winer explains that when a person talks about the receiver's behavior, they are talking about their thoughts about the receiver's behavior. If they are talking about one's reaction toward the receiver, they are talking about their feelings toward the receiver. Further, he explains, that a statement that starts with the word "You" can only be a thought about the receiver's behavior. A simple example is the phrase, "You make me angry." Many people will see this statement as a feeling; however, when we recognize that we are referring to the receiver's behavior and not the person sending the message, we understand that based on Winer's conceptualization, we are sharing a thought, rather than a feeling to the receiver. Understanding the difference is a key to Winer's goal of teaching more constructive and healthy conflict styles.

THE VERBAL AND NONVERBAL CODING SYSTEM IN RCT

Winer's training program focuses on the specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors a person uses to interpret danger or safety in strong conflict situations. Through role-playing and video recording a client's own behavior, they see the specific behavior they use and how that behavior prevents or helps to resolve conflict. By looking at what behavior a person uses to interpret safety and danger and to share a feeling in response to safety and danger, one can identify the specific behavior a person uses in a strong conflict situation. Winer calls this "a communication coding and decoding system." By this system, a person can tell whether they are going passive, aggressive, or assertive, know what behavior to change to become assertive, and what behavior they need from their partner to feel safer to share and to listen. We will now examine the communication behavior of Winer's coding in his training program in more detail and compare it to the existing literature.

When people communicate, they are expressing their emotional state with their nonverbal behavior and spoken words. Bateson (1951) referred to content and relationship levels as report and command aspects of communication. Reports convey information, and commands refer to how the message should be taken. It is often through nonverbal

communication that the command information is channeled. As people move their hands, direct their eyes, raise their voices, assume a variety of postures, and adjust their spatial distance, they amplify and support the verbal statements they are making. Historical studies in nonverbal communication, often divide nonverbal cues into a variety of “codes” such as the voice (paralanguage or paralinguistic), the body and facial expressions (kinesics), eye behavior (oculesics), and personal space (proxemics), simultaneously recognizing that nonverbal cues must be examined in relation to each other and to one’s verbal communication (Jones and LeBaron, 2002).

Verbal Statements

Verbal statements can be key determinants of the outcome of the conflict situation. Winer examined various types of verbal phrases and their effects on conflict and its outcomes. One example of this is to distinguish between “I” statements and “You” statements.

In conflict situations, most practitioners and researchers label “I” statements as assertive and “You” statements as aggressive but without empirical (Bippus and Young, 2005; Winer, 2021). Simmons et al. (2005) reported that a higher proportion of statements starting with I-language and a lower proportion of you-language was associated with better problem solving and higher marital satisfaction. Indeed, Wood (2016) indicated that “I” language is a cornerstone of effective conflict management” (p. 268); while Biesen et al. (2016) found that more frequent you-language during face-to-face conflict discussion was negatively associated with the interaction quality of couples. Consequently, when using “I-statements,” one takes responsibility for the part they played in the disagreement and displays openness for deep listening and resolution.

Winer teaches his clients that an interpersonal conflict situation involves, a sender and a receiver, and an assertive style conveys clarity where both parties need to be represented. That means the speaker includes themselves, using the word “I.” Since it is a personal exchange with another, the receiver needs to be included with the word “You” causing it to become an “I-You” statement. “I” statements, without the word “You” can have multiple meanings in a personal exchange because the recipient is unclear. For example, “I’m angry with this situation,” could mean, “I’m angry with you” but it might mean “I’m angry with someone else or with the world” or “I’m angry with myself for this situation.” This is why Winer trains clients to use “I-You” and not simply “I.”

Winer also addresses the use of “We” statements which he argues can also have multiple meanings. The phrase “We should be more caring,” for example, could convey, “I want to be more caring to you” or “I want you to be more caring to me,” or “I don’t feel cared for by you,” or “I think you need more caring from me,” among other interpretations.

Winer agrees that in conflict situations “You” statements can have multiple interpretations, and moreover, can place blame directly on the receiver. The statement, “You make me angry,” for example, can imply “I’m angry with you,” or “The things you do make me angry.” Further, when the statement places blame and responsibility on the receiver, it is likely to make the receiver feel

defensive, resentful, and be less likely to want to “make peace” and resolve the conflict. This is similar to Gottman’s (1976) concept of constructive leveling, which emphasizes phrasing one’s emotions to how the sender feels in response to the receiver’s behavior. According to Winer, a receiver is more receptive to hearing how the speaker feels toward them when the phrase begins with “I” followed by a feeling and the word “You” representing the receiver, than to hear a negative “You” statement that assigns blame or criticism for the receiver’s actions (e.g., Stieg, 2017).

Nonverbal Messages

Verbal messages do not exist in a vacuum and are not solely responsible for relational outcomes. Rather, nonverbal messages play a major role in how meaning is interpreted during conflict as evidenced by the work of a number of scholars (e.g., Manusov, 1995; Carton et al., 1999; Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002; Burgoon et al., 2009). In Winer’s observation of video recordings of his clients, nonverbal behaviors and verbal messages were used to determine whether the situation was perceived by the receiver of the messages as safe or dangerous. The nonverbal behaviors that were examined included facial expressions, body movement/posture and gestures, eye behavior, gaze, eye contact, blinking rate (oculesics), vocalics (paralinguistic), and personal space (proxemics/spatial behavior). These behaviors, as they appeared in Winer’s observations, are described below and discussed in the context of the empirical literature in interpersonal conflict.

Facial Expressions

The face is part of what is known as the “kinesics” code of nonverbal communication, which has a rich history of research (see for example Burgoon et al., 2009; Yoo and Noyes, 2016). Some of the early work regarding facial expressions was done by psychologist Paul Ekman (1997) who documented culturally universal facial expressions and created a coding scheme called the Facial Action Coding System. With this system, the face is divided into particular movements or action units (AUs). In particular, Winer’s training honed in on facial expressions and movement such as tightening or relaxing the masseter jaw muscles when experiencing anger and expressing aggression. This most closely aligns with Ekman’s AU 31 the “jaw clencher” and perhaps AU 29, the “jaw thrust.”

Although research examining action units and how they correspond to particular facial expressions is limited, Gottman’s extensive research with couples in his so called “love lab” at the University of Washington identified some of these behaviors. For example, Gottman’s observations suggested that a clenched jaw in several negative interactions might be associated with displaying contempt, belligerence, and anger (see Driver et al., 2003 for a brief summary of the Gottman Lab studies). Goldstein and Thau (2004) suggest that making couples aware of their tight facial muscles and clenched jaw can give people the insights they need to be more relaxed and honest about their hidden emotions.

There is evidence that individuals who can accurately recognize facial expressions in others and themselves report higher levels of satisfaction in their interpersonal relationships (Gottman and Levenson, 1992; Carton et al., 1999; Yoo and

Noyes, 2016). According to Yoo and Noyes (2016), during a conflict episode, being able to identify the facial expressions of negative emotions (e.g., anger, contempt, disgust, fear, and sadness) could assist with conflict resolution. They suggest that understanding and recognizing a person's facial expressions during conflicts can assist with adjusting one's own behavior, relaxing the masseter muscle, and overall, communicating more effectively.

Eye Gaze

Eye behavior, also known as oculosics, is crucial to the experience of intimacy (Andersen et al., 2006). Researchers have long distinguished various types of eye behavior, including "gazes" and "glances" which are distinguished by their length (Sillars et al., 1982), eye "widening" which is when the eyelids open and expose white around the iris (Noller, 2005), "mutual gaze" which refers to two people gazing at each other's faces, and "staring" which is a gaze that persists regardless of the behavior of the other person (Kleinke, 1986). Gaze influences a variety of judgments of our conversational partner: attentiveness, competence, credibility, dominance, and emotional expression (Kleinke, 1986).

In Winer's practice, he suggests that when resolving conflict, a speaker should engage in looking without staring. Passive individuals often "look away" and have rapid blinking, while aggressive individuals often use staring and limited blinking. This comports to what we see in the research literature. Weger et al. (2014) found that active listening resulted in higher perceived understanding and greater conversational satisfaction. In a study by Bodie and Jones (2012), high nonverbal immediacy, which involves several nonverbal behaviors, including maintaining eye contact most of the time, was seen as a supportive listening strategy. "Stonewalling" refers to the total lack of listening behaviors during couples' interactions including gaze avoidance. According to the findings in Shapiro and Gottman's (2004) study, stonewalling has been shown to include the avoidance of eye contact or "monitoring gaze where the person glances at the partner occasionally and quickly looks away" (p. 197). Driver and Gottman (2004) describe this as a passive response in which minimal effort is made to reply to a partner's bid for communication. One couple in Winer's training knew they had a fight and flight relationship but could not understand why this pattern occurred so frequently until they saw their video recording with eye contact. He would consistently look away with fast eye blinking. She, on the other hand, would stare. When one person stares and the other avoids eye contact, we again have the making of the flight/fight communication interaction.

Body Movement

The kinesics code of nonverbal communication typically involves features of the eyes and face (covered above), as well as the movement of the body, such as gestures, posture, and gait. Gestures that occur only during speech are synchronized with linguistic units, often perform text functions like speech, and so are considered a similar psychological process to speech production. They are generally not interpretable in the absence of speech (unlike emblematic gestures that have distinct meaning),

are individual and spontaneous, and are interpretable across cultures (McNeill, 1985).

Winer differentiates between fast and quick, and very slow/or no gestures. He indicated that during conflict, passive individuals use little-to-no body movement; whereas aggressive nonverbal behaviors tend to be threatening, attacking, and involve quick or rapid body movements. In his workshops, Winer would often playback the video on fast forward when studying body movement, making the movements more apparent. The passive person's movements were typically so few or small that when viewing the video, they often did not see any movement and thought they were looking at a still frame video. In comparison, the more aggressive participants, used more gestures and more quick and threatening movement. Both passive and aggressive individuals participated in fight/flight interaction patterns with their partner. Research gauging the rapidity of movement is relatively sparse, but generally, results map on to the openness and closedness which is often seen in the Gottman laboratory (e.g., Driver et al., 2003; Driver and Gottman, 2004). Clearly, more research on the rapidity of movements and perceptions of aggressiveness, passiveness, and assertiveness is needed. This insight could contribute significantly to the body of literature on managing conflict in interpersonal relationships.

Proxemics

A leading pioneer of the study of how space affects human interactions, Edward T. Hall, coined the term proxemics (Beebe et al., 2016). He identified four spatial zones in non-conflict situations: intimate space (0–1½ feet), personal space (1½–4 feet), social space (4–12 feet), and public space (12 feet and beyond). The space desired for interactions is highly variable and context-dependent (Beebe et al., 2016). Hall posited that by analyzing the distance between two people, one can gain better insight into the relationship. More specifically, proxemics cues can indicate the level of intimacy or affinity between individuals. As Mehrabian suggests, "standing close to rather than far away from a person, or leaning toward rather away from him or her is indicative of liking in our culture" (as cited by Gamble and Gamble, 2014, p. 96).

Winer looked at spatial distance in conflict situations as different than in non-conflict situations. His advice to stand "not too close and not too far apart when in conflict," corresponds with Burgoon's early work on personal space violations (e.g., Burgoon and Jones, 1976). Maintaining an expected space distance, as determined in large part by the individuals, the relationship of the interaction partners, and the context, is more likely to lead to positive relational outcomes than violating these spatial expectations.

Based on his own observations of participants in his training sessions, Winer adds that spatial distance also affects whether or not the participants are engaging in aggressive, passive, or assertive behaviors. In conflict situations, aggressive spatial behaviors can include encroaching upon one's space by being extremely close to the participants. Further, when a person enters another's personal space, it can indicate status and/or dominance (e.g., Knapp et al., 2014). Winer states that aggressive or passive spatial behavior usually makes it more difficult to resolve conflict.

Conversely, this closeness in proximity during conflict tends to produce adrenaline and can threaten others involved. During conflict episodes, this information can help assist with analyzing nonverbal behavior to determine why people are displaying negative or positive emotions toward one another.

Vocalics

Vocalics (i.e., Paralinguistics) is the study of how we use our voice (not the content of our words) to communicate. It includes characteristics such as volume, rate, pitch, pauses, silences, and vocal variety. In his book, Winer (2021) described vocalic-related reactions in the escalation and de-escalation of conflict in interpersonal relationships as including increased or decreased volume, rate, pausing, interruptions, hesitations, monotonal vocalics, and vocal variety in speech patterns. These vocal cues convey assertiveness, aggressiveness, or passiveness, depending on how and/or when they are used.

In his training program, Winer describes the feeling of anger as being among the core underpinning emotions in conflict. According to Scherer (1986), when it comes to expressing anger aggressively, it is associated with higher rates of speech, little to no pausing between speaker and receiver, and a raised pitch. Passive anger or what some call cold anger, is associated with a lower voice pitch that is hard to hear, long pauses, a very slow rate, and monotone vocalics “characterized by lower levels of arousal” (Biassoni et al., 2016, p. 2). Finally, assertiveness is associated with gentle volume and pitch that is not too loud, is easy to hear, a varied rate, is not fast or slow, vocal variety, and pausing. It is prudent to consider that the same (verbal) message can have different meanings, nuanced by the various vocal channels by which the message is relayed. Infante et al. (1996) associated an affirming style with a variety of nonverbal behaviors including the vocal characteristic of a relaxed or gentle voice. On the contrary, verbal and nonverbal passive or aggressive behaviors expressing a lack of or lowered attention toward the relational partner, unfriendliness, and tenseness, are associated with aggression and a non-affirming communicator style (Infante et al., 1996).

THE RESULTS OF WINER'S COMMUNICATION TRAINING PROGRAM: ANECDOTAL EXAMPLES

The amount of change that occurred in Winer's training program was remarkable as reported by his clients. These transformations are evident based on video observations of relational partners, customer service representatives with customers, and elementary school students' interactions with peers and educators. The anecdotal examples given show how powerful this communication behavior (i.e., RCT) can begin effectively managing conflict. One client, for example, began the training having anger issues, was not relaxed, was passive, used “I” and “We” statements (neither clearly identifying the receiver), shared thoughts and not feelings, saw people in his relationship, including his wife, as the source of his anger and not a trigger, vocally had very long pauses, monotone voice, did not display body or facial movement, and would rarely look at

the other person during interactions. By the end of the training, he used “I-You” statements, shared his feelings clearly, was able to remember the real sources of his abuse, his voice was gentle and easy to listen to, and his body motion was slow and gentle. Further, he was able to share his anger with people who he cared about and get them to listen to him to resolve conflict successfully. He shared: “Before this training, I didn't think it was possible to see this kind of change in such a short period of time. My change is remarkable.” Another person shared that before the training she was never able to listen to someone sharing anger without taking their anger personally. That changed following the training. Another client that was very aggressive and used sharp body movements said that before the training she would have one fight after the other with her daughter. Midway through the training, she shared a conversation with her daughter in which she slowed down the body movement and made adjustments based on the feedback from Winer and the group. She reported that when she ended the conversation, her daughter came up to her and said, “Mommy I love you.” which she rarely said before.

In another context, a fourth grader who would constantly get into fights and bully others, was required to go through the training program. He had three other students that made sure he used the communication skills when he got angry with another student. Not only did he stop bullying others, but he made friends with others that he had bullied, and got praise from his teacher. One unanticipated consequence which Winer did not expect is that the helpers also started to use the communication skill as well as sibling and parents. One student said his relationship with this dad improved significantly when he used what he learned in the training. A customer service representative for a major tech company constantly got complaints from customers. He was also very resistant to the training. He turned around so much, that his supervisor and manager complimented him on how great he was at handling difficult customers. In fact, when colleagues would have difficult customers, many times they would go to him for help.

The RCT has had a profound effect on many of Winer's clients anecdotally. More systematic research is needed into the direct effects on the clientele of Dr. Winer and others like them. Conducting an evaluation of Winer's methods or the responses to his workshops was not our purpose here. Rather, our goal was to draw a connection between what practitioners like Winer are doing in their everyday practice and what the research literature tells us about effective communication during interpersonal conflict. Ultimately, we want to illuminate the work of practitioners, like Winer, as an invitation for further systematic research of real-world problem-solving in conflict resolution training.

CONCLUSIONS

Communication is a broad discipline that involves the use of quantitative and qualitative methods to develop theories and concepts that can lead to increased competence and skill in human interactions (Braithwaite et al., 2015). Winer's approach in investigating communication and conflict in interpersonal

relationships was developed through observation and encourages the use of checklist evaluations for interactants to identify and examine one's behavior. It is Winer's contention that the practical methods used in his training have proven to be successful in managing conflict in a variety of interpersonal contexts including romantic and marital partnerships, friendships, educational settings, and in the workplace.

The individuals and relational partners who attend Steven Winer's workshops often desire assistance in breaking a pattern of unproductive conflict management strategies in their relationships. It is important, therefore, to identify some of the behaviors that may contribute to these destructive patterns, teach others how to recognize them, then give them alternative more affirming, and immediate replacement behaviors. Indeed, in any interpersonal interaction and probably more so during the conflict, the relational aspect of the message is paramount to determining what the interactants are relaying, feeling, and consequently, how they will respond to one another to maintain and heal a relationship moving forward. While practitioners like Winer often rely on their own observations, researchers and practitioners can guide one another to find the most productive methods to manage conflict. It is imperative to reiterate that the goal here is not to embark on the impossible task of eliminating all interpersonal conflict, nor suppressing negative emotion. Rather, our aim is to help bridge the gap between theory and practice, and provide empirical support for another tool, Winer's coding system, that will help people become effective in

their interpersonal relationships during the conflict. Describing communication and behavior and grounding it in theory is an important step to this end. As the clients in Winer's training demanded, it is essential to provide specific verbal and nonverbal skills that will give them the choice to express emotions, but in a way that leads to more satisfying interpersonal relationships. Our analysis suggests that Winer's system as developed through his training is ripe for further exploration. The next step is to further put his system to the test for more empirical support.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

ND, JS, FJ, and RN all supplied background literature. ND, JS, and FJ conducted the analysis and evaluation. All authors contributed to the writing of this paper and approved the submitted version.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank Dr. Steven Winer for his assistance in the background research for this article. This project could not have been conducted without his assistance.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2022.863960/full#supplementary-material>

REFERENCES

- Andersen, P. A., Guerrero, L. K., and Jones, S. M. (2006). "Nonverbal behavior in intimate interactions and intimate relationships," in *The Sage Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds V. Manusov, and M. L. Patterson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc), 259–277. doi: 10.4135/9781412976152.n14
- Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bateson, G. (1951). "Information and codification: a philosophical approach," in *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*, eds J. Reusch, and G. Bateson (New York, NY: W. W. Norton), 168–211.
- Beebe, S., Beebe, S., and Ivy, D. (2016). *Communication: Principles for a Lifetime, 6th edn*. London: Pearson.
- Biassoni, F., Balzarotti, S., Giamporcaro, M., and Ciceri, R. (2016). Hot or cold anger? Verbal and vocal expression of anger while driving in a simulated anger-provoking scenario. *SAGE Open* 6, 1–10. doi: 10.1177/2158244016658084
- Biesen, J. N., Schooler, D. E., and Smith, D. A. (2016). What a difference a pronoun makes: I/We versus you/me and worried couples' perceptions of their interaction quality. *J. Lang. Soc. Psychol.* 35, 180–205. doi: 10.1177/0261927X15583114
- Bippus, A. M., and Young, S. L. (2005). Owning your emotions: reactions to expressions of self-versus other-attributed positive and negative emotions. *J. Appl. Commun. Res.* 33, 26–45. doi: 10.1080/0090988042000318503
- Bocar, A. C. (2017). *Aggressive, Passive, and Assertive: Which Communication Style Is Commonly Used by College Students?* Available online at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2956807>
- Bodie, G. D., and Jones, S. M. (2012). The nature of supportive listening II: the role of verbal person centeredness and nonverbal immediacy. *West. J. Commun.* 76, 250–269. doi: 10.1080/10570314.2011.651255
- Bowlby, J. (1958). The nature of the child's tie to his mother. *Int. J. Psycho Anal.* 39, 350–373.
- Bradshaw, J. (1988). *Healing the Shame That Binds You*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communication.
- Braithwaite, D. O., Schrodt, P., and Carr, K. (2015). "Introduction: meta-theory and theory in interpersonal relationships," in *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication: Multiple Perspectives, 2nd edn*, eds D. O. Braithwaite, and P. Schrodt (New York, NY: Sage).
- Burgoon, J. K., Guerrero, L. K., and Floyd, K. (2009). *Nonverbal Communication*. Boston, MA: Routledge.
- Burgoon, J. K., and Jones, S. B. (1976). Toward a theory of personal space expectations and their violations. *Hum. Commun. Res.* 2, 131–146. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1976.tb00706.x
- Canary, D. J., Cupach, W. R., and Messman, S. (1995). *Relationship Conflict: Conflict in Parent-Child, Friendship, and Romantic Relationships, Vol. 10*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Carton, J., Kessler, E., and Pape, C. (1999). Nonverbal decoding skills and relationship well-being in adults. *J. Nonverb. Behav.* 23, 91–100. doi: 10.1023/A:1021339410262
- Caughlin, J. P., and Scott, A. M. (2010). "Toward a communication theory of the demand/withdraw pattern of interaction in interpersonal relationships," in *New Directions in Interpersonal Communication Research*, eds S. Smith, and S. R. Wilson (Sage), 180–200. doi: 10.4135/9781483349619.n9
- Coan, J. A., and Gottman, J. M. (2007). "The specific affect coding system (SPAFF)," in *Handbook of Emotion Elicitation and Assessment*, eds J. A. Coan, and J. J. B. Allen (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 267–285.
- Davis, K., and Latty-Mann, H. (1987). Love styles and relationship quality: a contribution to validation. *J. Soc. Pers. Relation.* 4, 409–428. doi: 10.1177/0265407587044002
- Driver, J., and Gottman, J. (2004). "Turning toward versus turning away: a coding system of daily interactions," in *Couple observational Coding Systems*, eds P. K. Kerig & D. H. Baucom (New York, NY: Routledge), 209–225.
- Driver, J., Tabares, A., Shapiro, A., Nahm, E. Y., and Gottman, J. M. (2003). "Interactional patterns in marital success and failure: Gottman laboratory

- studies,” in *Normal Family Processes: Growing Diversity and Complexity*, ed F. Walsh (New York, NY: Guilford).
- Ekman, P. (2004). “Emotional and conversational nonverbal signals,” in *Language, Knowledge, and Representation*, eds J. M. Larrabazabal, and L. A. Pérez Miranda (Dordrecht: Springer), 39–50. doi: 10.1007/978-1-4020-2783-3_3
- Ekman, R. (1997). *What the Face Reveals: Basic and Applied Studies of Spontaneous Expression Using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS)*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Gamble, T., and Gamble, M. (2014). *The Gender Communication Connection, 2nd edn*, ed M. E. Sharpe (New York, NY: Routledge). doi: 10.4324/9781315699721
- Gibb, J. (1961). Defensive communication. *J. Commun.* 11, 141–148. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1961.tb00344.x
- Goldstein, S., and Thau, S. (2004). Integrating attachment theory and neuroscience in couple therapy. *Int. J. Appl. Psychoanal. Stud.* 1, 214–223. doi: 10.1002/aps.73
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Gottman, J. M. (1976). *A Couple's Guide to Communication*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Gottman, J. M., and Levenson, R. W. (1992). Marital processes predictive of later dissolution: behavior, physiology, and health. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 63, 221–233. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.63.2.221
- Guerrero, L. K. (2017). “Attachment theory in families: the role of communication,” in *Engaging Theories in Family Communication*, eds D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, and K. Floyd (New York, NY: Routledge), 38–50. doi: 10.4324/9781315204321-4
- Infante, D. A., Rancer, A. S., and Jordan, F. F. (1996). Affirming and nonaffirming style, dyad sex, and the perception of argumentation and verbal aggression in an interpersonal dispute. *Hum. Commun. Res.* 22, 315–334. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1996.tb00370.x
- Infante, D. A., Trebing, J. D., Shepherd, P. E., and Seeds, D. E. (1984). The relationship of argumentativeness to verbal aggression. *South. Speech Commun. J.* 50, 67–77. doi: 10.1080/10417948409372622
- Jones, S. E., and LeBaron, C. D. (2002). Research on the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication: emerging integrations. *J. Commun.* 52, 499–521. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2002.tb02559.x
- Kleinke, C. L. (1986). Gaze and eye contact: a research review. *Psychol. Bull.* 100, 78–100. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.100.1.78
- Knapp, M., Hall, J., and Horgan, T. (2014). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction, 8th edn*. Wadsworth, OH: Cengage Learning.
- Koerner, A. F., and Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of family communication. *Commun. Theory* 12, 70–91. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00260.x
- Manusov, V. (1995). Reacting to changes in nonverbal behaviors relational satisfaction and adaptation patterns in romantic dyads. *Hum. Commun. Res.* 21, 456–477. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1995.tb00354.x
- Martin, M. M., and Anderson, C. M. (1997). Aggressive communication traits: how similar are young adults and their parents in argumentativeness, assertiveness, and verbal aggressiveness. *West. J. Commun.* 61, 299–314. doi: 10.1080/10570319709374579
- Maximo, S. I., Tayaban, H. S., Cacad, G. B., Cacanindin, M. A., Pugat, R. J. S., Rivera, M. F., et al. (2011). Parents' communication styles and their influence on the adolescents' attachment, intimacy and achievement motivation. *J. Behav. Sci.* 6, 60–74. doi: 10.14456/ijbs.2011.5
- McNaughton, J., and Niedzwiecki, C. K. (2000). Gender differences in parent child communication patterns. *J. Undergrad. Res.* 3, 25–32. Available online at: https://www.uwlax.edu/globalassets/offices-services/urc/jur-online/pdf/2000/j_ncnaughton.pdf
- McNeill, D. (1985). So you think gestures are nonverbal? *Psychol. Rev.* 92, 350. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.92.3.350
- Melody, P. (1989). *Co-Addicted Relationships*. Wickenburg, AZ: Desert Studio.
- Noller, P. (2005). “Behavioral coding of visual affect behavior,” in *The Sourcebook of Nonverbal Measures: Going Beyond Words*, ed V. Manusov (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum), 141–150.
- Pipas, M., and Jaradat, M. (2010). Assertive communication skills. *Ann. Univer. Apulen. Ser. Oecon.* 12, 649–656. doi: 10.29302/oeconomica.2010.12.2.17
- Roisman, G. I., Madsen, S. D., Hennighausen, K. H., Alan oufe Sr, L., and Andrew Collins, W. (2001). The coherence of dyadic behavior across parent-child and romantic relationships as mediated by the internalized representation of experience. *Attach. Hum. Dev.* 3, 156–172. doi: 10.1080/14616730126483
- Sandor, D., and Rosenthal, D. (1986). Youth's outlooks on love: is it just a stage or two? *J. Adolesc.* 1, 199–212. doi: 10.1177/074355488612006
- Scherer, K. R. (1986). Vocal affect expression: a review and model for further research. *Psychol. Bull.* 99, 143–165. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.99.2.143
- Shapiro, A. F., and Gottman, J. M. (2004). “The specific affect coding system,” in *Couple Observational Coding Systems*, eds P. K. Kerig, and D. H. Baucom (New York, NY: Routledge), 191–207.
- Sillars, A. L., Coletti, S. F., Parry, D., and Rogers, M. A. (1982). Coding verbal conflict tactics: nonverbal and perceptual correlates of the “avoidance-distributive-integrative” distinction. *Hum. Commun. Res.* 9, 83–95. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1982.tb00685.x
- Sillars, A. L., Pike, G. R., Jones, T. S., and Murphy, M. A. (1984). Communication and understanding in marriage. *Hum. Commun. Res.* 10, 317–350. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2958.1984.tb00022.x
- Simmons, R. A., Gordon, P. C., and Chambless, D. L. (2005). Pronouns in marital interaction: What do “You” and “I” say about marital health? *Psychol. Sci.* 16, 932–936. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01639.x
- Stieg, C. (2017). *The Best Way to be Heard in Any Argument*. Relationship Advice. Retrieved from <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/i-statements-relationship-communication>
- Tripathy, M. (2018). Assertiveness—a win-win approach to business communication. *IUP J. Soft Skills* 12, 48–56. Available online at <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/assertiveness-win-approach-business-communication/docview/2064878987/se-2?accountid=10674>
- Weber, K., and Anderson, B. R. (1997). The effects of maternal verbal aggression the adult child's future romantic relationships. *Commun. Res. Rep.* 14, 221–230. doi: 10.1080/08824099709388664
- Weger, H., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., and Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. *Int. J. Listen.* 28, 13–31. doi: 10.1080/10904018.2013.813234
- Winer, S. (2021). *The Game Changer: Learning How to Resolve Conflict and Manage Anger in a Personal Relationship*. Self-published.
- Wood, J. T. (2016). *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters, 8th edn*. Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Yoo, S., and Noyes, S. (2016). Recognition of facial expressions of negative emotions in romantic relationships. *J. Nonverb. Behav.* 40, 1–12. doi: 10.1007/s10919-015-0219-3

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Copyright © 2022 Dunbar, Summary, Jackson and Nassuna. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.