

TITLE: Do parents provide greater nonverbal support to their daughters than to their sons with their gestures?

KEYWORDS: Sex differences, nonverbal communication, parental gesture input

AUTHORS: Hamki, K., Baumann, S., Özçalışkan, Ş.

FACULTY SPONSOR: Dr. Seyda Özçalışkan, Associate Professor, Department of Psychology

Introduction: Studies on parental talk addressed to 4- to 10-year-old older children suggest that parents talk as frequently to their sons as they do to their daughters, but the content of their talk shows differences. Parents provide more supportive speech (e.g., praise, approval, acknowledgement) when talking to their daughters than to their sons (Leaper, Anderson & Sanders, 1998).

Purpose: In this study, we take this finding one step further asking whether parents follow a similar pattern in gestures that they produce when addressing their children. More specifically, we ask whether parents provide more supportive gestures (e.g., nodding the head for affirmation) when addressing their daughters than when addressing their sons.

Method: We examined this question by studying the gestures produced by parents of 19 typically developing children (9 girls, 10 boys, $M_{age}=5.3$) during a 10-minute structured play session with their children. The sessions involved free play with toys and book reading. We coded all the gestures children produced; and computed both the total number of all gestures and support gestures (i.e., nods) each parents produced.

Results: Our preliminary results showed that parents provided more supportive gestures to their daughters than to their sons, in line with our predictions. Importantly, the parents did not differ in the amount of speech or gestures that they produced when interacting with their girls vs. boys, suggesting that the greater use of supportive gestures with girls is not driven overall amount of gesture production.

Conclusion: These findings further extend earlier findings on speech to the domain of gesture, showing greater parental support to girls than to boys both in verbal and nonverbal communication. These findings also suggest that gender differences in parental nonverbal input are more likely to be found in more detailed aspects of the gestures that parents produce when interacting with their children, rather than in overall amount of nonverbal input.