

## Nonverbal Behavior in Psychopathological Conditions

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**Received:** February 03, 2016; **Accepted:** February 04, 2016; **Published:** February 07, 2016

### Editorial

In clinical and research settings, psychopathological conditions are often evaluated through verbal measures, such as, questionnaires, scales, clinical interviews, that focus on the presence of set of symptoms (ex: affective, cognitive and social). However, patients sometimes are not able to precisely communicate their problems. They can avoid the description for the clinicians and researchers of some symptoms or other relevant information because of private feelings, such as shame, social desirability, or other reasons. Other times, patients cannot recognize what exactly happen with them that cause emotional and social problems, what impairs their verbal report and treatment.

In this context, the use of the nonverbal communication is relevant as a tool to access socio-emotional information that is not expressed in patient's verbal communication. The nonverbal communication is composed by reflex and automatic movements, with low awareness control. Since it is a multi-channeled communication (ex: messages are transmitted by hand gestures; eye contact; head movements; body posture, etc.), the expression of emotional states and social intentions is enhanced. Although the nonverbal behavior can be influenced by culture, the evidences from different fields, such as Biology, Ethology, Comparative and Experimental Psychology, show that the nonverbal behavior is universal. Therefore, it is a tool that can be used in different cultural backgrounds, in clinical and nonclinical samples, contributing with the psychopathological research field, scope of the present Journal.

Studies of nonverbal communication in psychopathological conditions have been focused in the patients' ability of decoding nonverbal socio-emotional stimulus (decoding studies), as well as patients' ability of expressing feelings and intentions in the environment (coding studies).

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**Citation:** Fiquer JT. Nonverbal Behavior in Psychopathological Conditions. Acta Psychopathol. 2016, 2:1.

In the decoding studies, it is common the evaluations focused on the recognition ability of emotional stimuli (ex: facial expressions of emotion) in samples of schizophrenic, phobic and depressed patients. In the coding studies, less frequent than the decoding ones, the behavior of the own patients is the main object of study. Ethological techniques of observation and register of behavior have been applied to access the interpersonal and emotional aspects of psychiatric patients in hospital ward, during clinical interviews, in familiar or group interactions, etc. These observations can contribute with the evaluation of spontaneous social interest, genuine positive and negative effects that underlie patients' interactions and social adjustment.

Therefore, multidisciplinary and innovative studies focused in coding and decoding abilities of nonverbal socio-emotional stimuli can enhance the knowledge related to psychopathologies features, assisting in diagnosis. This field can also contribute with researchers and clinicians in the elaboration of interventions and clinical improvement assessment of patients submitted to different types of treatment.