

# Behavior Dynamics Journal

A bi-monthly publication focusing on the Operational Application of Behavior



## VERBAL AND NONVERBAL CUES THAT COULD INDICATE DECEPTION

### Culture and Behavior

We know that the body speaks volumes, but what it says depends on the culture you're in. Facial expressions, gestures, mannerisms, and degree of eye contact vary greatly across countries. For example, "Arms, which are used little by Nordics during conversation, are an indispensable element in one's communicative weaponry in Italy, Spain, and South America," writes Richard Lewis in "[When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures](#)." The cultural differences in body language are vast — there are entire books dedicated exclusively to hand gestures. This edition explores cultural differences in nonverbal and verbal communication across different cultures. Culturally specific cues can often be misinterpreted as deception both nonverbally and verbally which causes cross-cultural interactions to be prone to misunderstandings and potentially incorrect assessments. In this edition we will enlighten law enforcement and security professionals on how to avoid incorrect assessment of nonverbal cues and deception in cross-cultural interactions.

Certain behavior and deception cues transcend all cultures, but many do not. It is important to understand different cultural norms are so you don't make an erroneous assessment of a potential nonverbal cue. The cultural diversity of people encountered by security staff and law enforcement has increased substantially over the last decade. Alongside the usual challenges of their law enforcement roles, officers must also decipher whether or not the behavior of an interviewee from a different culture is behaving suspiciously or if their behavior is simply the result of his or her culturally unique way of interacting. The overwhelming findings, found through over three decades of research, are that communication across cultures can be prone to misinterpretations and misunderstandings. People are generally not very good at interpreting the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of potentially guilty people from cultures other than their own. For example, in one study involving Jordanian and American participants telling genuine and fabricated stories, a set of American judges were able to identify deception within the stories of other Americans, but were less certain about identifying deception in the stories of the Jordanians. This is a prime example of how a particular behavior cue in a certain culture may mean the complete opposite of what you would interpret in this country. Below is a list of some common cultural norms to look for when dealing with individuals from other countries.

### Cultural Norms

#### Physical contact when communicating or generally speaking:

**Arabs:** Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and United Arab Emirates

**Latin Americans:** Bolivia, Cuba, Equator, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Dominican Republic

**Southern Europeans:** French, Italian, Turkish

#### No Contact:

**Asian:** China, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, Thailand, Indians, Pakistanis

**Northern Europeans:** Australia, England, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland

**Americans**

#### Gestures and eye contact:

**Americans:** taught to look directly into the eyes.

**Japanese and Koreans:** taught to avoid direct eye contact, direct eye contact to them is considered a weakness, and may indicate sexual overtones. For **Americans:** up and down means yes, side to side means no.

**Bulgaria and Greece:** the nods are reversed in meaning.

