

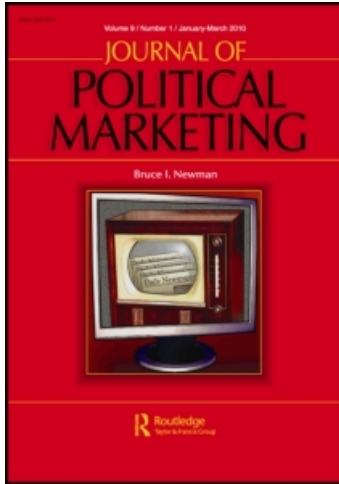
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### **The Relationship of Verbal and Nonverbal Behavior to Political Stature: The Political Interviews of Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon**

Tsfira Grebelsky-Lichtman<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Ono Academic College, Kiryat Ono, Israel

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# **The Relationship of Verbal and Nonverbal Behavior to Political Stature: The Political Interviews of Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon**

TSFIRA GREBELSKY-LICHTMAN

*Ono Academic College, Kiryat Ono, Israel*

*The study presents an innovative model for examining both the relationship between the verbal and nonverbal behavior of a political figure in political interviews and the effects of his/her political stature on his/her performance. The uniqueness of the model lies in the simultaneous examination of the two channels of communication, the verbal and nonverbal and the definition of their relationship, e.g., discrepancy when there is a contradiction and inconsistency between the channels, and non-discrepancy when they are consistent and do not contradict each other. The model characterizes patterns of discrepancy and non-discrepancy both in the behavior of the interviewer and in that of the interviewee and relates them to the political standing of the interviewee. The study examined the behavior of Israel's former prime minister Ariel Sharon in television appearances over the past 20 years, in which he had both periods of strong political standing as well as periods of low political status. Findings significantly show that patterns of discrepancy and non-discrepancy between the verbal and the nonverbal messages are indicative of the political stature of the political person being interviewed. The findings have interesting methodological and theoretical implications.*

**KEYWORDS** *media image, political communication, political interviews, political stature, verbal and nonverbal communication*

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Address correspondence to Tsfira Grebelsky-Lichtman, Department of Communication, The Hebrew University, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel. E-mail: grbelsky@netvision.net.il

The main goal of the current study is to examine whether there is a relationship between the public standing of a political figure and his/her verbal and nonverbal behavior during political interviews. The study offers a unique approach in its holistic view of political communication, which is based on the premise of multiple channels; the analysis of political interviews must address both the verbal and the nonverbal communication channels simultaneously and find the connection between them. It is assumed that in each face-to-face interaction, two kinds of messages are transmitted: verbal and nonverbal (Baveles and Chovil, 2000). The verbal message includes the contents that are transmitted to the target audience on the cognitive level. In a television interview, for example, there is an immediate audience, the interviewer and the broader audience made up of attendants who do not play an active role in the interaction but are still present in the background. Along with the verbal communication, nonverbal communication also has a crucial impact in any interpersonal communication (Siegman & Felldstein, 1978), so that the end message received is a combination of both.

The assumption of mutuality means that all the participants have an active role in the nature of the interaction and its development. Based on this assumption, the current research examined the participants in the interaction. In other words, both the interviewee and the interviewer in the political interview were examined.

There is an increasing role and influence of the media in the political arena (Wring, 1998; Blum-Kulka and Liebes, 2000). Researchers have found that television highlights the “charisma” and personal style of politicians and helps construct their image (Friedman, Mertz, and DiMatteo, 1980; Bartels, 1993; House and Howell, 1992; Sheafer, 2001). As a result, the politician’s image and his compatibility with the medium of television are given more weight in the course of the communications event (Newman, 1999). According to Greatbatch (1992), the televised interview is a context in which the journalist who conducts the interview tries to draw information from the newsmakers, experts, or eye witnesses for the benefit of the listeners or television viewers. There is a vast sociological body of literature that deals with news interviews, on radio and television, with well-known figures (such as politicians) as well as with private individuals. The research focused on a number of issues, such as turn-taking, openness, closing up, organization, neutrality, and disagreement among the interviewees or between the interviewee and the interviewer (Bull, Elliott, Palmer, and Walker, 1996; Greatbatch, 1988, 1992). Over the last few years, political interviews have become the focus of attention and of research from various points of view, such as psychology, linguistics, and sociology. Transcripts of political interviews were analyzed in order to establish their distinction from other social situations (Bull et al., 1996; Aronson et al., 2002). As a result, the political interview has been identified as a social situation in and of itself, having its own characteristics.

Heritage (1985) maintains that one of the characteristics of a political interview is that it does not take place between two participants who are having a dialogue; rather, it is conducted between a speaker and a large congregation of listeners. From the point of view of the interviewee, Liebes (2001) notes that as the political issues become more complex, the ideological distinctions between the political parties are reduced. The public is called upon to show faith in the politician "because he is credible and means what he says." The politicians turn directly to their voters through the media. Newman and Sheth (1985) present a comprehensive model of primary voter behavior. Heritage (1985) claims that the fact that the exchange takes place between the interviewee and his listeners bears an immense impact on the course of the interview, which is why interviewers often resort to what is known as the "audience's reaction" because the politicians' responses are not directed at them, but at the audience.

The political interview is characterized as a contextual framework, where the underlying assumption is of challenge (Weizman, 2009; Greatbatch, 1992). In general, one can distinguish between a supportive move and a challenging move on the interaction continuum (Burton, 1980). Support is defined as any verbal or nonverbal behavior that pursues the continuousness on which the interaction was based. Challenge is defined as any behavior that discontinues the continuousness on which the interaction was based, diverting it to a different direction. The typical speaker in an everyday conversation is more likely to demonstrate support rather than challenge. Not so in political interviews, where both the interviewer and the interviewee demonstrate more challenge (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998; Pomerantz, 1984). Greatbatch (1988) underlines the fact that interviewers of political figures often cast doubt on and challenge the interviewee's statements, while he/she, in turn, reacts by objecting to the investigative procedures.

As for challenging strategies, the political interview is characterized by a high proportion of interruptions (Beattie, 1982). Particularly noteworthy is the avoidance of a direct answer. Bull and Mayer (1993) list at least 30 different ways of avoiding a direct answer. Another characteristic of the political interview is that the politicians enter into a state that Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett (1990) call avoidance-avoidance conflict, wherein all the possible answers to a question involve a negative result for the interviewee, although he/she is still expected to respond. Another group of conflicts stems from the pressure of time constrains. Weizman (1999) presents additional challenging strategies, such as closed questions, negative questions, polar items, metalinguistic comments, and repetition.

Weizman distinguishes between two roles that accompany the political interview: (1) the social role (position in the world, i.e., prime minister) and (2) the interaction role (position in the media, i.e., interviewee). Weizman claims that the interviewee is expected to fulfill the two roles simultaneously, whereas the interviewer, for his/her part, can challenge each one of these

roles. Because of this role assignment and duplicity, the interview acts as a broad stage for the development of challenging patterns (Weizman, 1999; Labov and Fanshel, 1977).

In discussing the relationship between a political interview and nonverbal communication (Walter & Trimboli, 1989), Honda (2002) describes a discussion between two panel members on the dispatch of Japanese soldiers to Cambodia as part of a peace corps. Irokawa points a pen with his right hand at Shikate, who does not demonstrate visible signs of anger. When Irokawa makes a rude comment to Shikate, the latter responds with a little smile, and, at the same time, the audience reacts with significant laughter which diffuses the severity of Irokawa's attack. Shikate's reaction shows that he is not intimidated by Irokawa's assault. However, Honda's analysis does not address the issue from the point of view of nonverbal transmission of messages, but as an element within the entire context of conflict management in the course of the interview.

Liebes (2001) notes that the public feels threatened by expressions of conflict and a clash of opinions and its need for adopting a position; hence, it prefers a pleasant and perhaps even somewhat emotional conversation. In Lippman's (1924) spirit, Liebes assumes that the complexity of the public agenda makes it difficult for the lay listener who is not an expert to follow the arguments and that, moreover, the listener is not interested in taking note of information in these areas at all. A third assumption made by Liebes, which leads to a similar conclusion, is that the public reacts cynically to the politicians and their true motivation for supporting one policy or another. A politician who is aware of these sentiments feels the need to distance himself/herself from detailed argumentation of policy and content, devoting most of his/her efforts to delivering the message that he/she is worthy of trust. Messages that combine verbal as well as nonverbal communication are the tool to achieve this goal, as Bush said, "Read my lips," or in a different context: "look me in the eyes."

Hasson (1999) notes that people who lie as a lifestyle, such as politicians and their spokespersons, possess a high level of awareness and therefore "fail" less when providing answers to certain questions. Kennish (1989) also states that professionals may become so adroit at controlling their reactions that they can "beat the interviewer at his own game." He mentions the story that during the Carter-Reagan debate, Reagan's adviser James Baker passed a note to "his" candidate with only one word on it: "grin."

Masters (1996) analyzed emotional reaction to video clips in which political leaders appeared for nearly 20 years. He states that it is the politicians' nonverbal behavior that shapes the voters' opinions and behavior. McDonald (1996) describes situations in which not only does the addresser deliver nonverbal messages but this develops into nonverbal communication that stimulates the addressee. He found that in their interviews, both Bill Clinton and Bob Dole smiled in a way that made their audience react by activating their own facial muscles to form a smile. And since smiling makes

one feel better, the viewer's attitude toward the interviewee becomes more favorable. Meyrowitz (1985) takes this one step further, when he claims that the camera highlights the political interviewee's humanity, silencing abstract and conceptual rhetoric. In this context, he notes that when presidential candidate Edmund Muskie denied on television in 1972 reports that he had assaulted his wife, most viewers remembered that he had wept. Very few remembered what he actually said. In another instance, described in Proodian's article in *The Wall Street Journal* (1988), during his election campaign Harry S. Truman read a written speech that was so dull that everyone was convinced that his likewise boring rival, Dewey, won. Truman managed to tip the scales not by changing the messages but by simply discarding the texts that were prepared for him and firing the public with his "give 'em hell" campaign call. As a mirror reflection, looking from the listener's point of view, Proodian says: "No one I know reads campaign speeches. But most of us will listen, searching past the surface for clues . . ." (Proodian, 1988: 1).

There are only a few studies that examine simultaneously the relationship between the two communication channels that can be found in political interviews: the verbal and the nonverbal. Is there non-discrepancy between these two channels of communication? In other words, is there consistency between the verbal and the nonverbal messages that are transmitted at the same time, or is there discrepancy between the two, namely a contradiction, a difference, or inconsistency between the two simultaneous messages? The study conducted by Grebelsky-Lichtman, Shamir, and Blum-Kulka (2009) showed that a substantially larger percentage of the messages delivered in political debates is characterized by discrepancy between the verbal and the nonverbal messages. In general, non-discrepant behavior is characterized by a clear and unequivocal message transmitted in both channels simultaneously. On the other hand, a message characterized by discrepancy between the channels may cause cognitive and perhaps even emotional difficulty in deciphering the message. Such a message has implications from the standpoint of the viewers' conceptualization of the interviewees and their metaconceptualization. Additionally, it should be pointed out that a large number of situations of a "short circuit" in communication result from the inconsistency between the verbal and the nonverbal messages, often with the interviewee unaware of the conflict between his two transmitted messages (Kurtz and Prester, 1984).

Besides the general distinction between non-discrepant behavior and behavior characterized by discrepancy during political interviews, we also characterized discrepant and non-discrepant patterns as follows: (1) "challenging non-discrepancy," characterized by verbal and nonverbal challenge; (2) "supportive non-discrepancy," characterized by verbal and nonverbal support; (3) "supportive discrepancy," characterized by a challenging verbal message and a supportive nonverbal message; and (4) "leakage," a discrepancy pattern characterized by a supportive verbal message and a challenging nonverbal message.

The term *leakage*, in this meaning, was first used by Ekman and Friesen (1969, 1974) to describe a message characterized by verbal support and non-verbal challenge. Leakage stands in inverse proportion to potential control. Communication channels that are more controllable would have less leakage; on the other hand, in communication channels with a large measure of control, there is likewise a great chance to reveal involuntarily concealed information (DePaulo, 1992). The topic of leakage constitutes a central theme in the literature about interactions that involve deception or even lies (DePaulo and Rosenthal, 1979; Rosenthal and DePaulo, 1979; Zuckerman, DePaulo, and Rosenthal, 1981, 1986).

It would seem that even in Biblical times it was known that nonverbal communication might be revealing and thus make it difficult for a person to lie. See Isaiah chapter 3, verse 9: "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them" (authorized version). Hasson (1999) emphasizes that in order to lie, a person has to have a high sense of awareness. This is the basis for the "lie detector" based on physiological reactions. Hasson also stresses that in contrast with the transmission of messages among animals, where the proof of credibility lies with the deliverer of the signal; with humans the symbolic communication has redirected the onus of proof onto the recipient of the signal. In other words, it is the viewer who must examine the consistency and credibility of the information received from the interviewer. Vrij, Edward, Roberts, and Bull (2000) examined the ability to detect lies by analyzing verbal and nonverbal behavior in a study that involved 73 individuals. Their conclusion was that 78 percent of the lies and truths could be detected on the basis of nonverbal behavior alone. When the verbal communication was taken into account, that percentage was even higher. In light of these experiments, the current study built on the assumption that during the periods in which a political figure's public standing is at its lowest, that person's behavior would be characterized by an increased proportion of leakage-type discrepancies, with supportive verbal messages and challenging nonverbal messages. In addition, at the basis of this experiment lay the second assumption that during such periods, many more expressions of challenging non-discrepancy patterns would be manifested through the characteristic challenging verbal and nonverbal messages, since such messages convey a situation of conflict or crisis that might find its expression in defensive or aggressive behavior.

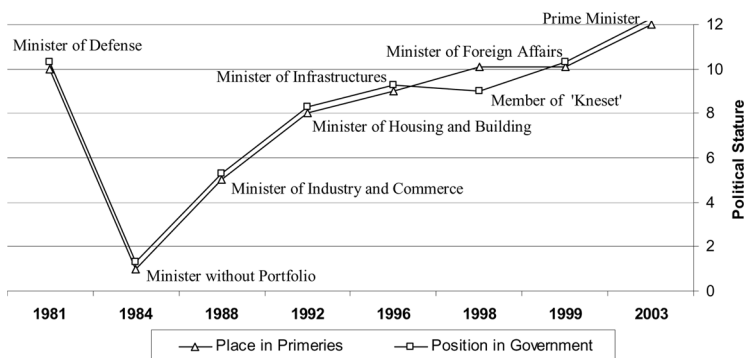
It was assumed that during periods in which the political figure's public standing was strong, his/her behavior would be characterized by a greater ratio of "supportive non-discrepancy" and "supportive discrepancy," characterized by a challenging verbal message and a supportive nonverbal message. Lessin and Jacob (1984) termed this type of discrepancy, when the verbal message is challenging but the nonverbal message is supportive, as *positive inconsistency*. In their opinion, such a non-discrepancy pattern is of great adaptive importance. Grebelsky-Lichtman et al. (2009) show that this

type of discrepancy may be the most effective for a candidate during a televised political debate. In this pattern, the candidate presents a verbal challenge characterized by a negative attitude toward his/her opponent or toward the current situation, while his/her nonverbal message is supportive and casts an air of security, comfort, and ease, thus positioning himself/herself as someone who can create a change in reality.

Sharon's political career was characterized by sharp and extreme fluctuations, from the position of a senior cabinet minister to formal and public disqualification and back to the pinnacle as prime minister. To define Mr. Sharon's political stature during the years 1982 through 2002, the study used three criteria: his position in the Likud primaries list, his position in the government, and experts' assessments.

As can be seen in Figure 1, chronologically, Sharon's biography during these years can be divided into the following period. The first period takes us up until the beginning of the first Lebanon war in 1982. This particular point in time marks the final phase of Sharon's political evolution from the time he left the Israel Defense Forces in 1974 through his gradual ascent up the governmental ladder to the position of minister of defense. During this period, Sharon enjoyed an elevated public status.

The second period starts with the final stages of the war in Lebanon and continues until the publication of the conclusions of the Kahan Commission. During this period, Sharon was at the center of a public storm that erupted following the question of whether the war in Lebanon, which he led, could have been avoided or whether it a "war of no choice." The debate raised many questions concerning Sharon's credibility and public conduct during this war. Because the war resulted in a substantial number of casualties, the furor was intense and emotional. It reached its peak when the Kahan Commission formally disqualified Sharon from serving as defense minister,



**FIGURE 1** Ariel Sharon's political stature: 1981–2003. In the primaries, his highest ranking was 1 (2003 election) and his lowest was 12 (1984 election). We created a scale of 1 to 12 where the highest place (1) gets the highest marks (12) and the lowest place (12) gets the lowest marks (1).



a crucial point that completed a reversal in his public standing, from a high approval rating to the status of a virtual pariah.

The third period is the period between the publication of the Kahan Commission's report and Sharon's election to the premiership in 2002. This is a period distinguished by absorbance followed by a gradual rehabilitation of his public standing, up to the completion of the second and dramatic turnaround, when Sharon reached his political apex. In 1999, he was appointed chairman of the Likud and, in 2001, prime minister.

In light of Sharon's personal history, the study's hypotheses were as follows: With the passing of the years and the strengthening of his public standing, his behavior will be characterized by (a) more supportive non-discrepancy; (b) less leakage; (c) more positive discrepancy; and (d) less challenging non-discrepancy.

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Collection

Televised interviews with Ariel Sharon were examined over the course of a tumultuous period extending between 1982, when he served as defense minister in Menachem Begin's government, until 2002, during his first term as prime minister. The first interview analyzed in the present study is from the first period of Sharon's political career, given on January 1, 1982, just before the beginning of the war in Lebanon. We therefore assumed that this interview reflected Sharon's high public standing at that time. The analyzed interviews held during the second period are from June 16, 1982, September 16, 1982, and October 22, 1986. Analyzed interviews held during the third period are from September 26, 1990, July 13, 1994, January 24, 1996, October 10, 2000, and October 18, 2002.

As mentioned earlier, following the holistic approach, although the purpose of the research was primarily to examine Sharon's behavior, it was impossible to analyze his conduct without also analyzing the behavior of his partners in the interactions, namely the different interviewers. Consequently, both Sharon and the interviewers were analyzed. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that each interview was conducted by a different interviewer.

### Coding Verbal Communication

A transcript was made of each one of the political interviews, according to the rules of conversational analysis (CA) (Couper-Kuhlen, 1999; Psathas and Anderson, 1990). The transcript was divided into episodes surrounding a common thematic frame according to Blum-Kulka (1997, 2002, 2003). Episodes from three areas—politics, economy, and personal—were selected as the basis for comparison between the various interviews. For the sake of

analysis, the episodes were split into utterances, and each utterance was analyzed both from its verbal and its corresponding nonverbal aspect. Additionally, the support and challenge of each of these expressions were likewise reviewed. All in all, the analysis is based on 21,600 analysis units: 9 television interviews, 6 episodes in each interview, and 400 utterances and instances of nonverbal behavior in each episode.

The coding of the utterances in the verbal communication was based on an analysis of the speech acts (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2003), including declaration/expression of opinion, repetition, instruction, proclamation, questions, rejection, refusal, agreement, disagreement, encouragement, complaint and reprimand, apology, and laughter.

### Coding Nonverbal Communication

The coding of the nonverbal communication was based on gestures and postures. In addition, facial expressions were likewise addressed. This approach was made possible thanks to the many close-ups during the interviews. It should be noted that facial expressions bear a great influence on social interaction (Kraut and Johnson, 1979). They bear a significant message concerning an individual's feelings (Ekman and Friesen, 1969; Ekman et al., 1972). Specifically, many studies have demonstrated that a political leader's expressions have a direct emotional effect on television viewers (Lanzetta, Sullivan, Masters, and McHugo, 1985; McHugo, Lanzetta, Sullivan, Masters, and Englis, 1985; Sullivan, Masters, Lanzetta, Englis, and McHugo, 1984). From the nonverbal standpoint, the general framework of the interview is similar in all the excerpts that were analyzed, with Sharon and his interviewers sitting behind a table and being filmed from a rather limited number of angles. That is why the nonverbal analysis focused mainly on the face, the head, the hands, and the torso (Babad, 1999): the face—a smile, a frown, an expression of surprise, puckered brows, amazement, a gaze down, eye contact, blinking, narrow/wide eyes, relaxed/tense facial muscles, sarcasm, and the face's overall degree of expressiveness; the head—movement and expressiveness, nodding in agreement, thrust, shake, moving the head forward, touching the head; the hands—holding the hands together, expressiveness and motion, beating, sharp cutting gestures with the hands, round, soft, circular, and rhythmic movements; the body—shrugging of shoulders, leaning forward, leaning backward, and leaning sideways; changes—in body and in movement, change of expression, and change in intensity; miscellaneous—regulators, illustration, relaxed versus tensed, emphasis; and voice—pitch, softness, modulation, emphasis, and tempo.

### Reliability

For 10 percent of the episodes (2160 analysis units, verbal and nonverbal), separate coding was conducted by two coders and the reliability of the

judges (Cohen's kappa) was examined following the four types of coding: coding patterns of support and challenge in the verbal communication, .92; coding patterns of support and challenge in nonverbal communication, .90; coding of the verbal strategies of support and challenge (on the basis of the speech acts), .87; and coding the nonverbal strategies of support and challenge (on the basis of gestures and postures), .89. In addition, a reliability test was conducted on the division of the interaction into utterances. Here, the rate of congruency among the coders was found to be 96 percent.

## Data Analysis

The construction of the discrepancy and non-discrepancy variables was made on the basis of a comparison of every verbal utterance with the nonverbal behavioral parallel that accompanied it. Four types of discrepancy and non-discrepancy were identified, as mentioned earlier: (1) "supportive non-discrepancy"; (2) "challenging non-discrepancy"; (3) "Positive discrepancy," meaning verbal challenge with nonverbal support; and (4) "leakage," namely verbal support with nonverbal challenge. Initially, the raw data were concentrated in a table. The values expressed the sum of total speech acts in each interview. Thereafter, since the length of the interviews was not identical, the values were converted into percentages to enable comparison.

In order to examine the trends of behavioral changes over the years, models of regression were applied to the discrepancy and non-discrepancy categories as well as to each one of the four patterns of behavior. These models were applied both to Ariel Sharon and to his different interviewers.

Finally, the correlation between Sharon's behavior and that of his interviewers was also analyzed in patterns discrepancy and non-discrepancy and according to each of the four categories. The question of the relationship between the interviewer's verbal and nonverbal behavior and the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the interviewee is of particular significance, as it may point to patterns of reaction behavior, namely which behavior elicits what reaction. This could help characterize the course of the interview and is furthermore important for the analysis of both the interviewer and the interviewee. How would it be possible to lead the interview on a certain course, or, alternatively, how is it possible to break or change the flow of the interview during its course?

## RESULTS

The findings are presented on the basis of the study's hypotheses regarding the relationship between the verbal and nonverbal behavior in political interviews. First, Ariel Sharon's behavior in the various interviews was analyzed, then the interviewers' behavior during those interviews was analyzed,

and finally the relationship between Sharon's behavior and that of his interviewers was analyzed.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the four categories of the relationship between the verbal and the nonverbal communication in all the interviews in percentage points, as well as a summary of the overall instances of discrepancy and non-discrepancy that characterized Sharon during the years 1982 to 2002.

### Discrepancy and Non-Discrepancy in Ariel Sharon's Behavior Over the Years

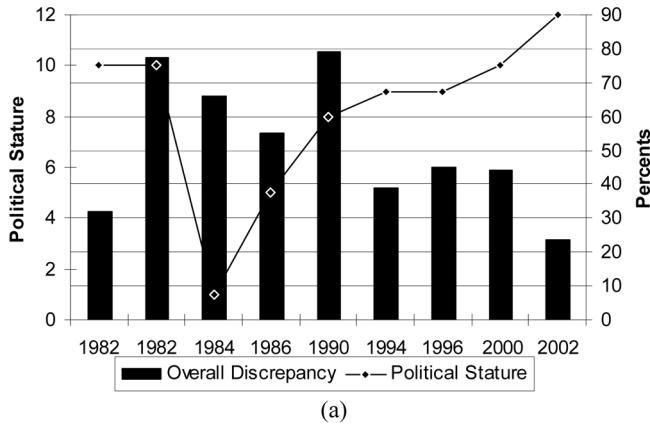
Regarding the general patterns of discrepancy and non-discrepancy, which characterized Ariel Sharon in the interviews that were analyzed, we can see in Table 1 and in Figures 1 and 2, which depict discrepancy and non-discrepancy, that a rough division into two periods can be made: 1982 through 1990 and 1994 through 2002. The exception to this pattern is the first interview in 1982. One can see that during the 1980s, Sharon's behavior was characterized by discrepancy, as opposed to his behavior during the 1990s and toward the later years, 2000 and onwards, which was characterized mainly by non-discrepancy.

### Supportive Non-Discrepancy Patterns in Ariel Sharon's Behavior During Political Interviews Over the Years

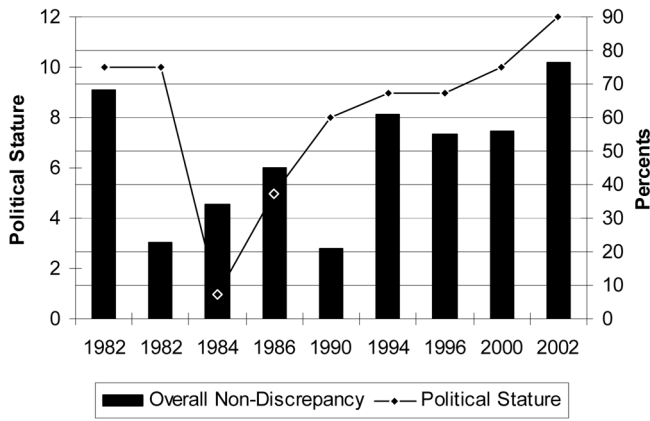
Consistent with the hypotheses of the study, that Sharon would be characterized by an increase in supportive non-discrepancy over the years, Figure 3 shows a rise in the percentage of supportive non-discrepancy over the years. In the first three interviews, conducted between 1982 and 1984, no supportive non-discrepancy was observed (0 percent). From that point onward, the degree of supportive non-discrepancy grew. Yet, there are two exceptions.

**TABLE 1** Ariel Sharon: The Relationship Between the Verbal and Nonverbal Channels (Percentage Points)

	Supportive non-discrepancy	Leakage	Adaptive discrepancy	Challenging non-discrepancy	Overall non-discrepancy	Overall discrepancy
<b>1982</b>	0	30.4	1.5	68.1	68.1	31.9
<b>1982</b>	0	77.3	0	22.7	22.7	77.3
<b>1984</b>	0	61.3	4.8	33.9	33.9	66.1
<b>1986</b>	5.2	50.0	5.2	39.7	44.8	55.2
<b>1990</b>	3.7	62.2	17.1	17.1	20.7	79.3
<b>1994</b>	32.8	17.2	21.9	28.1	60.9	39.1
<b>1996</b>	6.9	37.9	6.9	48.3	55.2	44.8
<b>2000</b>	46.5	17.4	26.7	9.3	55.8	44.2
<b>2002</b>	64.7	15.3	8.2	11.8	76.5	23.5

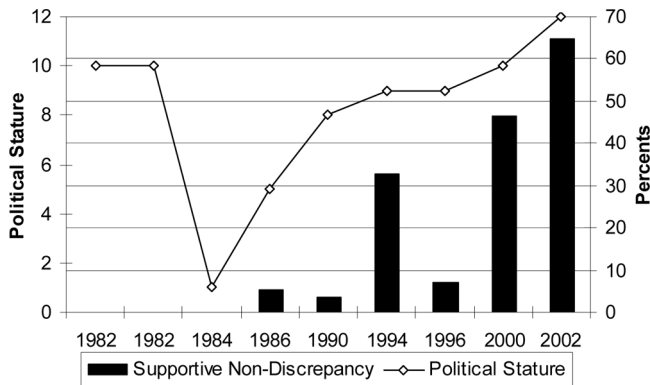


(a)



(b)

**FIGURE 2** (a) Overall discrepancy that characterizes Ariel Sharon; (b) Overall non-discrepancy that characterizes Ariel Sharon.



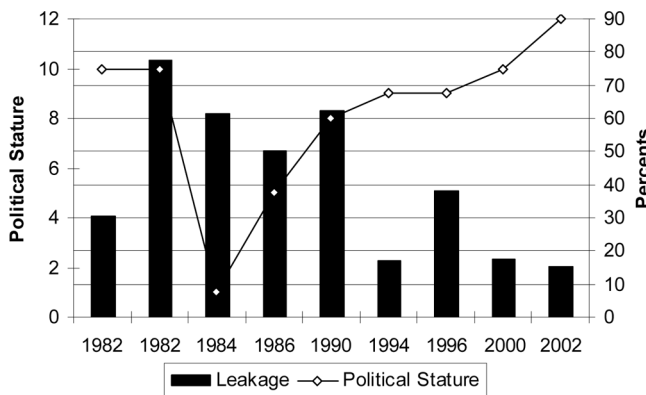
**FIGURE 3** Percentage of supportive non-discrepancy in Ariel Sharon's behavior during his political interviews over the years.

The first is the 1990 interview, in which supportive non-discrepancy was observed at a rate of 3.7 percent, while an earlier interview, from 1986, demonstrated supportive non-discrepancy at a higher level (5.2 percent). The second and more blatant exception was observed in the interview from 1996, where a rate of merely 6.9 percent of supportive non-discrepancy was observed, whereas the preceding 1994 interview presented a rate of 32.8 percent of supportive non-discrepancy. The highest level of supportive non-discrepancy was observed in the 2002 interview (64.7 percent). When, for instance, Sharon was asked about the problem of the social gaps in Israel, he expressed verbal support: “We are taking action to close the social gaps,” while at the same time he expressed nonverbal support: His facial expression was calm, his body posture was open, and his hand gestures were round.

The regression model demonstrates that, consistent with the assumption underlying the research, a statistical significant increase in supportive non-discrepancy was apparent over the years:  $R^2 = 0.75$ ;  $F(1,3509) = 21.01$ ;  $p = .0028$ .

### Leakage Patterns in Ariel Sharon’s Behavior During Political Interviews Over the Years

As for the discrepancy pattern known as leakage, it was assumed that its level would decrease over time. As expected, a downward trend in leakage was found as the years progressed (Figure 4). It appears that this trend began in the second interview from 1982, where the highest level of leakage was noted (77.3 percent). Thus, for example, when Sharon was asked about his attacks on the government, he replied “I have every respect for the government” and exhibited verbal support. However, he simultaneously manifested gestures of warning and threat with his hands and frowned angrily: a show of nonverbal challenge.



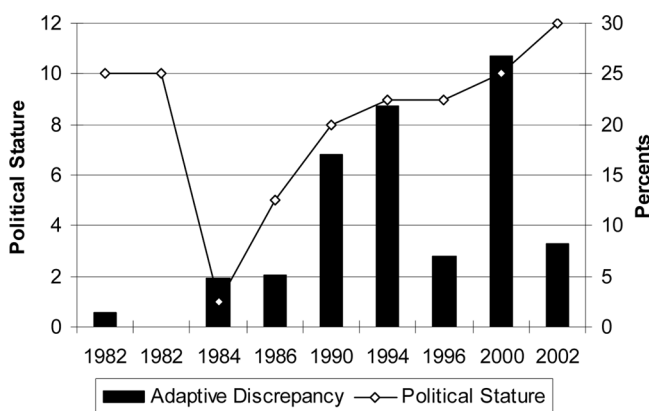
**FIGURE 4** Percentage of leakage in Ariel Sharon’s behavior during his political interviews over the years.

The first interview from that year showed only 30.4 percent leakage from the verbal and behavioral messages. But as with the pattern of supportive non-discrepancy, the leakage pattern also showed exceptions. In the 1990 interview, a level of 62.2 percent was observed, which is higher than the level observed in the 1986 interview (50 percent). The interview from 1994 shows a lower level of leakage than the level of leakage noted in the 1996 interview (17.2 versus 37.9 percent, respectively). As for the supportive non-discrepancy, the regression model for the leakage category also showed statistically significant results:  $R^2 = 0.53$ ;  $F(1,2211) = 7.92$ ;  $p = .026$ ; despite the exceptions.

### “Positive Discrepancy” in Ariel Sharon’s Behavior During Political Interviews Over the Years

As for the pattern of behavior characterized by positive discrepancy, in which the verbal message expresses challenge and the nonverbal message expresses support, it was assumed that an increase in this pattern would be observed over time. Consistent with this hypothesis, an upward trend was observed in the positive discrepancy as the years went by (Figure 5). Thus, for example, in an interview from 2000, when he was asked about the security situation, Sharon expressed verbal challenge and said “The situation is difficult and will become even more difficult,” while at the same time transmitting nonverbal support, with an open body posture, arms open, and a smile.

The positive discrepancy also showed exceptions to the general trend. Particularly striking are the exceptions noticed in the interviews from 1996 and 2002. In 1996, positive discrepancy of 6.9 percent was observed,

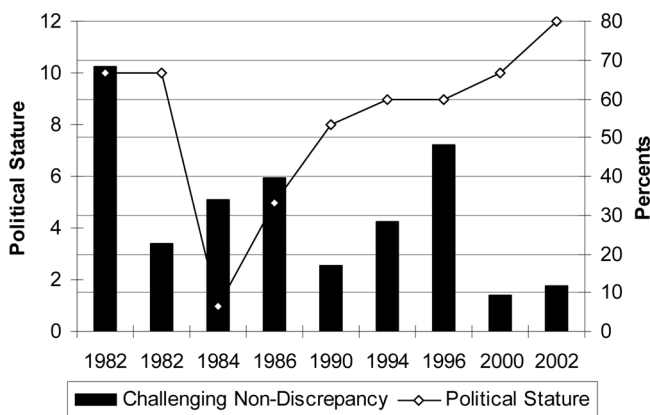


**FIGURE 5** Percentage of adaptive discrepancy in Ariel Sharon’s behavior during his political interviews over the years.

distinctly lower than that of the preceding interview, conducted in 1994 (21.9 percent). The 2002 interview also showed a lower level than expected (8.2 percent) compared with the peak level (26.7 percent) found in the 2000 interview. These exceptions were also noticed in the regression model. Apparently, as opposed to the cases of supportive non-discrepancy and leakage, these exceptions had a greater impact, resulting in just marginal statistical significance:  $R^2 = 0.42$ ;  $F(1,294) = 4.98$ ;  $p = .061$ .

### Challenging Non-Discrepancy in Ariel Sharon’s Behavior in Political Interviews Over the Years

When examining the behavioral pattern characterized by verbal challenge complemented by nonverbal challenge, the hypothesis was that the challenging non-discrepancy would decrease over the years. This pattern of behavior was the only one that could not be verified. Although in general a downward trend was noticed in the challenging non-discrepancy over the years (Figure 6), this trend was less obvious than the other trends and is characterized by a larger number of exceptions. The highest level of challenging non-discrepancy was observed in the first interview (1982: 68.2 percent), where Sharon demonstrates, for example, verbal and nonverbal anger simultaneously. The final two interviews (in the 2000s) showed the lowest levels (9.3 and 11.8 percent in 2002). Between these two polarities, there was a substantial degree of oscillation, which was particularly evident in the low level of challenging non-discrepancy in the second 1982 interview and in the high level found in the 1996 interview. An analysis of the regression also shows that the trend line did not reach statistical significance:  $R^2 = 0.19$ ;  $F(1,861) = 2.99$ ;  $p = .3$ .



**FIGURE 6** Percentage of challenging non-discrepancy in Ariel Sharon’s behavior during his political interviews over the years.



## Discrepancy and Non-Discrepancy in the Interviewers' Behavior Over the Years

While the analysis of Ariel Sharon's verbal and nonverbal behavior during his interviews was carried out, his interviewers' characteristics were likewise analyzed. Table 2 summarizes the breakdown of the four categories in all the interviews that were analyzed, in percentage points, as well as a summary of the overall discrepancy and non-discrepancy levels that characterized the interviewers.

Table 2 reveals that, contrary to the clear trends that characterized Ariel Sharon's behavior, it is difficult to find similar trends among his interviewers. This is also manifest in the regression models that were performed. Similar to the statistical analyses applied to Sharon's behavior, regression models were also applied to the interviewers in the four categories: supportive non-discrepancy, leakage, positive discrepancy, and challenging non-discrepancy. None of the models achieved statistical significance.

## The Relationship Between Sharon's Behavior and That of His Interviewers

The relationship between Ariel Sharon's verbal and nonverbal behavior and that of his interviewers was also analyzed. Correlation tests were conducted for the first four categories in Table 1 that characterize Ariel Sharon versus those categories that characterized the interviewers (Table 2). Two intriguing statistically significant correlations were observed: An  $r=0.3$  positive correlation was found between the percentage of leakage by Sharon and his interviewers. The more Ariel Sharon demonstrated behavior patterns characteristic of leakage-type discrepancy, the more this was emulated by his interviewers. Another significant negative correlation of  $r=-0.56$  was found between Sharon's challenging non-discrepancy and that of his

**TABLE 2** Interviewers: The Relationship Between the Verbal and Nonverbal Channels (Percentage Points)

	Supportive non- discrepancy	Leakage	Adaptive discrepancy	Challenging non- discrepancy	Overall non- discrepancy	Overall discrepancy
<b>1982</b>	21.4	0	57.1	21.4	42.9	57.1
<b>1982</b>	50.0	12.5	0	37.5	87.5	12.5
<b>1984</b>	7.1	10.7	25.0	57.1	64.3	35.7
<b>1986</b>	25.0	75.0	0	0	25.0	75.0
<b>1990</b>	0	5.9	0	94.1	94.1	5.9
<b>1994</b>	33.3	0	41.7	25.0	58.3	41.7
<b>1996</b>	23.1	7.7	23.1	46.2	69.2	30.8
<b>2000</b>	44.0	0	8.0	48.0	92.0	8.0
<b>2002</b>	6.3	6.3	12.5	75.0	81.3	18.8

interviewers. As the interviewers expressed more of the behavior characterized by challenging non-discrepancy, Sharon demonstrated less of this behavioral pattern.

## DISCUSSION

The study examined whether there was a relationship between a political figure's public standing and his/her verbal and nonverbal behavior during political interviews. The findings indicate that such a relationship indeed exists. In fact, the results suggest that an analysis of the relationship between the verbal and nonverbal behavior during political interviews can help characterize a political figure's status.

The patterns of discrepancy and non-discrepancy in Ariel Sharon's behavior during the period of 1982 to 2002 were analyzed. The indices reflect, respectively, the degree of consistency and inconsistency between the verbal and nonverbal communication channels, in turn, reflecting the degree of consistency in the message delivered by the interviewee. The results show that the manifestation of the summarized cumulated ("overall") indices in Sharon's political interviews in effect truly reflect the three periods that characterize his public and political stature during the 2 decades studied. It is interesting to note that the political analysis indicates an extremely low point in 1983 (the Kahan Commission) and a point of a great leap in 1999, when he was elected leader of the Likud Party. On the other hand, the turning point, as reflected in the model of the current study, according to the findings of the cumulated summarized indices, is already evident in 1994 (or somewhere between 1990 and 1994), a period during which no apparent outstanding event occurred in Sharon's biography that could explain the results. In other words, the results present a novel approach to pointing to the beginning of the shift in Ariel Sharon's behavior as having taken place during the early 1990s, while the actual political manifestation of the shift appeared only later, at the end of the 1990s. Thus, the suggested theoretical and methodological model may constitute a means of defining changes in the public standing of political figures.

In general, it may be stated that in periods during which a political figure's public standing is strong, it should be possible to observe a high degree of non-discrepancy between his or her verbal and nonverbal communication in political interviews. When the political figure's public status is weaker, it comes under attack through public and personal criticism directed at him or her. Such periods will be identified by a higher level of discrepancy between the verbal and nonverbal channels.

It is of interest that the findings of the current study defined four parameters to characterize discrepancy and non-discrepancy types. We hypothesized that when Sharon's public standing was shaky and he was

sidelined to the fringes of public consensus, he would come under a stronger "attack" and his behavior would therefore be more characterized by challenging non-discrepancy and leakage. It was assumed that challenging non-discrepancy would be observed because it wards off attacks and enhances opposition messages and that a greater degree of leakage would likewise be observed because, in times of distress, the politician is hard put to manifest nonverbal behavior that expresses his/her attempts to extricate himself/herself from such predicaments. The mirror image is likewise valid. This means that once a politician's public standing is strong, the level of challenging non-discrepancy and leakage is expected to be lower for the same reasons. As for the supportive non-discrepancy and positive discrepancy, our underlying hypothesis was that they would increase as the stature of the person in public office grows. In the case of politicians, this phenomenon is intensified due to another element: politicians discover and understand that this pattern serves their political goals and learn how to utilize it. Sharon himself put this into words in the 1986 interview: "I know that nowadays it is commonly believed that a person should be judged by the strength of his voice; if he speaks gently, he is considered more responsible, if he speaks slowly, he is seen to be weighing the options more carefully."

The results of the study confirmed the first three hypotheses. In two of the four categories through which the relationships between the verbal and nonverbal channels were examined, namely, supportive non-discrepancy and leakage, statistically significant results were obtained. In an additional category, positive discrepancy, marginally significant results were obtained. The fourth hypothesis was refuted. The level of challenging non-discrepancy in the last two interviews was indeed the lowest, but in the first interview it scored highest. Additionally, there was substantial oscillation between the two polar ends. No statistical significance was obtained for the challenging non-discrepancy category. Exceptions from the general pattern characterized all the categories, but only the category of challenging non-discrepancy did not yield a statistically significant result.

The fact that the behavioral pattern characterized by challenging non-discrepancy was found to be relatively stable throughout the years can shed a light on Ariel Sharon's return to the political arena. During this period, Ariel Sharon was inclined not to enter into a direct and blunt confrontation with his interviewers. He also invested efforts not to respond nonverbally, which could have contributed to the manner in which he would be perceived by the viewers during the political interview. It should be noted that challenging non-discrepancy is a pattern that elicits a negative perception of the public figure among the viewers. Studies have shown that challenging nonverbal behavior deters the audience and lowers the political figure's popularity among the viewers (Masters, 1996). A public figure who exhibits a large measure of challenging non-discrepancy is perceived as skeptical and arouses antagonism. It should be added that such a message,

although clear and unequivocal both to the interviewees and the viewers of a political interview, is intense in its power and the undermining effect it expresses (Lunger and Wurf, 1999).

It is interesting to note that in these instances when Sharon demonstrated challenging non-discrepancy, the course of the interaction was in fact characterized as a confrontation between the interviewee and the interviewer, involving exchanges of serious accusations. For years, as is demonstrated by the political interviews, Sharon viewed journalists and institutionalized communication as vehicles that should work for the benefit of public interests as it is perceived by the authorities. Thus, often, when he was confronted with a difficult question, Sharon would react by launching a counterattack against the interviewer as a representative of the entire media as an institution.

The highest level of challenging non-discrepancy since 1982 was found in the 1996 interview. The Israeli political scene at the time of this interview was characterized by a high level of instability. The interview took place approximately 2 months after the assassination of the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin: November 11, 1995. In the aftermath of that event, accusing fingers were pointed particularly at Binyamin Netanyahu, then chairman of the opposition, and at the Likud Party in general, as responsible for the incitement that led to the assassination. The public "assault" was unremitting. Yet, by January 1996, this onslaught subsided, and the growing public support for the peace process that began immediately after Rabin's death decreased once again to the level that prevailed prior to the assassination. It seems that this fact made Sharon react to the attack on the Likud with his own counterattack. This was manifest in both the low measure of supportive non-discrepancy and in the high degree of challenging non-discrepancy that characterized him in that interview.

As for the pattern of challenging non-discrepancy, it is of interest to note the high negative correlation that emerged between Sharon's behavior and the behavior of his interviewers in this pattern. This finding indicates that Sharon is not in the habit of entering into direct confrontations with his interviewers. On the other hand, Sharon's interviewers express challenging non-discrepancy, which is the normative behavior for an interviewer in a political interview. There may be several causes for this behavior: A political interview is defined as an argumentative spoken event (Clayman and Heritage, 2002), and the interviewer's role in the interaction is to challenge the interviewees, their skills, capabilities, and actions, giving them the opportunity to demonstrate their own capabilities (Wiezman, 2003). However, the fact that Sharon reacted to the interviewer's challenging non-discrepancy with a different pattern of behavior helped him avoid a direct assault and confrontation, which could have derived from the challenging non-discrepancy.

This pattern of behavior could be adopted by leaders and public figures in situations of a political interview in the mass media; the more you are challenged, the less challenge you should demonstrate in your response.

The question is how the results, which indicate a linear correlation between the parameters studied and the time axis, correspond to the fact that the axis of this time in Sharon's life reflects upheavals in his public stature. The results suggest that an assessment of the findings can point to the influence of the various periods even if the general trend remains unchanged. This stands out clearly upon reviewing the leakage figures. Although a statistically significant linear correlation was obtained, indicating a decline in leakage over the years, the three periods in his career can easily be detected. The first interview held in 1982, before the Lebanon war, had a low level of leakage; the four interviews carried out between 1982 and 1990, the low period after the war and the implications of the Kahan Commission's report, were characterized by a large measure of leakage; and the four interviews conducted between 1994 and 2002, when Sharon was part of the consensus and enjoyed a steadily growing favorable public standing, showed, once again, a low level of leakage.

This interesting finding indicates that the non-discrepancy characterized by a supportive verbal message and a challenging nonverbal message, known as leakage, characterizes periods during which Ariel Sharon's public standing was at its lowest. In this type of behavior, covert information that the individual wishes to conceal emerges in an uncontrolled manner through his/her nonverbal communication. As noted earlier, such behavior characterizes situations involving fraud, deceit, and even downright lies. Correspondingly, such behavior found more expression in periods when the political figure's public standing was low. In other words, an analysis of the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication reveals that during that period Ariel Sharon felt discomfort and dissatisfaction and perhaps even experienced the need to withhold information during the course of a political interview. It is apparent that an analysis of patterns of discrepancy sheds light on the person's public standing. This finding corroborates the findings from political debates, showing that behavior characterized by leakage is manifested in televised political debates among candidates who had the lower hand in the debates. For example, this behavioral pattern characterized Netanyahu during the 1999 debate as well as Peres during the 1996 debate, in which they both failed (Grebelsky-Lichtman et al., 2009).

It is important to note the positive correlation obtained between the percentage of leakage that characterized Sharon and the percentage of leakage that characterized his interviewers. This demonstrates that when one party appears to "put on a mask," expressing conflicting messages through the two channels, the other party tends to follow suit. Occasions in which an attempt is made to tear off the mask and expose the pretense are rare. An attempt to do so, which would be the exception to the rule, can be found in the interview from 2000. The interviewer asked Ariel Sharon questions on issues relating to his bitterest political rival, Binyamin Netanyahu. In reaction to Sharon's response, he remarked: "I have a feeling that you are actually

smiling when you say this.” This statement clearly demonstrates the effect of the nonverbal communication, its weight in the interaction, and the extent to which the interviewers, and even the audience at home, sense it as they watch the interaction.

It should be pointed out that this finding, which indicates a positive correlation in the degree of leakage among the participants in the interaction, was also discovered when examining interpersonal interaction in situations involving parents and children (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2003). The more the parent exhibited leakage-type discrepancy, the more the child reacted in kind. Interestingly, this pattern appears also in political interviews. This shows that the interviewer’s strength lies in being more conscious of the interviewee’s nonverbal communication and being able to expose the leakage rather than in responding in a manner that involves mutual pretense. This exposure of discrepancy by the interviewer can serve to augment the interview’s newsworthiness, as it has the power to uncover lies, deceptions, or fraud on the part of the interviewee.

An outstanding finding that characterizes Sharon’s verbal and nonverbal communication during periods when his public standing was firm is positive discrepancy, in which the verbal message expresses challenge while the nonverbal message expresses support. It seems as though whenever he felt confident of himself and his stature, Ariel Sharon allowed himself to behave in a manner in which, despite the verbal challenge, he could express supportive nonverbal communication. This behavior somewhat softens the threat felt by both the interviewer and the audience at home. Thus, a positive attitude toward Sharon is maintained and he avoids antagonism. Other studies conducted in this field involving analyses of political interviews and situations of interpersonal communication (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2003; Grebelsky-Lichtman et al., 2009) have shown that this type of discrepancy is the most effective behavior in political interviews and has effective implications both in terms of how the interview can flow in a more supportive fashion, which does not include outright conflict, as well as in terms of how the audience at home perceives the public figure.

In September 2003, a festive New Year’s interview was held with Prime Minister Sharon. The television critic Rogel Alper referred to the interview in his column, giving it the title, “The Prime Minister Is Amused.” He wrote (Haaretz, September 29, 2003): “There is no way of telling whether the audience enjoyed watching their leader being asked to explain his actions, but it is a well-known rule that when the shepherd is happy, the herd is happy. And Prime Minister Sharon certainly seemed extremely pleased with the interview. Most of the questions quite amused him, and since he is blessed with calmness and peace of mind in the line of fire, the more the questions were penetrating and irritating, the more they amused him.” These comments can be viewed as an extrapolation of sorts to the findings of the current study.

Consequently, the methodological and theoretical tool suggested, based on a comparative analysis of the verbal and nonverbal communication channels in political interviews, may offer an insight into the public standing of the interviewed personality, in addition to offering a characterization of the sum total of communication aspects involving interviewee and interviewer in a political interview.

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#### AUTHOR NOTE

Tsfira Grebelsky-Lichtman is a lecturer in the Department of Business Administration at the Ono Academic College and in the Department of Communication at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She received her PhD from The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Grebelsky-Lichtman's current area of research is political verbal and nonverbal communication.