Research suggests that there are specific nonverbal behaviours, which could be perceived as vulnerable, that make the individual more susceptible to physical or sexual attack. In particular, gait, body language, and facial expressions are major components in the perception of an individual’s vulnerability to victimization. Findings pertaining to gait indicate that individuals who walk with shorter strides, lateral weight shifts, constrained arm swings, and walk at a slower pace are perceived as more vulnerable to attack by potential perpetrators. The literature on body language has identified individuals who use more hand and foot gestures, rather than arm and leg movements while conversing as more susceptible to an assault. Research on facial expressions has found that individuals with neutral, sad, fearful or shameful facial emotions are perceived as more vulnerable and weak. Furthermore, social predators are more inclined to use specific behavioural criteria when selecting potential victims. Individuals scoring high on the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale: Version III and the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised have increased accuracy at identifying potentially vulnerable victims based on the victim’s appearance and behaviour. This review highlights the relationship between non-verbal behaviours and the perception of vulnerability, implicating the role of awareness as a preventative measure against victimization.

Nonverbal behaviours heavily influence an individual’s perception of others. Nonverbal cues such as hand gestures and facial expressions provide social perceivers with information regarding demeanour and future intentions (Book, Costello, & Camilleri, 2013). For example, quivering hands may signal that an individual is feeling nervous or fearful. These perceptions can subsequently influence a social perceiver’s actions. Examples of possible responses to this behaviour include attempting to calm the individual or simply ignoring the behaviour. However, to a social predator, this sign of fear can be viewed as an opportunity of which they can take advantage. While individuals may be unaware of their small movements, in the social world, nonverbal interaction gives a wealth of information and cues that people respond to unconsciously or consciously. Observers may interpret them as a display of the individual’s vulnerability to victimization.

Extensive research has been conducted to investigate the underlying mechanisms and techniques associated with victim selection (Book, Costello, & Camilleri, 2013; Gunns, Johnston, & Hudson, 2002; Sakaguchi & Hasegawa, 2006). Some individuals may be fortunate enough to never experience assault, whereas others may fall victim to it on numerous occasions. Interestingly, there is a small proportion of the population that is repeatedly victimized by various perpetrators (Farrell, Phillips, & Pease, 1995), suggesting that these victims may have unique characteristics. Research has shown that vulnerability to victimization is strongly correlated with the expression of certain nonverbal cues (Book, Quinsey, & Langford, 2007; Grayson & Stein, 1981; Wheeler, Book, & Costello, 2009). Furthermore, certain individuals, including physical attack offenders, inmates, and psychopaths, are more inclined to perceive these cues accurately (Book et al., 2013). Individuals who score higher on measures of psychopathic traits, as assessed by the Self-Report Psychopathy Scale: Version III (SRP-III; Paulhus, Heumann, & Hare, in press), exhibit higher accuracy in detecting vulnerability to victimization in individuals based on nonverbal behaviour (Wheeler et al., 2009). This finding suggests that automatic behaviours, such as walking style, may serve as a waving red flag to these individuals. Potential vic-
TIMS COULD BE EXHIBITING VULNERABILITY BY THE LENGTH OF THEIR STRIDES OR THE GESTURES THEY USE WHILE CONVERSING WITH OTHERS.

This paper will examine the literature to determine which nonverbal behaviours expressed by potential victims make them distinct and susceptible to assault. Specifically, the present paper will focus on how nonverbal behaviours such as, gait, body posture, gait, and age. The inmates who scored higher on measures of psychopathic traits primarily used gait to make their assumptions. This research suggests that the inmates attributed particular aspects of nonverbal behaviour, such as gait and body posture, to the individual’s internal traits. Specifically, the researchers suggested that the inmates were associating these aspects with a vulnerable and weak personality. Social predators rely on these revealing nonverbal cues when selecting their prey (Wheeler et al., 2009). The findings also suggest that the cunning traits of a psychopath make them more attuned to handpicking easy-to-attack victims. Their lack of empathy and remorse (Hare, 1993) allows them to focus their attention on nonverbal cues, such as gait, to facilitate deception and exploitation of others.

On the other hand, research investigating the kine-matics of gait suggests that the vulnerable gait of a victim can be summed up into a simple algorithm of its various aspects (Gunns et al., 2002; Johnston, Hudson, Richardson, Gunns, & Garner, 2004; Sakaguchi & Hasegawa, 2006). This implies that anyone, not just psychopaths, can select easy-to-attack victims by simply observing a potential victim’s gait and applying the algorithm. To determine what the algorithm encompasses, a study was conducted to examine the specific characteristics of gait, which result in the perception of victim vulnerability (Gunns et al., 2002). Thirty non-criminal men and thirty non-criminal women were asked to provide ease-of-attack ratings of people walking. The results demonstrated that females were considered easier to rob or rape if their gait was characterized by shifting their weight laterally or forward and back, lifting their feet, displaying limited arm swing, having low energy and high constraint, a slow pace, and short strides. Men were considered easier to physically attack when they walked with shorter strides, decreased energy, increased constraint, and if they had lower weight. In general, individuals do not pay attention to the length of their strides or the speed at which they walk. However, these aspects are easily observable to anyone seeking out a potential victim. Self-awareness of these nonverbal cues could save an individual from physical attack. Altering aspects of walking style can decrease ease-of-
help to pinpoint possible victims.

The dominance or submissiveness exuded by a woman in a social situation plays an integral role in the perception of her vulnerability (Hareli, Shomrat, & Hess, 2009; Richards, Rollerson, & Phillips, 1991). In particular, research has found that submissive women are more likely to be sexually attacked in comparison to dominant women (Richards et al., 1991). While socially dominant women often implicitly project assertiveness and powerfulness through nonverbal behaviours (Murzynski & Degelman, 1996), socially submissive women tend to project passivity and other implicit behaviours that express conformity to authority (Hareli et al., 2009). Perpetrators can visually distinguish between dominant and submissive women based on these nonverbal behaviours, including the body language they express. Research has shown that dominant women tend to use larger limb movements and shift their weight more often while standing, whereas submissive women use smaller hand movements, foot movements, and hold postures for longer periods of time (Richards et al., 1991). These results suggest that social perceivers easily interpret nonverbal cues and associate aspects of behaviour to the subject’s personality and vulnerability.

**Body Language**

Body language encompasses the fluidity of limb movements, the degree to which arm and hand gestures are used, leg movements, and shifts in weight. Variations in body language can convey different meanings and internal traits to social perceivers. In a study investigating the aspects of body language, which elicit vulnerability to victimization, researchers asked 53 inmates in a minimum-security prison to view videotapes of people walking on the sidewalk (Grayson & Stein, 1981). The inmates were instructed to evaluate the person’s body language, and provide a rating of their vulnerability to assault. The findings indicated that there are three specific components of body language that suggest the potential victim’s vulnerability, which include body weight shifts, type of walk, and specific body-limb movements. In terms of body weight shifts, an individual was more likely to be perceived as a victim if they shifted their body in a lateral, diagonal, or up and down direction, rather than forward and back. Also, a perceived victim is more likely to walk gesturally (activate the entire body) rather than posturally (activate only part of the body). In regards to body-limb movements, unilateral movements rather than contralateral movements are indicative of being perceived as a victim. Unilateral body-limb movements are classified as moving one side of the body, whereas contralateral movements are classified as moving both sides of the body (right arm and left leg, or left arm and right leg). Furthermore, non-victims’ movements were characterized as smooth and organized, whereas the body language expressed by victims was described as awkward and disjointed. Body language characterized by reduced synchronization and fluidity in a person’s movements often lead to the perception that the individual is more vulnerable to victimization (Murzynski & Degelman, 1996). Therefore, in accordance with gait, body language can also help to pinpoint possible victims.

**Facial Expression**

Facial expressions are external displays of what people are feeling internally; they serve as an excellent tool for social perceivers to decipher an individual’s emotions. In many cases, perpetrators select their victims by first examining their potential victim’s facial expression. For example, physical attackers tend to avoid people with an assertive expression because it indicates a possible threat of danger. Individuals identified with increased psychopathic tendencies have been found to be effective at judging the assertiveness of others by their facial expression (Book et al., 2007). Assertive individuals are perceived to be more likely to retaliate during a physical attack, which would not make them an easy victim. However, individuals with a sad or distracted expression may be perceived as having their defenses lowered, making them easier targets for physical assault (Wheeler et al., 2009). Consistent with the evidence presented on gait and body language, certain facial expressions can also suggest an individual’s vul-
nerability to victimization.

As previously discussed, psychopaths have the ability to observe and evaluate gait and body language, which may signify an individual’s vulnerability. Research suggests that psychopaths are also accurate at pinpointing potential victims based on their facial expressions (Book et al., 2007). It is puzzling that psychopaths can be accurate at detecting facial expressions and emotions due to their own inability, or decreased tendency, to feel emotions such as empathy, remorse, and fear (Hare, 1993). Researchers have conducted studies to provide an explanation for this emotional paradox (Book et al., 2007; Lorenz & Newman, 2002). On the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare 1991), Factor 1 makes up the interpersonal and affective component, including symptoms of reduced affect, and lack of empathy and remorse. Individuals scoring high for Factor 1 are characterized by manipulation and superficial charm (Hare, 1993). To compensate for the reduced affect experienced by psychopaths, social cues, such as facial expressions, are used to make sense of and manipulate social situations. This is supported by research suggesting that psychopaths are highly accurate at identifying emotions (Wheeler et al., 2009) and rating the intensity of emotions (Book et al., 2007).

In addition to perceiving assertiveness through facial expressions, social dominance and submissiveness can also be expressed through facial expressions. As previously mentioned, submissive women are more likely to be judged as vulnerable victims of sexual assault (Richards et al., 1991). In a study investigating which facial expressions indicate social dominance and submissiveness, men and women were perceived to be socially dominant or submissive based on different facial expressions (Hareli et al. 2009). Women with happy or angry facial expressions, and men with neutral facial expressions were perceived as more socially dominant. On the other hand, neutral or fearful facial expressions in women were perceived as more socially submissive. In men, sad, fearful or shameful facial expressions were indicative of social submission. These findings suggest that simply expressing a facial expression associated with dominance can steer physical attackers away from the individual. Facial expressions are another nonverbal cue used to perceive and take advantage of an individual’s vulnerability to victimization.

**Concluding Remarks**

Victim selection is considered to be an astute and precise process. It requires potential perpetrators to carefully observe their desired victim’s nonverbal behaviours such as gait, body language and facial expressions. These nonverbal behaviours help physical attackers assess whether the individual is vulnerable to victimization. Selecting easy-to-attack individuals makes the victim selection process more cost efficient. For example, it would not be in the best interest of a perpetrator to select a victim who has an increased likelihood to retaliate. It is important for perpetrators to make accurate internal attributions based on the victim’s non-verbal behavioural cues. It may be assumed that only ruthless and intelligent social predators, such as Ted Bundy, are capable of deciphering our every move, however, this may not be true. Specific components of walking style, body language, and facial expressions are easily distinguishable by any individual assessing the target’s behaviour.

Implications of these findings suggest that individuals should increase self-awareness of their nonverbal behaviour and its association with perceived vulnerability. In addition to increasing self-awareness, alterations to personal walking style should be implemented to reduce ease-of-attack ratings, especially in vulnerable individuals. Relevant alterations can be taught through training sessions consisting of how to change specific, individualized characteristics of nonverbal behaviour, which are indicative of victim vulnerability (Johnston et al., 2004). General fluidity and synchronization of body movements should also be taught and practiced to avoid potential victimization. Current research has focused on understanding the underlying mechanisms to victim selection, but the next step should center on the applicability of the knowledge collected. Victim selection research should also examine how to bring awareness to and train the general public to exude dominant and assertive nonverbal behaviour. Furthermore, studies should be conducted to examine whether adopting dominant nonverbal cues through training sessions is feasible, and whether they will remain persistent. By changing one’s body language or facial expression to
appear more dominant, the individual can decrease the likelihood of portraying the role of a victim, and subsequently prevent potential physical assault. Therefore, keeping all of these nonverbal cues in mind can potentially save an individual from harm, or even save their life.

References
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