Episode 85: Colin Hesse

# KL: Katie Linder

# CH: Colin Hesse

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode eighty-five.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Check out the shows website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I am joined by Doctor Collin Hesse Assistant Professor in the department of speech communication at Oregon State University. Collin completed his PhD at Arizona State University in 2009. His research focuses on the links between interpersonal communications and both psychological and physiological health. Specific communications processes of interest for Collin include the communication of affection, alexithymia, and family communication. Thanks so much for joining me in the studio today Collin.

**CH:** Yeah, glad to be here!

**KL**: So it’s kind of strange that we are both here at Oregon State. Collin, because I realized that we are both from the same undergrad and we actual had overlapping time at Whitworth University up in Spokane. And I saw you and totally recognized you from that time. So it’s great to see you again. [Laughs]

**CH:** That is crazy I don’t actually run into a whole tonof Whitworth University people in my, in my travels. It’s there is actual a good friend of mine we went to Arizona State together in grad school Allen Nickleson. Who now is back as a professor at Whitworth [KL:Really!] in the communication department. So I am able to go up there ever couple of years and talk to them about grad school and about some of the undergrads there. And that’s great, but certainly in the academic field I don’t catch a whole a lot of Whitworth people so that made me laugh.

**KL**: It is a small world [CH: It is]. Well I am really excited to have you here to talk about some of our work with interpersonal communication. So let’s start there can you just give us kind of a little bit of a board over view of some of your research in interpersonal communication.

**CH**: Yeah so lets the title interpersonal communication first off. So we have this very specific area of the communication discipline where we focus on really two individuals that are trying to form meaning together and out of that search of meaning it sort of plays out how we form and maintain relationships. Now the element that I have been interested in that general picture is in how people’s communication ability’s not just help them in their relationships succeed, but also serve to help them succeed as individuals with links to mental and physical health. So a general understanding that the communication that we do together isn’t just, it’s not just words. And it doesn’t just serve a single purpose in terms of maybe helping our relationships have sort of a satisfying encounter or lead towards a satisfying relationship. But it can also have some long term benefits for us as individuals in terms of our health.

**KL**: Okay so I am really curious about this because I have been reading lately and also just talking to people about introversion vs extroversion, in terms of relationships, networking and all these different kinds of things. And I am wondering to what degree in this research there is any sense of kind of how the long term benefits differ from different kinds of people. Like I am obviously we are not all going to get the same benefits from these interpersonal communications. Have you found anything about like what are the factors that might impact this introversion extroversion may or may not be one? But that kind of thing?

**CH**: Oh absolutely. It’s a combination of I mean people in our field look at sex differences, they look at personality differences things like attachment styles. So whether someone is more prone to having a secure relationship or more sort of prone to anxiety or avoidance. There have been a couple things looking at personality traits with introversion extroversion. And it’s not so much the benefits aren’t there it’s more in that how we go about getting those benefits. Like an extroverted individual is so much more comfortable in a variety of settings and so because of their comfort and their ability to just succeed in a wide variety of situations. Those benefits come a little more easy to them. Were as for an introvert individual those communication encounters if done, in a place where they are comfortable where they feel they can be successful and can still be beneficial. But if we just thrust an introverted individual into a public setting. Say now go have lots of conversations with lots of people automatically that will lead to some healthy consequences for you. I man that doesn’t necessarily, it doesn’t play out like that. You know certainly none of the research would say that any of our recommendations or some or the main finding of our field would be exactly the same for every individual. That elements like cultural background and um psychological make-up absolutely matter, and so we sort of refine our recommendation in terms of the when’s and the how’s and how much’s. But the some of the overarching recommendations in terms of our need for relationships and um how some elements of communication can help us do better in relationship types. So we can have those general overarching concerns, but the sort of nitty gritty how to’s can change from people from various backgrounds and types.

**KL**: So in the complexity of this research I would imagine there are some challenges to try and get at what you are trying to get at. In terms of I would imagine data collection, but also analysis. It sounds like it can be pretty interdisciplinary as well. What are some of the challenges you find with research on interpersonal communication.

**CH**: Yeah I mean I think you have actually hit on a couple of them. I want to highlight the interdisciplinary one first and foremost. When a person like myself is even conceiving of a study or building sort of a lit review looking at a general topic. I am not using simply communication articles I have to even from grad school I have had to become more adversed in some of the field of psychology, sociology, um family studies, human development. So even some of the main publications that you will see coming of interpersonal researchers come out in a wide variety of not just interdisciplinary journals things like the journal of social and interpersonal relationships that several disciplines will go into. But also discipline specific journals like journal of marriage and family that they are more like family study journals. People from my field will go into so that interdisciplinary element is huge in that if you really want to understand how these correlations are happening you can’t just look at communication theories or communication findings you really have to search else were. The other challenge or one other main challenge in doing this is never being satisfied with looking at one particular study in a field. Let’s take conflict or something, never looking at one specific study and developing large generalizations of a study. Even of it is an incredible study, even if it is a great experiment or a survey with a high sample size, a very large n. You can never just be satisfied with just one because you know that, that is just telling you one part of the picture in terms of how individuals are relating together. Because no one study is truly being able to look at all of those other possible variables that might to some degree matter. In these whether it is a conflict situation or something else so. When I teach communication students research methods like here at Oregon State one of the main conclusions I am always telling them is to never take one study as the be all end all of a given question. That you need to look at five, ten, twenty, thirty studies, this is why medanalisis are so critical in terms of understanding some of these questions. So that we can really have a clear expectation or ability to predict human behavior.

**KL**: So I am wondering, what are some of the things that are kind of on the horizon for interpersonal communication research? Where this is- areas that need more exploration or things that are kind of trending right now in the field.

**CH:** There is a couple of big areas I think the general trend in interpersonal com research it’s actually really exciting it’s were the field. So like the field started actually in the 1970’s a very specific discipline an off shoot of some of these other areas. So we are still pretty young, but just in the last I would say five to ten years. You are really seeing the field sort of go from most studies looking at like romantic relationships or marriages or friendships in sort of a specific relation able content. And instead looking at how those relationships work in things like social media and online communication. Tons on interpersonal scholars some of my collages who are sort of switching from romantic relationships to going online. Or they are sort of becoming more interpersonal/health communications scholars. So looking at how these interpersonal concepts play out in like doctor patience communication or between doctors and nurses. Or you are seeing the very beginning of interpersonal and organizational communication scholars start to merge. Were instead of their being, there use to be in our discipline two very strong silos where you are an interpersonal scholar or an organization scholar. Now we have people that are both and so it’s like how do these relationships and searches for meaning play out between supervisors and employees, or between coworkers. So what’s exciting is that I am being able to see some of this research and do some of it. Where you are taking some of the same theories and principles of interpersonal research and take it into some of these new contexts and just see how they work, how they play out. So I am seeing far more of that now in the last five to ten years than I ever have before.

**KL**: That sounds like a lot of fun and I want to remind our listeners as well we do have an episode I believe episode 71, but I will double check and link to it in the show notes with a health communications researcher. Specifically talking about patience doctor relationships so it’s really fascinating. Um we are going to take a brief break when we come back we will hear a little bit more from Colin about his research and affectionate communication. Back in a moment…

[Music plays]

# Segment 2:

**KL**: Colin I know one of the areas of your research is affectionate communication. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

**CH**: Yeah so this has been an interest of mine since grad school where I started working with Doctor Corey Floyd who was then at Arizona State and now at Arizona and this was part of his area as well. And for him and now for me the affectionate communication is this idea that anytime that I have these feelings in positive regard towards someone that I can either hold them in and not communicate it or I really can communicate it or I don’t feel it and communicate it. The idea of communicating feelings of positive regard towards someone else. So it’s a very general concept we can perceive it in terms of the verbal things like “I love you” or non-verbal things like hugs and kisses or “tie signs” we call sort of like holding hands, arm around the shoulder. Where you are tying the two people together physically. Or we call sort of supportive acts these are acts of affection that aren’t maybe by definition affectionate. So something like if I fill up my wife’s car with gas there is nothing about that act necessarily that says it is affectionate, but she knows I am doing it because to show affection. So we would still consider that an act of positive regard. So it’s sort of an umbrella term under which a lot of this stuff can sort of be represented.

**KL**: So I am curious especially in your last example if there are areas where you research things that are considered more direct versus more indirect. Like is there a distinction you are drawing there or is it just really how you are defining it?

**CH**: You know it kind of depends on the type of study that we do. When we are looking at sort of what we call trait affection. So in general how much do you communicate affection to the world around you. We sort of let the participates come up with for themselves sort of their own general version of what that term affection means. And we don’t do a lot of picking apart between direct and indirect. Um however when we do some of the more specific types of affection research. So If I ask a participate “How much affection right now are you communicating to your mother? To your spouse?” Then we will ask them specifically the questions that do deal with some of those main direct or indirect ways and sort of try to get at some more specifics in that way. So yeah it kind of depends on the main question that we have for the study.

**KL**: Okay so I have kind of a strange question. It’s kind of like the tree and the forest question. If the tree falls in the forest and no one is there, does anyone hear the tree fall? However that metaphor goes. I am curious about, because you ask people to kind of define affection for themselves. To what degree does it matter if they believe what they are doing is affection, but the person on the other end doesn’t perceive what they are doing as affection? For example the car, example you know you can fill the gas and feel like this is affectionate that I am doing toward my spouse. But if your spouse doesn’t see it that way to what degree does that impact the research you are doing, does it matter?

**CH**: That’s a great question. I mean really that’s one of those questions you can ask almost any type of communication researcher. Because again you are talking about this idea of finding meaning between two people, but a lot of times when we are doing research we are only getting the perception of one end, and individual involved in the dyad. There are didactic studies we have done of affection and generally the correlate between person A’s perception of what they give and person B’s of what they receive are kind of the same around like 60 percent. But yeah you are not going to get 100 percent similarity in terms of that there is always the miscommunication about who thinks what is affectionate and that kind of stuff. In terms of how we study affection then we don’t so much pay tons of attention to, to that in every study. There has been a couple studies were we have made sure that in terms of the manipulation experiment. We have um got perception B- excuse me participate B’s perception of what just occurred. But other times it is just the knowledge that, that is one potential way that error can entry into the equation.

**KL**: That’s really interesting. Um I am wondering if you can talk about through your research what you found to be the benefits of trait affection or relationship specific affection.

**CH**: I will start with…this has been one of the sort of a cool way that uh we have sort of seen how communication and interpersonal communication. Can have some long lasting benefits. So what we find for trait affection again so this is the idea that in general how affectionate are you to the world around you. Not just to a specific relationship but in general. And so these are the people that always seem to have a smile on their face or always seem to be they are people that are readily giving hugs to people around them. These are people not like myself and that’s fine. But what we find is that those individuals numerous studies, not just one study but over a dozen studies. We found that these individuals have lower levels of stress, lower levels of depression, lower levels of some other sort of mental health constraints. They are closer in their relationships, more satisfied, more committed, more likely to have secure attachment style they self report having a higher number of close relationships in general. In terms of health they tend to have lower levels of blood pressure, diastolic and systolic. They tend to have lower levels of cortisol in their system or in terms of what is called a diurnal level that daily change of cortisol. You want to see a nice big change from higher levels in the morning to lower levels at night. And you see that wonderful decrease in cortisol over the day for people that communicate more affectionate in communication generally whereas people who don’t have a more flat variation of cortisol. Where they are remaining more physiologically stressed over the day. So in terms of trait affection it has just been very clear in a lot of studies that it’s just health. We tend to…I will get to the relationship side of things… we tend to frame these predictions and hypothesizes on this idea that affection is an adaptive behavior that helps individuals a better survive the theoretical. The theory we normally use is called the affection exchange theory the main proposition that matters here is this idea that affection helps us better survive by opening us up to better resources. So I get more relationships and those relationships give me more resources whether they are tangible resources like money or a lot of intangible resources like support or affection like myself. And I helps in the goal of reproduction seeing myself as a potential fit partner or potential fit parent. And so using that theory in generating a lot of these hypothesizes. It’s been boy I really can’t think of a lot of studies that I have been a part of a good number over the last ten years where general trait affection. Where that hypothesis has not generally been supported in our research. For relational specific affection, the main one we tend to look at in this research is romantic. Whether in a romantic relationship either pre-marriage or post marriage, or [laughs] during marriage. What we tend to see their it’s a similar idea that we tend to see some healthier relationships, so if there is more affection being communicated in that relationship. Those relationships tend to be healthier and the people inside the relationship tend to be heathier. And then the final point is if we see affection increased in that relationship then the person becomes healthier. So this is a couple of the experiments we have done. Uh for example one that is one of my favorites that I did, back in the day back in grad school. We had a romantic couples come into the lab, we had one of the members get base line levels of cholesterol. And then for the experimental group we told them over the next four weeks to increase their kissing behaviors. So I think the general instructions was “On a scale of 1-10 think about how much you kiss your romantic partner”, so if you are at a four try to kiss at a six, if you are a six then eight and if you are a ten then just never stop kissing. Just kiss constantly. So we sent them off to do that for four weeks while the control group did no change what so ever. And when we brought them back the controlled groups cholesterol hadn’t really changed at all over the four weeks. And the experimentally groups total cholesterol score had dropped about eight to ten points, over the four weeks. I know it’s controlling for things like dietary changes or exercise changes or any big life events that might have happened over the four weeks. You know it was just a small simple change of a type of non-verbal affection that was happening during the course of the four weeks. And it had apparently some type of physiological reaction because of it. We find those sort of cool finding in our studies as well.

**KL**: That is very neat. Well we are going to take a brief break when we come back. We will hear more for Colin about his research. Back in a moment…

[Music plays]

# Segment 3:

**KL**: Colin I know that part of your work is also on affection deprivation. What does that mean exactly?

**CH**: Yeah so this is one of the new ways that people in our field have been starting to look at affection. This is the idea for some individuals there is a difference between the amount of affection that I am getting and the amount of affection I desire. Specifically that I am getting less than I desire. And so this is the idea that affection deprivation does not necessarily mean I am experiencing low levels of affection, it just means I am experiencing less than I want. So theoretical someone could be getting high levels of affection, but still want more than they are receiving. And so they are still theoretically be deprived. It’s kind of linking the idea back to some of the social exchange work. Where there is a difference between sort of my general outcome of costs and rewards and my comparison level. How much profit I actually want to get from this relationship. So again I can have a positive outcome. But if my comparison level is higher than my outcome. I am still dissatisfied, so it is a similar idea.

**KL**: Interesting. So can you talk to us about a couple studies you have been doing in this area…

**CH**: Yeah so one of the first things I did looking at this was link it back to romantic relationships. And look to see how romantic relationships sort of played out if at least one of the members thought that they were more deprived in terms of affection. And what my partner and I found in that study a couple things. The first was that individuals that perceived more that they were deprived of affection in their relationship that they were less satisfied and less committed and less close. So some pretty strong links to the relationship outcomes again these are correlation not causation. Also we added a couple of extra variables in there we saw that individuals there’s a direct correlation, I mean positive correlation between deprivation and relationship uncertain. So the people that are more deprived also noted that they are more uncertain about the relationship whether they are going to stay in it or how it link to the future. And the other thing we saw was that individuals that were self-reported being more deprived also self-reported being higher on a concept called relational maximization. And these are individuals that what the most out of their relationship that they are generally always dissatisfied if they are not getting the best of everything that they could possibly get in their relationship. So generally again what we found if you are higher in deprivation that you just weren’t doing us well in your romantic relationship. The second one that I took a look at was that I wanted to know or think about, you know if someone perceives themselves as deprived of affection how might they then try to get that feeling back. And one of through some of the…this goes back to the interdisciplinary question that you talked about we talked about earlier. But one of the literatures that I brought into this was some of the literature looking at pornography consumption. And that potentially one thing that people might do if they perceive themselves to be deprived of affection is try to get that feeling through pornography consumption. And in that study we did find a positive direct correlation between deprivation and consumption of individuals that seem to be more deprived were more likely to consume pornography which then lead to some negative individual and relational outcomes. As found in a lot of the pornography literature it doesn’t do a great job of protecting and sustaining your romantic relationships. So in both cases the finding has generally been that affection deprivation does not tend to be correlated at the very least with some with healthy outcomes. And I should say that the studies of depravation at least the ones I know about so far have all been correlational.

**KL**: So I am curious when you are thinking about these different studies if you are reading literature outside of your field and saying “I wonder how we can apply affection and deprivation” to this. Or are you kind of coming up with your studies and then looking outside to say “What are the other things that can inform this?” And it may be a little bit of both but is it typical one or the other.

**CH**: It is kind of a little bit of both. You are trying to be well read in a lot of stuff and coming up with little brainstorms like “what are things that might matter?”, you know out of the blue when you are thinking about studies. Like for example another recent study that we did on the other side of things we actually looked at the concept of excessive affection so people that are receiving more affection than they wanted. When my colleague and I started thinking of that study we were like what are some ways that, that might play out in real life. Where people might be receiving more affection than they are getting and one of the automatic correlates we were like was helicopter parenting. So you know we didn’t go looking at the helicopter parenting literature before that but we just thought you know what that is absolutely a common concept where people might be getting more affection than they want. And so then we did a study looking at it. So it kind of goes both ways. Sometimes you are looking at the literature and then you apply your stuff to it, and other times you are like okay this might work lets go look at the literature and see if that could play out.

**KL**: So as you are doing these studies and you are focusing in on a particular populations. Is there a point when you decide we need to try this out on a different population? Like is there a study example you have for you know affection and deprivation where you kind of switched populations and said we need to look at this in a different context.

**CH**: Yeah yes absolutely. That’s where again with a lot of these types of research if you only stay stuck looking at romantic couples, you are not getting the full understanding of how a concept like deprivation might matter. So one study just in the last year that a colleague and I did was to look at affection deprivation in the context of doctor patience communication. So our assumption our initial assumption is that affection matters. That patience’s actual want their doctors to communicate some type of positive regard to them. And that they have that type of expectation and so again there might be a disconnect between how much they are actually receiving and how much they want. And so we asked a lot of individuals to think about communication they had with their doctor. And to fill up some stuff based on that and yeah what we tended to see, again correlation. Is that individuals that scored higher in deprivation they were much less satisfied with their visits with their doctor they also scored less in adherence they weren’t as likely to do what the doctor told them to. They scored lower on patience openness so they weren’t as likely to talk to their doctor, through what they were thinking and feeling at the time. And they also scored their doctor lower in competence so they didn’t perceive their doctor as good of a doctor. Which again you don’t necessarily think of a doctors prospection of how skilled they is going to come down to some of their interpersonal feedback or some ways they can communicate affection to people. But our participants reported that yeah they really wanted that. That I perceive my doctor as just a better doctor if they are doing a better job at jut communicating affection to me.

**KL**: So given that you study kind of these different stakeholder groups. How are you kind of sharing the outcomes of this research? I mean I would imagine it goes beyond just the people in your field who are also studying this, that there could be really practical applications for this for romantic coupes, for doctors who are trying to improve the relationships they have for their patience’s. Um I am curious I guess about two things: one is at what point do you feel you can share something and say kind of definitely “This might be a thing”. And then two how do you go about doing that?

**CH**: Yeah so I think that the first one for me with where I am at in my field is that pretty soon here. I’m just about to make the plunge going up for a ten year and so I have built up some years of research so the idea is soon. My advisor has started writing a couple of books both scholarly and popular press called The Loneliness Cure that just came out last year. That’s trying to um sort of bring back some of these ideas back to the larger population. And then it’s sort of there has actually been some conversations between myself and some former colleagues about whether this would take a form of a book. Making sure we are taking a look at a couple of studies including one that the data has been collected and we are thinking about where to send it out and trying to send it out not just to comm journals but sending it out to either interdisciplinary journals or journals of other disciplines. To sort of let other disciplines know what we are doing and what we are finding. And so I think that it is a long process, but is certainly one that as I move forward into the middle or later stages of my career I think it will be one of my sort of large sort of general goals. It’s not just, I mean I love doing the research I very much enjoy but I think moving beyond that to communicate some of those findings to the population as a whole is defiantly going to be one of those on the docket goals to do.

**KL**: Well that is very exciting! Colin I want to thank you so much for coming into the studio, sharing about your work. It has just been so fascinating to hear about the work you are doing with interpersonal communications.

**CH**: Thank you very much for having me!

**KL**: Thanks also to our listeners for joining us this week’s episode for research in action. I am Katie Linder and we will be back next week with a new episode.

[Music plays]

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor’s guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

# There are several ways to connect with the “Research in Action” podcast. Visit the website to post a comment about a specific episode, suggest a future guest, or ask a question that could be featured in a future episode. Email us at riapodcast@oregonstate.edu. You can also offer feedback about “Research in Action” episodes or share research-related resources by contacting the Research in Action podcast via Twitter @RIA\_podcast. Finally, you can call the Research in Action voicemail line at 541-737-1111 to ask a question or leave a comment. If you listen to the podcast via iTunes, please consider leaving us a review.

# The “Research in Action” podcast is a resource funded by Oregon State University Ecampus – ranked one of the nation’s best providers of online education with more than 50 degree programs and over 1,000 classes online. Learn more about Ecampus by visiting ecampus.oregonstate.edu. This podcast is produced by the phenomenal Ecampus Multimedia team.

# “Research in Action” transcripts are sometimes created on a rush deadline and accuracy may vary. Please be aware that the authoritative record of the “Research in Action” podcast is the audio.

# Bonus Clip:

**KL:** In this bonus clip for Episode 85 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Colin Hesse discusses his research on alexithymia – take a listen:

**KL**: Colin I know some of your earlier research focused on the concept of alexithymia. Can you talk about that?

**CH:** Yeah, so I got interested in that in grad school, because of the idea that there are just some individuals that aren’t as skilled in understanding and communicating emotions. I think that this is an excellent example of where you see a connection to your own life to some of the research. My wife would tell you that at the very least. Um but it’s this concept where individuals would be talking through some very traumatic experiences. But they would be very stone faced and not really showing much emotion while talking about it. So this one psychologist came up with this idea. It is conceived today as a general trait, so basically everyone would score a higher or lower in this concept. A lot of people have sort of a cut off where there is a twenty item scale, and based on your scale on the twenty items you would sort of score as high or low in alexithymia. But it’s also sort of constructed as sort of just a general continuum where people are just higher and lower. And so then my interests in linking that in our ability to communicate to each other. Because one of the fundamental ideas in interpersonal com is the importance of emotions. That emotions are one of the main ways to construct meaning with each other. So if an individual just isn’t as strong in communicating in emotions as in communicating and thus are they able to build and maintain relationships. In general with a couple of studies that I did. We saw that individuals who did score higher tended be worse at forming and maintaining relationships. So they communicated less affection, certainly. They had lower score of satisfaction and closeness, those relationship measures. They were higher with attachment anxiety or attachment avoidance. They tended just not to do a good as a job of being able to maintain relationships. The one other than the main study I looked at with the concept was to bring strangers into the lab. So you would have strangers talking to each other, one of the individuals scored either very high or very low on the scale so we called them high or low on the scale of alexithymia. The other individual was a confederate someone who had scored at the mid-point, so they weren’t high they weren’t really low they were there. And how those individuals talked to each other for ten minutes just about some general. Like “What do you do here at the university?” “What are some of your favorite classes?” kind of just get to know you sort of questions. And then what we saw afterwards for the confederates they were asked to report on their perceptions of the person high or low in alexithymia. And what we found is that participants were more attracted physically, socially and from a task level. They were more attracted to people low in alexithymia, than people high in alexithymia. And that was a significant change. They also reported significant differences in some of the, what we call in our field “relational messages” they were getting. So these are I can tell you lots of words, but in my words there are embedded messages of intimacy and trust, dominance and equality. So they were getting things like experiencing much less of the message of intimacy, from people high in alexithymia. Or they were experiencing much, significantly more dominance from people higher in alexithymia. These were just out of a ten minute initial interaction, these are conversations generally that are more scripted more wrote, they aren’t considered that dangerous of a conversation. But people were still noticing significant differences in how these individuals were presenting themselves to a stranger. So from the very beginning our ability to understand our own emotions, understand the emotion of the person sitting across from us. And engaging in some emotion communication can have a strong influences from the very time that we from the very moment that we meet someone else.

**KL**: Wow, okay so I am curious because you talked about the like emoting but also the receiving of emotions. And this immediately makes me think about emotional intelligence. And whether or not there is a connection between alexithymia and people who have low emotional intelligence scores. And not only cannot emote, but can’t read other people’s emotions as well and respond to them in the way they need to. Is there anything on that?

**CH**: Yeah there is some correlations between the two and some research would say the constructs certainly have some other lap. When people use both scales in a study they don’t find perfect correlations between the two, but certainly some subnative ones. So I would say a lot of the times what I am looking at research on emotionally competence in general I will certainly use some studies on emotional intelligence or some studies on alexithymia to form some general claims about the importance of emotional competence in general. There are certainly some similarities one of the main differences is that alexithymia is this what they call this external oriented style. Where you are constantly you don’t like fantasy or thinking about what might be what. Just clear logical this is what’s real, what’s truth and I am not going to focus on anything else. So there is a couple smaller differences like that, but there is certainly some conceptual overlap.

**KL**: Well and it’s curious because I think you know a lot of us are kind of cultured to performing emotions in certain ways. And it is part of our acculturation in different communities and how might you emote something to be a certain kind of emotion. And it seems like those people who don’t want to imagine don’t want to be thinking and beyond that, they just don’t see the purpose of that. They don’t see the purpose of performing an emotion in an outward way. Is it that and or the fact that they literally can’t do it?

**CH**: So I would probably say there is some evidence of both. On the evidence of that they just can’t. There was one study we did a couple of years ago where we actually took some people and did some brain imaging of individuals that scored high and low. And we found some significant differences in brain activation to emotional images, especially ones that were more positive. That individuals that scored higher in alexithymia, just their brains where less activated in serval emotion processing centers in the brain than individuals that are low. So that would give us some evidence, whether you know biologically or culturally. By the time that individual is eightteen years old there was something going on upstairs, that just made it less likely for them to really comprehend the emotions that were occurring around them. But then certainly I would also agree with you from an externally oriented style perspective that it not just be I be less able, but I just would not think it important at all. That it’s not two of the main examples that are given to talk about this in terms of like what sort of popular culture. Like the older example would be Spock and the newer example would be Sheldon from Big Bang Theory. And so in both cases you have individuals who just don’t really understand the point. And that would absolutely be a part of it for these individuals as well.

**KL**: Well this is so interesting thanks so much for sharing about some of your work on alexithymia.

**CH**: Alright, thank you vey much!

**KL:** You’ve just heard a bonus clip from episode 85 of the “Research in Action” podcast with Dr. Colin Hesse discussing his research on alexithymia – thanks for listening!

# “Research in Action” transcripts are sometimes created on a rush deadline and accuracy may vary. Please be aware that the authoritative record of the “Research in Action” podcast is the audio.